



SCIENCE COLLECTORS CORNER

Congratulations to

KING ALBERT I

*Read his winning
article about
Lou Gehrig*





Falling into Autumn

By *Khendra Murdock*
aka *JammingJames23*

September is upon us, which is good news for those of us who can't handle heat (raises hand) and good news for football fans (raises hand again, although basketball is still my favorite sport).

Can the Saints repeat as Super Bowl champions? What rookies will shine?

Which teams and players will have breakout years? We'll find out over the next few months.

I'm also pleased to announce that we have quite a few articles from the July and August writing contest in this month's issue.

I've enjoyed reading everybody's submissions and I'm looking forward to many more in the coming months.

If for any reason you don't want an article of yours to be featured in the magazine, please let me know.

All the same, keep up the great work, everyone!



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Baseball Product Review: 2010 Topps Heritage

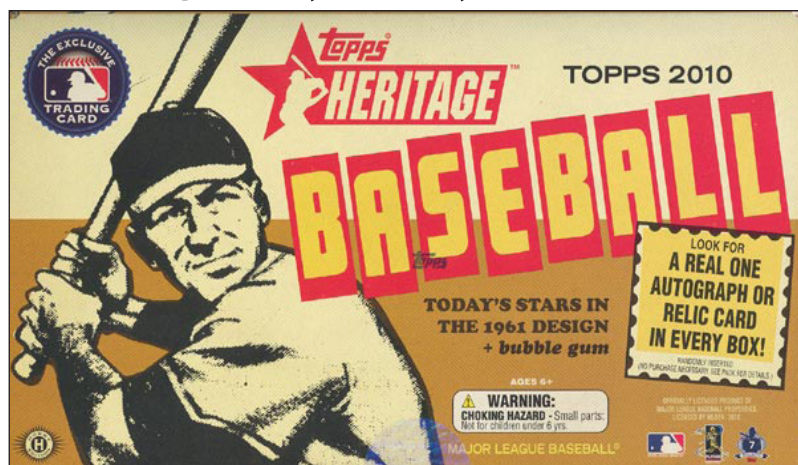
Topps Heritage continues to use the design of yesteryear — 1961

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

Topps Heritage is back and continues to use the design of a release from yesteryear. This year focuses on 1961 Topps, the year Mantle and Maris chased after Ruth and the single-season HR record. There are various types of base cards for players, team portraits, league leaders, managers, baseball events, all-star teams, and MVP winners. There are 500 cards in the base set, 425 regular and 75 short prints. Short prints are cards 426-500 and have a white back instead of a cardboard back. There are three parallels: Chrome, Refractor, and Black Border. They are numbered to 1961, 561, and 61, respectively.

There are 4 insert sets to be found in Heritage. 2 of them are Baseball Flashbacks and News Flashbacks. Baseball focuses on game related events and news on noteworthy events in 1961. Next is the Ruth Chase '61 set, which is a 14-card set that highlights Ruth's charge to 60 in 1927. Finally, there is the Then & Now series that pairs a player from 1961 with a player from today.

Each box yields 1 auto or relic on average. Most boxes contain either a Real One Auto or Clubhouse Collection Relic, though there are autograph/relics to



be found. Lucky collectors will find Relics devoted to the Ruth Chase set.

Topps has been using Heritage to showcase a set from 50 years ago for the last few years. This year has the intrigue of it being from 1961. Much like the mania in 1998 when McGwire and Sosa were going at it, 1961 had a pair of sluggers doing battle (Mantle and Maris) in the chase for Ruth's HR mark in a single season. The added bonus was they were teammates and played for the most popular team in baseball. The inserts stay relevant to 1961 instead of primarily focusing on today.

This is definitely a set for set collectors. However, I see a couple of issues. A minor one is the inclusion of checklist cards as a part of the main set. I give that a pass as that's how they were done in the original set. The big issue is with duplicates, but not so much in regards to the regular set. It's getting a duplicate that's an SP. It's bad enough there are 75 of them. It's worse when you pull a duplicate you already got in a box. Accordingly, there's no way a box should yield a duplicate of an insert unless you have the complete set in the box. This happened in our box with the Ruth Chase '61 series as 2 of the 6 cards were duplicates.

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at Topps for giving us opportunity to open and review this release.

BOX INFORMATION

24 packs per box
8 cards per pack + 1 stick of gum
Current Retail Price: \$74.99-\$84.99 (online)

RATINGS

Base - 3.75/5
Design - 4/5
Fun - 3.5/5
Value - 3/5
Rebuy - 3/5

Total - 17.25/25 (69%)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIVmd_6Pn5w (part one)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woIVJx3fYuQ> (part two)



Racing Product Review: 2010 Wheels Element

BOX INFORMATION

24 packs per box
6 cards per pack

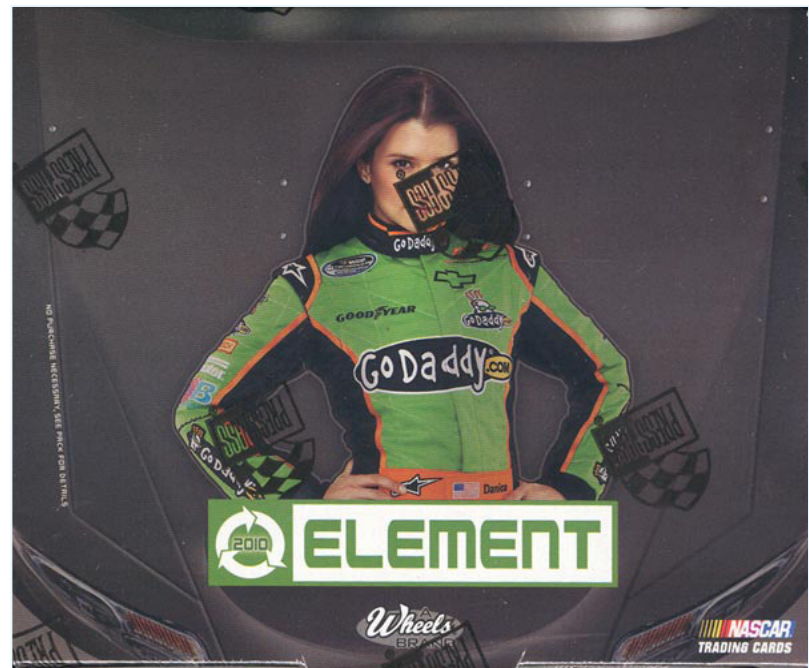
Current Retail Price: \$74.99-\$84.99 (online)

RATINGS

Base - 5/5
Design - 2.5/5
Fun - 3.25/5
Value - 3.5/5
Rebuy - 3.5/5

Total - 17.75/25 (71%)

Video Link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=31wF3d4FtLI>



Element returns for sophomore season

By Tony Joyce
aka Enigma

Press Pass unveiled Element last year to rave reviews. It was a new idea and executed well. Unfortunately, they were unable to follow up on that success. The base cards are basic in design. They do not display well (you can see this a lot better with the cards in hand and not from scans) and that is probably due to the use of recycled cardboard (which is truly commendable otherwise). The use of yellow on the backs of some of the cards makes reading the card numbers almost futile. There is a green border parallel and a blue (numbered to 35), but those can only be found in the mystery pack box loader.

Quite confusing are the inserts. Last year, each set followed a

theme that centered around Elements. I know the Hall of Fame (HOF) series is a continuation and have no issue with that (the 100 card set being 10 cards per release throughout the year). However, why do we need an Eclipse promo card to show off the next release? That's like saying "this release is a throwaway and get ready for the next one." However, I do like the painted look to the cards. I can see the High Octane Vehicle set in part as this release is focused around "Going Green," but the 10 in '10 series is something I would have expected in a previous product.

At an average of 1 autograph and 1 memorabilia card per box, there's a point of anticipation on what you might find. The memorabilia cards are nice as there's a mix of the type of race used items you

will find from tires, flags, and sheet metal pieces. However, the autographs are perplexing. For instance, the autograph we pulled has a green flag and "Drive" as a design on it, but there are other autograph versions that have different colors and words on them. Does that mean there are variations for each autograph, a select few drivers per color theme, or something else?

There was a lot of hype behind the release of Element this year and it looks like it has underachieved. While the idea of using recycled materials to make the cards was a wonderful thing to do in principle, it made the cards appear lackluster. Outside of the box loader potential, there are no numbered parallels (I really miss
(Continued on page 28)



Kicking Collecting's Butt - Tennessee Titan's Rob Bironas

By Alphonso Mitchell
aka DarkLotus

When you think of an NFL kicker, what are the first words that enter your mind? Usually it's "wide right" or "HE MISSED IT!!!" Many fans quake in fear when their teams' chances come down to the leg of their kicker. Furious prayers are made to the football gods, asking for a good hold and no wind. But not me. You see, I am a Tennessee Titans fan; our kicker, and my favorite player, is a guy named Rob Bironas, one of the most accurate and quite possibly THE most clutch kicker in the game. Rob Bironas has missed but ONE game winning kick during his five years of service for the Titans and has compiled a career 84.5% of field goals made, going 136 for 161 with a long of 60. He has yet to miss more than 6 field goals in a season and only has had 2 blocked in his career. These stats by are impressive enough by themselves, but then take into effect October 21, 2007 versus the Houston Texans. Rob made NFL history by becoming the first kicker to make eight field goals in a game. He made field goals of 52, 25, 21, 30, 28, 43, 29 and 29 again, a game winner as time expired.

Rob is my favorite player because he is an excellent kicker and his father is his hero, as is mine. He said about his father once, "He is the guy I look up to, the guy I hope to be like one day. He has succeeded in life in spite of where he started. He is a man of principle and truth; and has supported me every step of the way. My dad is my true hero and I can't thank him enough for believing in me."

Rob spent time in the camps of the Packers, Buccaneers, and Steelers trying to make his NFL dream come true. He kicked for the Charleston Swamp Foxes in AFL2 and the New York Dragons in the AFL, and was working at his father's building

(Continued on page 17)



MY FAVORITES

There are not many Rob Bironas cards on the market, but I have been able to procure a few. My 3 favorite Bironas cards are as follows in order:



3.) 2006 Upper Deck AFL #140. This is his first official card from when he was a member of the New York Dragons in the Arena Football League.

2.) 2008 Bowman Sterling #84. This is the first and ONLY Rob Bironas card that includes a piece of authentic player worn memorabilia AND there are 7 different versions to collect.



1.) 2006 Topps Total Rob Bironas/Lamont Thompson/Craig Hentrich #152. This is Bironas' FIRST official NFL card and is widely recognized as his "Rookie Card."

My Adventures with Two of My Favorite Players

*By Andrew Farn
aka MasonRaymond0320*

A few years ago, I remember that I would walk into the local hobby shop every week, looking for any random Roberto Luongo insert. My favourite player back then was Luongo, and to me, he was god. I knew nothing about the hobby, and would buy any cards that looked attractive.

Well, just last year I stumbled across some YouTube videos made by a very nice member on sportscardforum.com named TannieS. It must have been a wonderful feeling to be able to receive mail, I thought, and that is how I got into card collecting. She recommended sportscardforum.com, so I ended up signing up. I did my research and learned about the different companies: the difference between In the Game and Upper Deck, and learned the differences between a swatch, jersey, and patch.

My favourite player was Mason Raymond. I went to a card show in search of his cards and came across a Mason Raymond Victory rookie for \$5. I was of course filled with joy to be able to receive my first card for my collection. I started liking Ryan Kesler, and ended up collecting him. Then I started watching Matt Duchene, and liked the quick pace game he played, so I ended up collecting those 3 players.

I recently got some pretty high end cards pretty much for free from a few very special members on sportscardforum. So I have been able to have mid end cards, low end cards, and high end cards in my 3 different player collections. Plus I have been lucky enough to have gotten a few in-person autographs from some players that I have looked up to for the longest time. Here are some of my adventures:

I had the pleasure of meeting my 2 favourite players on the Vancouver Canucks (Ryan Kesler and Mason Raymond), and absolutely loved the opportunity to be able to meet players that I watch every night on TV.

My experience with Ryan Kesler came weeks before Christmas last year. The holiday season made it even more exciting. With special deals on all of the Canuck merchandise, I could pick out anything that I thought was reasonably priced. I picked out a puck,



and brought my t-shirt along for him to sign. My shirt is my mini project that I have been working on for the past year. It currently has 4 autographs on it (Mason Raymond, Ryan Kesler, Alex Burrows, and Trevor Linden). I lined up for about an hour before meeting Kesler. He wasn't very personal to you, but still a very nice guy. He signed my shirt and my puck, we exchanged a few words, and I got ready for the long drive back home.

That was definitely one of the better days of my life, a day that I will not forget anytime soon. After he made Team USA for the 2010 Team USA hockey team, I was overjoyed that he had made it, and I felt privileged to have been able to meet one of the greatest players in the states.

