



THE HAWK: Andre Dawson's entry into the Hall of Fame was a no-brainer this year. RICK STEWART/GETTY IMAGES

## Dawson a deserving hall of famer

By MICHAEL OWENS

Congratulations to Andre Dawson on being elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame in his ninth year of eligibility.

His wait is not the longest a player has had to endure before being elected to the baseball Hall of Fame. Last year, Jim Rice was finally elected in his 15th and final year of eligibility. After that, other special considerations need to be made by a different pool of voters if a player is to reach the Hall.

It took Andre Dawson nine years of voting to finally get in. Of course, his statistics didn't change one iota over these nine years. What did change was the caliber of other eligible players who were being considered each year.

When Cal Ripken and Tony Gwynn were on the ballot for the first time, Andre Dawson must not have been a terribly convincing candidate to some voters. If you compared Andre Dawson to Rickey Henderson, well, Dawson's numbers and overall career just didn't have the same overall effect.

Nonetheless, if you were responsible for considering whether Andre Dawson deserves induction to the Hall of Fame over the course of these nine years, and finally there comes a year in which there are no other players who are overwhelmingly worthy for induction, then you get the chance to "sneak him in."

It appears this is what happened in this past year's voting. No other players were elected in this voting process. Much younger and newly-eligible Robbie Alomar came very close. Long-time candidate (and starting pitcher) Bert Blyleven was also very close but did not get the required 75 percent of votes.

The obvious point, which is hardly original but worth emphasizing after this year's voting results, is that the debate becomes not only whether a player belongs in the Hall of Fame, but when and how he might "sneak in."

Let it be known, compared to this year's other eligible players, Andre Dawson is a Hall of Famer.

How conscious is he that it took nine years of voter consideration to lead to his induction, and that he will be inducted with no other playing peers who went through the same voting process? Never mind.

Of the eligible players in the 2009 vote (class of 2010), Andre was the cream of the crop. Who cares if he wasn't judged to be worthy in his first eight years of eligibility. The voters "finally" came to appreciate him just enough this year! He deserves the honour partially based on being one of only three players with 400 home runs and 300 steals.

Hypothetically, it would be interesting to have a more uniformly objective method of induction. Induction to Cooperstown is an artful happenstance function. Timing is almost everything..

Michael Owens is a writer living in New York City.

# Manning looks to Miami to cap MVP with Super Bowl

By KARL YU  
Epoch Times Staff

While Indianapolis Colts QB Peyton Manning took home an unprecedented fourth NFL MVP award, you can be certain he's not satisfied—he wants another Super Bowl ring.

Colts head coach Jim Caldwell said that it is due to his pivot's insatiable competitive fire.

"He just has an innate will to excel," Caldwell told the Associated Press.

"He never gets bored with it." Manning shared his first MVP award with the late-Steve McNair back in 2003.

That year, Indy's No. 18 completed 379 of 566 passes (67 percent) for 4,267 yards with 29 passing touchdowns in the regular season.

Peyton shone in the first two games of the 2003 postseason, but he threw four interceptions in the AFC championship game and the Colts lost 24-14 to the New England Patriots.

Manning repeated as MVP the following season, finishing the 2004 regular season campaign with 4,557 passing yards, a career-high 49 touchdown passes, and a passer rating of 121.1.

Just like in the 2003 playoffs however, Manning defeated the Denver Broncos and lost to the New England Patriots.

The Colts star signal-caller won the Super Bowl (and Super Bowl MVP) in 2006 season but would not win another league MVP award until 2008.

The fact that he won the accolade during that season was somewhat of a miracle as he missed a bulk of training camp and the preseason because knee surgery.

Manning finished the 2008 season completing 371 of 555 passes for 4,002 yards with 27 TDs.

Again in 2008 he fell short in the playoffs, this time losing to the San Diego Chargers in OT 23-17.



ANOTHER POSTSEASON BECKONS: Peyton Manning wants to cap his MVP season with a Super Bowl victory. ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

### THIS TIME IT'S DIFFERENT

This year, Manning still put up good numbers, going 393 of 571 for a career-high completion percentage of 68.8 percent with 33 TDs, but he did so while the team was undergoing a bit of a renovation.

