

# An Honor *that* Keeps Growing

RETURNING TO COOPERSTOWN EACH SUMMER HAS STRENGTHENED MY BOND WITH THE HALL OF FAME AND FELLOW INDUCTEES.

BY DAVE WINFIELD

*Ten years ago this summer, in 2001, Dave Winfield was inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame by the Baseball Writers' Association of America on his first ballot. Winfield amassed 3,110 hits in a 22-year major league career, hitting 465 home runs, driving in 1,833 runs and earning 12 All-Star selections. The seven-time Gold Glove Award winner was a key contributor for the 1992 World Series champion Toronto Blue Jays, playing alongside 2011 Hall of Fame inductee Roberto Alomar on a team assembled by general manager Pat Gillick, also a 2011 Hall of Fame inductee. Winfield also played briefly with the third member of the Hall of Fame's Class of '11, Bert Blyleven, when both were members of the California Angels.*

*In addition to his role as executive vice president and senior advisor for the San Diego Padres, Winfield appears weekly on ESPN's Baseball Tonight as an analyst. This spring, Winfield reflected on his career in baseball – and the 10th anniversary of his Hall of Fame election – with Brad Horn, the Hall of Fame's senior director for communications and education.*

Ten years ago... what a journey it has been.

Earning Hall of Fame election was an exciting time and an important milestone in my life. Hall of Fame induction day was an affirmation that I had a really great career. I was so proud to be in Cooperstown that day, with so much pomp and circumstance and with so many important people in my life – family and friends – and in baseball, because it really is the crowning achievement of a lifetime commitment. When you give your heart and soul to your occupation for nearly 40 years of your life and you have done something you love, it is a great thing.

As to the day itself and my speech, to condense my entire career with all the teams and all of the years of playing was no easy feat. The day was a little hotter than it had been in awhile. I remember being really emotional with the entire experience, and I was certainly glad when it was over. I was definitely nervous, because the speech represents just one moment in time to express yourself and give thanks to all the people who helped me get to that point.

Unfortunately, my mother had passed away in 1988, and my father had just passed away in 2000. I would have loved to have them there with me that day. My wife, my kids, my brother and best buddy, Steve, were all there, along with my wife's parents, Robert and Louise Turner, who are like parents to me.

Hall of Fame election is almost like getting your PhD. When they call you "Doctor," you know that you have reached the highest level of your profession. When they call you "Hall of Famer," there's no doubt about what that honor represents. I'm really proud of that.

I have truly enjoyed my association with the Hall of Fame over the last decade. I go to the induction ceremony every year... I never want to miss it. Being a part of the elite few is a great honor, but it is also a real pleasure to be around friends and with so many guys I admire and wanted to be like when I was growing up.

I find that a lot of people think that, as a Hall of Famer, you played your entire baseball career at one position. But the first position I played was third base, then I moved to shortstop, where I played and also pitched throughout high school. When I began college at the University of Minnesota, all they wanted me to do was pitch. That was until my senior year, when they wanted me to hit and play the outfield.

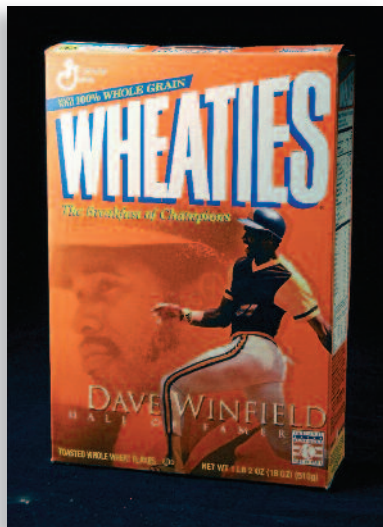
Signing professionally, I had a lot to learn when I arrived in the big



Dave Winfield retired following the 1995 season and earned election to the Hall of Fame in 2001 on his first ballot, receiving 84.5 percent of the BBWAA vote.

leagues. I played just one collegiate season in the outfield before going right to the major leagues, without ever playing a game in the minor leagues. Think about that. I was pitching every day for four years, and then I end up in the major leagues with just a few games in the outfield. I missed out on a lot coming into the league like that. By my first full year – mid-summer of 1974 – I became an everyday player, and then by 1977, I was an All-Star.

My path wasn't laid out by grand design that I was going to be a Hall of Famer. If you think you know it all when you get to the big leagues, you find out in a hurry that you don't know anything. I changed my style and my techniques at least three times while I was in the big leagues. If I hadn't changed anything, I would be just a footnote in baseball history. I came into the game with raw skills, but without making technical changes, I would not have been as successful.



