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## Spander: Rice's induction brings back memories

By: [Art Spander](#)

Special to The Examiner

August 11, 2010

CANTON, OHIO — It was all about the past. And the future. The celebration was for what had been, Jerry Rice, Eddie DeBartolo, the Team of the '80s.

The thoughts were for what might be, a renaissance of the 49ers.

No, never will be there be another Rice, with his flair, his hands, his 1,549 receptions. Or another Niner dynasty.

Yet in the early hours of morning, as memories were recalled, backs were slapped and joy seemed everlasting, one could find hope among the ruins, could discover talk about a Niner rebirth.

Rice had been enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame on a memorable Saturday night of poignant words and frequent cheers, joining two men who threw him the football, Joe Montana and Steve Young, along with the leader of the defense, Ronnie Lott, who had been inducted in previous years.

And DeBartolo, the owner whose own entry into the Hall at least has become a point of discussion among voters, never would allow the achievements of any of his players to go unappreciated.

After the speeches came the party, an Eddie D. classic in a huge tent full of music, noise and history. Former Niners such as Hall of Famers Dave Wilcox, Fred Dean and Bob St. Clair; such as Steve Wallace, Harris Barton and Guy McIntyre; former Raiders running back Marcus Allen and, perhaps most significantly, current 49ers owner John York attended.

Yes, John and Denise DeBartolo York, and son Jed, Eddie's nephew, the Niners' leader these days, sharing handshakes and laughter with Eddie and his family, including brave wife Candy. The feud is over. Unity is in session.

"Nine and seven, or maybe 10-6," said John McVay, who was general manager in the early Bill Walsh



Former 49ers wide receiver Jerry Rice, left, and former team owner Eddie DeBartolo were a big part of the festivities at Canton, Ohio, on Saturday. (AP)

years. He was predicting the 49ers' record for 2010. He was predicting a place in the playoffs for the first time since the 2002 coaching regime of Steve Mariucci, who naturally made an appearance at the affair after his work on the NFL Network.

They're going in the right direction, the Niners. Mike Singletary understands how to build a winner. Alex Smith understands what is expected of him. Who isn't optimistic in August? Especially when the good old days are on display at the birthplace of pro football.

"There never, ever will be another organization like this in the history of sports," Jerry Rice had said in a very impressive address after an emotional introduction by DeBartolo.

If that comment by Jerry was an exaggeration, it wasn't much of one. Those Niners of Walsh, George Seifert and Eddie D. spoiled us forever.

"Eddie DeBartolo gave you what you wanted," Rice continued, "and he said, 'All I want in return is to win championships.' We did, five Super Bowls in 12 years."

It was so right. The Niners hadn't done anything. Then they did everything. Roger Craig high-stepping into the end zone; Keena Turner grabbing runners; Brent Jones grabbing passes. They were in the house. So was Merton Hanks. So was Bill Ring.

"My single regret," said Rice of a career that also included seasons with the Raiders, "is I never took time to enjoy it."

His compensation may be that millions of fans were able to enjoy it for him.

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