

## Do Andy Van Slyke Baseball Cards Have Any Value?

*"Every season has its peaks and valleys. What you have to try to do is eliminate the Grand Canyon." - Andy Van Slyke*

Andy Van Slyke was a very good baseball player. He didn't hit over .300 in his career, hit a lot of home runs, or steal a lot of bases. Van Slyke isn't anywhere close to having the career numbers to even be considered for the Hall of Fame. He was a strong defensive player, though, and played a lot at one of the most important positions on the field in center field.

What Van Slyke is most famous for is his acquisition from the St. Louis Cardinals by the Pittsburgh Pirates. It's easily one of the best trades the Pittsburgh Pirates ever made. The Cardinals got a very good catcher in Tony Pena, but outfielder Van Slyke and two other players went the other way. It wouldn't be long until the Cardinals regretted this swap.

Of course, at the time of the trade in 1987, Tony Pena was an amazing catcher. He was consistently worth 3.5 or more Wins Above Replacement (WAR) between 1982-1986 for the Buccos. So when the Cardinals traded for him in the 1986-1987 off-season, they didn't expect Pena to be worth only about 2 Wins Above Replacement *in total* over the next three seasons. Although Pena would actually continue to have a long respectable career, he was never the same after leaving Pittsburgh.

Previously, Van Slyke was an okay player with the Redbirds. He had decent 1985 and 1986 seasons, producing an average of 3.4 WAR between those seasons. He wasn't an All-Star, but he was a plus-defensive outfielder with the speed to steal 30 bases each season. While Mike LaValliere, who was traded alongside Van Slyke, was no Tony Pena, he'd be worth about 2 WAR a season for the next few years. As it would turn out, LaValliere's great on-base skills would make him pretty valuable. Plus, he was a very good defensive catcher. Pena for LaValliere was already a great trade for Pittsburgh.

Van Slyke, on the other hand, emerged into a perennial All-Star for the Bucs. He would compile 30.9 WAR in the Steel City over 8 seasons. After injuries derailed his 1993 season, he had a very poor season in the strike-shortened 1994 campaign. He split 1995 between Philly and Baltimore before retiring for good. Since retiring from playing baseball, he's served as a Major League coach for the Detroit Tigers and the Seattle Mariners. He's also since become an author.

While Andy wasn't a Baseball Hall-of-Famer, there's no doubt that Cardinals fans certainly are not happy their team made that trade. While he wasn't missed in 1987, there were certainly times afterward where Van Slyke's presence would have been welcomed over guys like Milt Thompson. Still, the Pirates definitely benefited from what was a roster crunch from St. Louis, and they received a player that became a beloved part of their franchise.

## What is the Value of an Andy Van Slyke Baseball Card?

Because he was such a good-looking, well-liked, charismatic ballplayer, Andy Van Slyke baseball cards have more value than you might think. When it comes to Pittsburgh Pirates and St. Louis Cardinals card collectors, Andy is still a player much in demand by baseball card collectors.

Andy Van Slyke's most valuable rookie cards are featured in 1984 Topps and 1984 Donruss. They fetch about \$20 each at auction for graded PSA 10 Gem Mint examples. The 1984 Fleer rookie is much less expensive. However, the limited-run glossy 1984 Topps Tiffany version of the Andy Van Slyke rookie has somewhat more value, with one of the 8 PSA 10 Gem Mint copies in existence selling for \$361.25 on eBay on December 27, 2021. However, the PSA 9 Mint and lower copies sell at only a slight premium to the regular 1984 Topps printing. There's also the 1982 TCMA pre-rookie card, which also doesn't fetch much at auction.

While Van Slyke does have a couple of good rookie cards to collect, he also has some non-rookie cards that also hold some value. The best Andy Van Slyke baseball card that's not a rookie card with the most value is actually the 1993 Topps Finest Baseball's Best refractor. One graded PSA 9 Mint copy sold for \$40 in November 2018, but another PSA 9 Mint copy sold in January 2019 for a staggering \$127.50!

As of August 2022, there are only 123 graded PSA examples of this Van Slyke baseball card in existence, with 76 of those being PSA 9. Being depicted on the Pirates and being in a condition-sensitive set for grading makes this card a key to any Andy Van Slyke baseball card collection. Unfortunately, it's not a card that sells at auction very much any more. It's hardly one of the most valuable 1993 Topps baseball cards, but if you come across it, there is some good value in the 1993 Topps Finest Refractors set overall.

Another Andy Van Slyke baseball card with value is the 1987 Topps Tiffany – his most valuable Cardinals card – worth about \$30 in graded PSA 10 condition. There's also the 1994 Bowman's Best Red Refractor – worth about \$20 for a PSA 9 example. Other PSA 10 graded examples of other Van Slyke cards exist, and while they sell at auction, are available in the \$5 to \$10 range already slabbed.

While Van Slyke isn't a Hall of Fame hopeful, his baseball cards have surprising value. It goes to show how a player's personality, popularity, and good looks can endear him to many collectors. He played for some very good Pirates teams, too. His acquisition is easily one of the better Pirates trades of all time.

*Updated August 2022*