Being open to change and to learning to play the game the right way are tremendous life lessons the game teaches us. Everyone is good when they get to the big leagues. When you allow for change, when you are open to listening and willing to commit to being better, good things happen. Fortunately for me, it all came together. You can't be a Hall of Famer just on physical ability.

I learned to respect the game – play it hard, play it fair, play it right. And it's not only in the way you play the game, but in how you deal with the people in and around the game: teammates, opponents, fans, organizations, etc. I was consistent, and that was important to me, because it is who I am. I didn't want to complain, and I wanted to bring respect to the name on the front of the uniform as well as the name on the back. It worked for me.

I guess the journey really began when I first put on that uniform as a kid and would walk with my brother to our baseball field, about a half block from where we grew up. That was such a proud moment, to put on a good-looking uniform, washed, with our spikes polished. My brother and I would walk to the field of play, thinking about what we could do that day that was better than anything we had done before in baseball. For my brother, could he make the Willie Mays "catch over the head?" For me, it was "what was the hardest ball I ever hit? Can I hit one harder than I had before?" We just wanted to do something to win the game and do something we had never done before.

In some ways, that's what makes this Hall of Fame fraternity so special. We all have stories that tie us to our love for the game. When we get together at Induction, we kid the new guys when it is over. They are rookies, and they don't get to say much in their first year of being a part of the

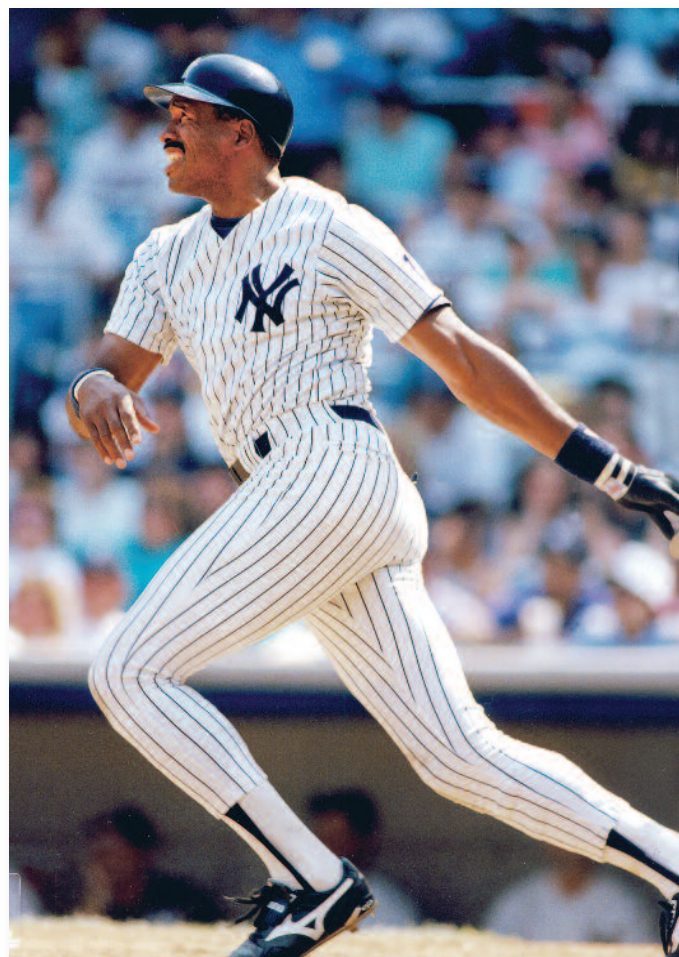


Photo File

**Above:** A 12-time All-Star and seven-time Gold Glove Award winner, Dave Winfield spent nine of his 22 major league seasons with the Yankees. He started his career in San Diego and later played for the Angels, Blue Jays, Twins and Indians. **Left:** After earning election to the Hall of Fame in 2001, Winfield was featured on a Wheaties box. **Below:** Winfield's Twins jersey from 1993 when he collected his 3,000th career hit.

Hall of Fame. But the next year, you *are* one of the club. The Hall of Fame is composed of the elite players and, as a Hall of Famer, your character, achievements and all of your honors are recognized and honored in perpetuity.

As Hall of Famers, we appreciate the recognition, because the Hall of Fame is a great destination – for players, for fans, for all of us who love the game. It is where your artifacts and memories live on forever. Each time I go to the Hall of Fame and talk with another Hall of Famer, I learn something new about the game, about an approach, or about how people looked at me when I played the game. I always learn something new.

These are moments to be treasured. Sitting on the back veranda at the Otesaga Resort Hotel, listening to baseball stories, and taking it all in. 🍌