Well, a few months later, 3 Canuck players were to be stationed at 3 different malls, signing autographs. There was to be a Steve Bernier signing, Willie Mitchell signing, and an Alex Burrows signing. I chose the Willie Mitchell signing because he is one of my favourite defencemen in the NHL – a solid stay-at-home defencemen. I brought along a Mitchell poster, and my good ol' Canucks shirt. At that time, I had 2 autographs on that shirt (Trevor Linden and Ryan Kesler). When I got to the mall for the signing, I patiently waited in line about 30 minutes prior to the signing. When I got my voucher, it said that Mason

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In the beginning - a look back at collecting in the 90s

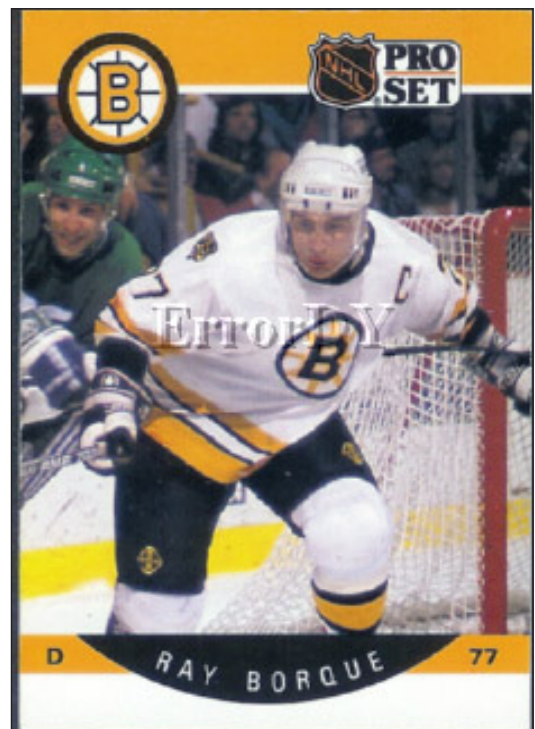
*By Karine Hains
aka Phebs888*

It was a long time ago, but I still remember it like it was yesterday. It was a cold night of December 1990 in Quebec. I was 10 years old and had just gotten back from school. I was watching *Fraggle Rock* while waiting for dad to get home from work. Back then, he worked on a building site quite far away; it was an hour drive each way and it meant he had to gas up his truck quite often. He did just that on that night, and while he was at the petrol station, he did something else: he signed up for their fidelity program, which meant that each time he gassed up there, he would get a certain amount of vouchers to spend in-store.

He had always been a hockey fan, and for as long as I can remember, he had tried to pass on that passion to me. It had worked a charm! Back in 1986 when Montreal won the Stanley Cup, he had let me watch every single game, even the ones in Calgary that started at 10.00 PM Eastern time. He would make me nap straight after dinner and then wake me up for the game; to him, it didn't matter that it was a school night. He knew just how into hockey I was, and even then, I completely idolized Patrick Roy. No matter how much my mother protested, I was always allowed to watch the games. So on this cold December night, when he got his first vouchers to spend in-store, he noticed a box by the cash register that read "Pro-Set Hockey". Upon further inspection, he realized that these were collectible hockey cards, so he decided to buy me a couple of packs to see if I could become interested in collecting.

When he got home, I heard him call me from the door saying he had something for me. I ran there: which 10 year old doesn't upon hearing that there is something to be had? I looked at him puzzled when I saw that he was holding 2 little pieces of blue plastic wrapper. To be honest, I thought that he had gotten me some candy or chocolate while gassing up – what was I going to do with 2 pieces of blue plastic wrapper?!? Noticing the confused look on my face, he laughed and told me to look closer and read what was

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My Holy Grail - 2001 Topps Traded Pujols rookie bat card

*By Matt Contreras
aka KingAlbert1*

It was sports card trading night at my neighborhood sports shop Jersey's Cards and Comics in Gloucester, Virginia. It was about 5 o'clock when my mom dropped me off there. I brought some jersey cards to trade. For example, I brought my Mark Teixeira, Derek Jeter, and Bill Mazeroski cards. My Albert Pujols jersey card, though, would come in handy a little bit later.

I was specifically looking for some Derek Jeter or Albert Pujols memorabilia cards, but since my favorite team is the Yankees, anyone on the Yankees would do. After I walked in, I asked for the memorabilia card box, as usual, and began looking at the baseball cards. I came across lots of game used, some autographs, and a couple of patch cards, even a Marilyn Monroe relic dress card. This amazing bat card crossed my eye along the way. The card was a 2001 Topps Traded Albert Pujols ROOKIE bat card! Even though I forgot my price guide at my house, anyone in their right mind knows an Albert Pujols rookie card is worth something, especially if that rookie card has a piece of his bat on it! The problem was the most expensive card I had to trade was that other Pujols jersey card, and that was only worth 20 bucks. I decided I would try to trade for it anyway. I handed the card to the manager, Jon, and he started to look over it for quite a while. You know what, though, it was definitely worth the wait.

After my mom picked me up from the shop at 6:00, I was practically kissing the card, worshipping it basically. When I got home, I saw my dad watching the Yankee game. I immediately went to my room to get the price guide. I brought the price guide and the card to the living room to show my dad and to figure out how much this card was worth. I showed the card to my dad first and then started to look for it in the price



guide. So, I began to flip through the pages and went to the year 2001. Afterward, I went to Topps Traded, and then finally went to the rookie relics. I look through the player list, and guess who's on top – ALBERT PUJOLS, BABY! And the grand total is... \$175!! Score! Of course it was in mint condition or else it would've been \$100. The funny thing was the second most expensive card was a

Wilson Betemit bat card, and that was only 10 dollars! I was in shock. My dad, who has been a 20 year baseball card collector, didn't believe me himself. He had to double check for me. I didn't blame him. Still in shock, I went to my computer to look on eBay to see how much the card sold for. Sure enough, it was selling for \$175 buy-it-now. I couldn't believe it! I got one of my favorite baseball players, and as a bonus, his rookie card. It was my first hundred dollar card. I started thinking, why in the world did Jon trade me a \$20 card for a \$175 dollar card? I know he wasn't stupid, but I wouldn't say I ripped him off, either. I'd just say it was a good trade – for me, at least.

I figured out later that the rookie card wasn't worth as much as the other Albert Pujols relic rookie cards in 2001. There were some worth \$200, \$500, and one card was worth \$4000!! I didn't care, though. I still made a great trade and that is all I cared about.

Well, at the end of the day, I know I was definitely happy. This card has definitely changed my life and in my baseball card collecting. Since then I've traded for a Topps Tribute Lou Gehrig bat card and a Prime Cuts Albert Pujols bat card. I admire this card so much, and I never let this card out of my sight. I will keep this card until Pujols retires, and hopefully this card will boost up in price when he makes it to the Hall of Fame. This will be my most prized possession for a very long time.

Better yet, it's my Holy Grail.



The Comeback Kid - Boston's Jon Lester

By *Kevin Ransom*
aka *spoodini*

It was late in the dog days of summer of the 2006 Major League Baseball season. I had restarted my collecting of baseball cards only about a year prior focusing on my beloved Red Sox whom I had been cheering for since I had my first Red Sox jersey at 3 months old. I had put together a nice little collection of rookies and game used cards and was looking toward picking up some of the newer prospects autographs for my collection. One night I was checking the newest Red Sox team news online when I saw a headline that I just could not fathom: "(Jon) Lester has treatable form of lymphoma". I could not believe what I had read, the up and coming starting pitcher for the Red Sox at 22 years old has cancer. I, myself, being only 20 years old at the time, had a sick feeling in my stomach. I had a scare with the possibilities of this disease a couple of months earlier and luckily I passed the tests they put me through.

But learning someone else, about my age, had to deal with this affliction hurt me inside. As a fan, I wanted to support him the best I could but in reality the best you can do is just wish for the best.

Deep down, I knew he could beat this. It was a highly treatable form of cancer, he was young and athletic, and had the best doctors in the country.

At the time I had only one card of Lester worth noting, his "true" rookie card - 2002 UD Prospect



Premieres. But I wanted something better: I wanted an autograph of a guy who was going to beat cancer and hopefully pitch again one day. I pulled some money together and searched the best I could for a Bowman Chrome rookie autograph of him. I searched high and low and waited a couple of weeks to pull the trigger on the one I wanted in my price range. I finally pulled that trigger and a few days later it arrived in the mail. It was a beautiful sight to see.

Crisp and smooth autograph and beautiful colors from the refractor coating, it was exactly what I wanted to base my collection of him, my Red Sox collection, and everything else I have off of. I finally received a card that I could look at and say not only is he a great pitcher, but he is a real fighter and someone everyone can look up to.

A year later, Jon Lester went to the mound for his first game back



from beating cancer and won that game while pitching out of a few jams, showing his great poise and perseverance. Later in 2007, he played the biggest game of his career to that point and shined. He gave up 0 runs in 5 2/3 innings in Game Four of the 2007 World Series. Jon Lester earned that victory which clinched the 2007 World Series championship for the Red Sox.

Early the following May, he pitched his first career no hitter against the Kansas City Royals. Today, he is one of the best left handed pitchers in the game of baseball and earned his first All-Star nomination this year. The sky is still the limit for Jon Lester as his future looks bright.

He has been an inspiration to people everywhere no matter what team you root for in baseball. If this kid could comeback from can-

(Continued on page 26)

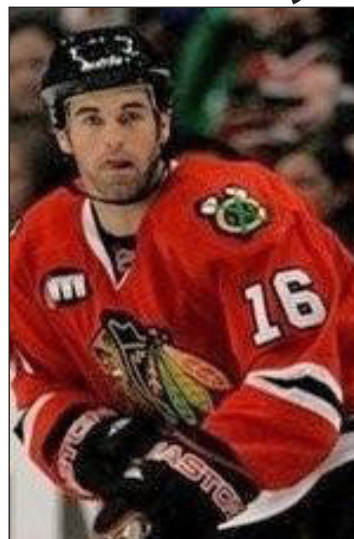
Andrew Ladd's Stanley Cup Party

By Andrew Farn
aka MasonRaymond0320

July 18 – a day that I was looking forward to for the past couple of weeks. And when that day finally arrived, I was so excited! Why was I excited? Well, Andrew Ladd, left winger on the Stanley Cup champion team the Chicago Blackhawks, was bringing the Stanley Cup to his home town of Maple Ridge. It was about an hour away from where I live, but I didn't mind travelling all of the way down there. This was a once in a lifetime experience, and I was sure that I would not miss out. He was going to bring the Cup to his arena where he used to play hockey, so this was extra special, especially for him.

After about an hour of driving, I finally arrived at the arena. I was

nervous but excited. I had brought a base card and a magazine for him to autograph. I wasn't sure if I would be able to get an autograph because about 2000 people were expected to turn out. When we got into the arena, we were seated in the bleachers. One hour later, Andrew Ladd arrived with the Cup. The mayor and Andrew made a speech, and then we were to wait in line to



either meet him or take a picture with the Cup. Groups of us waited on the outside of the rink (the rink was actually plastic instead of ice being there).

It felt like forever before I could actually get onto the rink and stand in line to meet him. 45 minutes later, I finally got to meet him! I was so thrilled. I got my magazine and my card autographed, and he gave me an extra signed photo! That was great because the magazine autograph hadn't turned out that well. It had turned out all faded, which was kind of too bad. But I was happy. That was my main goal of the day – to meet Andrew Ladd, and now that that had been accomplished, I could just relax.

This was definitely a day that I will not forget any time soon!

The Joys of Collecting

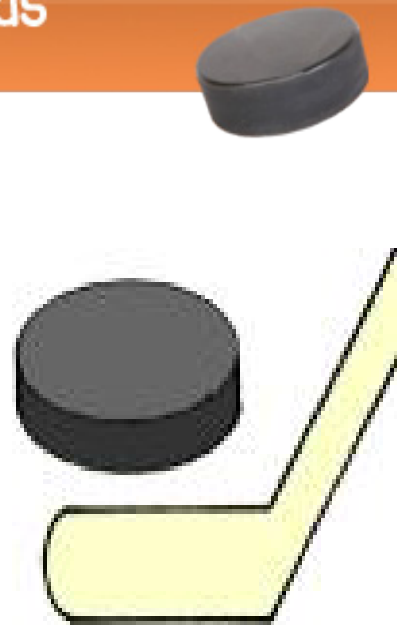
By Karine Hains
aka Pheeb888

This hobby of ours has a lot to offer: the thrill of the chase when collecting cards, the addictive feeling of gambling on a high end box of wax, the chance to test your negotiating skills when trying to conclude a trade – but what I prefer without a doubt is the incomparable community feeling that can be found

among us collectors. Sure, there are some bad eggs, but generally speaking, the collecting masses are nice and helpful.

When I first started collecting as a kid, it was very much a solitary passion. None of my friends really caught the collecting bug, so I was left to my own devices. Today, however, it is different.

(Continued on page 23)





The Day I'll Never Forget

*By Matt Contreras
aka KingAlbert1*

It was a White Christmas Eve and my friends from Texas were over for the holidays. It was turning out to be the worst blizzard in years. After my friends and I had a snowball fight, played football, and jumped on the trampoline, my sisters were working on their 'Christmas Lists'. In the meantime I was writing down what baseball cards and other presents I wanted. I began to write:

1. Star Wars Lego Sets
2. 2007 or 2009 SP Legendary Cuts hobby box
3. Nerf guns

Not a long list, but it's what I wanted at the time.

It was time to go to bed at 10:30, but I couldn't sleep. It was a long night for me. You know every kid stays up all night on Christmas Eve. I started to think about what I would get the next day. Could there be a chance of getting a hobby box? Was there a possibility I could get nerf guns? Or was there going to be a surprise waiting for me in the future? I could tell you one thing, though, I wasn't thinking of anything else, because I finally fell asleep.

It was Christmas Day in Gloucester, Virginia. After my dad said "HO HO HO," we all decided to meet at the tree downstairs. My parents brought their cameras and we were just about to begin opening presents. It was still early in the morning, about 8:00, so we decided to have breakfast first. After our



sausage, egg, and bacon breakfast we finally were ready to crack open those presents. While my two little sisters started thanking 'Santa' for their American Girl Dolls and their Littlest Pet Shop toys, my friends and I were opening ours. When I got my 3 presents from under the tree I brought them to a spot in living room, and began to open them.

