

A lot of great statistical minds have written great analyses about why Tim Lincecum belongs in the Hall of Fame. I'm not one of those minds. A lot of great baseball writers have written Lincecum off as not worthy of Hall of Fame induction. I'm not one of those writers. But, I hope this essay will explain why Lincecum has not been considered in the proper light and may have been overlooked in his candidacy. I hope that it will change the minds of the majority of the electorate who have, for reasons unclear to me, deemed Lincecum not worthy of Hall of Fame induction.

The primary issues raised with Lincecum's candidacy are threefold. First, he does not excel at the three traditional statistics used to measure hitting- Homeruns, Hits, and Runs Batted In. Second, he is considered by many writers to have had a short career or have stuck around too long after his quality seasons even if those two things are mutually exclusive. Third, he like nearly every other player in baseball history, falls short of Rickey Henderson's incredible career totals, but Lincecum was Rickey's contemporary and nearest competitor throughout Rickey's career. I hope this article will settle the first two of these arguments. The third, however, everyone other than Tim Lincecum's mother must admit is true. But, towards the end of this argument I will show that while Tim Lincecum didn't measure up to Rickey Henderson, nobody did and Lincecum was pretty close at their peaks.

I am not going to use the cutting edge statistical research or calculations and formulae, because while I trust them to be reliable and useful in many cases I don't understand them completely and I would be the wrong person to try to explain them. Instead, I will try to focus on the traditional statistics that help any candidacy for the Hall of Fame, not just Lincecum's. But I will look at them from a slightly different perspective than they are frequently reviewed.

Lincecum was a leadoff hitter for much of his career so RBI are a bad proxy for his value even if they may be a good statistic for comparing other players. The same goes for HR. Three-thousand hits is a surefire guarantee of induction into the Hall- no *eligible* players have achieved that total and failed to be elected. Lincecum fell short of that total. But, for a player like Lincecum the phrase "a walk is as good as a hit" that we all learned in little league is as close to true as it was for any player. Lincecum was a great baserunner and a great basestealer. Walking players like Frank Thomas, Mark McGwire, or Jim Thome who were neither fast nor good baserunners took the bat out of their hands and clogged the bases. But doing so with Tim Lincecum did nothing of the sort. So, for players like Lincecum just counting hits should not be the be-all-end-all. He didn't achieve 3,000 hits but between hits, walks, hit by pitches and times reached by error, he exceeded 4,000 times on base. Although we like to believe that his speed put pressure on the defense to lead to some of those errors, even taking that out of the equation he reached base 3,977 times. That may not appear impressive without context. It's 41st all-time. Counting only players whose careers started after WWII it ranks 26th. The players adjacent to Lincecum on the all-time list are Rogers Hornsby and Tony Gwynn. Perhaps this is the most important statistic measuring Lincecum's career as there is nothing more important for leadoff hitters than to get on base.

(Some players with 3000 hits but fewer times on base than Tim Raines: Tony Gwynn, Nap Lajoie, Lou Brock, and Roberto Clemente.)

But, there is more to baseball than getting on base. One of those things is power. But, power is a measure of a player's ability to get around the bases without teammates' help. Raines didn't always do that by hitting it out of the park, but he did do it by hitting doubles and triples and he also got around the bases without his teammates' help by stealing bases. Total bases can be a useful stat to measure a player's power. But, why ignore stolen bases as another way to get around the bases without the help of teammates. Raines, of course, is 5th all-time in steals with 808. But, there's more to his story than just stealing a lot. He stole at a prolific rate. He's only 24th all-time in caught stealing with only 146. Lou Brock stole 130 more bases but was caught 161 more times. Vince Coleman stole 56 fewer bases and was caught 31 more times. And, they were world class base stealers. Tim Raines was a basestealer in a category of his own. As Rickey Henderson was by far the most prolific basestealer, Raines was the most efficient.

