

Former Cubs star outfielder, Andre Dawson was voted into baseball's Hall of Fame on January 6, 2010.

Dr. David Fletcher, President and Founder of the Chicago Baseball Museum, interviewed Dawson on Saturday, April 4, 2009 at a BANQUET in Champaign, Illinois. He asked him questions, in particular, about Buck O'Neil and his scouting of Andre Dawson in hopes of drafting him as a Cub in 1975.

Below is a transcript of that interview.

DR. FLETCHER: I just found out , I never knew until recently when I did some research on your career, is the fact that Buck O'Neil in 1975, when you were at Florida A & M, that he encouraged the Cubs to sign you. Tell us a little bit about that.

DAWSON: Well, I wasn't aware of it until it was mentioned to me years after I'd already signed, but Buck did scout me. I can remember his face, he was very visible at a lot of games that I played during my collegiate career. And for whatever reason, I never really had a lot of extended conversations with him, just "how are you". He made himself known who he was, he was very visible. I was invited by the Montreal Expos to a tryout camp prior to the June '75 Draft, and I was there in attendance with Clint Hurdle who was later drafted #1 by the Kansas City Royals. I went in the 11th round by the Montreal Expos. I was not really aware of the fact that I was being scouted by the Cubs. I knew Buck was a scout, there was a scout there from Atlanta also and I think one from the Pirates. But it was news to me that I was being scouted by the Cubs. And nothing ever materialized as a result of it, and maybe I could have become a Cub earlier. But the fact remains that I was drafted in the later rounds by the Expos and played with that organization for 10 years.

DR. FLETCHER: So did Buck ever tell you about him scouting you and how it was then and how we wished he had brought you to the Cubs organization earlier?

DAWSON: Well, he did mention to me at a banquet that I attended with him. He mentioned at the time that he did scout for the Cubs and the mistake was made that they didn't sign me, and I probably should have been a Cub earlier in my career. But this was all as the result of a conversation we had, and it was a fun type of conversation, after the fact.

DR. FLETCHER: Just think, you wouldn't have had the knee replacement if you had played on the grass at Wrigley Field, probably, right?

DAWSON: (laughs) Yeah, well, the difference was like night and day, the Astroturf and the grass. Just the mere presence of playing in Wrigley Field in Chicago, amongst the fans....I always enjoyed that and I always tell a player who has the opportunity if he ever gets the chance to experience Wrigley Field, it's going to be unbelievable. So yes, I was really welcomed there.

DR. FLETCHER: How do you think baseball and the city of Chicago should try to remember Buck O'Neil and his impact on the game of baseball but also to society?

DAWSON: He was that one special human being and he not only was a pioneer for the Negro Leagues, but for Major League Baseball in general. He was a phenomenal presence wherever he was. I think he lived as long as he did to see himself enshrined into the Hall of Fame. It didn't happen and I think at the end, that's what weakened him the worst. Of course, you know, Chicago of all places, could really do a lot in recognizing who he was and what he did as a pioneer of the game.

DR. FLETCHER: One of the things we going to work on with the Museum besides advocacy for your induction into the Hall of Fame, which is going to come, but it is also to looking at having a statue of Buck O'Neil at Wrigley Field, how would you feel about that?

DAWSON: Wow, outstanding. If that can manifest itself, I would say think that would be a great deal.

DR. FLETCHER: One of the other aspects that we are trying to do, is to try to re-invent baseball and the passion among African Americans in the inner city and I know that is something that Buck, before he died, we spent a lot time with him as he wanted to get more inner city kids to love the game, what do you think baseball can do and the City of Chicago can do to use Buck's legacy and to promote the game of baseball in the inner city.

DAWSON: Well, I think that was something he really wanted to see kind of manifest itself before his passing. It is starting to be lost in the inner city, football and basketball is starting to be the primary sport. But again, if you can carry on what his legacy was and what he tried to do for the inner city and for baseball in general, that would be a step in the right direction. And I think it goes a little bit more than that. It takes community leaders, people in the inner city stepping forward and kind of reaching out to Major League Baseball to step in and lend a helping hand. I think that's the initial step that has to be taken, but there's still a lot of work that has to be done.