

# Randy Ready and His Magical 1987 Season

For a time, I was penning an article series called Junk Wax Dynasty, in which we look at Major League Baseball players from the “Junk Wax” era of baseball cards. The idea was to find the hidden gems from 1987 to 1993. While I didn’t keep up with this series, I did pen a few articles about players who had some fantastic years that have since been mostly forgotten. For this installment, we take a look at the career year of a San Diego Padres utility player by the name of Randy Ready.

How many Randy Ready cards from 1987 were put into bicycle spokes? Probably a lot. Funny thing is, utility infielder Randy Ready actually had a career year in 1987. According to Baseball Reference, his performance that year netted the San Diego Padres 5.8 Wins Above Replacement. To put that in perspective, that’s the same number that a young Barry Bonds put up that year. Considering that the Padres acquired Ready in 1986 for a player to be named later that had a career WAR of -0.1, the Friars were quite pleased with his performance.

Before we get into that career year, though, it’s important to know what was going on in Randy’s life at the time. This dude dealt with tragedy the year before. [Check out this article from the L.A. Times:](#)

*“On June 13, 1986, the day Ready played his first game as a Padre after having been acquired from the Milwaukee Brewers, [Randy’s wife] Dorene collapsed on the floor of their home in Tucson. She was unconscious for 7 to 10 minutes. During much of that time, her brain was deprived of oxygen.”*

Oh, boy. That ended Ready’s 1986 season right there, so he could go be with his wife and three young sons. His wife had suffered a heart attack that left her with permanent brain damage, and she never recovered from it. So, Randy and his sister Cindy had to raise the children.

Later, it would be found that some prescribed diet pills were what gave her the heart attack. A few years later, a jury awarded the family more than \$25 million in a settlement. Of course, that eventual money couldn’t make up that loss. Baseball became Randy’s escape. So, it makes what happened that next season even more special.

Back to baseball, Ready was a patient hitter who regularly walked more than he struck out. But in 1987, his bat exploded for a .309/.423/.520 batting line for a .943 OPS. That’s a 153 OPS+ or 53 percent above league average. He hit a career high 12 home runs and batted in 54 runs. He added 7 steals but was caught three times, so he only added a bit of value there.

In 1987 he played second base, third base, left field, and right field. Ready was a steady average fielder at both second and third base and a bit below average in the outfield. But in ‘87,

Ready was worth 5 Total Zone runs above average in only 52 games at second base and 3 runs above average at third. He was even 3 runs above average in left field in only 16 games, partly thanks to an outfield assist. In all, he amassed 1.2 defensive WAR.

Unfortunately for Ready, a lot of this success was due to a .325 batting average on balls in play. His .211 ISO or isolated power was backed up by career highs in doubles with 26 and triples with 6. He'd never show that level of power again. So, with eventual career marks of .280 BABIP and .127 ISO, this was a major outlier.

## Was Randy Ready in 1988?

Ready was not bad in 1988, but he would be traded to the Phillies along with John Kruk for outfielder Chris James. Kruk would go on to be very good. But, it got worse for the Padres. James would be OK, but the Padres would trade James along with Sandy Alomar and Carlos Baerga for Joe Carter. Alomar and Baerga would go on to be very good for the Indians, and even Chris James had a strong year in 1990.

Of course, Joe Carter was a good player, but he went on to be terrible for the Padres. So, he was flipped along with Roberto Alomar (future hall of famer) for infielder Tony Fernandez and Fred McGriff. McGriff would be good, but Fernandez would be underwhelming offensively. Imagine if the Padres had Kruk, both Alomar brothers, Baerga, and Ready still... Somewhat hilariously, in 1991, [Fernandez would be part of what could have been an unassisted triple play](#) by none other than... Randy Ready!

Fernandez wouldn't be the player he was in Toronto for the Padres again (with 2.2 WAR in 1991 and 1.1 WAR in 1992). But, he would end up having a late career resurgence, ironically with Toronto in 1993, with Cleveland in 1997, and again with Toronto in 1998 and 1999. Meanwhile, the Padres only got one good year out of Wally Whitehurst (2.7 WAR). Man, the Padres made a lot of bad moves...

Anyway, back to Randy...

## Randy Ready and the Rest of His Career

Ready was never quite as good again after 1987. It's not hard to imagine why, especially with what he had to deal with in his home life. His last really good year was 1991, in which he posted a 1.3 WAR in only 76 games. In that year, he hit .249/.385/.322 for a roughly league average .707 OPS. That batting line included a dreadful .207/.294/.207 (.501 OPS) against right-handed pitching, but a .265/.418/.367 (.785 OPS) against lefties.

The rest of Ready's career was plagued by an inconsistent glove that overshadowed his strong plate discipline. Still, he stuck around in the majors until 1995 and played in Japan for a year in 1996. Looking back now, the real thing that held Ready back from being an above-average super utility player were his platoon splits.

Career vs RHP: .246/.341/.356 - .697 OPS in 1180 PA

Career vs LHP: .271/.375/.415 - .790 OPS in 1308 PA

In today's analytically driven game, Ready would have been strictly a platoon bat that could play second base, third base, and the outfield corners. He would've probably been worth 1.0-1.5 WAR in part time duty and perhaps he would've settled in at one position, either at second or third base with occasional starts in a corner outfield spot against a left-handed pitcher. He was also not utilized nearly as much as a pinch hitter as he likely should have, especially in the National League. Still, he cobbled together a decent career as a 25th man, which is hardly something to sneeze at. It's just interesting that he wasn't utilized better.

## Randy Ready as a Coach and Manager

Randy never really left the game, either. He returned to the game as a minor league manager in 2002, and also served as the Padres hitting coach for a bit. That stint as hitting coach proved disastrous as the Padres had one of the worst lineups in baseball. That probably wasn't his fault, though. Anyway, he has continued in the game as a minor league coach and manager. In 2017, he became a minor league manager in the Marlins system. Also, [according to his SABR bio](#), Randy's children have turned out very well!

Ready is definitely well-liked in the game. The teams he's managed have often made the playoffs and he's been an overall winning manager. It's a shame that his playing career really only had a couple of bright spots (1987 and 1991), but he did have quite a ride.

So, the next time you come across a Randy Ready card, especially from 1987 or 1991, don't be so quick to dismiss them. In fact, he's the top utility player in my Junk Wax Dynasty. He deserves to be remembered, even if it's just for that amazing 5 WAR season in the wake of family tragedy.

~ *Amelia Desertsong*