

Does Lou Whitaker Belong in the Baseball Hall of Fame?

Tigers great Alan Trammell was a great shortstop. Yet, the Tigers great was still in the conversation for the Hall-of-Fame until 2018 when he was finally inducted by the Hall of Fame Veterans Committee. Meanwhile, his double-play partner, second baseman Lou Whitaker, was no longer eligible to be voted in traditionally due to a lack of support from the Baseball Writers Association voters.

Not only is this sad for Tigers fans, but he is more deserving of being in the Hall-of-Fame than most of his second base peers, including 2011 inductee Roberto Alomar. While he could still enter the Hall through a Veterans Committee decision, it's clear that he's been snubbed for too long.

Was Lou Whitaker Unfairly Snubbed in the Hall of Fame Voting?

A sponsor of [Lou Whitaker's Baseball-Reference page](#) brings up an excellent point. Alomar had an adjusted OPS (on-base plus slugging percentage) of 116 over his career with 7 teams. Whitaker also had an adjusted OPS of 116 over his career with only one team. They both played about 2300 games and Whitaker amassed 69.7 WAR compared to Alomar's 63.5 WAR in 12 fewer games. Like Alomar, Whitaker was a Gold Glove-caliber defender and won three Gold Glove Awards. Alomar won 10 Gold Gloves, but compiled only 2.4 defensive WAR. Whitaker had 15.4 defensive WAR.

Of course, both second basemen spent much of their careers alongside plus defensive shortstops. Alomar had Cal Ripken in Baltimore and Omar Vizquel during his Cleveland years. Whitaker had Trammell alongside for virtually his entire career. It's likely that Vizquel actually made Alomar look even better than he was. But it's a pretty clear consensus that Alomar was a great glove man. Still, according to the statistics, Whitaker was even more valuable on the defensive side of the ball.

The main reason that Whitaker isn't in the Hall of Fame is that, to put it simply, he's a quiet, humble, low-key guy. He never seemed incredibly concerned about being in the Hall, actually saying that if he didn't make it the first time to not bring his name up again. Obviously, writers remembered this and most left him off of their ballots. Of course, this was just Whitaker's humility. But his play should've been enough to earn him a place, right?

Alomar and Whitaker By the Numbers

With statistics like WAR (wins above replacement) only now becoming mainstream, baseball card statistics (Average, HR, and RBI) have long been the deciding factors in who is chosen for the Hall of Fame and who's not. But Whitaker's and Alomar's "counting numbers" are relatively the same – 244 HR, 1084 RBI and 2369 hits for Whitaker and 210 HR, 1134 RBI, and 2724 hits for Alomar. None of those are the "shoo-in" numbers, as no major milestones like 300 HR or 3000 hits were reached by either of them. The extra 300 hits do help Alomar's case, but not incredibly so.

Alomar's career OPS was higher than Whitaker's, .814 to .789, but the only real baseball card stat where Alomar had the edge was in career batting average (.300 to .276). Their on-base percentages were very similar, Whitaker at .363 and Alomar at .371. Slugging wise, Alomar also had the edge, .443 to .426. So offensively, Alomar had an edge, but not outrageously so.

The Hall-of-Fame Value of Gold Glove Awards

Really, the only advantage that Alomar had over Whitaker was his ten Gold Gloves. But after doing some research on Fangraphs.com, it appears that Alomar was *not* quite the glove man that people believed. For his career, his Total Zone rating was -3. That means Alomar's defense was worth a total of 3 runs *below* average over his career. By Total Zone, Whitaker was worth 77 runs above average. According to Total Zone, Alomar only had three truly very good seasons at second: 1998 with the Orioles and 1999 and 2000 for the Indians. Most of the time, Total Zone had him being worth negative runs in almost every other season that he played.

In any case, Alomar is definitely still worthy of being in the Hall of Fame. But if he is, then the runs that Whitaker saved on defense put him in the same exact category as Alomar, especially as both had career batting lines 16% above league-average. Alomar was always a higher-profile player on some extremely good teams, however, and so he was seen as a much better player by the writers.

It's incredible to see just how much better Whitaker was on defense than Alomar, according to the numbers. But, considering Alomar added more value on offense, they're fairly equal. In any case, Lou Whitaker belongs in the Hall of Fame. Hopefully, the Veterans Committee fixes this mistake in the future.

~ Amelia Desertsong