





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SPORTS

Tim Raines' path to Hall of Fame began as athletic whirlwind in Sanford

 By **STEPHEN RUIZ**
ORLANDO SENTINEL | JUL 29, 2017



Sanford's Tim Raines will be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame on Sunday.

Don Williams' phone was abuzz in January, all because of a crazy prediction he made 40 years ago that finally came true.

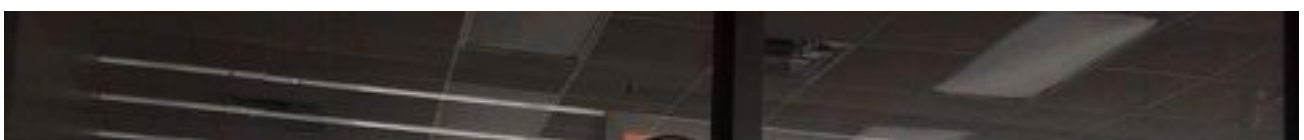
A Seminole High School graduate, Williams was a freshman baseball player at Western Carolina University in the late 1970s. He barely was getting settled into college life when he first heard Wayne Tolleson's name.

It wasn't the last.

Williams' teammates and fraternity brothers raved repeatedly about the athletic exploits of Tolleson, a wide receiver on the football team and a shortstop on the baseball team. With the mountains of North Carolina as a backdrop, Tolleson's feats seemingly were elevated with each recounting.

Tolleson went on to a 10-year career in the major leagues, so he was plenty talented, but Williams told his friends he knew someone better.

"Tolly is good, and I'm glad he's on our team, but I'm telling you, he's [nothing] compared to one of my high-school buddies," Williams said. "His name is Tim Raines. Write it down now because he is going to be in the Hall of Fame."





Sanford native Tim Raines will be inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame on Sunday.



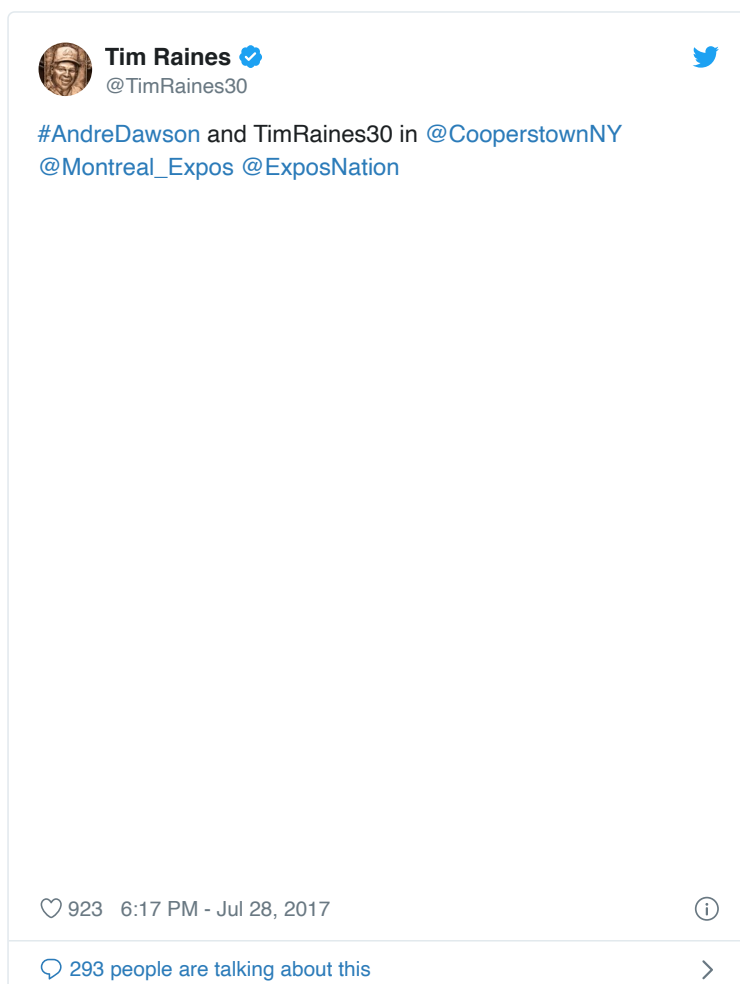
Along with Pudge Rodriguez and Jeff Bagwell, Raines will headline the Class of 2017 during the National Baseball Hall of Fame induction ceremonies Sunday (1:30 p.m., MLB Network). The Sanford native, who played 23 years in the majors, is being enshrined after his 10th and final year on the ballot.

"It's like a war hero who finally makes it back home safely," said Ocky Clark, a former national track standout who went to Seminole High School with Raines. "We've been waiting a long time for this. He's our favorite son."

With their lengthy speeches and honoring the game's past, Hall of Fame inductions are more about storytelling than statistics. While the numbers — 2,605 hits, 908 stolen bases, 1,571 runs, a .385 on-base percentage and two World Series rings, among them — more than justify Raines' enshrinement, those who know him best are not fixated on them.

They were flooded with memories as the big day approached.

