



## **Ellis Valentine**

Entering the 1977 season the Montreal Expos were starved for a superstar talent. They looked to the young outfield trio of Andre Dawson, Warren Cromartie, and Ellis Valentine to provide the spark the franchise sorely needed. As the first athlete ever drafted out of LA's Crenshaw High School, 20-year old Valentine was hailed as the greatest prospect the Montreal organization had ever produced. At 6-4 205lbs, he was an impressive physical specimen. Valentine had speed, power, and a cannon arm. Then Expos manager Dick Williams immediately touted his rocket launcher as the best in league, comparing it to the legendary Roberto Clemente's.

After appearing in just 12 games in 1975, Ellis got his first significant taste of the major leagues in 1976, playing in 94 games and hitting .279. Despite the limited playing time, the 22 year old finished fourth in the NL with 12 outfield assists.

In 1977, his first full season in the majors, he was selected as an all-star. He seemed to just be scratching the surface of his immense talent. He posted another solid offensive season in '78, once again belting 25 home runs and was awarded a Gold Glove after leading the majors with 24 outfield assists.

By 1979 the once doormat Expos were contenders. A World Series seemed to be in the future of the Expos. Ellis posted his third straight 20 home run season in '79 and the Expos won 95 games, but they were unable to overtake the eventual World Champion Pirates.

In 1980, Ellis was on course for possibly his greatest season, but was hit in the face with a pitch and missed 40 games with a broken cheekbone. His injury may have been what kept the Expos out of the post season. In 1981, Ellis was dealt to the New York Mets. From there he went on to play for the California Angels before ending his career with the Texas Rangers. Valentine hit .278 with 123 home runs in his 10 year career.

Ellis is now a soldier in the struggle to help America's youth. He began a career in counseling upon his retirement from baseball and speaks to youth about the benefit of staying in school, staying off drugs, and staying out of gangs.

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