

Rice, Henderson stand among game's greats

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And then there was a guidance counselor in high school: "My first year in high school, my favorite sport was football. I did not like baseball. My counselor, Mrs. Wilkinson, bribed me into playing baseball. She would pay me a quarter every time I would get a hit, a run scored or stole a base. After my first ten games, I had 30 hits, 25 runs scored and 33 steals. Not bad money for a kid in high school."

And years later, after 25 years in the majors, Henderson couldn't give up the game that at one point wasn't his first choice.

In reference to his decision to play in the Atlantic League at the age of 44, he said, "I love the game of baseball. That's why it was so hard for me to walk away from the game."

For Rice, though, with the misfortune of having to deal with injuries and problems with his eyesight, his career was limited to 16 years, and is seen as much of the reason for why it took him the full 15 years to be inducted. Rice hinted that his decision to play on as long as he had might have lengthened his wait when he said, "(I have) no regrets. Well, wait a minute, maybe those last few at-bats in 1989 that I saw my .300 average drop to .298,

that I do regret."

In having to wait as long as he did, Rice said, "And then after 15 years, you get a phone call that you thought you'd never get. Your aspirations realized. Your tears overflow. Because you know now that the highest honor of your career means so much more than you ever thought it would mean forever."

For the 288th and 289th members of the Hall, it was clearly a day where they could immerse themselves in the grandeur of the moment, similar to a fan of the game, as 49 of the 64 members of the Hall still living were on the stage with them. But Henderson and Rice weren't alone in being inducted this year, even though the third inductee (courtesy of the Veterans Committee) couldn't be on the stage, that being Joe Gordon, who starred at second base for Cleveland and the Yankees. His daughter, Judy, was there to speak on his behalf in accepting his induction, and of all the spoken words during the ceremony, hers were the most poignant, when in recognizing it's significance to her and her family, "He had insisted against having a funeral. And as such, we consider Cooperstown and the National Baseball Hall of Fame as his final resting place, to be honored

forever."

For Henderson, one of the more humorous moments was his recalling his memories as a young fan, in trying to get a Reggie Jackson autograph.

"As a kid growing up in Oakland, my heroes were Jackie Robinson, Willie Mays, Hank Aaron, Reggie Jackson. What about that Reggie Jackson? I stand out on the ballpark in the parking lot waiting for Reggie Jackson to give me an autograph. Reggie used to come out all the time and I'd say, 'Reggie, can I have an autograph?' He would pass me a pen with his name on it. He never gave me an autograph."

And as was clear in the eyes of those who witnessed Rice's and Henderson's speeches, despite their persona that many knew on the field, or off of it during their playing days, both exemplified the understanding of the gravity of the moment. In Rice's words, "It is hard to comprehend that I am in a league of only one percent of all professional baseball players. I am in awe to be in this elite company and humbled to be accepting this honor," to which Henderson concluded with, "And at this moment, I am very, very humble."

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News staff photo by ANDRES CAAMANO

A Boston Red Sox fan holds up a "Thanks Jim" sign among the 21,000 fans that watched the Baseball Hall of Fame induction ceremonies Sunday in Cooperstown, N.Y.

Despite raindrops, Hall inductees bask in the glow

BY ANDRES CAAMANO
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COOPERSTOWN, N.Y. — Upon walking the streets of Cooperstown prior to the Baseball Hall of Fame induction ceremony Sunday, one might have mistaken it to have been held somewhere around Boston, as Red Sox Nation was in full bloom, a sea of blue and red, from the slew of caps, jerseys, t-shirts and the like. It almost seemed to be an afterthought that Rickey Henderson was also going to be inducted this year, and unlike Jim Rice, who had to wait until his 15th and final year to be inducted, "Rickey" — who always seemed to be in a rush from when he was born in the back of a car, on the way to the hospital, to his 25-year career in major league baseball — was inducted on his first try, with 94.8 percent of the vote.

With their inclusion, the two newest Hall of Famers became the 288th and 289th members of the Hall.

If not for a few green and yellow jerseys in the vicinity of where I was sitting amongst a sea of seats and blankets, with 21,000 on hand, it was hard not to think that red and blue were the colors of choice for the vast majority of those who made the trek out to the quaint little spot in the middle of New York.

The fortunes of both Henderson and Rice seemed to be shining on Sunday, as the region had to deal with scattered showers late Saturday. Sunday was no different, as almost from the start, the rain first began to drizzle, before beginning to pick up during the convocation. When Rice came to the podium, though, almost immediately the sun began to break through the clouds, and the rain became a



News staff photo by ANDRES CAAMANO

The two newest members of the Baseball Hall of Fame, Rickey Henderson, left, and Jim Rice, are all smiles on the stage with 49 other living members of Hall during ceremonies Sunday in Cooperstown, N.Y.

distant memory.

While Rice and Henderson might have played the game significantly differently, with Rice's prowess more so with his big bat, and Henderson with his legs, the two voiced a few identical themes in their acceptance speeches Sunday, with both talking about how baseball wasn't the only sport that they excelled in, and that football could have lured them away from the diamond — but that for each of them, one of their parents pointed them instead in the direction of baseball.

In Henderson's words: "Back in high school, I played football, a little hoops and baseball. My dream was to play football for the Oakland Raiders. But my mom thought I would get hurt playing football, so she chosed baseball for me. I guess mom do knows best." In

Rice's: "Near the end of my senior year, I had some decisions to make. Nebraska was offering me a four-year scholarship for football. I talked to my Dad about it. My Dad said, 'I think you got a better shot at becoming a professional baseball player than a professional football player.' So that was it."

For Henderson, though, it took more than his mother to steer him toward baseball as the sport of choice.

First there was a coach in his Babe Ruth league: "When I was a kid in Oakland, Mr. Hank Thomas tricked me into playing Babe Ruth baseball by coming to pick me up with a glazed doughnut and a cup of hot chocolate. That was the way he would get me up and out of bed and onto the ballpark."

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