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# *Baseball and* **BARBECUE**



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PADRES LEGEND RANDY JONES TALKS  
LIFE IN THE FAST LANE.

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BY LOYD McINTOSH

**THE HISTORY OF BASEBALL IS FULL OF CHARACTERS, BUT NO ERA OF THE GAME IS AS CHOCK-FULL OF GOOD-NATURED, FUN-LOVING WHACKOS LIKE THE 1970S. MAYBE IT WAS THE BAD BASEBALL FASHION AND, LET'S JUST SAY, INSPIRATIONAL HAIRDOS—HEAD AND FACE INCLUDED—COMBINED WITH SOME UNIQUE PERSONALITIES THAT MAKE THE DECADE SO MEMORABLE. ROLLIE FINGERS AND HIS TRADEMARK HANDLEBAR MUSTACHE, U. L. WASHINGTON AND HIS IMPRESSIVE AFRO AND UBIQUITOUS TOOTHPICK AND GOOSE GOSSAGE WITH HIS FU MANCHU AND WILD-MAN STARE FROM THE MOUND ALL COME TO MIND.**

**O**ne player who should be mentioned in the same breath with the best characters from the 1970s is the ace lefty Randy Jones. A native of southern California, Jones played the majority of his major league career for the San Diego Padres during the team's dark-brown and mustard-yellow phase, hurling sinkers with astonishing efficiency—he once pitched a game against Philadelphia that took only 89 minutes to play back in 1977. From the mound, Jones stood with a fantastic plume of white-man afro poking out from underneath his cap, a '70s 'fro so legendary in San Diego that there is even a Padres Facebook fan page on the internet called RJ's Fro. More than 30 years since pitching his last game for the Padres, Jones is a legend in San Diego, not for his style—if you can use that word regarding

baseball uniforms of the 1970s—but for his performance. The guy had the goods.

For instance, Jones is the first Padre to earn a save in an All Star Game (1975), a win in an All Star Game (1976) and to win the Cy Young Award (1976), and he is the second player in the team's history to have his number retired by the club—the first being Dave Winfield. Injuries forced Jones to retire after a short stint with the New York Mets in 1983, but Jones' post-baseball career has been just as colorful, transitioning into roles as a successful sports radio personality and a food-business entrepreneur, all done with a sense of adventure, humor and a willingness to throw practically anything at the wall and see if it sticks.

**R**andall Leo Jones was drafted in the fifth round of the 1972 Major League Baseball draft by the San

Diego Padres, four years after the club's expansion season in 1969. It was a difficult time for the young team as the Padres struggled for wins during its first few seasons. Jones, meanwhile, spent his first year of professional baseball in AA Amarillo, Texas, where he developed a name for himself as a promising young pitcher. In the summer of 1973, Jones got his chance, after a starter on the roster was traded in return for \$60,000 to help keep budding superstar Dave Winfield. It was his first and last call up from the minor leagues. "I didn't know if I could pitch in the big leagues at the time, but somebody in that organization believed that I could," says Jones. "Jackie Brandt was my manager in Amarillo in 1973, and he said I had a knack for finding a batter's weakness, and he told me, 'Just keep doing what you're doing.' I went up there, and after my first couple of appearances, I realized, 'I can pitch at this level. I can win here. I can do this.'"

Still, the Padres were an expansion team, and, accordingly, the club took its lumps for a few years. Jones' first two years in the National League, 1973 and 1974, the Padres went 80–102. His first year as a starter, 1974, Jones registered a record of 8–22. "If your team is going to lose 102 games, somebody has got to have lost them," says Randy with a big, throaty laugh. "You have to be able to handle failure in baseball, and you have to learn from your mistakes. You have to learn from your failures, and that's the only way you can get better. I was able to do that."

