



# The Diamond Appraised

by Craig R. Wright

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## Why Tim Raines Should have been Elected on the First Ballot

This news just in: Tim Raines was not elected to the Hall of Fame on this, his first ballot. It wasn't even close. He received less than a third of the votes he needed for election. This wasn't a surprise. I had this column already written and ready to go before the vote was announced. But just because it was not a surprise does not make it right, either.

Tim Raines is not only deserving of a plaque in Cooperstown, he should have gone in on the first ballot. There are different ways a player can justify his place in the Hall, but by far the most common is to have a career that is a reflection of both quality and durability. A very handy measure for comparing career quality and durability is the measure of Win Shares developed by Bill James.

Tim Raines amassed 382 win shares in his career, and that is a very special accomplishment. Every player who has amassed 365 win shares in his career and who is eligible for the Hall of Fame is in there – except now for Tim Raines, though he still has another 14 years of eligibility. And for the past 30 years. if you topped 380 career win shares, you were a first ballot Hall of Famer – unless your name was Tim Raines.

Here are the players with at least 380 career win shares whose first year of eligibility for the Hall of Fame was in the last 30 years:

Hank Aaron	636	Cal Ripken Jr	423
Willie Mays	640	Robin Yount	422
Frank Robinson	515	Dave Winfield	413
Joe Morgan	507	Paul Molitor	409
Carl Yastrzemski	485	Willie McCovey	405
Mike Schmidt	463	Wade Boggs	396
Reggie Jackson	442	Tony Gwynn	386
Al Kaline	437	Rod Carew	384
George Brett	436	Tom Seaver	383
Eddie Murray	427	Tim Raines	382

Everyone there was elected on the first ballot except for Raines. He's at the bottom of that elite list but very close to some very fine company, and there are adjustments that should move Raines up that list. Baseball has had three seasons where more than 10% of the schedule wasn't played because of a labor strike. Raines was a regular in all three of those seasons, and hurt by it more than any player on this list. Projecting his win shares for the full schedule in those three seasons, his win shares jump to 397. Do the same adjustment for other players who lost win shares due to those strike seasons and Raines edges up three notches past Gwynn (396), Seaver (391), and Carew (390).

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And we aren't done yet. If a player has a Hall of Fame prime but his career is shortened due to a health issue not related to the game, voters appropriately tend to give them a little slack. When a Kirby Puckett has his career stopped cold after a dozen seasons because he lost vision in an eye due to glaucoma, we tend to compare his career to other Hall of Famers in terms of what they have achieved through the same age.

Raines' career totals are very good for his era, but they are also dampened a bit by his serious battle with the disease Lupus late in his career. When Raines was 39 in 1999, he was struggling physically and a kidney biopsy was performed on July 23. He was diagnosed with Lupus and missed the rest of the season and all of the next year as well. The disease is considered incurable but treatable for leading a normal life – but not necessarily for playing major league baseball at ages 41-42. And in his 2-year comeback attempt Raines managed only 178 at-bats and averaged only .247. To some extent the fairest comparisons with other Hall of Famers might better be comparisons only through age 38 when Raines was Lupus free. Raines has more career win shares through age 38 than seven of those first-ballot Hall of Famers.

**Career Win Shares through age 38 (adjusted for strike seasons)**

Tim Raines	391
Paul Molitor	383
Wade Boggs	381
Tony Gwynn	374
Willie McCovey	370
Rod Carew	369
Dave Winfield	360
Tom Seaver	347

Over and over it comes through that Raines is not only just a Hall of Famer, but that it should have been an easy call to vote for him on this ballot, in his first year of eligibility.

### **Why Tim Raines was NOT Elected on the First Ballot**

Many voters tend to just eyeball careers and gloss over the little things, thinking that in the long run it won't make a difference. But if there are a *lot* of little things conspiring against the accurate vision of a career, they do tend to add up. I bet most HOF voters did not give much, if any, weight to the impact of the 123 games lost to the labor disputes during Raines' career, or to the fact that a disease essentially ended his career at age 39.

And when the HOF voters looked for the eye-popping numbers, some will say they didn't see enough to excite them. "Yeah, he was a great base-stealer, but it's not like he ever stole a 100 in a season." Well, he did steal 71 when his team played only 108 games. Project that to a full schedule and you are looking at 106.5 steals. And forget projections, he stole the third most bases in history, and he did it in the Live Ball Era where the caught stealing data is consistent, he was the most efficient of the great base stealers.

		SB	CS	SB%
1	Rickey Henderson	1406	335	80.8%
2	Lou Brock	938	307	75.3%
3	Tim Raines	808	146	84.7%
4	Vince Coleman	752	177	80.9%
5	Joe Morgan	689	162	81.0%
6	Willie Wilson	668	134	83.3%
7	Bert Campaneris	649	199	76.5%
8	Kenny Lofton	622	160	79.5%
9	Otis Nixon	620	186	76.9%
10	Maury Wills	586	208	73.8%

Also working against Raines is that all of his All-Star seasons were in a foreign city that no longer has a team. There isn't a horde of Montreal Expo fans out there bristling with excitement that one of their own might go into the Hall. And if there were, they aren't in a good position to be heard. And believe it or not this kind of thing can make a difference. If enough people say, "Look hard at my guy," you are inclined to do it, and Raines is the type of candidate who would have benefited from a closer look by some of the voters.