The first present I opened was a box of Star Wars Legos. The second present was a hobby box of 2007 SP Legendary Cuts. Exactly what I wanted! After I opened the SP Legendary Cuts box there was only one more present. It was pretty small, but you could tell it was a baseball card (I wouldn't have known that if my dad hadn't wrapped it). Anyway, I opened it, curiously, and discovered that it was, indeed a baseball card, but I didn't know it was going to be my favorite card in my entire baseball collection. It was a 2003 Lou Gehrig Donruss Elite All-Time Career Best Relics, a bat relic

numbered to 100. Even though I didn't get any nerf guns, I'd take a Lou Gehrig bat card any day. I immediately burst into tears. I wanted to buy this card on eBay for those past 3 months, and my dad bought it for me as a Christmas present. After I hugged my dad and thanked him for the present, I went to my room, fell on my bed, and I started bawling. They were tears of joy, because I was extremely happy that I got this card. When I stopped crying, I looked for my price guide, and began flipping through the pages and found out it was worth \$150. A month or two before, I acquired an Albert Pujols rookie bat card from a trade that was worth \$175. This Lou Gehrig card, by far, beats Albert Pujols by a mile. Lou Gehrig has been my idol since little league. He played every game like it was his last, especially toward the end of his career when he was forced to retire from his life threatening disease that destroyed his nerves. Anyway, after I put the card in a magnetic case, I picked up all my presents and put them in my room. Then I went outside on the trampoline to play with my friend Jonathon. This was definitely the best Christmas ever.

Even though the Lou Gehrig card isn't my most prized possession, it's definitely my favorite card for two reasons: one, because he is my idol, and two, because my dad knew I wanted this card, and he got it for me. I will always remember that Christmas for the rest of my life.



A Word with Chris Bossy

*By Karine Hains
aka Pheeb888*

In the 1980s in hockey mad Montreal, the name Bossy was synonymous with greatness. Today it still is, not for the highlight reel moves of Mike but for the hockey cards store of his brother Chris.

The Bossy kids grew up loving and “literally” eating hockey; the 6 brothers all dreamt of a National Hockey League career, but as Chris puts it himself: “Doesn’t everyone want a career in the NHL? But as time passed, we all sensed that we were not all gifted, reality sets in and life goes on.” What they could all do, however, was collect hockey cards. In Montreal, a city which is often seen as The Mecca of hockey, kids are almost born with a pack of cards in their hands.

From a young age Chris collected for a few years before quitting like most teenagers. He returned to what is referred to in collecting circles as “the hobby” in 1980, just in time to collect the cards produced featuring his brother. In 1995, he quit again, somewhat disillusioned by the mass production of cards by the Upper Deck company and the fact that it was too easy to get them – the thrill of the chase had gone. He then started up again in 1999 when he was reintroduced to trading cards.



Having touched many careers in his life, he was forced to find a non physical occupation after suffering a back injury that resulted in 2 herniated discs. When a friend of his, who owned a toy store called Le Coin du Jouet in Lasalle, moved into a bigger space and asked him to open a card section in his store, he had found a perfect new career: something he would be able to do that was as much a hobby as it was a job. He has now been running the card section of the store for 4 years in Carrefour Angrignon.

The rise of the internet has been a blessing for him, opening new doors and bringing a large quantity of collectors from around the world to his front door, figuratively speaking. There are now numerous trading sites online where he has met a lot of people and formed a network of traders. The human aspect is one of the things he prefers in the hobby: “I love the possibility of acquiring new cards by interacting with people online, getting great trades done. You meet so many types of people that friendships do grow,” he says.

I met Chris myself on one of those trading websites, and his human approach to the hobby is what made me want to visit his store in Montreal during my holiday. When trading with him, you do not get the





A Word with Chris Bossy (Continued from page 12)

feeling that he is running a business but rather that he is trying to get the right cards to the right people. He has even started getting lists of wanted cards from his customers and trading/buying for those online on the different trading sites and on eBay. Another service he offers is to help people value their cards – there are plenty of new collectors who think they have found a golden egg but are in fact just holding a card from the mass production era.

Overall, Chris is really positive about the hobby although he admits that his one pet peeve is the fact that some people see the value given to cards by Beckett as dogma.

He says: “When will we all understand that the value of a card can vary from one person to another? What gives Beckett the right to put a value which sometimes doesn’t even come close to the real value which people are willing to pay for?” A number of online collectors are asking themselves the exact same questions.

When I first met Chris online, I was surprised to find out that for him writing in English is easier than in French. As you may know, Montréal is in the province of Québec in Canada, the one province where French is the first language of the vast majority of the population.

Having left Québec for London 8 years ago, I was surprised to hear that the language is not a problem for Chris. In the day to day running of his store, he does speak more French than English, but sometimes it can be 50/50. The use of a language is only a difficulty if you are hard headed and do not wish to learn, according to him. The language aspect gets easier every day, he tells me.

Mike Bossy might have finished his 10 year NHL career with 1126 points, but in 10 months on www.sportscardforum.com, his brother Chris already has 187 successful transactions and runs a great store in Montreal. Check his bucket at <http://s921.photobucket.com/albums/ad54/cp27bossy/> and his web site at <http://bossyscards.weebly.com> - if you see anything you like, drop him a private message on SCF (his user ID is bossy’scards).



My Adventures

(Continued from page 6)

Raymond would be signing. I had met Raymond about a year earlier, and had really wanted to meet Mitchell. I didn’t mind once I met him. He was his usual self, very personal and nice. He commented to me on how cool it was to have autographs from Kesler and Linden. I have taken a liking to him even more after that experience. He is a very humbled guy as well as a very fast and talented young hockey player.

The excitement, passion, and the very kind people are what make getting in-person autographs, and this hobby very addicting!



30 Pieces of Hope

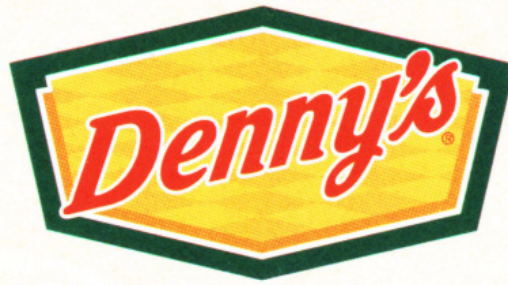
By Tim Viola
aka Tivo32

There isn't just 1 card that is valuable to me, but 30. Let me explain. In 1996, Denny's held a promotion where they sold packs of baseball cards that held one holographic card. That summer, my mom and I went several times and I was able to buy a few packs. I really loved the cards. I liked the holographic look of the cards, but I loved that I was able to get them while spending time with my mom and eating at Denny's. I loved being able to trade the cards with the different employees of Denny's who were also collecting the cards. As a kid 8 years old, it was the best summer imaginable.

As the summer of 1997 approached, I remember one day my mom reading the newspaper and excitedly telling me that Denny's would be doing the same promotion. I got so excited and ran around jumping. I immediately began imagining what the cards would look like, feel like, and who the players featured would be. My mom told me that we could go to Denny's once a week throughout the summer and that I could get a pack each time we went. The first time we went that summer, I was surprised when I was told that there would be a drawing for people who entered and the winner would receive a complete set of the cards. Every time we went to Denny's, I filled out an entry.

In the beginning

(Continued from page 7)
written on the wrappers. I was even more confused as everything was written in English (French-Canadian kids do not speak very good English when they are that young) until I noticed 1 word which was the same in both languages: hockey. I tore the wrapper, and my first ever hockey card looked back at me: Ray Borque. Yes, Borque: this was the now-famous number 1 error card of the 1990-1991 Pro Set Series. There were 14 more cards in that pack, and as I looked through them, I became completely hooked. I loved hockey and I finally had a way to find out a lot of information about my favorite players. Of



The summer came and went and I had a great time with the cards, my favorite being my Mo Vaughn card, but thought nothing of the contest. That November, I had the shock of my young life (I was in 4th grade at the time) as I was forced to leave my friends I had grown up with and switch schools. I remember how sad I was my last day at the school. When I got in my car and the first thing I began to do was cry. I cried all the way home. It was a feeling that, at 9 years old, I had never really felt before. I could not even process the feelings and emotions. When I got home from school, I remember walking to my room and just sitting on my bed crying. My mom walked in after a few minutes and told me I had mail. Anyone that remembers being young knows that when you get a piece of mail at 9 years old, it was a big deal. I immediately opened my envelope and inside was a white box. I opened the box

and the first thing I saw was Tim Salmon (the number 1 card on the checklist) and I was confused. I then sorted through and saw all the cards and realized what had happened. I had won the contest. But more than that, those 30 silly pieces of cardboard were a sign of hope. They were a sign that a nine year old kid would make it through one of the hardest times of his life. They were a sign that there are always silver linings to every dark cloud. I kept those cards close to me for the next few years.

Now that I am 22 years old, I still know where those cards are. I have kept them in mint condition all these years, and every now and then I will pull them out and slowly look at each of the 30 cards in the set. I realize that those cards are not worth much, that the set will probably never be worth anything.

But I don't think I could ever bring myself to sell the set even if it was worth thousands, because every time I see those cards, I smile. I smile because I remember the excited feeling every week going to Denny's and opening 1 pack. I smile because I remember the nervousness with which I filled out every contest entry. I smile when I remember what it was like to feel deep sadness and loss. But most of all, I smile because those 30 cards reminds me that there is always a light at the end of the tunnel and that things will always get better.

course, everything was written in English, but it didn't take me too long to figure out what goals, assists, and points were in that foreign language.

From then on, dad and I had a new ritual. He would gas up the truck three times a week: Monday morning, Wednesday evening, and Friday evening, and I would get a couple of packs when he got home on those 3 days. Initially, I would open the packs, look at the card, and soon get on the floor, acting out a pretend game involving whoever was in the pack on that day. Mike McPhee, Chris Nilan, Guy Lafleur, Ron Tugnutt and Curtis Joseph: they all played together and it mattered very little which

team they were on. This carried on for a couple of months until one Sunday my dad came in my room and said: "Come on we're going to the flea market and you're coming". I hated shopping, but no matter how much I said I didn't want to go, he was insistent that this was one shopping trip I wouldn't miss.

When we got there, dad led me straight to one table in the corner of the huge surface, and I finally understood why he thought I would like that shopping trip. In front of me was a massive table full of 300 count boxes of cards, top loaders, binders, all kinds of supplies! I approached with certain reservation, noticing that the man behind

(Continued from page 15)



1989 — A summer of cards & the spawning of a lifelong hobby

By *Ethan Cahn*
aka *hhliving1101*

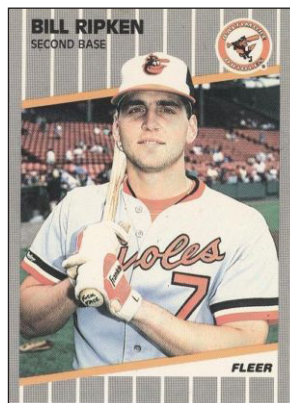
I can still remember it like yesterday: school had just ended and a long summer awaited me. My best friend Alan and I had a few bucks in our pocket so we decided to hop on the old bikes for a quick ride down to the local 7/11. We were planning on getting a slurpee and enough candy to choke a horse.

We had our candy and slurpee in one hand and were just about to leave when I noticed this grey box with pinstripes going through it: the 7/11 had just gotten in 1989 Fleer. I hadn't bought any cards since about 1983-1984 when I just kind of stopped, but I had heard about this kid named Ken Griffey Jr. (knowing who his dad was helped), so I decided that, rather than getting the candy, I would get \$10 in packs instead (around 20 packs total). Alan picked up the

last 16.

We both peddled back, both excited and a little concerned (that was a good bit of money for us at the time) to open these things we just bought, and we were very pleased. Both of us got the Griffey Jr. rookie card, but I got something else — something wrong...

Yes, I pulled the “Rick Face” card of Billy Ripken. The worst part about it, I didn't even notice until I did the team splitting (I was an O's fan at the time). I also noticed that Alan had pulled a Billy Ripken card too, but instead of saying what mine said, his was scratched out with black pen marks.



That weekend we decided to go to one of the local shows that used to occur every week in the Washington D.C. area only to find out about the rarity (at the time) of these cards we had. One dealer offered us a deal we couldn't refuse: a whole box for the card. It was of this “new” company making a shot at baseball cards. This dealer gave us both a full box of 1989 Upper Deck baseball for our Ripken errors. It was an easy choice: if my mom had found that card, it would have been tossed anyway.

Out of my box, I got the Griffey and 2 Randy Johnson rookie cards for good measure.

This series of events is what hooked me to this world of sports cards. A bike ride to 7/11 for a slurpee and some candy — what a humble beginning to a lifelong hobby!

In the beginning

(Continued from page 14)

the table seemed to take extra care with his cards; he certainly wasn't acting out pretend games on the floor with them! When I got to the table, I looked through his binders and discovered that there was more than Pro-Set to card collecting. When I got new packs on Monday, I put the new cards straight in my binder in the right numerical place. Just like that, in the space of a weekend, I had learned to collect like a grown-up. Through the next 6 years, there would be numerous trips to the flea market for supplies, singles, and eventually price

guides.

At 16, I stopped collecting as I found new hobbies and became busier with college and sports, but in 2007, I came back to the hobby. Having moved to England in 2002, I was suffering greatly from hockey withdrawal, and when a knee injury forced me to stay at home for 4 months, I needed to find something to keep me busy. I searched “sports cards” on Google and discovered sportscardforum.com. As soon as I saw the website, I realized that collecting would be possible even from a distance! I could buy cards and then trade or

sell them on this web site to improve my personal collection. Within minutes, I was hooked again. Since then, I've not looked back; I keep on collecting and building my collection. In just over 3 years, my Patrick Roy collection includes over 900 different cards (base, inserts, game used and autographs), 2 autographed jerseys, an autographed mini-mask, and numerous oddball items. As for my Brodeur collection, it is less impressive standing at around 600 cards, but it matters not to me, it just means that the chase will last even longer...



Autographed Memorabilia — Protect Yourself

*By Kevin Ransom
aka spoodini*

Autographed memorabilia is something we collectors really take for granted. We see our favorite player's autograph on a bat, ball, jersey, puck, and just about everything available for someone to autograph, and we will see these online for sale. Online auction sites and your friendly message boards are littered with tons of autographed items ready for your hard earned cash. But how do you know if they are truly authentic? How do you know it's not a forgery?

