

# BASEBALL UNDER GLASS

## ***Ryno, Rossy going in opposite directions on managing***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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Symbolically, they looked like the ships passing in the night. Or passing off the baton. Whatever old phrase you want to employ.

Ryne Sandberg and David Ross sat at opposite ends of their threesome with Kyle Schwarber on stage in the middle at a charity event in downstate Urbana over the weekend. They definitely were going in different directions.

Ryno is easing up on life now. Hard-charging a decade ago into a hoped-for eventual big-league managerial career – preferably with the Cubs – Hall of Famer Sandberg seems content now to work as a Cubs ambassador, the franchise's big-name former player making appearances around his new year-round home in Chicago.

Meanwhile, Ross is the hottest commodity in baseball – literally. Reportedly getting as much as \$30,000 for a personal appearance, Grandpa Rossy just added an ESPN baseball analyst gig to his portfolio, only weeks after chief patron Theo Epstein hired him as a Cubs special assistant. Who'd ever think a backup catcher would be carried off the field by his teammates after Game 7 of the World Series? But that's the impression Ross made with both Cubs players and fans in his final two years in the majors. He finished well, to be sure.

In reality, Ross is just starting a manager's training program. In the 2010s, such Manager 101 programs go through the front office, not Peoria and Iowa as they did for Sandberg starting in 2007.

While the crush of the 400-some folks paying \$300 a head in Urbana prevented yours truly from any elongated conversation with Sandberg, he did confirm for Dr. David Fletcher, president of the Chicago Baseball Museum, that his managerial days are over at 57.



**Ryne Sandberg (from left), Kyle Schwarber and David Ross entertained a packed house of 400 in Urbana recently.**

Ross also was parsimonious with his comments due to the masses pressing for his attention. But his hiring by the Cubs and his logical destination was so obvious by the Cubs, given his popularity with his teammates, his proven leadership abilities and a huge comfort zone in dealing with media – all prerequisites for managing.

### **Ross as Maddon successor?**

Daily Herald sports columnist Barry Rozner recently wrote that Ross should succeed Joe Maddon whenever his term as Cubs manager concludes. I'd concur with Rozner, given the goodwill and credibility that Ross has built in Chicago. If he wins another Fall Classic as a Cub, Maddon, going on 63, will no doubt put a clock on the rest of his dugout career as a renaissance man wanting to enjoy other things in life.

When I mentioned the Rozner column to Ross amid the mob scene, his eyes widened. That kind of specificity is premature. You surely don't want to put a timetable on succeeding a sitting manager coming off a Fall Classic triumph.

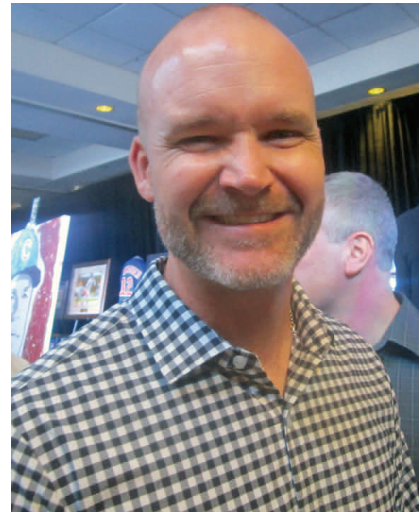
On Sunday, Ross told Bruce Levine and David Schuster on The Score that managing "piques my interest." Being suggested as a future skipper was a "huge, huge compliment." But for now, the freshly-retired Ross wants a "stress-free" life. Picking his spots to do baseball scouting/analyzing while working a weekly game or "Baseball Tonight" sounds as blood-pressure lowering as it gets.

Still, working as a catcher is a traditional, initial training ground for hordes of managers, ranging from Joe Torre to Bob Brenly to Mike Matheny. Ross was no star, and only occasionally a regular. He had a chance to soak up the game in both the dugout and bullpen. He seems to possess the perfect temperament to manage.