Another factor working against Raines is that most HOF voters don't fully appreciate the value of reaching base, nor do they pay enough attention to it. I bet that among the over 500 Hall of Fame voters that less than 50 even know that three times Raines reached base more often than any other player in the league — or that for the 15-year period from 1981 to 1995, the only players in the majors who reached base more often than Raines were Rickey Henderson and Wade Boggs.

And mentioning Rickey Henderson brings us to what I am sure was one of Raines' biggest obstacles to a first-ballot election. Henderson and Raines were often compared to each other as similar players — they had similar strengths, style of play, and their careers completely overlapped. Every day Raines spent in the majors, Henderson was also a major leaguer. Henderson was a much better player than Raines, and I mean a lot better. Henderson's career value is truly elite, among the top 15 players to ever play this game. Raines is out there in the 50s. I'm sure more than a few voters struggled with the faulty logic that the honor of a "first ballot vote" for Raines might somehow put him on par with Henderson.



And finally we come to the seamier side of why Tim Raines was not elected to the Hall of Fame on this ballot. When Raines joined the Expos, the team had a drug problem that was growing. Years later club executive Murray Cook estimated that at one point they had eight cocaine users on the team. Tim Raines was the youngest player on the team and remembers how he was introduced to cocaine by some veteran teammates, and how, "when I got anything it was always from a player." He said he used cocaine with eight or nine other players, most of whom were teammates. Early in the 1982 season Raines began heavily using cocaine and feared he had become addicted and was ruining his life.

At the end of June the 22-year-old Raines voluntarily disclosed his drug problem to the team physician and to club president John McHale and asked for help. The club did not want Raines to stop playing while undergoing treatment, even though that meant leaving him in a clubhouse with a lot of temptation. They arranged for Tim to be treated by a local psychiatrist and McHale often drove Raines to his appointments. McHale related in a 1985 interview how Raines "worked hard" on his rehabilitation. Tim initially did well, but had a relapse about two weeks before the end of the season. That is when Raines decided he would need to go into a round-the-clock treatment program after the season. It was announced to the media that Raines was entering a California clinic to undergo treatment for chemical dependency of an unspecified drug. After completing the 30-day program and being free of drugs and alcohol for over two months, Joe did an interview with the *Montreal Gazette* detailing that his problem had been with cocaine, talking about his decision to break free of it, and why he felt it was important to come clean publicly.

Raines remembers, "I voluntarily sought help because I didn't want it to get in the way of my career, and coming clean was part of that therapy. I took what happened as a learning experience, and going forward I think it made me a better person." Raines was a model citizen the remaining 19 seasons of his career.

I'm amazed at how well this early cocaine problem is remembered in regard to Raines and how it is brought up over and over again. You don't have to spend much time on the web to realize some folks still hold this against him in his case for the Hall of Fame.

The really seamy side of this is how it compares to the selective memory some folks have in regard to Paul Molitor's career. In 1984, court testimony in the trial of a drug dealer established that Molitor had made numerous purchases of cocaine from him in 1979 and 1980. When confronted with this evidence, Molitor admitted it was true and that as a younger player he had used both cocaine and marijuana and that it had gotten so bad that at age 24 he missed Christmas with his family because he had been on a cocaine binge, and they had been so concerned that they had the police check on him to make sure he was still alive. That woke him up to his need to change his life, that he quit cold turkey, and never again used illegal recreational drugs.

This has been duly reported from time to time in discussions of Molitor's career but it just doesn't seem to stick in people's minds. There is a web site called [baseballlibrary.com](http://baseballlibrary.com) that has these quick little bios on the great players in the game. If you look at Molitor's bio, the drug stuff doesn't make the cut. It is not mentioned at all. Look at Raines' bio and his cocaine use practically gets its own paragraph. But regardless of how we *remember* this stain on their careers, there is no reason at all to consider Raines' transgression as different from Molitor's. In fact, I would give it less weight because Raines was younger, in a more difficult situation, and he voluntarily came forward. Separate from the similarity of their brief struggle with cocaine, on the ball field these two players were very similar and a case can be made that Raines was *better* than Molitor.

- ⊖ Molitor and Raines are both 7-time All-Stars.
- ⊖ Raines led the league in more offensive categories than Molitor did.
- ⊖ Their career OPS is very close, .817 for Molitor and .810 for Raines.
- ⊖ OPS gives no credit to their base running. Molitor was good but Raines is among the best ever.
- ⊖ Raines created more runs per out expended in his career than Molitor did. (.245 to .233)
- ⊖ Through age 38 their totals are similar, including Raines reaching base more often (3837 to 3780)
- ⊖ In Win Shares, which includes defensive value, Molitor has only slightly more career win shares than Raines, and through age 38 it is actually Raines who has more Win Shares (391 to 383)
- ⊖ Even Raines' peak seasons are slightly better than Molitor's. His four best seasons are all better than Molitor's four best.

Raines is black. Molitor is white, has an All-American look to him and did milk commercials.

I have no problem with Molitor being in the Hall of Fame. I have no problem with his getting in on his first ballot. He had my full support.



I've given lots of reasons for why some voters might have underestimated Raines on this ballot. I believe that most of those who did not vote for Raines reached their conclusion by their perception of his value on the field. But it only takes a small block of voters to block a player's election. If there is any Hall of Fame voter out there who voted for Molitor and then this time around entertained — in even the slightest way — the notion that Raines should have to wait a year or longer because of that early drug stain on his career, then I say, "Shame. Shame on you."