Caldwell took over for long-time head coach Tony Dungy and 2009 was the first year that Manning didn't have WR Marvin Harrison as a target.

Anthony Gonzalez, who was expected to pick up the slack for Harrison, suffered a right knee injury in the team's opener and was subsequently placed on injured reserve.

But good players make the ones around them better and Manning certainly did that.

'He just has an innate will to excel'

—Indianapolis coach Jim Caldwell on Peyton Manning

Wide receiver Reggie Wayne and tight end Dallas Clark continued to be targets in the passing game but young receivers Pierre Garcon (765 yards receiving) and Austin Collie (tied for rookie-high 60 receptions) also benefited from Manning looks as well.

"When you lose a receiver that's been such a constant performer like Marvin Harrison and you replace him with young guys, there's change there," Manning told the Indianapolis Colts official Web site.

"I have to believe that the way our team responded to that change... these guys just came to work everyday and didn't let all these changes affect them."

Generally speaking, winning the MVP hasn't translated into Super Bowl success. But the Indianapolis star QB would like history to repeat itself this year.

Super Bowl XLIV will be held in Miami, the site of Manning's one and only championship win.

## Is F1 ready for Michael Schumacher, average driver?

### F1 not the same game anymore

By JAMES FISH  
Epoch Times Staff

While the first race of the 2010 Formula One season is still months away, a nearer date is highly anticipated. On Feb. 1, seven-time World Drivers Champ Michael Schumacher will take his first laps in the new Mercedes F1 car during preseason testing in Valencia, Spain.

Schumacher's return has created huge excitement among fans and media. News of his signing with Mercedes has overshadowed the FIA/FOCA controversy, "Crashgate", and the election of Jean Todt.

But Michael Schumacher is an unknown quantity. Strip away the hype, and Michael Schumacher, 41, is an aging driver trying to make a comeback after three years out of a formula car—a driver who in August was deemed physically unfit to drive.

Formula One is a game of hundredths of a second. Precise split-second reaction makes the difference when squeezing the extra few hundredths of a second out of each corner.

The game has changed since Schumacher retired. The tires, the cars, and the strategy are entirely different.

But the biggest change is the test ban. Michael Schumacher was the legendary testing iron man, logging hundreds of thousands of kilometres between races and off-season, honing his skills, learning the cars, training his instincts. With almost all testing banned, Schumacher will have to learn the car, and develop his skills, while practicing for each race.

None of this is to say that Michael will not do well in his comeback. The man has won nearly twice as many F1 races as any driver in history for a reason—he has enormous natural talent and ability. But he also faces some serious obstacles.

No matter how Michael does at Valencia, everyone who has ever heard his name will be trying to get tickets or a seat at the television to watch him race.

The German Grand Prix is a guaranteed sellout. And even if he doesn't come out of the box on fire, fans will tune in to see if he hits his stride in the next race, or the next.

### WHAT IF?

But what if he never again becomes dominant? What if he is a steady mid-pack driver? What if, relegated to the middle of the grid, he allows his equally legendary aggressiveness to lead him into avoidable accidents?

Schumacher has never been shy about assisting other drivers to take off-track excursions. Maybe the stewards would tolerate some contact when he was driving for Ferrari and winning every race. Will they have the same respect when he is a mid-pack Mercedes driver?

And, should he be merely a good, and not the greatest, driver on the grid, how long will it take before the press—and the public—turns on him. How long will it take before he is facing boos at the track and sharp criticism in the press? Is F1 generous enough to accept Michael Schumacher, average driver? Will this take the pleasure out of F1 for Schumacher?

The entire F1 world will be watching the Circuit de Valencia on Feb. 1. Who is fastest will be secondary. The primary question will be, "How did Michael do?"

## Unpredictability reigns supreme in college basketball

### Debating the strongest conference

By SUSAN SHAN  
Epoch Times Staff

In the world of college basketball, nothing is certain. What we thought we knew can change instantly with the parity that is now commonplace.

