

# Don't underestimate Ryne Sandberg

## Look no further in the search for the next Cubs manager

BY WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

There's a popular belief in Major League Baseball that Hall of Fame players don't make good managers. The game comes so naturally to them that they don't have the patience or ability to develop players, goes the argument.

But that doesn't mean Ryne Sandberg wouldn't.

Sandberg proved the naysayers wrong as a player and, if given the opportunity, will do the same as a major league manager.

Selected in the 20th round of the 1978 amateur draft by the Philadelphia Phillies, Sandberg took nothing for granted as a player. He toiled at every level of the minor leagues before making his major league debut as a shortstop in 1981.

But the Phillies projected him as a second or third baseman or a center fielder and he was blocked from those positions by Manny Trillo, Mike Schmidt and Garry Maddox, respectively.

In 1982, the Phils, a perennial but aging contender, sought to replace shortstop Larry Bowa, who was locked in a contract dispute. Cubs general manager Dallas Green agreed to exchange his shortstop, Ivan DeJesus, for Bowa, but only if Philadelphia included Sandberg in the deal.

The Phillies, believing Sandberg to be expendable, made the deal. It was one of the worst trades in MLB history.

The Cubs, who initially wanted Sandberg to play center field, made him a third baseman and he became one of the top-rated rookies of 1982. But the following year he was moved to second base to make room for a newly acquired veteran, Ron Cey.

Mentored by Bowa, Sandberg learned to turn the double play and developed into a nine-time Gold Glove Award winner.

When his 15-year career with the Cubs ended, Sandberg's resume included the National League's 1984 Most Valuable Player, 10 straight All-Star Game appearances, 2,385 hits, 282 homers, 1,061 RBIs, 344 stolen bases and a .989 career fielding percentage that is a major league

record at second base. And none of it was achieved without hard work.

There's also the issue of determination.

Since 2005 when Sandberg was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame, he could have traded on his name like so many other Hall of Famers. But he believes he can be a successful manager at the big league level and has the single-mindedness to pursue that goal.

His willingness to spend four years in the Cubs' farm system as a manager underscores a rare humility for a Hall of Famer as well as his determination to manage in the majors.

In 2010 he led the Triple-A Iowa Cubs to an 82-62 record and first place in their division while winning the Pacific Coast League's Manager of the Year award.

When he wasn't hired for the Cubs' managerial job in 2011, Sandberg left the organization to manage the Lehigh Valley Iron Pigs, the Phillies' Triple-A affiliate. At present, his IronPigs are in first place in the International League's Northern Division. That's not only a reflection of his managerial ability, but also his determination to succeed.

Finally, there's the issue of loyalty. Sandberg once remarked that his "only regret was that the Cubs didn't get to a World Series for the hometown fans." The feelings are mutual. When Lou Piniella abruptly stepped down near the end of last season, the fans made clear their desire to replace him with Sandberg, who's already admitted that managing the Cubs would be his "dream job."

With the Cubs locked in the throes of one of their worst seasons and saddled with a team payroll of about \$145 million, it's time for ownership to cut payroll and begin the rebuilding process in earnest.

The Ricketts family would be wise to bring Sandberg back into the fold. He knows what it takes to be a successful major league player, he's already proved his talent to develop players, and he possesses the kind of name recognition that will retain fan interest in the team as well as generate excitement during the inevitable lean years of the rebuilding process.

If the Cubs bypass Sandberg again, Chicago's loss will be Philadelphia's gain. And the Phillies won't make the same mistake twice.

*Baseball historian William C. Kashatus is the author of "Almost A Dynasty: The Rise and Fall of the 1980 Phillies."*