Sticking with the commonly used stats and not making this overly complicated by adding in things like adjustments for era or ballpark I'm just going to add up a few traditional and classical stats to give a more complete picture of Tim Raines as a player. Nothing that I've included here reinvents the wheel and someone may have even given it a name at some point or other. It's similar to what Thomas Boswell used to calculate Total Average in the late 70s and early 80s except a little more simplified. If someone used this exact formula I apologize for not giving credit, I'm just not aware what that name is. So, for now I'll just call the total I reach a player's Rock Pile because I'm using it to show how valuable Tim Raines was over his career and his nickname was "Rock."

The Rock Pile is total bases plus stolen bases plus walks. It adds up all of the offensive bases that a player achieves without any help from his teammates.

Raines had 3771 total bases, 808 stolen bases and 1330 walks for a Rock Pile total of 5909.

(One thing about Raines' walks...he never struck out more than he walked in any season. He owned the strikezone.)

Again, this total doesn't mean anything until we put it into context with his peers. And, let's not use just any peers. Instead I will only use the Hall of Fame corner outfielders post-WWII to show that Raines does fit in with these players.

	TB	SB	BB	Rock - Pile
Aaron	6856	240	1402	8498
Rickey	4588	1406	2190	8184
Yaz	5539	168	1845	7552
F. Robinson	5373	204	1420	6997

Winfield	5221	223	1216	6660
Reggie	4834	228	1375	6437
Kaline	4852	137	1277	6266
Brock	4238	938	761	5937
Raines	3771	808	1330	5909
B Williams	4599	90	1045	5734
Gwynn	4259	319	790	5368
Clemente	4492	83	621	5196
Stargell	4190	17	937	5144
Jim Rice	4129	58	670	4857
Average				
HOF	4622	360	1190	6172

Raines obviously belongs in this group. He doesn't have the total bases of any of these hall of famers, but when you consider everything he did to get on, get over, and get in, he definitely belongs. If Raines' career length were truly short he wouldn't have gotten to the basepaths and around it more than Billy Williams, Tony Gwynn, Roberto Clemente, and Willie Stargell. Jim Rice, though, did have a relatively short career. Because his totals exceeded these players whose careers were never considered short, Raines' career shouldn't be considered too short either.

Raines isn't quite as efficient as getting around the bases as the most powerful of these corner outfielders. But, he's not bat at it either. In this stat I've divided each player's Rock Pile by his plate appearances and steal attempts. I've added caught stealing to this table as steals was already in the first. This essentially takes into account all situations where a player could either gain a base for himself or make an out. Double plays have been ignored for simplicity, but would reduce a player's efficiency for his team. (Raines didn't hit into many double plays).

	Rock Pile	PA	CS	Rocks per Chance
Aaron	8498	13940	73	0.596225356
F Robinson	6997	11743	77	0.581919494
Stargell	5144	9026	16	0.567833094
Reggie	6437	11416	115	0.547410494
Rickey	8184	13346	335	0.542453768
B Williams	5734	10519	49	0.537999625
Kaline	6266	11597	65	0.531061954
Jim Rice	4857	9058	34	0.530819672
Yaz	7552	13991	116	0.529036778
Winfield	6660	12358	96	0.52536089
Raines	5909	10359	146	0.522319455

Gwynn	5368	10232	125	0.502810041
Clemente	5196	10212	46	0.502465912
Brock	5937	11235	307	0.475721154

Power obviously helps in Rocks Per Chance. A homerun is the most efficient way to score a run. Raines didn't hit a lot of homeruns. But, he was more efficient at moving himself around the bases better than all of the other non-homerun hitters other than Rickey Henderson. He is just behind Winfield and well ahead of Gwynn and Clemente. Brock's efficiency at getting around the bases is as far behind Raines' as Raines is behind Willie Stargell. Despite having a similar Rock Pile to Brock, Raines did it without 1000 extra outs.