In a report a couple of years ago, the FBI determined that over 70% of "authentic" autographs listed online are fake, so just about every 3 out of 4 autographs are forgeries used to try and steal that money you worked hard for. That's an astounding number considering the large amount of autographs you can find online right now with a simple search.

I believe that even I have been conned by this once before. As a younger collector coming back to the hobby, I wanted a David Ortiz autographed 8x10 to hang on my wall. I searched eBay for something in my price range and finally won an auction for \$18. It said it came with a Certificate of Authenticity (COA) so I thought everything was accurate and was happy.

It arrived and I put it up on my wall in a frame and was proud to have my favorite player's autograph right in front of me. I started



searching for some David Ortiz autographed cards and saw his autograph on several different cards. I looked up at my 8x10 hanging over my desk and thought it looked a little different compared to the cards online. I checked the COA and saw it was by someone nobody has ever heard of, and my stomach felt a little sick. They didn't look the same and the angle of the autograph was completely different. I knew I had been conned. Even recently, I witnessed a LeBron James autographed jersey sell on eBay for over \$100, except it was such an obvious fake and eBay refuses to do anything about these auctions.

After my personal experience, I did the necessary research on the topic of getting authentic autographs.

First, when buying them online, you should only trust reputable dealers in the autograph market. PSA/DNA, UDA, and Steiner are some of the top authenticated dealers of autographs right now. PSA/DNA, for a fee, will look at your autograph and determine their opinion whether it is real or not and certify them for you.

Sometimes you can find small companies that have autograph

signings with players and you can get a COA and pictures of the athlete signing the memorabilia; most of these companies seem pretty legitimate. If you didn't want to pay the higher value for something authenticated by the three major companies, I would consider using one of those smaller companies with caution.

Secondly, do your research on these companies that provide a COA beforehand; Google is a great tool.

I would not buy an autograph any other way than the ones listed above as the odds of it being real are not in your favor. Otherwise, the only way you really know whether an autograph is real or not is by getting your own autographs in person.

Next, take a look at the prices and description of the item. Is this item a reprint? Does this price seem too good to be true? Answer these questions yourself to make sure you are ready to purchase something authentic.

Make sure you take all these necessary precautions before purchasing that piece of autographed memorabilia you want for your collection.

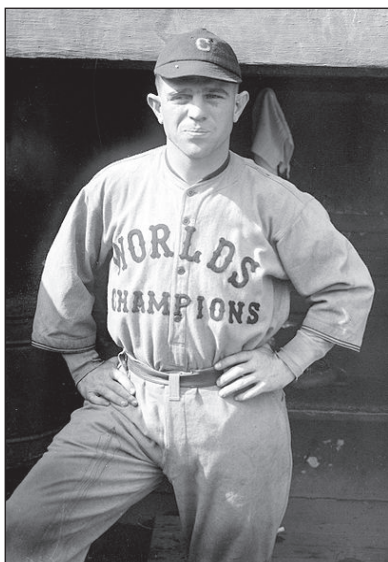
You want to be sure you are spending your money on a real piece of autographed memorabilia and not a piece of fraudulent memorabilia designed to take your money from you. It's sad that these things must be done to protect you, but if you don't protect yourself, no one else will.



Christmas Box Break!

*By Matt Contreras
aka KingAlbert1*

My best box break was on Christmas Day in 2009. I only got 3 presents that day, but one of them was a 2007 SP Legendary Cuts hobby box. After I opened my nerf guns, I decided to open the Legendary Cuts box. This box comes with 12 packs with 4 cards per pack. You can find ON AVERAGE 2 signatures. I ripped open the box, and started opening the packs. The number 1 reason I wanted this hobby box was because I liked the base cards. After I opened the 7th pack, I started to get a little worried that I wouldn't get my signature. The only memorabilia I had gotten, at the time, was a Bill Mazeroski jersey card. No worries though, I got my signature in the following pack.



When I began unwrapping the 8th pack of the box, I knew I got a signature. I could feel and see the thick card in the pack. I got the base card that was previous to the autograph, and I began sliding the card sideways of the signature. The first thing I saw was it was numbered out of 100. The second thing I saw that the ballplayer's first name was Joe. I was beginning

to think that I was about to get a signature from the 'Yankee Clipper' himself, but that didn't happen. I revealed the card to my family only to find out the player's name was Joe Sewell. I didn't know who the guy was, but I was just happy that I got an autograph. The rest of the packs were just all base cards. I even got a Warren G. Harding (our 29th president) insert card numbered to 550. I wasn't too thrilled about the autograph just because I didn't know who the guy was, but I was happy that I got a signature. It was actually the first signature or autograph I had ever gotten.

After we were finished opening our presents, I went to my room to go on the computer to check who in the world this guy is. When the page finally loaded, I began reading

his article. He played with the Yankees and Indians for 13 years, he won a World Series with each team, and he holds the record for the fewest strikeouts in a season (3). I was amazed at what this guy did throughout his career. Not too bad of a pull. Later on in the article, I saw that he was in the Hall of Fame.

Although the card was worth \$80, I still wasn't satisfied with the card. Later on I traded him with the Bill Mazeroski card at my neighborhood sports shop Jersey's Cards and Comics for a Barry Bonds and Sammy Sosa dual bat card. Although he was a good player, and holds a record in the Major Leagues, nobody knew who this guy was. Needless to say, it probably was the best hobby box break I've ever opened.

Kicking Collecting's butt

(Continued from page 5)

automation business in Louisville, while kicking footballs on his lunch breaks. Rob was signed by the Tennessee Titans during training camp of the 2005 season. His first game kicking for the Titans was against the San Francisco 49ers in preseason, which also happened to be my first NFL game. He

made both of his kicks, 1 FG and 1 XP. The Titans had a chance to win the game on a last second field goal. Rob Bironas was competing against another kicker for the job and was sitting on the bench when the game winning try was missed. The Titans went on to lose the game on an OT field goal by ex-Titans kicker Joe Nedney.

I have at least 1 version of EVERY card listed and at least 1 of every card Rob Bironas has available including 2x 2006 UD AFL Silver /100, a 2008 Bowman Sterling Gold Refractor Jersey /25, and a 2008 Topps Black /57. The only thing missing from my Bironas collection is a 1/1 printing

(Continued on page 25)

An Unexpected Encounter

By Kyle Britten
aka kbritt41

I remember this day so clearly.

So one day last year at the end of July, my family and I decided to go to the Baltimore Ravens training camp.

We were going to leave at around 5 o'clock a.m., but we found our car's tire had a nail in it and was flat (we still don't know to this day how it happened).

Well, maybe it was a blessing.

So my dad, my brother, and I were changing a tire at 5:30 in the morning, in the high humidity.

We changed it in about 30 minutes, but my mom decided to go up and get a new tire, and air in them all. At this point when she came back, it was about 10:00 a.m., and we were about to leave for training camp after deciding to go. We got lunch on the way down and started driving.

It was a somewhat fun ride, especially with them building a cool highway that twists over each other in a certain way.

Around 1:30 p.m., we decided to stop at a target near McDaniel college (where practices are held) to stretch and maybe get something. We went in and we found Ravens jerseys for only \$20.00.

We knew it was a great price; I got a Flacco, and my brother got an Ed Reed.

We checked out and started driving to the college. We arrived around 2:00 p.m., hearing about a tornado warning 2 miles away. We were going to turn around, but we

went anyway.

It was pouring rain, and they said practice was cancelled.

We being disappointed, and my dad not going, and him worrying about us in that weather, said to go check into a hotel and stay the night.

Well, that rain was a huge blessing. It stopped around a half hour later, despite reports saying it will pour the rest of the day.

So, the rain stopped, even though it was wet and muggy, and the Ravens called practice for the ones who stayed and stuck out the storm (us and a few others). They went to one field, and it was too wet, and they were going to another field on campus. A nice lady who worked for the Ravens told us that they were going to the different field and how we could get there.

Well, we got there as the players were walking down. They all slapped our hands and said hi. Me being a big Joe Flacco fan, I saw him walking down, talking to Ray Rice. I was stunned that I was seeing him in person; I go "Ja-Ja Joe Fl-Fl-Flacco." He goes, "What's up, man?" and shook my hand. Needless to say, I almost fell down that hill due to shock.

So they practiced, and they were almost over, and the nice lady that told us where to go, helped us out again, telling us to go to where the players sign while they are leaving. Well, it was packed. Some scrub offensive line player stole my pen, making me mad, and he also then said it was his.

Still, I saw Flacco walking up. Every single person there was stomping the ground and shouting, "FLACCO! FLACCO! FLACCO!" Man, I was happy to see him again. Ignorant adults that were there basically shoved me out of the way, though, so I didn't get Flacco. Until he was done signing, I was obviously sad.

Despite all that, the nice lady from the Ravens again helped me out and told me to give her the jersey. I did, and she went up to him and got Flacco to sign it. I was so happy,

I didn't know what to do. She really helped me out. I got other autographs, including Ray Rice, Terrell Suggs, Haloti Ngata, John Harbaugh, and others. But I will never forget me getting Flacco's autograph thanks to that lady.

On the way back, we stopped at the Ruby Tuesday diner, which was very good.

I told our waiter about Flacco, and he said, "Man, that is so sick, I'll check with my manager to see if we need it to hang up" since the restaurant had memorabilia of the local teams. I laughed and said, "It's not for sale, man. Haha."

Man, I will never ever forget that day.





Autographs — A How-To

By Drew Pelto
aka *censored*

Everyone knows that one guy.

The one who has the awesome man cave at his house. I'm not just talking a flat-screen TV, bar stools, and a pool table. I'm talking the guy with signed jerseys, photos, bats, balls, pucks, and Swedish pancake makers hanging from the walls. You've seen the place. Maybe you're that guy (you lucky son of a...).

This is to help out the person who wants to be that guy. You don't have to sink hundreds or thousands of dollars into memorabilia that may or may not be authentically signed. With a small investment in the raw materials and through use of your free time, I'll show you how to start your own autograph collection.

There are two main ways to get the autographed items you desire—in person, or through the mail. Part one will deal with hounding in person, whereas part two will examine mailing methods.

Part one: “Can I borrow your Sharpie”— an unacceptable phrase

I spent three years as a hardcore autograph hound when I lived in Boston for college. Most of my time was spent on hockey, with some baseball and basketball to pass the time. I started in January of 2003 being unable to tell Ted Donato from Ted Lindsay, but finished my time in December of 2005 with a respectable collection

in the vicinity of 1000 autographed items.

And here I am to pass my wisdom onto you. So welcome, rook. Here's a crash course in starting your collection.

1. Have Something to Get Signed.

It seems so obvious, yet I've seen many people who come with nothing to get signed. Almost anything works. Cards are cheap and usually easy to find. You probably have a ton yourself. If not, you can often find player lots or team lots on eBay for cheap. Ask around and work some trades at boards like SCF. Photos look great, but are a little more expensive (\$2-\$5, depending on where you look). Same with pucks, baseballs, footballs, basketballs, bats, jerseys, sticks, you get the idea. They're great single-signed or team-signed items, but they're more expensive. If you want something simple, get a pack of plain white 3x5 cards. If they're ruled, get them signed on the plain white side. After that, if you have a printer capable of printing on index cards, you can print a name, team logo, and really anything you want about the player on it. Make sure you test it on an unsigned card first! Be forewarned, some players won't sign blank index cards, so think about just printing a team logo on them from your computer. If you plan to collect basketball players, go to a local home improvement store and get some plain wooden floor tiles.

Signatures look great on them.

2. Do Your Homework.

No one likes a collector who knows nothing about who he's collecting. I've been that guy before, and I won't lie to you: it sucks. If you hound a team, make sure you can identify at least half the players on it. Strive for knowing who every player is. What helped me out early on was to print off a sheet with every player's color headshot, name, jersey number, height, and weight. Additionally, these are easy to get signed. If you don't know who a player is, have them sign the sheet. They'll usually sign right by their photo. Of course, the easiest way is to just get a team's jersey or some other generic team item, but with that you run the risk of a player signing it twice (or more). At worst, leech off the other collectors around. If you don't know who someone is, look at what the player is signing for someone else. Just don't do it too much, you parasite. As one autograph blogger once told me in my early days, “If you don't know who he is, then you don't need his autograph too badly.”

3. Preparation is key!

Make sure that everything you want to get signed can fit into a small backpack, messenger bag, or box. I always use a messenger bag or a laptop case to carry everything in. Make sure all your items are easy to get to. What I often do is make what I call “8 boards” or “9 boards” to hold my cards. Go to a
(Continued from page 20)



Autographs — A How-To (Continued from page 19)

photo supply or scrapbooking shop to get photo corners and get some rectangular pieces of cardboard, foam core board, posterboard, or something of the like (cut it to about 9x12). In a pinch, old two-pocket folders work well for this. Composition notebooks are great for this as well. Some will use a spiral bound pack of 4x6 index cards. Take a card, put two photo corners on it (on opposite corners—the top right and bottom left or top left and bottom right), and stick it to the cardboard. Either do it three rows of three cards vertically, or four rows of two lengthwise. You should be able to slip the cards in and out of the corners without any major problems. Don't try to force them into the corners if it's hard. Just get an index card or piece of paper to carefully lift the corner, then slide the card in. You may have to bend the card a little, but be careful not to crease it; just gently curve it. If your cards are super-glossy, rub them down with an eraser or a little talcum powder. This will counteract the gloss and the autograph won't bubble up on the card. For the most part, try to limit yourself to four or fewer cards of a single player. If I make a 3x3 board, I'll put a row for a player. If I have one card of one player, and one card of another player, I'll put them in the same row with an empty space between. If I have two of a player and one of another, I won't put them in the same row (unless it's a row of 4).

