

brighter by the constant presence of Expos players. A few of them would show up to teach baseball skills and talk to campers for \$100, maybe \$200 for a couple hours; most of them did it for free. Raines was one of them. The campers sure as hell remember.

“I was six, maybe seven years old, and I remember Raines being there,” said Brian Benjamin, who along with Elan Satov, Eric Kligman, and Andrew “Bean” Kensley formed the core of the Maple Ridge Boys, the group of classmates who accompanied me to hundreds of games at the Big O growing up. “He was hitting balls out of the park, onto the street, and I just stood there in awe watching. Then he came over and talked to us for a long time. I mean, I *loved* Tim Raines.”

Unfortunately, and unfairly, the voting members of the Baseball Writers’ Association of America haven’t loved Raines as much.

✎ **TIM RAINES’ HALL OF FAME CASE** ✎

At this writing, Raines has come up for Hall of Fame induction seven times, and been rejected seven times. This is ridiculous.

From 1981 through 1990 with the Expos, Raines hit .302 and posted a .391 on-base percentage (second-best in the NL). During that time he drew 769 walks, just 17 behind the first-place Dale Murphy among National League players in those 10 seasons. Raines stole a league-leading 626 bases, more than Cardinals speedster Vince Coleman, and nearly twice as many as the number-three player on the list, Coleman’s teammate Ozzie Smith. Raines’ 926 runs scored ranked first, as did his 81 triples. His 273 doubles placed him third, behind only long-time teammates Tim Wallach and Andre Dawson. And by Wins Above Replacement, Raines was number one. In other words,

the best player in the entire National League from 1981 through 1990–10 full seasons—was Tim Laines.

Never in baseball history, other than in cases of steroids use (and that's a whole other hornet's nest), has a player who was the best in his league for an entire decade been denied induction into the Hall of Fame. Laines' detractors argued that he was a lesser player after leaving the Expos, and they're right. He struggled with injuries and played in 100 games or more just four more times after the 1992 season. But Laines still put up fine numbers, with on-base percentages of .401, .365, .374, .383, .403, and .395 from 1993 through 1998—playing key part-time roles on two World Series-winning teams in New York. He stole 808 bases in his career, the fifth-highest total of all time (with all four players above him in the Hall of Fame), and Laines' 84.7 percent career success rate is the highest ever for anyone with nearly as many attempts.

Voters' obsession with round numbers—and only *certain* round numbers—has clouded their judgment. Tony Gwynn made the Hall of Fame on the first ballot with 97.6 percent of the vote. That always struck me as funny, and not because Gwynn wasn't a great player; he certainly was. But Gwynn posted a career .388 on-base percentage and 763 extra-base hits in 9,288 at-bats; compared to Laines' .385 OBP and 713 extra-base hits in 8,872 at-bats—with Laines stealing 489 more bases. The two started their careers and retired at almost exactly the same time, and the numbers add up to basically identical career value. But because Gwynn made his living slapping singles, while Laines was a master of drawing walks, Gwynn and his 3,141 hits sailed into the Hall, while Laines and his 2,605 hits are still on the outside looking in. Laines, by the way, also reached base more times in his career than Hall of Famers Honus Wagner, Roberto Clemente, Lou Brock, Richie Ashburn . . . and yes, Tony Gwynn.

Try this exercise: replace 600 of Raines' 1,330 career walks with 400 bunt singles and 200 strikeouts. You're left with an inferior player who'd have been enshrined in Cooperstown years ago: this because the voters are obsessed with hits and don't count walks—and because humans happen to have 10 fingers and are thus obsessed with counting by increments of 10, 100, and 1,000.

It comes down to this: Tim Raines kicked ass, and too many people missed it. Induct the guy into Cooperstown already and let's end this nonsense.

Though Raines was irreplaceable, the player tabbed to fill his shoes as the Expos' biggest star was certainly memorable: another Jheri curl-rocking showman, a three buttons-unbuttoned, gold chain-wearing, diamond earring-sporting, 45-second-home-run-trot-producing character named Ivan Calderon. His first season with the Expos ended up being the second-best of his entire career, as he slugged 19 homers, stole 31 bases, and hit an even .300. Unfortunately, the good times with Calderon didn't last. He played in just 48 games the following season, and was out of baseball at 31.

What was effectively Calderon's last hurrah was wasted, as little else went right for the '91 Expos. The rest of the lineup was a disaster, with DeShields taking a huge step back after an excellent rookie season, and Grissom struggling in his first season-long run with a full-time job. The most perplexing numbers, however, came from the two stalwarts at the infield corners. In his third straight drop-off from a terrific 1988 season, Andres Galarraga hit just .219 with nine home runs, striking out four times more often than he walked. The Big Cat got traded to St. Louis at year's end (then went on to have a huge second half to his career that few could