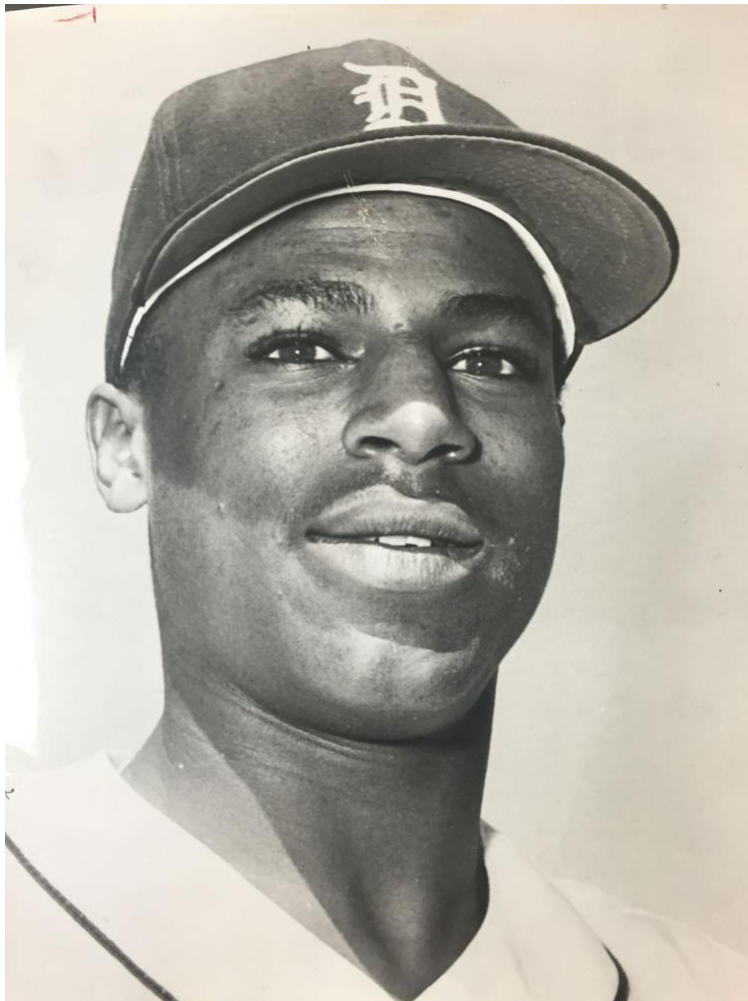


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EDITOR'S PICK

Hanging with Miss Cooper: Why not Lou?

By CARA COOPER cara.cooper@martinsvillebulletin.com
Dec 9, 2019



Lou Whitaker, a 1975 graduate of Martinsville High School, failed to get the votes for induction into the Hall of Fame after getting on the ballot for the Major League Baseball Modern Era Committee.

Bulletin file photo

The AP headline following the announcement Sunday that former St. Louis Cardinals catcher Ted Simmons was one of two who will be inducted into the Major League Baseball Hall of Fame: “Ted Simmons can thank analytics for Baseball Hall of Fame nod.”

It's true Simmons, who received 13 of 16 votes by MLB's Modern Era Committee, one more than was necessary for induction into the Hall of Fame, saw a jump in his candidacy thanks to advanced statistics. By WAR — Wins Above Replacement, a statistic used to represent how many victories a player provides his team versus what a “replacement level” player could provide — Simmons is one of just eight catchers in baseball history to have greater than 50 career WAR, finishing his 21-year career with 50.3.



“If it weren’t for the analytics people, my career as a potential Hall-of-Famer probably would have been shut down and forgotten about a long time ago,” Simmons told the AP. “When people started talking about on-base percentage and WAR, and explained how WAR comprised, then it became a real look into a real study, and then a real comparison started to develop.”

Sound familiar? It's a thought that mirrors what Lou Whitaker, a former Detroit Tigers All-Star second baseman from Martinsville, told the Martinsville Bulletin last month.

In the traditional categories, Simmons finished his career with a .285 batting average, 248 home runs, and 1,389 RBIs. Great, but not earth shattering, which makes his original 3.7% of the vote on the Baseball Writers Association of America Hall of Fame ballot understandable.