Handling people is the top job of a manager. Everyone can make out a lineup, call for a pitchout and pull the starter in the seventh. Grandpa Rossy simply seems a perfect people person. He'll have to clean up his off-color tongue a bit, on display during the Urbana event, but he'll become more sophisticated in time. He'll really be slick dealing with the media before and after games.

And yet he'll keep his tough side in reserve. Players will know they'll want to experience the good cop in Ross. Cubs fans will never forget the way he handled himself in 2015-16, gaining so much popularity he had a special day at Wrigley Field in his second-to-last regular-season home game. When has that ever happened to a backup player?

Ross laughed with Schwarber, several times remarking that he is now his boss. Well, not exactly. Ross reports to Schwarber's ultimate boss. Eventually, he'll grow out of the personality of being a teammate, a requirement for managing.



**At least one columnist already suggested David Ross should eventually succeed Joe Maddon.**

The one thing Ross must learn is the politics of the business. It is truly thick. That's apparently why Sandberg is not further pursuing a manager's gig when he is still relatively young.

### **Sandberg paid his dues old-school way**

Ryno dutifully journeyed the traditional path of gaining managing experience, starting in low Class A at Peoria 10 years ago. He moved up the Cubs chain level by level, until finally reaching Triple-A Iowa in 2010. Players had almost universal praise for his hard work and teaching skills. He seemed a natural to run his old team at some point.

But Sandberg was not squarely in the political orbit of Cubs GM Jim Hendry. When Hendry hired his final manager for 2011, he made permanent the interim hiring of old chum Mike Quade. That did not work out. Sandberg was interviewed, but had no chance. And when Epstein took over in Oct. 2011 with Quade not retained, Sandberg again was not seriously considered for the Cubs opening. He was not part of Epstein's Boston-originated posse.

Both Hendry and Epstein did Sandberg a favor in a big way. The Cubs were tumbling to their competitive nadir of the past decade. He would have been hired to be fired, given management change to Epstein and the sacrificial nature of the manager's job in a rebuilding program.

So Sandberg went on to his original team in Philadelphia, first as Triple-A manager for two years, then third-base coach and finally as manager late in 2013. But the timing was wrong again. The Phillies were in decline from their 2008-09 World Series runs. Like John Holland with the early 1970s Cubs, GM Ruben Amaro, Jr. hung on to his core several years too long. Sandberg resigned midway through the 2015 season. Managing obviously wasn't all it was cracked up to be, and a folding, fractious Phillies franchise sure took the joy out of the gig.

He's made another transformation, the fourth in his career. First was from third base to second base late in 1982 and a string of Gold Glove Awards. Then, punch-and-Judy hitter Sandberg began driving the ball at the behest of Cubs manager Jim Frey in 1984. A player who used one word where three more appropriately would do, Sandberg became more of a conversationalist in 2007, claiming he was merely doing what was necessary in the job he had. A manager needed to be more of a talker, to players, umpires and media.

### **Ryno settles in Lake Bluff**

And now Cubs ambassador. And he'll be first among equals, having bought a home in Lake Bluff. Living here year-round will enable Sandberg to represent the team in appearances as a much-beloved former player. Comparatively few former Cubs have



**Ryne Sandberg paid traditional dues to learn managing, starting with Class-A Peoria in 2007. Photo credit [Joel Dinda](#).**

made Chicago their permanent home, preferring to stay away from the frigid winters. Sandberg has given up mild off-seasons at his longtime Arizona residence to not only do the ambassador role, but to also stick close to family here.

After razzing this writer in Urbana about doing any more interviews – “you’ve got 35 years of tape” since his 1982 Cubs debut -- Sandberg displayed an enthused public persona. He gleefully recalled The Sandberg Game in 1984 and his two homers off Bruce Sutter. Mention of the Cardinals, a favorite team of many of the neighbors and relatives of the Urbana crowd, drew enthusiastic boos.

And remember how Sandberg whooped it up when alighting the Grant Park stage during the Cubs victory rally? That’s not the Ryno I remember.

But people – and situations – change. Sandberg does not need the stress and politics anymore. Time to reap the rewards of a Cubs Hall of Fame career.

And time for Grandpa Rossy to prepare to manage. He’ll need a new nickname – Skipper.