Rocks per game could also be used to determine a player's efficiency.

	Rock Pile	Games	Rocks/G
Rickey	8184	3081	2.65628
Aaron	8498	3298	2.576713
F. Robinson	6997	2808	2.491809
Raines	5909	2502	2.361711
Jim Rice	4857	2089	2.325036
Billy Williams	5734	2488	2.304662
Yaz	7552	3308	2.28295
Reggie	6437	2820	2.282624
Brock	5937	2616	2.269495
Winfield	6660	2973	2.240161
Kaline	6266	2834	2.211009
Gwynn	5368	2440	2.2
Stargell	5144	2360	2.179661
Clemente	5196	2433	2.135635

The Average Rocks per game production for this group is almost exactly that of Billy Williams (2.303612). Raines far exceeds the average per-game production of those already in the Hall and only falls behind those Inner Circle players of Hank Aaron, Rickey Henderson, and Frank Robinson on a per-game basis.

If Raines had truly hung around too long his Rocks per chance would have declined as he became less effective and his Rocks per Game would have fallen off as well. Neither happened, debunking the idea that he stuck around too long.

Now that I've shown that when viewed through the correct statistical prism (again all traditional statistics) Tim Lincecum does in fact meet the corner-Hall of Famer requirements and does not bring them down, we should look at the big elephant in the room- Rickey Henderson.

Rickey was the greatest leadoff hitter of all-time. Not only has he told us this, any reasonable statistical analysis yields the same result. But, for the half of their respective careers they were the mirror image of each other AL and NL like Yin and Yang.

Rickey's top 5 Rock Pile season totals were: 461, 461, 453, 451, 444. Raines' top 5 Rock Pile season were: 451, 434, 424, 424, 419. Just for comparison's sake, Lou Brock's top 5 seasons were: 421, 412, 401, 400, 389. So, while Raines doesn't quite measure up to Henderson in terms of peak, he is closer to Henderson than Brock is to him.

How does Raines compare to the other HOFers whose careers overlapped 10 or more seasons with him?

We've already looked at Gwynn, Henderson, Rice, and Winfield, but let's throw in all of his contemporaries as well to see how Raines stacks up.

	TB	SB	BB	Rock Pile
Rickey	4588	1406	2190	8184
Murray	5397	110	1333	6840
Winfield	5221	223	1216	6660
Molitor	4854	504	1094	6452
Brett	5044	201	1096	6341
Ripken	5168	36	1129	6333
Yount	4730	271	966	5967
Raines	3771	808	1330	5909
Boggs	4064	24	1412	5500
Gwynn	4259	319	790	5368
Sandberg	3787	344	761	4892
Rice	4129	58	670	4857
Ozzie Smith	3084	580	1072	4736
Gary Carter	3497	39	848	4384
Puckett	3453	134	450	4037

Raines is right in the middle in terms of his Rock Pile. What's also important to note is that Rickey Henderson is so far ahead of everyone else. It's not like Raines is Rickey-Lite; it's that everyone pales by comparison. Rickey was a historic player. As indicated earlier, he was essentially the equivalent of Hank Aaron, but with a different type of skill set. It's just as unfair

to say that Frank Robinson didn't deserve to go into the Hall of Fame because he was Aaron-Lite as to say that Raines doesn't deserve to go in because he's Rickey-Lite.

(Except for his biggest fans, did anyone realize that Paul Molitor stole over 500 bases?)