Simmons and Whitaker's numbers are similar — Whitaker finished his 19-year career with a batting average of .276, with 2,369 career hits, 244 home runs and 1,084 RBIs.

Whitaker also fell short of the 5% threshold needed to stay on the MLB Hall of Fame ballot and fell short on that same Modern Era Committee ballot that elected Simmons. Whitaker received just six votes.

This isn't meant to degrade Simmons' induction. He is, by all I've read, a very worthy candidate. But it's hard to argue that a look at advanced analytics makes him a better candidate, while other players with better advanced analytics are still left out.

Right now, Whitaker is 75th all-time in career WAR among every baseball player who ever played in the major leagues. Only three players with higher career WAR are currently not in the Hall of Fame — Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens (who also absolutely should be, but the reason for their absence is another column for another day) and Bill Dahlen, an apparent great for the Chicago Cubs and four other teams who finished his career in ... 1911.

Let's step away from comparing Whitaker and Simmons for a second. Let's compare Whitaker to another player. A middle infielder who played 20 years with a career .310 batting average, 3,465 hits, 260 home runs, and 1,311 RBIs. Great numbers, especially the hits.

But, that same middle infielder had a career on-base percentage of .377 (Whitaker's was .363) and a career WAR of 72.4, which is 88th all time.

That middle infielder? Derek Jeter, who next month will more than likely be just the second unanimous Hall of Fame selection. One Hall of Fame voter who has sent in a ballot voted only for Jeter (heavy eye roll). When you play in New York, make 14 All-Star games, win five Gold Gloves, five Silver Sluggers and four World Series, you're going to get recognition. But was Jeter really worth ALL that?

Heck, if you want to compare Whitaker to other Hall-of-Fame-worthy middle infielders, look no further than the one who played beside him for nearly 2,000 games. Shortstop Alan Trammell, inducted into Cooperstown by the Modern Era Committee last year, had a career .285 batting average, 2,365 hits, 185 home runs, and a .352 on-base percentage. His career WAR was 70.7, 95th all time.

Is Derek Jeter a Hall-of-Famer? Of course. Absolutely. No question. Was Alan Trammell? Probably. Was Ted Simmons? You could argue one way or the other until you're blue in the face, but the fact of the matter is come next summer it won't matter because he will have a plaque in Cooperstown.

But you can't definitively say that players such as Jeter are a slam dunk and leave out other players who were statistically better in other categories. You really can't put in Trammell and leave out his double-play partner of nearly two decades, who had nearly identical, if not better, numbers. That would be like saying Bert is an all-time great Sesame Street character while you ignore Ernie.

And you certainly can't say advanced statistics give Simmons, No. 300 all-time in career WAR, a place in Cooperstown and ignore how much those advanced statistics also help the cause of others.

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EDITOR'S PICK

SPOTLIGHT

Glen Wood helped foster a love of racing for outsiders

By CARA COOPER Bulletin Sports Editor

Jan 19, 2019



Wood Brothers founder Glen Wood signs autographs for fans at a meet-and-greet in Stuart in April 2016.

Bulletin file photo

One of my first solo racing assignments for the Martinsville Bulletin was in the spring of 2016. The Wood Brothers were having a fan meet-and-greet at their shop and museum in Stuart ahead of the Martinsville Speedway race that weekend, and I was to go and just take pictures.

I will be the first to admit when I started at the Bulletin I didn't know anything about racing. I think Dale Earnhardt Jr. and Jeff Gordon were about the only active drivers I could name. And of course I made the huge journalism mistake of not doing any research about the Wood Brothers before this event. I knew they were returning to a full schedule that year, and they had a young driver, Ryan Blaney, who was supposed to be pretty good. That was it. And in my young naivety I thought that was enough.

When I got there, I think it was obvious to all involved I had no idea what I was doing or where I was. Kim Wood Hall, Glen Wood's daughter, showed me around and finally said "Would you like to meet Glen and Leonard? They started this whole thing."

And they all couldn't have been nicer. The place was filling up with fans, and still Kim, Glen and Leonard Wood took me on a personal tour of the shop, describing every car, every poster, every driver who ever sat in the No. 21.

On one side of the shop, Blaney was signing autographs for the younger fans, and on the other, the Wood family was signing for the older fans. Fans who would come up and chat about this race or that one, and Glen listened to each one and had a personal

conversation with each fan like they were sitting by the fire. For a good portion of the night I just stood beside him and took pictures of him signing autographs, partially so I could listen in on his conversations.