Jones would eventually be one of the dominant pitchers of the mid-1970s, a time best remembered for great hitters in the National League, like Willie Stargell, Pete Rose, Johnny Bench and Dave Parker. Known as a ground ball pitcher, Jones had



quite a bit of success against many of the game's great sluggers; however, he did give up two significant long balls early in his career. Jones broke into the major leagues as a relief pitcher, and, one night against the Mets, he gave up his first hit—a home run to none other than Willie Mays. “I made sure I got his autograph afterwards. I just gave up a home run to him so I knew he wouldn't say ‘no.’ I still have the ball he signed for me,” Jones says. “I got my first start in the big leagues back in San Diego against Atlanta, and you'll never guess who got the second hit off of me? Hank Aaron.”

Jones pitched in one of the great eras of baseball with teams like the Cincinnati Reds Big Red Machine, the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Reggie Jackson-led teams in Oakland and the Big Apple. It was the last days before ESPN and huge television contracts turned professional sports into the enormous businesses they are today, however. In the early 1970s, the Padres were still a young expansion team and, for the first few years, flew commercial before team owner Ray Kroc sprung for a private plane. That meant Jones and his teammates spent a lot of time in airports waiting on planes to head to the next city. It also meant there was plenty of time to pull pranks on unsuspecting travelers.

“We'd be sitting around having a beer, waiting for the airplane, and we had these retractable reels with fishing line. We'd put a five dollar bill on the end of that retractable reel and one of us would drop that five dollar bill,” Jones explains. “Somebody would be walking and see that five dollar bill, and they'd bend down to pick it up, and you'd hit the button, and it would pull it away real fast. We had more fun with that thing. We'd be laughing our asses off.”

He also played with some great players in San Diego—guys like Winfield, Cito Gaston and Nate Colbert. One of his favorite memories involving a teammate was with Gaylord Perry, who was notorious for doctoring baseballs with Vaseline, among other items. Perry pitched with Jones for parts of two seasons in the late 1970s before being traded late in 1979. “He had gotten in the shower to get ready to pack and head out of town, so I snuck into his locker, and he had this little black box in there. He didn't know it, but I had the combination to it. So I opened it up, and there was about half a tube of Vaseline in the box,” Jones says. “I got it out and cleaned it all up, and before he left, I had him autograph it for me. I still have it here in my office so I can look at it and laugh once in a while.”



By 1975, Jones was becoming one of the premier pitchers in the National League, earning the National League Comeback Player of the Year Award, setting up his banner year, the 1976 season. By this point in his career, Jones was a star in San Diego, and Jack Murphy Stadium became the place to be when he pitched. For instance, 45,000 people showed up on opening day in 1976 to see him pitch against Atlanta, giving him a standing ovation as he took to the mound. “I was nervous enough already, but this really made me nervous,” he says. “But, I got off to a great start. I just kept winning ball games the early part of the season. I think I won 10 or 11 games in a row. The people really got behind me. It was just magical when you came to the ball park.” Jones finished the season with a record of 20–14 and won the Cy Young Award. He also finished the season with a damaged nerve in his pitching arm.



RANDY JONES ALL  
AMERICAN SPORTS  
GRILL BURGER

These were the days when pitching nine innings was an expectation and before the advent of modern sports medicine. Jones never recovered his form of 1976, pitching a few more years for the Padres, before signing with the Mets in 1980 and pitching his last game on September 7, 1982.

After retiring from baseball, Jones put his business degree from Chapman College to use, dabbling in a handful of business concerns before assisting his sister, who was launching a food-related business establishing delis, pizza parlors and commissaries on military bases around the world. He spent the next few years traveling the world doing PR work for the company before deciding it was time to stop living out of a suitcase. After moving back to San Diego, Jones started doing a little PR work for the Padres and then came up with his own food-related business on the fly during a round of golf with the Padres manager of concessions in the early spring of 1994.

"We were talking after the round, having a beer, and he mentioned that he needed

one more eating place in the ballpark for that year. I said 'How about a Randy Jones Barbecue,'" Jones says. "He looks at me and goes 'What's that?' I said 'I don't know, I just thought of it.' We started laughing, and I said 'If Boog Powell can do it in Baltimore, why can't we do it here.'"