Keep a space between players so a player doesn't accidentally sign a card that isn't of him. I've had it happen three times so far. Once in a while, some players will sign more than two or three each (Brian Mullen, Brian Propp, Brad May, Craig Hartsburg, and Brad McCrimmon are ones who stick out in my mind as guys who will sign full 9 boards), but don't get too greedy. Stick with no more than 3 items for the most part. Keep your pen ready and your items at close reach. Nothing is worse than seeing a player, having to dig something out, or going and getting something, and looking up to find him gone.

4. Have Something to Sign With.

Seems obvious, doesn't it? But the thing everyone seems to forget, or know little about, is the proper pen. It all depends on what you're getting signed. Lumocolor pens are the best on the market but are pretty tough to find. I highly recommend Sharpie markers. Blue Sharpies work best on cards, photos, light colored jerseys, bats, floor tiles, sticks, and index cards. Black Sharpies are good as well, but I recommend blue over any other color. It can be seen easier on a dark spot on a card than can any other color of marker. Black is best to use on a basketball. If you want to get darker items signed, like some bats, jerseys, footballs, or pucks, get a silver paint pen. Silver Sharpies are good, but highly unre-

liable. I've had them die on me at the worst possible moments. Try to find a Liquid Gold, or Liquid Silver brand pen. Ball-point pens should be the only things used on baseballs. Always keep your writing implement close at hand. I often stow mine in my hat.

5a. Location, Location, Location. And Timing.

Know where you're headed. There's nothing more futile than not having a good sense of a time schedule and not knowing where to go. A lot depends on what sort of event you plan to hound. Is it a team hotel, or a stadium/arena? What time does the game start? It varies for every sport, sometimes for every team, so you'll have to deal with a little trial and error at first. With hockey, I often hounded morning skates and visiting team hotels, and occasionally practices. I can't tell you a perfect system of timing, except that for baseball, players are usually at the park by 3 p.m. for a 7 p.m. game (and begin arriving as early as noon in some cases). Hockey players often have a morning skate at 10 or 11 am for a 7 p.m. game and will leave for the rink between 3 and 4:30. Hotel arrivals vary wildly depending on the team's schedule the previous day. Make friends with a few collectors and they'll hook you up. Within my first two months of hounding, I had a schedule completely set and even had one give me the number for the Boston Bruins Media Info Line so I could



Autographs — A How-To (Continued from page 20)

find out exact times of practices and morning skates.

5b. Loose Lips Sink Ships. Or In This Case, They Dry Up Sharpies.

Don't get too chatty about visiting teams' hotels. I hounded in Boston a lot, and in 2003 during the ALCS, crowds around the Yankees' hotel(s) were small: 10 or 20 people. A year later, it was around 100 people for the Yankees at the 2004 ALCS. Word spreads quickly. Don't say too much about where teams stay or you'll get a bunch of slack-jawed yokels just there to stare and get junk like scraps of paper or dollar bills signed.

6. Be Polite.

Don't cuss out a player for not signing. I remember hounding a Red Sox game once in the illustrious Summer of 2004: a player ignored us and a woman shouted "Thanks for nothing!" She was met by a groan from the rest of the collectors. Fortunately, she kept quiet the rest of the time. Don't get mad that you missed out on a player. There will be other opportunities (unless it's Tim Wakefield who signs one day per season; if you miss him, too bad). Don't shove anyone out of the way to get to a player or people will do it to you. Say "Please" and "Thank you." Address the player as Mr. Shanahan, or Brendan, maybe Shanny, never just as Shanahan. Don't shout out "There's Jagr!" or you'll have about 50 other collectors trailing

you to get to him. Don't run toward a player. If hounding at a hotel, don't follow the players into the lobby. Leave them alone if they're in the bathroom or eating a meal. If they're on the phone, try to wait until they finish their conversation. Simply, just treat the players how you would want to be treated in their situation. And don't crowd players. During the aforementioned 2004 ALCS 100-person-crowd, I was pinned between the crowd and the wall of the hotel as Joe Torre walked out. The hotel security folks had put out a rope barrier which was about as useful as an ashtray on a Harley. At least five people pushed against the rope screaming for him to sign. I politely waited and asked "Mr. Torre, will you please sign my ball?" He came over, took my ball and pen, backed up a few steps, signed, handed it back to me, and got on the bus. No one else got him, and why? Because I was the polite and calm one.

Now how hard is that? If I could fit in the time to do it while holding a 3.4 GPA in a college journalism program while pursuing two minors, you can do it too. I don't get out to hound as often as I used to, but I do enjoy it whenever I have the time.

Now that free time is rare, I have to find other ways to add to my collection.

Part two: The Russian Postal System blows

You're still here? Geez man,

you're supposed to be out hounding. I gave you all that good advice and you're still sitting on your duff, wasting time at the computer?

Oh, right. No teams within a two-hour radius. I feel your pain, as I have the same problem here.

Not all of us can be so blessed as to have a 15-minute walk or 5-minute subway or bus ride to get autographs. Many people live an hour or more away from the nearest team. Some of us live on a dental floss farm in rural Montana (I guess that would just be "Montana") and have no major league teams within 700 miles in any direction. My two-hour drives to Dallas and Oklahoma City don't seem so bad now that I see Montana on the map.

For those of us who can't just go hound, the US Postal Service (or Canada Post, or insert your country here) make it possible to get autographs by writing to your favorite athletes. You don't get the same interaction, and it can be hard to get certain items signed, but in the end, you're still getting your autograph.

And so, another brief bit of info— how to get the most out of your mailing experience.

1. Know Your Addresses.

Team addresses are easy to find. Just check out a league's website, and the mailing address for every team should be there. Home addresses are a little tougher to dig up. I went out and spent a good



Autographs — A How-To (Continued from page 21)

chunk of change to get Harvey Meiselman's Address Lists in 2007, but they're honestly worth every penny. As a warning, some teams do not usually give mail to players. In hockey, these teams are the New York Rangers, Colorado Avalanche, Philadelphia Flyers, and Washington Capitals. The latter three will give mail to players if you send via their practice facilities. Addresses for those can be found on a simple Google search. Home addresses can be found other ways, but I'll leave this up to you to find. There are a lot of sites out there that can help you. Even TCF has a heck of an address database.

2. The Letter.

If writing to multiple players on one team, send individual letters, not just a bulk mailing with every player in it. Make the letter you write as personal as you can. Just a simple "Sign these please" will probably end up with your items being sent back unsigned, if they even get sent back at all. If you can, write the letter by hand. Include some personal items about the player, such as congratulations on a recent milestone, or a good-luck wish for the playoffs, or best wishes for coming back from an injury. Make them know you're not just some schmoe looking to get a free autograph that you can turn around and sell. Typing the letter works, but some collectors believe you'll more than likely get better autographs, faster response times, and even specific requests you make fulfilled by writing by

hand. I haven't noticed a difference myself. Just make sure your handwriting is legible!

3. Send Something to Get Signed.

Again, it seems obvious, doesn't it? Via mail, cards, photos, and small items work best. Baseballs, pucks, and mini-helmets are possibilities in that vein. Avoid sending jerseys, sticks, bats, big balls (yeah yeah, ha ha, laugh it up; I mean like footballs and basketballs), or anything requiring special packaging. Usually I send a few cards. You can send usually up to about 5 in individual penny sleeves for the price of only one stamp. By the way, don't send too many items, either. The most I ever send is 5 cards. Often, I put cards in sleeves, put a couple index cards around them to protect them a bit more, and send. Sometimes the player might sign the index cards, too, which is a fun and easy bonus. Again, do your homework. If you see a player signs one item per person, don't send three. If they signed 8 for someone (a collecting practice I do not condone), don't hesitate to go for 4 or 5. And don't send anything you can't afford to lose. Don't send an Alexander Ovechkin rookie card to get signed (I learned that the hard way; fortunately I had two of it, so I had one to fall back on) because there's a good chance you'll never see it again unless the player has a good track record of signing. And even then, some unscrupulous assistant might switch out the card with a different

one and keep your awesome one.

4. Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope.

Make sure you enclose one! And make sure it has proper postage. If you don't enclose an easy way to get your signed items back, you may never get them back. Convenience for the player is the key here: the less the player has to do, the better your results will be. Make it easy for them, and you'll be much better off and have more success.

5. Postage.

Like I said, make sure you have proper postage. A simple 44-cent stamp will get your letter anywhere you want in the USA, but check with the Post Office for letters to Canada or elsewhere around the world. If worst comes to worst, enclose a dollar with your request to cover postage back from the player to you. Or, if your local post office has them, get an international reply coupon. Don't bother with them in Russia, though. In fact, don't bother sending anything to Russia for the most part. I've seen a success rate around 15% for others in sending to players there. I haven't tried it. I have personally had success to hockey players in Slovakia and Sweden. I have also seen several successes for various sports in Germany, England, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Japan, Spain, France, Italy, Czech Republic, and Finland.

6. E-mail is a possibility for some!

Some players have widely-publi-



Autographs — A How-To (Continued from page 22)

cized e-mail addresses that they'll sign through. Georges Laraque and Ken Dryden are two at the top of the list who are worth trying. Just send a similar letter to if you were writing via mail, ask if they might send a signed photo or something of the like, and make sure you enclose your mailing address. Laraque also doesn't mind shooting the breeze with fans, as far as I can tell. Back when the Penguins acquired him, I e-mailed welcoming him to the team and reminding

him that Donald Brashear and the Capitals were on the schedule in the next few weeks. I got a response thanking me and lol'ing at the reminder about Brashear.

So there you have it. I think I've covered everything there is to know about autograph collecting. Or at least everything I know and can remember off the top of my head. It's a fun hobby to get into and is decently cheap as long as you just send cards. Think about it this way— for \$44, you can get a roll of

100 stamps. That's 50 requests. My success rate has been about 60%—roughly 30 of 50. If you send 3 cards per player (some more, some less, but average 3), that's 90 cards you just got signed for a very small investment. It also helps if your significant other is very understanding, as this hobby gets addictive very quickly. At least it's legal and non-harmful.

Have fun, may your mailboxes be full, and may your 9-boards be finished!

The Joys of Collecting

(Continued from page 10)

It doesn't matter if no one collects near you because the internet is there! You can easily get online and find people to share your passion with. Online collecting offers so many upsides: cheaper prices on product, possibility to trade with fellow collectors, and possibility to get cards to and from anywhere in the world.

In 2007, I cracked my first packs in over 10 years; being isolated in England, I decided to look into possible sports cards web sites. I was astonished to find sportscardforum.com, and I must admit that it felt like home right away. 3 years later, SCF is still the site I visit the most often online. I've made over 400 successful trades and I've "met" a huge number of collectors. They are all different; they can be passionate about their team or their favorite player, but they can also be die-hard rookie collectors. As

time passed, I learned about all these people, so now when I bust some packs, more often than not I know exactly who will be interested in my latest pull. For instance, when one of my boxes of Ultimate Collection hockey revealed a Jonas Gustavsson rookie card numbered to just 99 copies, I sent a PM to one of the most dedicated collectors I know: Mike Cole. We have yet to strike a deal, but even if we can't, I will at least be happy to say that I tried to send the card in the right collection. I'm happy to say that it also works both ways: when people pull cards of my 2 personal collection guys (Patrick Roy and Martin Brodeur), they send me a private message right away — I do not even have to look through the box breaks forum anymore!

It doesn't stop at online dealing, though: good reports established online can often turn into easy in-person dealing. In the summer of 2009, I made my way to the

National Sports Collector convention in Cleveland. There I met quite a few members from SCF (mikesilvia, Enigma, Captngetch, scottkoz20, doniceage, and puckfrmcali to name a few) and I was able to not only conclude a few deals in person, but also enjoy one of the biggest card shows in good company. We all felt like kids in a candy store at the Convention and it was brilliant to have people to share that feeling with. Outside of the show hours we also enjoyed some activities (a Cleveland Indians game, the Rock'n'Roll Hall of Fame, and a great session of pack wars) and took the time to get to know each other better. It was a pleasure to get to know Scott's wife and little girl — she was a little cutie!

Fast forward to this summer: during my usual holiday in Québec, I decided to drop by the card shop of one of our members *(Continued on page 27)*



The Thrill of Card Collecting

*By Andrew Farn
aka MasonRaymond0320*

I recently found SportsCardForum.com last year, and have had the best time of my life collecting, trading, and spending my cash on cards of players that I admire. It is always heart warming when you see a hint of yellow in the mailbox after a hard day at school/work. But the best part of card collecting is probably the people that make this hobby so much fun, the people that will trade you a card because they know that it will make a home in your personal collection.

When I first joined SportsCardForum.com, last July of 2009, I was just like a lost dog. I was completely perplexed because I knew absolutely nothing about collecting, knew no one that collected, and knew no one on SportsCardForum.com. Well, I started replying to other members' show and tell threads and began slowly making friends. I remember making friends with a few of the other fellow Mason Raymond collectors on here, and would occasionally chat with them.

During my holidays a few months ago, I would be on SCF probably 3-4 hours each day looking for special deals, and replying to show and tell threads.

One of the members invited me into the live chat, in which you basically instant message back and forth. I had gone into the live chat possibly once before, but there had been no one in there. I went in there, and had a great time...listening to someone's box break, and chatting about hockey, and hockey cards in general.

I had loved that live chat experience, and started asking other people if they would like to chat. Soon enough, I got a group of people together and we would have a blast each night in the live chat.

This summer has been no different. I have gathered groups of people together, and I have been able to make quite a few friends because of the live chat feature, while chatting, and trading.

This is why I love the hobby so much. The groups of friendly people make this hobby exciting and passionate.

Aside from the people, the second best feeling in this hobby is when you receive mail. I know that each day during school, I am looking up at the clock or at my watch waiting for the day to tick by, so I can check the mailbox.

