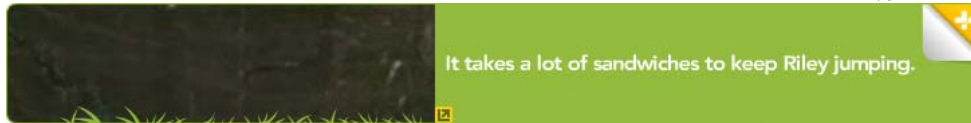


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LOCAL ANGLE

Rice getting head start on his route to Canton

February 05, 2010 | By David White, Chronicle Staff Writer



Jerry Rice arrives for his "Miami Rice" Super Bowl party.
Credit: Rick Silva / Associated Press

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HOLLYWOOD, Fla. — Former 49ers great Jerry Rice couldn't wait.

The Pro Football Hall of Fame panel won't elect the class of 2010 until Saturday, but the 49ers great went ahead and announced former 49ers owner Eddie DeBartolo as his presenter Thursday.

Seeing as he's considered the greatest receiver of all time, Rice isn't exactly jumping his route to Canton. He's just getting a head start downfield for when the ball comes.

"I don't take anything for granted," Rice said at his "Miami Rice" Super Bowl party at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

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"I look at the Hall of Fame just like I looked at when I got drafted. I remember back in Mississippi, I was with my brother. I didn't throw a party or anything. My brother, he had an apartment. It was two bedrooms. We sat there and watched the draft.

"I felt like I might go in the first round, but I didn't take it for granted."

Rice became a first-round draft pick then, and he's sure to become a first-ballot Hall of Famer now. And what more fitting place to be elected than Miami, home to some of Rice's grandest Super Bowl feats?

"Super Bowl XXIII, final drive," Rice said. "Joe Montana walks into the huddle, starts pulling grass, looked over and said, 'Hey, that's John Candy in the stands.' Three minutes, 10 seconds left in the ballgame and we moved 92 yards all the way downfield and won it.

"It was unbelievable. You make one mistake, ballgame's over. No one is ever going to remember the loser."

That's why they'll always remember Rice. The Super Bowl MVP caught 11 passes for 215 yards, both game records, to rally past the Bengals 20-16 at Joe Robbie Stadium.

Six years later, Rice and the 49ers did it again in Miami. Rice caught three touchdown passes in a 49-26 victory over the Chargers in Super Bowl XXIX.

Rice remembered these Miami moments Thursday night. Steve Young was the master of ceremonies for the event. DeBartolo passed on words of praise shared by the late Bill Walsh. Roger Craig and Randy Cross paid tribute.

Rice tried to downplay the advance party, noting all the other eligible receivers on the ballot, including Cris Carter, Andre Reed and Tim Brown.

Leave it to Rice to jump the line.

"Hey look," Rice said with a laugh. "I'm going to try and get a head start."

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