Nine weeks into the college basketball season and with conference play just getting under way, the battle for the best conference has heated up.

The Kansas Jayhawks, ranked No. 1 last Sunday, went into the Thompson-Boling Arena in Knoxville, Tenn. to play a Volunteers team that just dismissed its best player Tyler Smith after he and three other players were pulled over and police discovered guns and marijuana in their car.

The three remaining players are currently serving an indefinite suspension, leaving Tennessee with six scholarship players and three walk-ons to battle the best team in the country.

Using the crowd and inspired team play, the Volunteers pulled out a gritty 76-68 win. The hero, Skylar McBee, was a seldom-used walk-on whose dream was to play for the University of Tennessee.

With the Volunteers up three points, McBee found himself with the ball and a shot clock about to expire. He threw up an off-balance 3-pointer that swished in with 36 seconds remaining in the game, giving Tennessee a six-point lead.

The stunner in Knoxville suddenly thrust Tennessee and the Southeastern Conference back into the best conference in America discussion.

The Jayhawks, who were ranked No. 1 in both the AP and Coaches polls for nine straight weeks, including pre-season, now find themselves without an identity after a week of struggling against Cornell in a 71-66 victory at home and then losing to the undermanned Vols.

Kansas coach Bill Self said, "I don't



CONFERENCE PLAY UNDERWAY: Villanova beat Louisville on Monday and is now an impressive No. 4 in the polls. ANDY LYONS/GETTY IMAGES

know if Kansas is a team yet."

The dethroning of the former No. 1 team from the Big 12 conference allowed fellow Big 12 foe, Texas, to step into the No. 1 spot this week with a 15-0 record.

Also undefeated is Kentucky from the SEC with a 16-0 record and No. 2 ranking.

### RANKING THE CONFERENCES

However, Jeff Sagarin, famous for his formulated computer rankings,

currently ranks the Atlantic Coast Conference as the top conference, followed by the Big 12, Big East, Southeastern, Big Ten, and Pacific-10.

Joe Lunardi of ESPN.com composes a weekly "Bracketology" report that predicts which 65 teams will make the NCAA March Madness Tournament.

This week, Lunardi listed the Big East as top dog with eight teams, followed by the ACC and Big 12 with seven, SEC with five, Atlantic 10, Big

Ten and Mountain West with four, and Conference USA and the West Coast Conference with two each.

The glaring void in the list of multiple-bid conferences is the Pac-10, which Lunardi predicts will only send one team into the NCAA Tournament with the automatic qualifier spot, something unprecedented with a BCS conference in the 64/65-team era.

The weakness of the Pac-10 this year is unacceptable, though poor performance does not deserve all of the blame. USC, arguably the best team in the conference, ruled itself ineligible for the NCAA tournament with self-imposed sanctions as a result of their investigation into the O.J. Mayo recruiting scandal.

Mayo was a member of the 2007-08 Trojans team, but the 2009-10 team is the one getting punished for the violations.

Sagarin's rankings may appear odd because he has the ACC ranked as the No. 1 conference, but the ACC boasts six teams in the AP poll: No. 8 Duke, No. 12 North Carolina, No. 20 Georgia Tech, No. 23 Miami, No. 24 Clemson, and No. 25 Florida State.

Lunardi's Bracketology argues that the best conference is the Big East, also with six teams in the AP poll: No. 4 Villanova, No. 5 Syracuse, No. 10 West Virginia, No. 11 Georgetown, No. 15 Connecticut, and No. 16 Pittsburgh.

Popular opinion believes that the BCS conferences, minus the Pac-10, are the dominant forces in college basketball. However, March Madness has told us that nothing in college basketball is ever certain.

Two years ago marked the only year that all four No. 1 seeds made the Final Four. LSU in 1986 and George Mason in 2006 both as a No. 11 seeds made the Final Four. Villanova actually won the national championship in 1985 as a No. 8 seed.

With a few intense months of conference play just beginning, this season promises a big dose of upsets and Cinderella teams in the only thing that can be predictable about college basketball—its unpredictability.