When all there is in the mailbox, is advertisements, and bills...and no bubble mailer, I always have this gut wrenching feeling knowing that I was so excited about checking the mailbox, and there was nothing. But you get the opposite feeling when you do receive something special, such as a package of cards or a TTM autograph from your favourite player. When I get something in the mail, I always feel like screaming for joy. It is definitely one of the best feelings ever.

Another topic that I would like to touch on is the chase. I know that for me, if I like a specific card that I want for a set or for my player collection, I will be looking on Ebay or the SportsCardForum boards for it. It is always rewarding once you obtain that specific card. That is another joy of collecting...it keeps you occupied instead of sitting around wondering what to do all day.

One last topic that I would like to talk about is box/pack opening. I have never really busted much just because I can never afford it.

But when I do get a chance to bust, it is always fun, amusing, and I am always eager to get home after I leave the hobby shop with a pack or 2. I remember my first box that I opened up was a retail box of Upper Deck Ice.

I was so excited when to get home. I busted that box open only to find out that that box had all base cards in it.

That was a huge disappointment, and I have never touched an Upper Deck Ice retail box again. But when you get a few hobby packs, you are just hoping for the best. It is the 'not knowing what to expect' feeling that makes pack/box busting so thrilling.

The friends/people in this hobby, the mail received each day, the chase of cards for your personal collection, and the box/pack breaking is what makes this hobby the best, and definitely the most unique!



So Where Do We Go From Here?

*By Ethan Cahn
aka hhliving1101*

[Editor's note – After this article came in, In the Game joined the baseball card market, so Topps is no longer the exclusive producer of baseball cards.]

Lack of selection, escalation of prices, availability of product, mark up costs from retailers - what do all these things have in common, you ask? The end of set collectors as well as any chance of bringing in kids to the hobby. Now I say this mainly because of the most recent Bowman Baseball release, which went so through-the-roof that no kid (and even many adults) could shell out \$10 per basic pack, or \$25 per jumbo (don't get me started on the cost of the boxes these days).

Was it not supposed to be Topps' responsibility to attempt to bring in the younger generation? Per their agreement with Major League Baseball, it is and was promised BY TOPPS when they got the exclusive rights to produce Major League Baseball Cards. Sure, they have had a very cool gimmick that someone like myself can appreciate: the Topps Million card Giveaway, which gave the chance for anyone who pulled a "code Card" the opportunity to receive a card from past Topps company releases (including 5 1952 Mickey Mantle rookie cards, which still have not been awarded).

However, my point here is I learned to enjoy collecting through

my uncle. We would go out and get a few packs and then I would try to get a set - no fancy inserts and no short prints that are 1 per 12 box case. Instead, we got a pack price under or around a single dollar. Topps has not done anything but add more gimmicks to escalate the cost of their products, and they have not done ANYTHING to bring kids back to collecting as they promised they would do.

Recently other sports have opted to go with more than 1 company to produce their prospective sports, and that's been refreshing (it's also sad because having choices used to be the norm). In football, Panini and Topps have both been given license rights. Panini already has 4 sets under their belts and has done as they promised, recently releasing a reboot of Score, a low-end set geared toward kids as well as set collectors. Inserts are included, yes, but nothing too outrageous or extremely limited. Plus, they even include autographs. Granted, they may be of players who are not going to make it, but they are obtainable, and it's nice to see in a set with such a low price point.

Topps hasn't even gotten their first release out yet, but it's due out later this week as I write this. They have decided to do a similar promotion with their football brand as they did with the MCG program, thus guaranteeing the price for this product WILL rise by 1 1/2 to 2 times the original price point of \$2.99 hobby and \$9.99 hobby

jumbo pack.

Hockey has recently done away with the exclusive contract they had with Upper Deck and has awarded Panini a license to produce NHL cards; this was a welcome change to the hockey card market. Upper Deck had given up and gone through the motions the last few sets before the decision was made to bring someone else in. They got stale and, well, lazy. The NHL figured out that the best thing for their fans is to bring competition back to the market: bring in new designs and new innovations. Bringing in Panini gives them this.

So, back to the once-great baseball card market, the place where brands & companies were born and new ideas attempted...now there's no competition, completely contradicting what they as a sport stand for: fair competition for the betterment of the fans themselves.

Kicking Collecting's butt —

(Continued from page 17)

plate, but I have been looking for one and feel confident I will eventually add one or more to my collection. My favorite by far though, is a 2006 Topps Total card that Rob signed through the mail for me. To make it even better I received the card back on my 27th birthday, making it the best birthday present I got that year. I sincerely hope that Rob has a very long and accurate career kicking for the Titans and there are more cards featuring this under-appreciated player.



Shawne Williams — My Special Card

*By Mike Leno
aka dwighthoward*

Hi, this is “Dwight Howard” reporting from the greatest sports cards collecting site in the world. I will write about my first ever autograph cards which is also my favorite card. Every sports card collector always has a favorite card. My favorite card is obviously a basketball one, because I am a basketball freak. I can probably win 90% of any basketball trivia. Anyway, my first basketball autograph is my most memorable one too. My Shawne Williams 06-07 UD SP Signature Edition Auto was my first autograph. Although the player of the card is a “nobody,” I really like it. It’s a low-end autograph with no special inscriptions or game used or patch, but it is really a special card to me.

The way I got this card was during one of my first Sports Card Forum trades. I only had low end base, inserts, or rookie cards at first. Since I was a small 6 years old, I only brought the cheap one or two dollar packs from Walmart or Target every time I went there to purchase items. I never got any autographs or game used, but got tons of base, rookie cards, and inserts. But as soon as I joined this forum, I began obtaining higher end cards through sells on card cash, contests, and many trades. This Shawne Williams card was my first ever autograph card, and I traded for it in early 2009.

If you do not know, Shawne Williams is a 1986 born basketball



player from the University of Memphis. He played for the Indiana Pacers for his first 2 seasons and then played for the Dallas Mavericks for another 2 years. Although this player had major potential coming out of college, he did not live up to it and rather took another path. Unfortunately, he was often breaking the laws and getting arrested. Therefore, Shawne Williams is not a major impact player in the National Basketball Association, but his card, which is my first autograph basketball card, is my favorite one.

If I remember, I traded many base and stuff for the Shawne Williams basketball autograph card. The cards I traded away were a Jerome Bettis insert, Santonio Holmes base, Nate Washington

base, Ike Taylor base, and a Casey Hampton base.

In conclusion, this card may not be very special to anyone other than some of Shawne Williams’ fans, family of him, or Memphis Tigers alum fans, but this card is obviously special to me. This card helped bring my collection to a high. At first I only had cards around a dollar book value and sell value each. Now I have close to 200 cards from this forum from trades, card cash purchasing, and Sports Cards Forum contests that range from a dollar book value up to fifty dollar book value. Due to my first autograph of Shawne Williams, this allowed me to grow as a sports cards collector. I really appreciate the card, therefore, it is obviously my favorite sports card.

The Comeback Kid

(Continued from page 9)

cer and win a World Series clinching game and throw a no-hitter soon after, it makes you wonder what could I or anyone else do?

This card is the most valuable to me in my whole collection of sports cards and will be more valuable to me than any card I get in the future as well.

If I am in a rut, if I am in need of motivation, if I feel like I need some inspiration, I look over from my desk into a glass cabinet. Inside that glass cabinet, front and center, sits Jon Lester’s rookie autograph. I look at it and feel like I could conquer any obstacle put in front of me.



One-of-One Derek Jeter

By Jordan Goodman
aka 1of23

3 years and a few months ago I bought my first pack of cards. I bought the pack just because I saw it sitting on the counter for \$1, so I said what the heck and got it. I pulled a 1/1 Jeter Printing Plate, and from that point on I was a collector. But sadly, my home got broken into and it was stolen!

I have spent near 1,000 dollars on packs just in the past year. Then a few months ago I found a site called Sports Card Freaks, and I thought I had found sports card trading heaven! Then about a month ago I was introduced to a site called Sports Card Forum (SCF) and was like, "Oh my gosh, this site is huge!," and every chance I get, I'm on there.

Because of this site my favorite memory of collecting happened. One day I was one SCF, and my 5 year old son walked in, and was watching me on the site, and tapped me on the shoulder. He said,

The Joys of Collecting

(Continued from page 23)

(bossy'scards). If it hadn't been for SCF, I wouldn't have known to visit Chris' excellent store, and I wouldn't be flying back home today with plenty of personal collection goodies.

This visit to Québec also allowed me to make an in-person trade with Annie, another member of the site. One thing led to another, and before I knew it we were recording a video break of Ultimate Collection

"Daddy, can I start 'cowecting' with you?" Since then I have been teaching him about cards. Some of my friends say he is too young to teach, but I totally disagree.

My favorite card would have to be my Hank Aaron GU card, which I got a few months ago. I paid around \$250 at my local card shop, and I think it is the best two hundred and fifty dollars I have ever spent. I have it in a safety deposit box with my wife's jewelry.

My collection isn't that big it's got about 6 thousand cards. About 2500 are inserts, about 1500 are rookies, and about 2000 are base. So, I think I'm doing well so far.

My favorite person to collect is Mickey Mantle. Why, you ask? The reasons I like collecting him are because he is a legend, he will never go down in price, collections of him will always be able to be sold, he is valuable player, and he is the best ever (IMO).

My collection value I estimate at about 2-3,000 dollars, not near

what I've spent (I've spent near 10000). But that's the way I collect – it's not an investment, really, it's a hobby. I bet most collectors agree with me.

Some things people don't know about me are that I knew Buster Posey when he went to Lee County High School, that I knew Cliff Floyd when he was playing in the minor leagues in Albany, GA, that I am the creator of Baseballcardtalk.proboards.com, and that I had Babe Ruth autograph.

The most surprising moment in my collecting years was when I got the wrong package from eBay and it had 2 Graded 10 Derek Jeter RC's.

When I went to tell the guy, his account was gone! I was so excited but those cards got stolen with the Jeter 1/1. But a few months ago, I found a deal on a Jeter RC for 2 at a garage sale for a penny, and that just made my day since all my other good Jeter stuff was taken!

hockey.

Taking the high end gamble on your own is one thing but sharing the gamble with someone else is even more fun!

So much so that we did another video break the following week!

Of course, the results can't always be excellent but at least you have someone to share the highs and the lows with.

In closing, if you are a collector, get involved in your trading com-

munity because it will be worth the effort.

Take the time to notice who also collects in your area (much like the Sabres Mafia members found themselves on SCF), cultivate trading relationships (it is great to deal on numerous occasion with some people that you know you can trust), and – for the most daring – meet your fellow collectors in person, because this is where there is the most fun to be had!



The One Constant in a Life of Change

By Michael Barton
aka MonticelloCards

When I initially read about this contest, I really didn't have any idea in regards to what I would write about. Sure, I have collected for most of the past 25 years, but what has made collecting cards different for me? Well, my life has not been an easy road at times, but one of the few things in my life that has been with me from the age of 9 is my love of sports cards. Let me explain a little further.

I moved around a lot when I was a child. I went to 7 different schools in 7 years. I had an addiction problem for much of my life, which I can now proudly say is in the past. I have had everything, and I have had nothing. But my love for collecting cards has never wavered. At times it has been an escape from the difficulties of everyday life and it has been a place I could go and sit for hours (and hours) and just read the backs of cards and forget about things that may have been troubling me at the time. Collecting has given me a common ground with others, and I have made some lifelong friends because of this hobby.

Recently, I began collecting

rookie cards again. It has always been my personal favorite thing to collect ever since I was a kid trying to get 9 Will Clark 1987 Topps cards to fill up a 9 pocket page (I always thought that looked so neat in a binder). And I try to keep my collecting habits very basic these days. I know the rage is in autographed rookies and speculation, but I am actually enjoying picking up the basic cards. I recently acquired a 1986 Topps Tiffany Ozzie Guillen RC, and that card makes me happier than any 5 color patch autograph numbered to whatever! I also acquired a 1982 Fleer Cal Ripken RC, which was one of the holy grails of my youth. When I got it, I had to laugh because it reminded me of spending a few weeks trying to get one of those from my friend when I was 13. It never wound up happening then, so it brought a smile to my face that I could finally get my hands on not just a card, but a fond memory. The fact that it is slightly miscut, with the typical fuzzy picture, made it all the more fun to hold.

This hobby has its positives and its negatives just like life does. Personally, there was a time when I was completely into buying cards

to make a profit off of them. As I look back now, there was no enjoyment in that, and I even took a break at times in the past because I just got so turned off by the companies pushing these high dollar boxes and brand new cards fetching thousands of dollars. When I got back into it this time around, I decided this was going to be about the joys of collecting. So what if I cannot afford a box of Exquisite? I like cards for the information. I don't need to see "congratulations you have received" on the backs of my cards anymore. It's nice, don't get me wrong, but I enjoy reading about a person and seeing how they did in the minor leagues before they finally realized their dreams and made it to the show. I especially like the stats. I got into a heated discussion with someone not too long ago because they said there was no way Wade Boggs had ever hit 20 home runs in a season. I knew that little tidbit from the 1989 Topps Boggs, and it came in handy almost 20 years later!

Whatever you do in this hobby, do it because you enjoy it. Don't get lost in the money of it all, because it is very easy to do. I know, I've been there.

The Joys of Collecting

(Continued from page 4)

the Radioactive cards). The memorabilia and autograph selection has a wide variety of subjects. While we were fortunate to pull an extra memorabilia piece, not everyone will be so lucky. The big marketing

ploy is the random appearance of a \$20 or \$100 (USD) bill in boxes. That does provide an interesting twist to opening up boxes, but there's no word on how many boxes over the run have these. Typically, Press Pass puts out great

products, but I think this is one that will need to go back to the drawing board should it return next year.

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at Press Pass for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release.