At one point he looked over at me and smiled and just said “are you having fun?” I smiled really big back. I’d done a lot of fun assignments in my career to that point, but this was by far the best.

There have been a lot of sports reporters come through the Martinsville Bulletin, and for a lot of them, like me, this is their first experience with racing. Thankfully, in Glen Wood, who passed away Friday at the age of 93, and the rest of the Wood Brothers, right down the street we had a family who helped feed a new interest, which made learning NASCAR much easier.

Mike Smith, a one-time Bulletin Sports Reporter who went on to work as Director of Public Relations at Martinsville Speedway, was just as green as I was when he started. His story of meeting the Woods was also similar.

“I first met Glen in 1977, when their shop was down on the river in Stuart,” Smith said by email Friday. “I was a young reporter at the Martinsville Bulletin who had absolutely zero racing knowledge; actually, had never been to a race at that time. It made no difference to Glen. He patiently explained everything to me in that first interview. He didn’t make me feel stupid; he made me feel like family.”

Steve Waid worked at the Bulletin in 1970 before embarking on a 40 year NASCAR reporting career. His first story about the Wood Brothers came around 1972 or 1973, when the team was hitting their stride with David Pearson as their driver.

His first experience talking with Glen “describes to me and the rest of the world what he really was and how he really was.” Waid wanted to do a story about them from their shop in Stuart, and enlisted the help of Martinsville Speedway PR Director at the time Dick Thompson, who set up the appointment.

“At that time I thought Glen and Leonard were pretty close to the vest, quiet, even secretive guys because that was the reputation they had, at least among many people,” Waid said. “And it didn’t help any when Dick told me, ‘hey, you know the first question

Glen asked me was how long is it going to take?’ Well that just boosted my confidence to no end.

“But I went up there and I went to the shop and I tell you what, rather than seeing the individual I thought Glen was going to be, I met a very candid, very open, very informative man. He was very, very friendly, and Leonard was too. I knew that I was taking up their work time but nevertheless they answered every one of my questions and even showed me around the shop. So when I left there I thought, ‘well, this is not quite what I expected at all. This is a pleasant surprise.’”

Since that day more than 40 years ago, every time Waid saw Glen or Leonard and talked with them it’s been the same way.

“Just very friendly, very courteous, smiling, those kinds of personable people,” he said. “And I thought this really went against the grain of everything I’ve ever been told.

“And more and more people found that out as the years went by... Those two brothers, when they were in the garage there they were as friendly and as cooperative as most anybody you could find. That was one of the qualities. In addition to being the innovator and the creator and the pioneer and the icon he was in NASCAR for all his years in the sport.”

When I got back to the office that first night meeting the Woods, I realized that I had actually only taken a few pictures of Blaney, the whole reason I thought I drove to Stuart for the event in the first place. The majority of my shots were of the shop and the

elder Wood Brothers. I was really embarrassed to tell that to my editor.

“It’s mostly Glen and Leonard. Do people know them? Are readers going to care?”

My editor laughed a bit and said “Cara, you know they’re legends right? They’re a huge deal in NASCAR. Yes, people care.”

I guess I should have realized that given everything they told me in my tour, but they were all so unassuming and down-to-earth it never hit me that they were some of the biggest names in the sport.

And the biggest thing was they didn’t treat me like an outsider. Glen and his family wanted me to fall in love with the sport they had been in love with their entire lives.

They were successful in that endeavor, for me and many, many others.

“To me, that’s what made Glen special,” Smith said. “He never got caught up in all of the hype of the sport and the amazing things his team accomplished, all the honors he received. To him, it was about family, and his extended racing family.”

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Cara Cooper

https://www.martinsvillebulletin.com/sports/local_sports/hangin-with-miss-cooper-fair-pay-to-play-act-could/article_77460da8-3057-5d7d-af3d-672a91d91e26.html

EDITOR'S PICK

Hangin' with Miss Cooper: 'Fair Pay to Play' act could benefit more than just top college athletes

By CARA COOPER cara.cooper@martinsvillebulletin.com

Oct 7, 2019

One summer night when I was in college my friends and I were meeting up at Applebees. One good friend was telling us how he had run a 5K that morning and finished second.