"He would just take off from third base and steal home," said Bobby Lundquist, Raines' former high-school coach. "I said, 'My God, what's he doing?' And the next thing you know, he would beat the pitch to the plate. He was at home plate before the catcher caught the ball, so we developed some sort of signal so the batter wouldn't swing and kill Tim coming down the baseline."



Raines played four sports at Seminole, an athlete so gifted that he set records in track and field despite only participating in meets between the sport's season overlapped with baseball.

He was a standout running back in football, his favorite sport. Raines earned numerous college offers but was concerned about how long his undersized body could absorb the pounding. He signed with the Montreal Expos, who took him in the fifth round of the 1977 baseball draft, instead of playing football at the University of Florida.

"I saw him one night go into the end zone, turn around and take off like a bullet to the other end," said Sylvester Wynn, a Seminole High graduate who is now the school's boys basketball coach.

Said childhood friend Randy Harvey: "He was probably one of the best running backs ever to come out of the state."

In baseball, though, Raines could not be stopped — and not only because of his speed.

Williams recalled Raines as the only sophomore on the Seminoles' varsity squad, a rarity back then. When the varsity met the junior varsity in a scrimmage at Historic Sanford Memorial Stadium in 1975, Raines flashed his power.

Early in the game, using his natural right-handed stroke, Raines launched a home run to left-center field.

"As he is trotting around the bases, he is [talking trash] to us," Williams said. "All of the guys on the jayvee team, we're his buddies. We grew up playing Little League ball with him. He just loves to razz on you, all in a fun manner."

Raines was not done.

He learned to switch-hit as a youngster, so in his next at-bat, Raines deposited a home run over the scoreboard in right-center while batting left-handed.

"That was when I knew this dude wasn't like the rest of us," Williams said.



Tim Raines played 4 sports at Seminole High School, including standing out as an explosive running back in football. (Courtesy of Seminole High School)

Tim Raines played 4 sports at Seminole High School, including standing out as an explosive running back in football. (Courtesy of Seminole High School) - Original Credit: Courtesy of Seminole High School - Original Source: Courtesy of Seminole High (Courtesy photo)

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Raines, 57, comes from a hard-working family.

Both of his parents are originally from Georgia. A year or so after Ned Raines arrived in Sanford as a teenager in the early 1950s, he went back and brought down his girlfriend at the time, Florence.

Ned first got work picking oranges, then settled into construction. Florence grew up on a farm, toting watermelons and picking cotton, tomatoes, green beans and potatoes. She was a school custodian, worked in day care and cleaned houses.

Raines has four brothers and a sister.

"He came from a great family of athletes when you consider his brothers Ned, Levi, Sammy and Tommy," said Mike Prosser, who played Pony League baseball with Raines. "They were all phenomenal athletes. His father was a phenomenal athlete, too, but Tim had that special ability and charisma to drive teams crazy. If he was on base, it was over."

Although his father played semi-pro and two of his brothers made it as far as minor-league baseball. Raines clearly stood out.

His No. 22 is retired at Seminole High, and the athletic facilities there bear his name. A plaque recognizing them as the Tim Raines Athletic Park is affixed to a rock, the nickname he was given in professional baseball.

"I go back to my scrapbook that my mother put together for us all the time with articles and all that good stuff," said Bob Robinson, Raines' double-play partner as a second baseman at Seminole. "I brag a lot. I don't see him that often.

Robinson laughed.

"If it wasn't for him, I might have been recognized as a better player."

Raines enjoyed having fun, with his former coach one of his targets.

Lundquist, 66, had been a left-handed pitcher for the Gators who was not much older than his players at Seminole at the time.

Lundquist used to throw batting practice, normally without a screen in front of the pitcher's mound so he wouldn't get struck by hard-hit balls. He was safe most of the time, until Raines stepped in for his hacks.

Raines displayed exceptional bat control, especially for a high-school hitter, and intentionally tried to hit Lundquist with the ball.

Other times, they would wrestle. If Lundquist won, the Seminoles would have to run laps. If Raines won, they didn't.

One day, Raines inadvertently broke Lundquist's glasses when he flipped him.

"Lundquist was [ticked]," said Williams, now a lawyer in Orlando who has represented Raines.

Recalling that incident, Lundquist said "it was all in good fun." He liked to play with Raines, too.

"He used to play in our alumni game," Lundquist said of the player whose No. 22 is retired by Seminole High. "I told my catcher, 'I've got a potato,' and I painted it all white, and it looked just like a baseball.

"I said, 'Put this in your pocket. Whenever Tim gets on third base after the pitch is thrown, throw it over the third baseman's head.' Sure enough, Tim comes trotting home, and the catcher has the real baseball."

SPORTS

Hall of Fame ceremony

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Raines works as a minor-league instructor with the Toronto Blue Jays and lives in Goodyear, Ariz., with his wife, Shannon, and twin daughters Ava and Amelie, who will turn 7 in September. Raines has two older sons, Tim Jr. and Andre, named after Hall of Fame teammate Andre Dawson.

An outfielder in the majors, Raines finally has arrived at a place where only 220 former major-league players have been bestowed with plaques since the first Hall of Fame class in 1936.

"His coach [Lundquist] told me, 'He's going to be real good. He's going to be a big man in Sanford one day,'" said Florence Raines, who lives in Deltona with her husband. "It seems like it came true."

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