

Mark Grace Rookie Cards: A Hobby Analysis

Mark Grace is a renowned first baseman who made his mark in Major League Baseball with his consistent performance. Grace's career, primarily with the Chicago Cubs and later with the Arizona Diamondbacks, spanned 16 seasons. Grace became a fan favorite, known for his exceptional hitting skills and defensive prowess. Grace's legacy extends beyond his playing days, making him a beloved figure in the baseball community and continues to be part of the sport's media to this day in Arizona.

Baseball card collectors are typically concerned with players that hit for power or are incredibly exciting in the field or on the base paths. While certainly a very good hitter, Grace wasn't a slugger. He was more Keith Hernandez than Fred McGriff, hitting for above average batting averages and compiling great on-base numbers. Like the Mets & Cardinals great Hernandez, he was also a fantastic fielder at first base.

Fortunately for Grace, baseball card collectors make exceptions for franchise favorite players, even if they weren't offensive juggernauts of their era. As you'll soon learn, Grace has a fairly strong collector base even two decades after his retirement from MLB in 2003. Not only was he an icon during his years with the Cubs, but he's earned a spot in the hearts of Arizona Diamondbacks fans, too!

The purpose of this analysis is to see how Mark Grace's rookie cards — the most sought after of any sports player — stack up in the collecting world against his contemporaries and those with similar careers. We'll explore eBay sales data, factors influencing card values, and insights from collectors, seeking a comprehensive view of Mark Grace's rookie cards and their place in the baseball card hobby.

A Brief Bio of Mark Grace

Mark Grace was born on June 28, 1964, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He attended Tustin High School in Tustin, California, where he excelled in baseball. Grace later attended Saddleback Community College for two years, before transferring to San Diego State University, playing for the Aztecs under coach Jim Dietz. Grace was incredible for the Aztecs in his lone year there, leading the team with a .395 batting average, scoring 53 runs, and driving in 55 in 73 games.

The Major Leagues came calling for the San Diego State star when Grace was drafted by the Chicago Cubs in the 24th round of the 1985 MLB Draft. Despite being such a low round draft pick, Grace blew through the minors in 1986 and 1987, walking far more than he struck out, which would become a signature of his career.

Grace made his Major League debut with the Cubs on May 2, 1988. He quickly established himself as a reliable first baseman and consistent hitter. He played for the Cubs up until 2000,

earning three All-Star selections — 1993, 1995, 1997 — and winning four Gold Glove Awards in 1992, 1993, 1995, and 1996. (He deserved the ones in '92 and '93, although the Total Zone fielding stats say he got it on reputation in those other years.)

While it was sad that the Cubs would move on from Grace, he signed with the Arizona Diamondbacks in 2001. His relationship with the Cubs franchise was greatly damaged by their unwillingness to resign him to a reasonable deal. Still, this was a great move for Mark, as he played a crucial role in the Diamondbacks' 2001 World Series victory, including a pivotal hit in Game 7. Grace played with the Diamondbacks until his retirement in 2003. He'd stay in Arizona, where he's been ever since in his retirement.

For a time, Mark Grace was a color commentator on the Arizona Diamondbacks TV broadcasts. He held that job for a few years, but unfortunately, Grace dealt with some off-field challenges, specifically legal issues related to DUI charges, for which he served jail time. Naturally, the Diamondbacks relieved him of his broadcast duties.

Despite these challenges, he remains a respected figure in the baseball community. Mark Grace is still remembered for his team leadership, consistent performance, and significant contributions to the teams for which he played. He has also been involved in coaching, serving as a hitting instructor in various capacities. In fact, Grace even recently returned to the Diamondbacks broadcasts, but now in a greatly reduced role as an analyst for their pregame and postgame shows.

In all, Grace was known for his consistent hitting, finishing his career with a .303 batting average. He led all Major League players in hits (1,754) and doubles (364) during the 1990s. While he finished with just 173 HR, he added other value with his 70 stolen bases, and his 119 OPS+ because of his high walk rates.

Mark Grace Rookie Card Sales Data Analysis (2022-2024)

While there are other marketplaces for sports cards, eBay is still the premier marketplace for baseball cards. My methodology for collecting this data uses eBay Product Research, formerly known as Terapeak. This data goes back three years, which is enough to give us a good sense of how often certain players' cards perform over the long term.

Here we will take a look at:

- Number of cards sold per year.
- Average sale prices.
- High and low sale prices.
- Notable sales and auctions

For this exercise, I search for the given player under trading card single, then do additional searches for that player's "rookie card," as well as "RC." I make two similar searches since it will pull slightly different results based on the listing title. It's not scientific exactly, but for transparency, I will mention the results of both searches. We can then average them together to get a clearer picture. I will also search these players in trading card lots, in order to see if this player has a significant following in terms of collecting singles beyond just rookie cards.