In reality Jones didn't have to think too hard; he just had to reach back to his childhood. He sought the help of his grandfather, who had a barbecue sauce recipe that he developed in the 1930s in Weatherford, Texas, confident that the sauce would go over well with hungry Padres fans. However, when he presented the idea to his family, Jones didn't exactly get the response he was hoping for. "They kind of chuckled and said 'You want to do what?,'" says Jones. It took 13 different samples before Jones' grandpa approved a sample to run a batch and Randy Jones BBQ Sauce was born. "We finally got to a point where we said, 'That's good. That's it. And we've been producing it ever since.'"

With his grandfather's barbecue sauce in hand and opening day approaching,

Jones conceived, built and opened his barbecue stand at Jack Murphy Stadium in just six weeks. Fans turned up to get an autograph and shoot the breeze with Jones, who could often be seen hanging out at his stand, helping to make Randy Jones' BBQ a hit. Of course it didn't hurt that the food was good, as well.

Soon after opening the stand, Jones began bottling the sauce for retail markets and has expanded the line to include a spicy version. It can be found at restaurants and stores throughout southern California and on his website, randyjonesbbq.com. The original variety is a tomato, vinegar and molasses-based sauce that Jones has largely left alone over the years. He did make one change over time, replacing the high-fructose corn syrup with pure cane sugar, making it gluten free in the process. There is one secret ingredient, Jones says, that gives the sauce its unique flavor—pineapple.

An admitted dabbler, Jones says he likes to try new ideas and then move on to something new. However, impressed with



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## JONES SOUGHT THE HELP OF HIS GRANDFATHER, WHO HAD A BARBECUE SAUCE RECIPE THAT HE DEVELOPED IN THE 1930S IN WEATHERFORD, TEXAS. IT TOOK 13 DIFFERENT SAMPLES BEFORE JONES' GRANDPA APPROVED A SAMPLE TO RUN A BATCH AND RANDY JONES BBQ SAUCE WAS BORN.

the success of his barbecue stand, Jones has dipped his toe in other food-based businesses, including Big Stone Lodge—a country and western-themed restaurant and business in Calloway, California—and a San Diego joint called Randy Jones Sports Bar and Grill, both of which he closed several years ago. Recently, however, Jones and his business partner, restaurateur Mark Oliver, opened Randy Jones All American Sports Grill, serving up updated interpretations of sports bar classics with a hefty amount of barbecue on the menu.

“It’s fun if you do it right,” Jones admits. “The first one, I was actually there full time, and it was a lot of hours. This second one, I’m smarter than that. My name’s on it, but my partner Mark owns it and runs it, which he loves to do, and I like keeping

it full of people. It’s worked out real slick. I like it.”

Also in 1994, Jones got into the radio business, launching a San Diego Padres pregame show for a local radio station after agreeing to sell the advertising spots himself. An avid outdoorsman, Jones filmed shows for the Outdoor Channel for five years, and he also provides pitching instruction at his home from time to time. One of his star pupils was a pitcher many readers may have heard of, by the name of Barry Zito—just your average, run-of-the-mill Cy Young award-winner, two-time World Series champion and three-time All Star. However, during baseball season, the best place to find Jones is hanging out at his sports grill or barbecue stand, sharing a laugh or two, signing a

few autographs and, these days, posing for photos with fans.

“The most interesting thing today is these iPhones with the camera. Hanging out at the barbecue stand used to be just signing autographs, and now all of a sudden one guy says, ‘Can I take a picture with you?’” he says with a laugh. “Next thing I know, I look around, and there’s like 10 or 15 people in line wanting to get their picture with me. Hell, I better start dressing better if I’m going to be taking all these pictures.

“I just enjoy the fans, and I’ve been around them all these years, and now I’m meeting all these older people who were fans of mine, and now I’m meeting their kids,” he adds.” So it’s come full circle.” ■



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