My Collecting Experience

*By Jordan Olson
aka LynettesGirl*

Football card collecting to me is one of the greatest hobbies a person could ever have. It's something I have enjoyed since I was 14 years old. I'm always looking forward to mail time when I know I am getting new cards.

The first set of cards I got was from a second hand shop.

It was a stack of 2006 SP Authentic.

I saw them and looked at them for a few minutes, walked away to look at something else, and then came back and decided I wanted to buy them.

I think the only reason I bought them was because nearly all the guys on the school bus I rode were into football card trading. I honestly think that if I knew I'd have no one to trade with I wouldn't have bought them.

The next day I took them to school with me waiting for the day to end and the bus ride to begin. When it finally ended I ran to the bus and took my cards out and went to the back of the bus where the trades happened and passed the stack around. That day I started with 25 cards and went home with 50.

That Christmas I got my first box of cards, 2007 Topps Total, from my mom and step-dad.

There wasn't anything too special in the box, just a lot of base cards and quite a few rookies. I ended up trading nearly every card from that box.

September 2010



The first box I ever bought for myself was a 2007 Upper Deck hobby box.

That box held my very first autographed card.

I can't say I remember the name of the player but I remember he was wearing a Browns uniform. Nothing too special, but hey, it was my first, so it was special to me.

By the end of that year I had nearly 3,000 cards. I started to buy a lot more boxes and people bought them for me as gifts and sometimes just because.

By then I was starting to understand the value of cards and what to trade what cards for and I started getting into the Beckett magazines and understanding book value and all that.

That's when my little brother started to get interest in football cards. Every day after school we would go in my room and sort my cards for hours until he had to go to bed. I always ended up giving him a few cards here and there.

About 2 years later I moved in

with my grandmother. That's when my collection really started to take off. She started buying me a lot of retail boxes and single cards off of online shops and such. My first great pull came out of a 2005 Fleer Ultra retail box. It was an Aaron Rodgers Lucky 13 Rookie Card. I held on to that card for about a year before I decided I was okay with trading it.

The second best card I ever came across was a John Elway 2004 Topps Hall Of Fame Autograph, I bought that card from a friend not too long ago. That was the card I said I'd never get rid of. I was able to hold onto it for a few months before I got an offer for it I couldn't resist.

Throughout the years I've come across some very nice and interesting cards. I now spend most of my time trading, selling, and buying football cards.

All the money I have invested in my cards is all worth it to me. If I was offered a million dollars for my entire collection I would decline without second thought because my collection is all I have left of my little brother who I never see anymore; because of him, my cards, the ones I already have and the ones I get, mean the whole world to me.

To conclude my article I just want to say that my collecting experience so far has been very good, and I plan on growing my collection to at least double of what I now have!



The Great Customer Service Debate A Review of the Big 3

By *Ethan Cahn*
aka *hhliving1101*

More and more I see horror stories from collectors online about their recent “Run Ins” with The Big 3’s customer service departments. Recently I decided to test all 3 companies: For Topps, I along with many others, had some damage and badly centered Bowman Chrome 1st year rookies from this year’s 2010 Bowman release. For Panini, I recently had purchased 2 boxes of their 2010 Panini Elite retail boxes, both guaranteeing 1 hit per box and 1 insert or rookie per pack. In both these boxes I received only base cards, no rookies, no inserts, and no hits. Then finally Upper Deck had a redemption card for an Al Horford UD Spokesman Signatures from 2009 Upper Deck Basketball Series 1, and it was a case hit (there is no comparison on pricing, and no guide has attempted to value these due to their rarity). I am extremely active on their Facebook page and had seen that Mr. Horford could not, or had not, signed for them. I was informed of this by Chris Carlin directly, and was told to call in for a replacement.

On July 7th 2010 all 3 companies were contacted either by phone (UD and Topps), internet (Panini), or both. Let’s see how they did:

First up is Topps. I have had a few bad experiences with them in the past (up to and including a case having to be filed at the BBB), so I was not optimistic. I called them the morning of July 7th, told them

of the situation, and gave the address to send the cards back to. I was also asked to send a note explaining why I wanted these cards replaced, as well as the original receipt, which I did not have, but was told to send the cards back with the note “It would be Fine”. So flash forward to July 20th, I was surprised to see a package from Topps in the mail. Opening it I discovered my replacement cards in perfect condition, and I do mean perfect, ready-to-grade kind of stuff. There was nothing apologizing about the inferior product originally released, but this was still done nicely, and quickly...it took only 13 days, and the replacements were perfect.

Now onto Panini. Though I originally called, I was directed to their web site. There I was given all the information I needed, what I needed to send in (the box with their coding on it), where to send them, and how to track the replacements. They were sent the same day as the others, and put into their system, on July 11th. Within 2 days I received an e-mail from them that my replacements were logged in and shipping soon. They had given me both hits, 1 autograph (Chris Cook rookie card) and 1 jersey (Cadillac Williams, my curse – I ALWAYS get this guy in football), and also sent 4 rookies (including a Dez Bryant) and 7 inserts (none of which were numbered above /99). The great thing about the Panini/Donruss web site is they tell you what you are get-

ting when they ship it – no guessing. That was very nice to see. Finally on July 29th Panini’s package arrived safely with a very apologetic letter for the mix up.

Finally we have Upper Deck, who lost the rights to make cards for most of the pro sports these days. The once-giant within the industry now has only hockey, and recently acquired collegiate rights. For them I had a redemption card that I was informed would not be filled. This has happened to me before and generally they do very well with replacements. On the afternoon of July 7th I attempted to call them at 1 p.m. EST only to receive a voicemail informing me they had ALL gone to lunch. “OK,” I thought to myself, “a meeting, maybe?” At exactly 3 p.m. EST I called back and received the same message again. I then waited until 3:30 p.m. and finally got through, or at least it rang, then immediately went to hold. After roughly 20 minutes of being on hold I was finally on the line with a customer service rep (and as it turned out, one of the managers of the department). I told him about my redemption and that I was informed to call them for a replacement by Mr. Carlin (who is a true asset to Upper Deck and has always been a very approachable manager). At that time the representative asked me who I would like to have the card replaced with, a top 3 for each sport. Knowing the card I was due was not priced, I began to tell them a few of the better names in all



History Repeats Itself — Not If I Can Help It

*By Jordan Levitan
aka VanekSnipes*

My father, who has inspired me to collect just as he did, had a very unfortunate incident befall him concerning said collecting. He was born in the late fifties, which made him a teenager during some very good baseball years. He collected baseball cards and received many cards like Mickey Mantle rookie cards, and other cards that would be of great value today. Some of these cards were in quantities unimaginable. The occasional Ruth, or any other player of similar caliber, was sure to be found in bulk in my father's old collection.

When my father was at a certain age, my grandmother and his mother decided that he no longer

needed these cards. She deemed the cards trash and did the unthinkable. My grandmother, who I love dearly, has but one unforgivable act. She may have cost my father all the monetary and sentimental value of the cards, but above all, she etched this story into my memory through my father's incessant retelling each and every time I pull something of potential worth from anything resembling sports cards.

This has caused my father to stop his collecting. I might be heartbroken enough too if my entire collection just disappeared like it never existed. I would never bring this up in conversation just because blood is thicker than water. I cannot stress enough how strongly I can relate to this experience, not just

(Continued on page 35)

The Great Customer Service Debate (Continued from page 30)

sports, nothing too ridiculous, but bad enough for the rep to stop me and say: "You know, I sometimes do the replacement cards, and if I was doing this for you and saw the list of guys you have here, you would end up getting an autograph of a player who was 3rd best on a team." Harsh I thought, but at least honest, I guess.

As I write this, it is now August 19th, and finally I received an e-mail from them. Here is what it said:

"Congratulations Ethan!

Your redemption(s) has been moved to the shipment process. During this process your card(s) will be sorted, placed in protective cases, and packaged. We thank you for your patience while the cards are organized and prepared for shipping. Please allow 3-6 weeks from the receipt of this message in

order for the process to complete and the delivery of your redemption card(s).

* RT3WF2E4Q – 2009-10 NBA UD1 UD SPOKESMEN SIGNATURES NO #ING CD# SS-AH – AL HORFORD

We hope you will enjoy your new collectible!

For more information on Upper Deck products [...]"

So after 44 days I finally received an e-mail telling me it could be 3-6 weeks longer before I receive the replacement card(s).

All 3 of the experiences I have shown have been or are still being handled, but all 3 were handled differently for sure. Topps, while the quickest and most accurate, didn't even bother to say sorry for an error in their product. Next was Panini; they were the most apologetic, and frankly the most gener-

ous, giving me 1 autograph and 1 jersey card, then an extra insert and rookie.

Finally there was Upper Deck, who I can't give you any sort of positive few, as they still have not fulfilled the redemption. Even though Upper Deck was by far the most approachable, they still have not held up their end of the redemption so I really can't say how their service is as it is still an on-going issue.

Each has their own method: 2 were very kind and courteous, while 1 was very fast; the other was more informative as for what the replacements would be and where they were. Overall the contact that was made by all 3 companies was pretty good, but 2 of 3 showed why they are at the top of their game, and the industry as a whole.



Very Melo Mail

By *Ricky Schroeder*
aka *meloman315*

I live in Colorado; therefore, I'm a Denver Nuggets fan. I've been collecting since I was old enough to walk, pretty much, but I was too young to really get anything nicer than what I pulled in \$20 Target boxes. Well, when the Nuggets drafted 'Melo (Carmelo Anthony), I was just a casual collector, but when I turned 15, I got serious about getting a nice personal collection. Not having Paypal made it tough for me, but I relied on building my collection on trading for game used and saving enough money to go to the card shop and buy an autograph every now and again. On the old Beckett Boards, I was a member and a regular in the football collecting group "B.A.D" and basketball's "Aristocrats." Their generosity plus my trading turned me into a pretty serious 'Melo collector. However, I was still lacking on "high-end" type cards and had only around 5 autographs.

One lucky day there was a contest made for me. A fellow member (I can't remember his exact username, but it had something to do with Michael Jordan, and the member's name was Sean from Washington – big shout out if you read this) posted a contest. He had a 'Melo autograph he didn't want and was going to give it away, but had 1 very simple rule: he wanted it to go to a young collector that couldn't afford it, but was a 'Melo fan. I posted as soon as I saw it, telling him I was 16 and trying to build my collection. A few others posted their case, but he read mine and said 'never mind, let meloman have it, he deserves it.' If that wasn't enough, members of B.A.D. and the Aristocrats both posted saying I was a good kid and deserved the card more than anybody else they knew. Sean messaged me and said 'message me your address, and I'll send you some freebies.'

A few days later the package came...first card was the autograph promised to me, a 2006 (I think) SP Rookie Threads autograph. Absolutely thrilled, I saw 2 more cases in the package. The 2nd card was an awesome patch, also from Threads, with a piece of all-star patch! As if it couldn't get any better, the last card was from a set I'd never even thought about



being able to afford: a 2006-07 Exquisite Collection base card! I was BLOWN away!! Every time I saw him on the boards, I would thank him for his gift, and thanks to other members who told him, I'm such a big fan that he added those. That was one of the coolest things that has ever happened to me in collecting much less on the internet. Goes to show there are some great people out there!



My New Obsession: Pat Neshek

*By Nicholas Arvidson
aka Hawkeye1338*

It's official: I have created an obsession, and it all began because of one of my favorite baseball players: Minnesota Twins side-armor Pat Neshek. I am a regular reader of Pat's blog, and have always admired him because of his ability to connect with his fans. One thing that Pat is very passionate about is baseball card collecting. I had read his posts about new cards he had collected, new cards of himself that he had signed, and his pursuit to build nearly every set of cards each year. It had always been an interest to me as I am a die hard baseball fan, but I had never gotten around to collecting cards. I was under the impression that there is simply 1 card of every player produced each year, yet the complete set that Pat talked about had 30 cards in the set. I was naïve to game used, relic, autographed, serial numbered, and refractor cards. I had no idea that they even existed. I didn't even know that there was more than 1 manufacturer of cards – that is, until Strasburg mania began, and I saw the Strasburg 1/1 Chrome Refractor sell on eBay.

I spent the next w months religiously researching cards. I learned about everything. I learned the simple things like the difference between Topps and Bowman, the products that they release each year, and the individual sets that make up the products. A couple of months ago, I decided it was time to get involved with the local card community as well as the card community around the Internet. I found a forum that provides a place for people to talk about, buy, sell, and trade cards. I also found a great local card shop (and, in turn, learned what LCS stood for) that I loved to frequent. I even sent a Facebook message to Pat and got a great, lengthy response from him about cards, which is yet another reason why he is such a great athlete and awesome guy.

And then the time came to buy my first box of cards. Through my research, I had to decide what I wanted to collect. My research eventually led me to land on 2010 Topps. I debated starting with 2008 Topps or 2009 Topps, as they were a bit cheaper, but I felt that starting in the current year would be a smart



idea. I also considered collecting Topps Allen and Ginter, but it's a bit more pricey and I am a poor college student (go Hawkeyes!). I went to my LCS and grabbed my

first ever box of cards: a hobby box of 2010 Topps Series 2. I got home, sat on the patio, and cracked open the box. I was excited beyond belief. All kinds of thoughts were racing through my head. "What if I get the Strasburg Million Card Giveaway Redemption." "Remember, keep an eye out for Pie Face Variation Cards." As I opened back after pack and loaded the cards in to my 1,000 slots worth of nine page binder sheets, I began to realize that this new hobby was going to get addicting. About 20 packs in, I got my hit. I was hoping for an autograph, and it wasn't Strasburg, but I was not at all disappointed to see a game used Buster Posey Peak Performance card. I was happy with that, as I was a catcher in high school and have a soft spot for good, young catching talent. I also pulled two Cards Your Mom Threw Out Original Back cards and the Brennan Boesch Rookie Redemption card.