To give some context, I'll search "baseball cards" in the last ninety days to get a baseline of the current market. As of June 24, 2024, that term has around an 11 sell-through rate (henceforth known as STR) and an average sales price of \$24. "Baseball rookie cards" are 15% STR and \$31 ASP. "RC" is 15% STR and \$34 ASP, so it seems that using the abbreviation gets a better result. This might sound like a high average sale price for your average card collector, but this takes into account many graded cards, as well as autographed and memorabilia cards.

To this end, Mark Grace during the 2024 baseball season period has enjoyed an 13% STR and a \$21 average sale price. His rookie cards enjoy a 16% STR and \$19 ASP, whereas his RC listings enjoy a 16% and \$25.

This data tells us that in the current market, Mark Grace cards as a whole - rookie year or otherwise - enjoy a slightly above-average market on eBay. Considering that he enjoyed a 16 year career as an All-star caliber first baseman, much of that spent with the incredibly popular Chicago Cubs, that's not entirely surprising.

Grace also enjoys a decent market for card lots, with a \$17 average sale price and 13% STR. But, this is significantly lower than the baseball averages of \$23 and 19% str. Fortunately, this is easily explained as Mark Grace has so many of playing days card printed in the Junk Wax era (1987-1993). During that period, many sports cards sets were overproduced to a point that sealed product is still widely available in the 2020's. So, this factor skews the data to the downside somewhat since most dedicated collectors will already have Mark Grace rookie cards from 1988.

Over the past three years, there have been 2600 total sellers of Mark Grace rookie cards for an average sales price of \$15. This data is skewed somewhat by the inclusion of sealed 1988 Fleer Baseball Card Factory Sets, which don't even include Grace, a very annoying oversight on the part of Terapeak's algorithm. It also includes some listings of his 1989 Upper Deck card, which isn't actually a rookie card, per se, but it is sought after as being in the same set as Griffey Jr's #1 rookie card.

One look at the data reveals that Grace rookie cards are on a steady climb, both in sale price and in number of sales. There were 1400 sellers in the past year alone (June 2023-June 2024), with 2300 between June 2022-2024. This would seem to indicate that there's been a sudden spike in demand specifically for Mark Grace's rookie cards. But, the trend is pretty much the same as all sports rookie cards in general since 2023. It's good to see his cards have followed suit.

The most notable Mark Grace rookie cards include:

- 1988 Topps Traded #42T
- 1988 Donruss Rated Rookie #40
- 1988 Leaf Rated Rookie #40
- 1988 Fleer Update #U-77
- 1988 Score Rookie & Traded #80T

However, all but the Donruss Rated Rookie have alternate “Tiffany” or glossy versions. These will be included with the breakdown, but as these sets are much more rare, those cards fetch a premium. If you have the chance, the Tiffany/Glossy versions are the superior investment.

Like any other collectible, the condition of Mark Grace’s rookie cards significantly affects their value. Grading services like PSA (Professional Sports Authenticator), BGS (Beckett Grading Services), SGC, and CGC provide a standardized assessment of card quality, with grades ranging from 1 (Poor) to 10 (Gem Mint).

Key factors for card grading include centering, corners, edges, and surface condition. Cards that have been well-preserved and exhibit minimal wear are more likely to receive higher grades and command higher prices. Some collectors seek autographed versions of Mark Grace’s rookie cards. These can add significant value, particularly if the autograph is authenticated by reputable services.

So, because of the importance of grading in the baseball card hobby, we provide the PSA graded population of each rookie card, along with the percentage of those graded Gem Mint. A lower percentage means a card that’s harder to get higher grades.

1988 Topps Traded #42T

3 year sales: 400

Avg. sales price: \$18

PSA Population: 987

PSA Gem Rate: 45%

Tiffany:

PSA Population: 228

PSA Gem Rate: 20%

The 1988 Topps Traded #42T is one of the most recognized Mark Grace rookie cards. It features a clean design with a classic action shot of Grace in his Cubs uniform. As part of the Topps Traded series, this card was released mid-season and is considered a staple for collectors focusing on 1980s baseball rookies. While not exceedingly rare, the value of this card can vary significantly based on its condition and grading. High-grade versions (PSA 9 and above) tend to fetch a premium.

A PSA 10 copy of the Topps Traded Tiffany card **sold for \$550 in April of 2023!**

1988 Donruss Rated Rookie #40

3 year sales: 600

Avg. sales price: \$14

PSA Population: 1136

PSA Gem Rate: 41%

The 1988 Donruss Rated Rookie #40 card showcases Mark Grace with the “Rated Rookie” emblem, a mark of distinction for promising newcomers. Donruss's Rated Rookie cards are well-regarded among collectors for highlighting up-and-coming stars. Grace’s inclusion in this series underscores his status as a highly anticipated talent. This card is more common than others, thanks to being in the regular 1988 Donruss set, but remains popular due to its “Rated Rookie” designation. The value is largely influenced by the card’s condition, with professionally graded versions being more valuable.