“I won \$25,” he told us. “But I couldn’t keep it, because it would have been an NCAA violation.”

This friend at the time was on a partial track scholarship at Division II Lenoir Rhyne University in North Carolina. Despite the fact he was running at a Division II school and admittedly had no chance of ever going pro in track, accepting the \$25 would have essentially made him a professional athlete, and he would lose his scholarship and wouldn’t be able to run college track anymore.

This made me mad for two reasons.

1. This kid owed me a lot of gas money from throughout the years, and I thought if he had come into a little bit of cash that day he would be the one paying for our half-price appetizers that night.

2. More importantly, what was the big deal? He was running a street race, not wearing a Lenoir Rhyne uniform, and it was \$25.

Last week, California passed the “Fair Pay to Play” act that would allow college athletes to make money off of their being athletes. As is the case with any conversation of college athletics and money, this was met with both cheers and jeers.

Where much of the discussion takes place is about whether college athletes should be paid, but it's important to differentiate between paying college athletes and allowing college athletes to make money.

Paying college athletes an actual paycheck from the school is an extremely nuanced conversation, mostly because while Division I college football and basketball bring in billions of dollars, that is only two of two dozen NCAA sports, most of which don't bring in any money at all. And while it's nice to dream on those billions being divvied up between all those athletes, it won't happen. Who gets how much, and how equal do you divvy? It's a logistical nightmare to even think about, especially when you consider Title IX.

But allowing college athletes to make money is a much different conversation, and that's where the Fair Pay to Play act comes in. When the law goes into effect in 2023, athletes in California will be able to make money from endorsements, autograph signings, and anything else someone is willing to pay them for without fear of losing their scholarship. Imagine being a Division III college athlete and having a local car dealership offer you \$100 to be in a commercial. That would now be possible, and according to the AP as many as 10 other states are currently drafting legislation to follow California's lead.

Of course, this law has been met with a lot of backlash. Tim Tebow, best known for winning the Heisman Trophy and two national championships while playing quarterback for the Florida Gators, went on ESPN last month to express his frustration with the idea of allowing athletes to make money, fearing it would make students “selfish.”

“When I was at the University of Florida I think my jersey was one of the top selling jerseys around the world... and I didn’t make a dollar from it,” Tebow said on ESPN’s First Take. “But nor did I want to. Because I knew going into college what it was all about... what makes college sports special, to now it’s not about us it’s about we... it changes what’s special about college football.”

The irony here is that Tebow is one of the better examples for why college athletes should be able to make money. It’s impossible to know how much Florida was able to profit off of Tebow’s play on the field, but it was certainly in the tens, possibly hundreds, of millions when you consider ticket sales, memorabilia, and TV contracts. And Tebow’s best playing days were in college. He lasted just three seasons in the NFL, and was generally considered a bust. The money he made off of endorsements post-college is certainly much less than he would have made during his time with the Gators.

And Tebow was a lucky one, because his personality netted him an on-air job with ESPN, and a chance to give baseball a try in the New York Mets minor league system, so he’s not struggling for money. But many, many college athletes are. While his

argument is a sweet thought, and there is something really lovely about the idea of playing sports for the love of sports, that simply isn't possible for every college athlete in the country.

When people talk about paying college athletes, the focus is often on the Tebows, the Zion Williamsons, the Johnny Manziels, and big names like that. But they're a very small percentage of college athletes. And Division I athletes are a small percentage of overall players in the NCAA.

The NCAA's website states, "More than 460,000 NCAA student-athletes – more than ever before – compete in 24 sports every year." The most recent NCAA statistics show there are roughly 179,000 Division I athletes, 122,000 Division II, and about 190,000 Division III.

Sixty-two percent of Division II student athletes receive some level of athletic aid, according to the NCAA. But in Division III, athletic scholarships are not allowed at that level. More than a third of all NCAA athletes are not able to receive any sort of athletic scholarship money, but are also not allowed to make money off of themselves.

Division II and Division III athletes certainly won't be able to make life-changing money off of endorsements in the way a Duke basketball player or Alabama football player would, but Duke and Alabama athletes also have the chance to continue making money off of their likeness beyond their college days. For lower level athletes, those four years is likely the only chance they have to make money off of themselves. What's so bad about letting them keep \$25?

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