

Dawson gets Hall of Fame call as lone Class of 2010 inductee

By Paul Ladewski

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Former Cubs outfielder Andre Dawson had been through the Hall of Fame drill eight times before, but he sensed this one would be different.

At 6 o'clock this morning, Dawson began his usual workout at a local gym in his native Miami, where he resides with his wife and daughter. Then the man once known as Hawk did something out of character on the day of the Hall of Fame election. He paid a visit to the cemetery where his mother, grandmother and an uncle were laid to rest.

"I wanted to share some things with them at the gravesites," said Dawson, 55. "For a lot of reasons, I was more optimistic that I might get the call this year."

After Dawson returned home, he did some yardwork, ate lunch then waited for something good to happen. Shortly before 2 p.m., the phone rang. The voice at the other end was that of Baseball Writers Association of America secretary Jack O'Connell, who informed Dawson that he been selected as the 203rd member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

Dawson was named on 77.9 percent of the ballots among BBWAA members, a sizeable increase from the 67.0 percent that he received one year ago. At last 75 percent is required for induction.

"I really can't explain the elation," said the typically reserved Dawson, who did admit to a few tears along the way. "It has been a process that has taken awhile, but it's the greatest feeling that an individual can have."

Dawson was on the short list of best all-around outfielders in the 1980s decade. He .279 with 438 home runs and 1,591 RBI in 21 seasons, which were split between the Cubs, Montreal Expos, Boston Red Sox and Florida Marlins. He also was chosen for eight Gold Glove Awards and made as many All-Star Game appearances.

Now the question is, will the image of Dawson be shown in a Cubs or Expos hat on his Hall of Fame plaque?

Major League Baseball makes the call on such decisions with input from the player and Hall of Fame officials. Dawson was scheduled to meet with representatives on Thursday, when an announcement could be made.

While Dawson was believed to prefer the Cubs designation, "I'm just excited to be a Hall of Famer right now," he said.

Dawson was drafted by the Expos, and he hit more than half of his career homers (225) in 11 seasons with them. He spent six seasons in a Cubs uniform, in which he experienced his most productive and memorable campaign.

Dawson was plagued by knee problems so severe that he contemplated early retirement before his wife talked him out of it. "The Astroturf took the best that I had out of me," Dawson said. "It was painful. Sometimes I didn't know if I would make it."

In March, 1987, Dawson signed with the Cubs as a free agent, and he estimated the move from the artificial turf of Olympic Stadium to the natural surface of Wrigley Field added 10 years to his career.

In his first season on the North Side, even though the team finished in last place, Dawson was selected the National League Most Valuable Player on the strength of his 49 home runs and 137 RBI, both of which lead the league. He was paid a \$500,000 base salary.

"The Cubs fans embrace me since Day One and allowed me to relax and have fun," said Dawson, who would never take part in a World Series game.

As for the other Chicago candidates, former White Sox second baseman Roberto Alomar fell short of election with 73.7 percent of the vote in his first year of eligibility.

The development came as a surprise to the many observers who considered Alomar to be the most accomplished player on the ballot. "A definite Hall of Famer," Dawson called him.

A career .300 hitter, Alomar totaled 2,724 hits, 1,508 runs scored and 474 stolen bases in 17 seasons. He was selected for 10 Gold Gloves, a major league record for his position. He was selected for the All-Star Game on 12 occasions.

Lee Smith (47.3), Tim Lincecum (30.4 percent) and Fred McGriff (21.5) received serious consideration for the honor. Harold Baines (6.1) also exceeded the minimum 5 percent of the vote necessary to remain on the ballot next year.

Robin Ventura (1.3 percent), Ellis Burks (0.4) and Eric Karros (0.4) fell short of the minimum requirement in their first appearances on the ballot, while Mike Jackson and Todd Zeile did not receive a vote.

Raines was among the first callers to congratulate Dawson on his big day. The two were Expos teammates for all or parts of eight seasons.

“Yes, he did call and leave a message,” Dawson said. “Timmy definitely belongs in the Hall of Fame. It’s gonna happen, and when it does happen, I plan to be on that stage.”

This summer Dawson will have the stage to himself in Cooperstown, N.Y., as the only member of the 2010 class.

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