In fact, Trading Card Database considers this 1988 Donruss Rated Rookie (and its much rarer Leaf parallel printed for the Canadian market) to be Mark Grace’s “true” rookie card. However, this doesn’t seem to be true for most collectors, that also regard the Traded and Update cards as proper RCs, too.

The best recent sale for this card in PSA 10 condition was \$100 in October 2023. In 2024, a Gem Mint copy sells for closer to \$70.

1988 Leaf Rated Rookie #40

3 year sales: 50

Avg. sales price: \$24

PSA Population: 192

PSA Gem Rate: 34%

Because it’s essentially the same card as the Donruss, Trading Card Database also considers this to be another “true” rookie card. The only difference is the black LEAF logo in the upper left hand corner. However, this card is so much rarer than its “junk wax” Donruss counterpart that it holds a significant premium on par with the Tiffany and Glossy versions.

In fact, the most recent sale of a Gem Mint 1988 Leaf Mark Grace rookie went for \$280.99 in June 2024. This isn’t an outlier either — one sold in May 2024 for \$294.99 and not long before that in March 2024 for \$293!

1988 Fleer Update #U-77

3 year sales: 200

Avg Sales Price: \$12

PSA Population: 433

PSA Gem Rate: 36%

Glossy (Tiffany):

PSA Population: 464

PSA Gem Rate: 36%

The 1988 Fleer Update #U-77 card features Grace in a classic pose, capturing the essence of the late 1980s baseball card aesthetic. Fleer Update sets were known for their comprehensive inclusion of players who had significant impacts during the season, making Grace's appearance in this set notable. This card is less common than the standard Fleer set cards, adding to its desirability among collectors. High-grade versions are particularly sought after. Interestingly enough, the PSA populations for these cards are nearly identical, which is strange considering that the Glossy versions are actually rarer.

1988 Score Rookie & Traded #80T

3 year sales: 200+

Avg Sales Price: \$24

PSA Population: 1662

PSA Gem Rate: 31%

Glossy (Tiffany)

PSA Population: 352

PSA Gem Rate: 48%

The 1988 Score Rookie & Traded #103T card is another essential rookie card for Mark Grace collectors. The Score brand was known for its vibrant and informative card designs. This card is part of the Rookie & Traded series, which includes notable players who made significant impacts early in their careers. Similar to other cards from this era, its value depends heavily on condition and grading, with mint-condition cards being more valuable.

Of all the Mark Grace cards, the 1988 Score Rookie & Traded seems to be the premier choice among Grace rookie card collectors. The Glossy version is the easiest to get in top grade. My personal favorite is the Donruss/Leaf Rated Rookie. For whatever reason, I just really like that year's design. In fact, the Leaf is most valuable in high grade! If I could own any Mark Grace rookie card in PSA 10, it would be the Leaf.

Other Notable Mark Grace Baseball Cards

The most expensive and valuable Mark Grace baseball card is actually a "pre-rookie" card from the 1986 Procards set. One copy **sold for \$800 in January 2024**, with a second **sold in March 2024 for \$599**.

Being during his playing days, Mark Grace has a card in the famous 1991 Topps Desert Shield set. It was literally the same set as 1991 Topps, but had a special embossed Desert Shield logo and were sent to US Soldiers during the Gulf War. Since very few of these cards survived in top

condition, every card from that set is valuable. A PSA 10 copy of the Mark Grace #520 card **sold for \$475!**

Another notable Mark Grace card sale, this one an autographed minor league card, was a 1988 CMC Iowa Cubs Rookie Card with a graded 10 auto. This card had only one autographed graded example when it **sold for \$295 in June of 2023.**

While not especially valuable, another notable Mark Grace card isn't even a card of Grace himself. This is the 1995 Upper Deck Collector's Choice Chuck Carr #299 card with Grace literally grabbing Carr's butt on the basepaths. Clearly it was a candid photo that was just a joke, with the photograph snapped by someone whose finger is in the frame. Grace was known as a funny guy, and this is historical evidence that his humor extended well beyond the clubhouse and dugout and onto the field. This card can sell for a few dollars and is sought after by collectors who love cards of oddball photos. It also has a Gold Signature parallel which carries a bit of a price premium. Surprisingly it seems no one has graded this card with PSA...

So, in the following section, we will look at how Mark Grace's graded rookie cards as a whole compare to a few of Grace's contemporaries to see how he stacks up against those players' rookie cards.