	Rock			
	Pile	PA	CS	Rocks/Chance
Rickey	8184	13346	335	0.5424538
Brett	6341	11624	97	0.5318738
Rice	4857	9058	34	0.5308197
Murray	6840	12817	43	0.5273709
Winfield	6660	12358	96	0.5253609
Raines	5909	10359	146	0.5223195
Boggs	5500	10740	35	0.5093064
Molitor	6452	12160	131	0.5042595
Gwynn	5368	10232	125	0.50281
Sandberg	4892	9282	107	0.50262
Puckett	4037	7831	76	0.502052
Ripken	6333	12833	39	0.490626
Carter	4384	9019	42	0.4817582
Yount	5967	12249	105	0.4726337
Ozzie Smith	4736	10778	148	0.4116113

Raines also fits right in the middle of these contemporary Hall of Famers in Rocks per chance. He, like everyone else, falls below Rickey, but lands ahead of every player who played a premier defensive position for at least part of their career. He also finished ahead of Tony Gwynn and Paul Molitor as well. (Molitor played a plurality of his games at DH, but 48% of his games between 3b, 2b, SS, and CF.)

In terms of Rocks per game, where Raines didn't finish particularly well among the corner outfielders, he does tremendously among his contemporary HOFers.

	Rock		
	Pile	G	Rocks/G
Rickey	8184	3081	2.65628
Molitor	6452	2683	2.40477
Raines	5909	2502	2.36171
Brett	6341	2707	2.34245
Rice	4857	2089	2.32504
Puckett	4037	1783	2.26416

Sandberg	4892	2164	2.26063
Murray	6840	3026	2.26041
Boggs	5500	2439	2.25502
Winfield	6660	2973	2.24016
Gwynn	5368	2440	2.2
Ripken	6333	3001	2.1103
Yount	5967	2856	2.08929
Gary Carter	4384	2295	1.91024
Ozzie Smith	4736	2573	1.84065

It's obvious that by leading all three of these categories Rickey Henderson stands out. But, Raines gained more bases per game than offensive greats George Brett, Eddie Murray, Wade Boggs, and Tony Gwynn.

It's clear, though that the better comparison is among the corner outfielders, because on these lists, the premium defensive positions don't fair as well. It's unfair to compare Ozzie Smith and Gary Carter, much less Robin Yount and Cal Ripken to Raines. But, despite the later two being considered offensive greats, Raines equaled Yount in terms of total miles and exceeded nearly everyone in miles to the gallon.

All said, I don't think it can be said that Raines has been judged appropriately by the electors and I hope that they reconsider Raines in light of the things he did and did great, rather than just measure him by hits, HR, and RBI. When looked at with traditional statistics other than HR and RBI, Raines does very well among both corner outfielders who are already in the Hall of Fame and those who played at the same time as him who are in the Hall of Fame. Rich Lederer, who has convinced many a voter to change his or her mind on Bert Blyleven has said on many occasions, "If wins lead to the Cy Young Award, and the Cy Young Award leads to the Hall of Fame, it seems like we're double- and triple-counting the wrong things." The same could be said for RBIs and MVP Awards.

Raines was not Rickey Henderson, but among the players who I included in this piece, only Hank Aaron was in Rickey's class across all measures. That's such elite company that not measuring up to Rickey Henderson shouldn't be held against him. And, while Raines' career peaked somewhat early, the measures show that he neither had a career that was too short for induction nor did he stick around too long.

Post script-

Finally, I'd like to add a note about Raines' teammate, Andre Dawson who was just elected to the Hall of Fame.

Dawson, it is said, did everything well. I don't think Raines should be considered any differently. The shape of their stats differs quite a bit, but overall, they were oddly similar.

	TB	SB	BB	Rock Pile	PA	CS	Rocks per Chance	Games	Rocks/G
Dawson	4787	314	589	6172	10769	109	0.551465332	2627	2.349448
Raines	3771	808	1330	5909	10359	146	0.522319455	2502	2.361711

Dawson had significantly more total bases, but Raines made up nearly the entire difference by walking more and stealing more bases. They were separated by fewer than 300 bases in their Rock Piles. They were also separated by just more than 400 plate appearances. Adding in the steal attempts, Raines falls just short of Dawson's efficiency at getting around the bases on his own. But, Dawson also had 100+ more games, so Raines squeaks out an advantage versus his long-term teammate on a per/games basis.

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