Comparative Analysis

If you check Mark Grace's baseball reference page, you'll see that he shares his best "similarity score" with another highly popular first baseman in Keith Hernandez. Hobby wise this may not be the best comparison, since Hernandez has cards in the vintage era (pre-1980). But, it's an interestingly fair comparison, so we'll include him in this analysis keeping in mind the difference in era. The players I chose for this exercise are:

- Fred McGriff - who actually played for the Cubs after Grace and is a contemporary first baseman
- Keith Hernandez - for reasons already explained
- Don Mattingly - a very popular player at the same position

To make this a fair comparison, we are only looking at graded card sales in PSA holders of any grade. Otherwise there will be too much noise in the data. I'll use "rookie card PSA" as the search to acquire this data on eBay Product Research (aka Terapeak).

Last 3 years:

Mark Grace: 373 total sellers, \$44 avg. sold price

Notably this includes the two extremely high Procards sales mentioned earlier. So that average sales price is perhaps skewed a bit to the high side. But they are legitimate cards, even if not all collectors consider them "true rookies."

Keith Hernandez: 271 total sellers, \$91 avg. sold price

Because Keith's rookie card is from the popular 1975 Topps set, his rookie card is the highest priced on this list. His PSA 9 rookie can easily sell for \$400. Of course, most people don't buy the highest grade, and it's also a Rookie Infielders card that he shares with Phil Garner (29.7 career WAR) and 15 year MLB manager), Bob Sheldon (0.3 career WAR), and Tom Veryzer (career NEGATIVE 3.7 WAR).

Fred McGriff: 744 total sellers, \$89 avg. sold price

McGriff, better known as the "crime dog," is a recently elected Hall of Famer. So, that definitely has helped his sales numbers, although you may be surprised to learn that the average sales price hasn't gone up all that much. It's the sheer number of sales of his 1986 Donruss Rated Rookie (and his rarer Leaf version) that has propped him up.

Don Mattingly: 3036 total sellers, \$139.32 avg. sold price

This might sound strange coming from a Red Sox fan, but I think that Mattingly is the best of these four players. Had he not started having back troubles that deeply impacted his ability to hit for power, he would've been one of the greatest players of the 80's and 90's, period. But, injuries happen, and even with his body breaking down, Donnie Baseball was still a phenomenal player. He also went on to enjoy considerable success as a MLB manager. I'm actually shocked that the Veterans' Committee hasn't voted him in, and clearly the fans are casting their votes with their wallets buying his graded 1984 Donruss, Fleer, and Topps rookie cards!

From this comparative analysis, clearly Mark Grace's cards are much cheaper and less collected. Hernandez's sales are lower merely because his rookie card is much rarer. McGriff has higher sales thanks to his recent Hall of Fame induction. Mattingly is just one of the iconic players of the 80's, and despite his and Grace's careers looking very similar in the end, being a fan favorite Yankee will always mean something in the hobby. Still, I think Grace more than holds his own, and his cards are from highly overproduced sets!

Mark Grace Card Collectors

In the baseball card hobby, it seems there are "super collectors" of almost any significant player who ever played in the Major Leagues. Mark Grace is no different. The most prominent is Brad Wackerlin, who created the Mark Grace dot com website, [who has a virtual baseball card museum dedicated to Grace](#). This gallery shows Mark Grace cards, and many of their parallels, in all their glory. It's not an exhaustive collection — [Trading Card Database is my go-to for these purposes](#) — but it's still a lot of fun to look through.

Speaking of TCDB, as on June 25, 2024, there are 4,536 unique Mark Grace cards. There are still cards of Mark Grace being printed to this day, including autographs in various Topps baseball card products.

If you or someone you know is a big time Mark Grace collector, please let me know in the comments of this article!

My Conclusions About Mark Grace Rookie Cards

Grace's overall position in the baseball card market is stable, but certainly not outperforming the market. Still, while they may not command the highest prices compared to some of his contemporaries, they're respected and valued for their connection to a beloved player. As the hobby continues to grow and evolve, collectors may see increased value in cards of players like Mark Grace, who epitomized consistent excellence in their playing days and have a dedicated fan base.

Given the stable market trends and the increasing interest in baseball cards as investment vehicles, Mark Grace's rookie cards may present a worthwhile addition to a diversified sports memorabilia portfolio. However, I don't see his cards becoming any more than fans who want to park money into a card of one of their favorite players and not lose big.

Also, it seems the demand for 2024 Topps and Leaf Mark Grace autographs is actually pretty strong. If you want to park money in anything, these seem like a safe bet for me. It's better than blowing money on Topps Series 2 fat packs, at least!

Which player's cards - in any of the major American sports of baseball, basketball, football, or hockey — would you like me to cover next?

~ Amelia Desertsong

DISCLAIMER: This article is not meant to provide investment or financial advice. It is purely written for educational and amusement purposes.