As soon as the cards were all pulled and sorted, I sat back and marvelled at the sort of mini collection that I had already grown. It's been a couple months since that box, but my collection has already grown. I have completed the entire 2010 Topps base set (both series 1 and series 2) and have a decent collection of the insert cards. I am so hooked to the hobby already that I have already made a few trades, and can't go to Target or Walmart without picking up a Blaster Box, or at least a few packs on the way out.

My involvement in the baseball card collecting hobby has been brief, but it has been nothing but completely pleasant. The people in the hobby community are awesome, and I could not be happier to be involved in something so addicting and fun.



Carey Price's Contract: The Biggest Non-Story Story of the Summer

By Richard McAdam
aka RGM81

Ilya Kovalchuk signed a 17-year, \$102M contract with the New Jersey Devils that was voided by the NHL for salary cap circumvention.

The Chicago Blackhawks have dismantled their Stanley Cup-winning roster in order to fit under the constraints of the salary cap for the 2010-11 season.

Carey Price has not signed a contract with the Montreal Canadiens.

2 of these items are major news stories, the other is not. Yet it is the non-news story that has dominated much discussion—online and elsewhere—this summer. The fact that Carey Price remains an unsigned restricted free agent has been a lightning rod of debate, argument, and absurdity for followers of the Habs. With Jaroslav Halak traded to St. Louis and Alex Auld signed to act as a backup, there is no doubt that Price will be the #1 goalie for Montreal...once he signs. Until that event takes place, and surely long after it, Canadiens fans are dissecting every aspect of the non-signing and what it supposedly says about Price and his value to the team.

Let's start with the facts:

As of July 1, Carey Price is a restricted free agent without arbitration rights.

Having just turned 23 on August 16, he is still four years away from UFA status.

With Halak gone, there is no disputing that Price will carry the load

between the pipes in Montreal this year and for the foreseeable future.

Price's agent, Gerry Johansson, has stated that his client will not sign any offer sheet submitted by another team.

Johansson, Price's friend Josh Gorges, teammate Mike Cammalleri, and Price himself have all stated that Price wants to be with the Montreal Canadiens.

There are the things that are known to be true. Everything beyond these points tends to get a little murky and distorted based on how each particular person feels about Price, both as a player on the Canadiens and as a person.

The latter part of that statement may seem strange to non-Habs fans, but this is how things are with the very passionate fans of the Canadiens. Internet psychologists/general managers abound in Habsville, and many exercise their entitlement to make their voices heard regarding the former first round draft pick. Some of these opinions are positive, but the majority are not. Price has been labeled a prima donna, a selfish individual who puts himself above the team, an alcoholic party animal, and undeserving of having the honour of even being with the Canadiens, or even in the NHL... and this all comes from a leading Canadiens fan page! Some have even go so far as to say that by not immediately signing the first contract presented to him, Price is engendering bad blood between himself and the Canadiens fans, who will thus boo him during the

season and therefore have a negative impact on the team's performance. To say that the timing of when a player signs his contract will have a significant effect on the team's fortunes six months from now strains credulity, but it is nonetheless being said. It is strange that Rangers fans do not predict doom for their season based on Marc Staal's contractual status, nor do Ducks fans heap disdain upon Bobby Ryan because he has not ended his restricted free agency. But this is how things are with the very passionate fans of the Canadiens.

A short time ago Price's agent made some comments that have become a focal point for the discussion. Speaking to the Montreal Gazette, Johansson stated that the Canadiens and Price "are not necessarily close [to reaching an agreement], but it's not that we're not close in a bad way. We're having good conversations and we both are committed to getting things done." He added that the player is looking for a "shorter-term deal" with Montreal.

From this, detractors have gathered that Price:

- Wants out of Montreal as soon as possible.
- Wants more money than the Canadiens are offering.
- Intends to hold out through training camp.

Each of these is illogical in its own way, and each ignores the plausibility of

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Lots of Action in the Off-Season — The Hockey Team

By *Richard McAdam*
aka *RGM81*

“Lots of Action in the Off-Season – The Hockey Team”

It may be the dog days of summer, and the dawn of the 2010-11 season may still be over a month away, but there is still plenty of action ongoing with the hockey team!

The free agency period is in full swing, and it has given hockey fans and collectors a lot to discuss this summer. A number of high-profile players have switched teams, the Chicago Blackhawks have seen their roster greatly overhauled to meet the constraints of the salary cap, the Montreal Canadiens and Carey Price still have not successfully concluded contract negotiations (neither have the New York Rangers and Marc Staal, yet strangely Rangers fans aren't lambasting Staal), and the ongoing saga with Ilya Kovalchuk's cap-circumventing contract have given ample discussion fodder on the boards. As always, SCF members have demonstrated their knowledge and passion for the game, providing tremendous insights and enlightening some of the shadier elements of the way the NHL does business in the post-lockout era.

After a brief lull in product releases, the past couple of months have seen a torrent of new sets being unveiled. SP Authentic and Ultimate Collection have led the way, filling the Box Breaks forum and paving the way for innumera-

ble trades and sales. As expected, rookie sensations John Tavares and Tyler Myers are still leading the way, and are bolstered by the usual suspects in these 2 hugely popular sets. Even as the high-end 2009-10 products are being busted, we are being treated to the first 2010-11 product, with Upper Deck's Victory appearing on the boards to initiate P.K. Subban, Nazem Kadri, Dustin Tokarski, and other hold-over rookies to the hobby.

Speaking of 2010-11, the hockey hobby landscape is changing dramatically with the inclusion of Panini as an officially licensed manufacturer. The company has begun previewing its first product releases, Certified and Score, and they are meeting with generally positive reviews from the SCF membership. Not to be outdone, Upper Deck has posted product previews for Artifacts, Black Diamond, and the staple Upper Deck Series 1 releases, as well as confirmed roughly half of its release schedule for the upcoming season. In The Game has not yet confirmed any releases for 2010-11, but the tenth edition of its Ultimate Memorabilia release looms large on the horizon. Fans and collectors wanted variety, and they will be getting it this coming season, with 3 manufacturers all competing for their dollars and affections.

Totally away from the ice, there are a couple cool staff updates to report...

The hockey team is proud to

welcome some excellent new additions: BrokenHalo, reoddai, and Smashy77 have joined the team recently.

I recently got married in Kelowna, BC – to welcome me to the family, my new sister-in-law bought me a Josh Gorges (Kelowna Rockets alumni) game-used jersey!

Pheeb888 travelled to Quebec to visit her family. Look for her report of a very special hobby-related trip here: <http://www.sportscardforum.com/showthread.php?t=1178296>

That's all the news for this month. Keep your sticks on the ice!

History

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because he is my relative. I can relate entirely, because I have a collection that I value dearly, just as I am sure you all hold a very high value to your collections (which are probably worth more than mine).

I received my first Teemu Selanne card back in 2000 which makes me very young. It was a game used jersey card that I was unaware of before this. I always carried it with me in only a penny sleeve everywhere I went. It has been dropped, handled, and been anywhere you can imagine. By this, the monetary value has most likely been reduced to change because of the rigid corners. The card has gained eleven thousand times its original worth in senti-

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Customer Service ... Or Lack Thereof

*By Stephen Duell
aka spuds1961*

As a collector of 3 of the major 4 sports (baseball, football, and basketball in that order), I tend to buy a lot of product. I have purchased enough of the major 3 brands (Topps, Upper Deck, and Panini [formerly Donruss]) to gather an opinion. I never like running into a situation where I have to contact customer service because it usually means something went wrong. I have had the best experience with the customer service of Donruss/Panini, and I will go into the circumstances of why, as well as comment on my experiences with the other brands.

Starting with Panini: I once received a redemption for a foot-

ball card of Craig "Buster" Davis (an autographed college patch). Well, he never signed. Panini asked me who I collected; I told them the New York Giants. Within 2 weeks, in my mail was a Y.A. Tittle autographed patch card #17/26.

While getting the Tittle was an awesome experience, there's more from Panini. Another time, I pulled an expired Eric Wright autograph from Playoff Contenders. I contacted them and they told me to enter it online, saying they would see what they could do for me. Once again, a couple of weeks later, I received the Eric Wright unsigned card plus a Julius Jones Leaf Certified Materials Mirror Red autograph #65/70. This last

act by Panini absolutely blew my mind and made me a lifelong fan of their customer service.

In yet another instance, I was moving a couch in my computer room and I didn't realize there was a card on the floor. Unfortunately, it was a Brian Urlacher 3 color patch card from Rookies & Stars. I damaged it pretty bad but I figured it couldn't hurt to send Panini the card and a note explaining what happened. 3 weeks later, they sent me an absolutely beautiful Urlacher replacement of the same card as well as a 3 color patch.

My grade for Donruss/Panini's customer service is A+.

Moving on to Upper Deck, I haven't had as many dealings with
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Carey's Price Contract

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d. Price wants a short-term deal in order to parlay a strong performance into a larger, longer-term contract in the future.

Price recognizes that his 2009-10 performance was not up to expectations. Though his GAA and SV% numbers were above-average, his win-loss record was rather abysmal, and in Montreal, winning matters. Suppose then, that his desire for a short-term deal is to prove to the team, the organization, the fans, and himself that he is fully capable of being a dominant #1 NHL goaltender. Let's also suppose that he and his agent recognize that the market for goalies this summer is very weak and that the Canadiens are in something of a

salary cap bind. By taking a short-term deal now for less money than he might get over the course of a long-term deal, he is setting himself up to be in a strong position for the future.

After this season, the Canadiens have a number of large contracts coming off the books that will free up significant cap space. Andrei Kostitsyn, Andrei Markov, and Roman Hamrlik are three players representing \$14.5M – their contracts expire at the end of this coming season. While all three may return, it is doubtful they will all earn the same dollars they make today, and if Price has a stellar 2010-11 season on a 1-year contract, he stands to take some of those dollars on a new, longer-term

deal.

What does all of this mean? It means that the ongoing negotiations are just that. There are no hidden agendas to con the other side into accepting an albatross of a deal that will make one into a scapegoat if things go poorly.

There are no intentions to hijack the team and put it into a salary cap bind. As Johansson said, the talks and their pace are "relatively normal" for a marquee player in Price's position. Much like Staal and Ryan, a deal will be struck that is acceptable to the player and the team. Which is why all of this talk is so much hot air, and why the supposed story about Carey Price's long-running free agency is no story at all.

Customer Service

(Continued from page 36)

them as Panini, but enough to voice an opinion. The few times I have had to deal with them were slow moving, but in the end, they got it right. One time I had bought an older baseball product (2004 SP Prospects), but unfortunately, the box was shorted the dual autograph, which was supposed to be one of the guaranteed hits. With this purchase coming in 2009, I figured I would be told tough luck. Well, they did send a 2007 UD Masterpieces autograph of Glen Perkins, so at least I didn't feel totally hurt.

I was also lucky enough to pull a Jim Brown autographed letterman redemption from 2008 UD Icons football. The wait was excruciatingly long, but they were in constant conversation with me and even sent me some free packs for the long wait. Eventually, I got my autograph of Jim Brown.

Upper Deck gets a B for their customer service.

Here are some of my dealings with Topps:

I had purchased a blaster box of 2007-08 Bowman Draft Picks & Stars basketball. It had a redemption in it for Demetris Nichols numbered out of 599; it had still not expired at the time, carrying a book value of 15 dollars. Well, unfortunately, Demetris didn't sign, so after waiting 6 months, I got a Quincy Douby Bowman

Sterling autograph with a book value of 12 dollars. I didn't complain or even bother with that as it was only 3 dollars less than the Demetris Nichols and since both are minimal players.

My next redemption came from 2008 Topps Stadium Club baseball: a Chris Perez proof autograph numbered to 99. Unfortunately, once again, the player didn't sign. The card's book value was about 20 dollars. The replacement: a Jonathan Van Every regular card with a book value of 10 dollars. This time I was upset as they sent me a lesser value card for the 2nd time in a row, so I contacted Topps and they said they couldn't help. I'd never contacted the Better Business Bureau about sports cards before, but I'd had enough, so that's what I did this time. The BBB must've said something convincing to Topps as Topps sent me a letter apologizing, telling me to keep the original Van Every, and sending me the proof autograph of 99.

The last episode with Topps is partly my fault for buying an older product, but it was 2007-08 Stadium Club basketball, and I thought any redemptions would still be accepted as it was on the verge of just 2 years since the release. Anyway, I pulled a monster for me as I very rarely pull that one card that makes your hand shake: it was the San Antonio Spurs Super Team card #27/50,

and since they won the title that year, it was redeemable for a 50 card rookie superfractor set, which had a book value of 250 dollars. Yet when I started reading the back of the card, I found it expired on 06/30/09. I've never known a redemption to have only a 1 year window, so I contacted Topps. They told me there was nothing much they could do for me since expired means expired, but that they would send me some complimentary packs. Those packs are the reason for this month's article: they were 2 packs of 2009 Topps Heritage High Series, 1 pack of 2009 Topps T206, and 1 pack of 2010 Allen & Ginter – about 10 dollars in packs for a 250 dollar card.

Thanks, Topps – other companies will work with the customer on expired redemptions, but Topps with their baseball monopoly thinks they don't need to. I haven't boycotted Topps products, but I can tell you they are not the first brand I look for at the card shop.

Topps' customer service grade: C-

Well, hopefully I'll have a nicer article next month full of fluff and nice little puppies, but this month I just felt horrible about the hobby for the first time in a long time. Thanks for the read, and remember this article is only my opinion, so if any of you have other stories from these companies that are different, feel free to let me know. Take care.

History

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mental worth, at least. It sits in my personal collection in the most protective case in an area where I can always see it. This would be the equivalent of my father's unfortunate incident should something happen to it. This history in my family will not repeat itself if I can help it. I say this because my moth-

er is the type to do this; although I love her very very much, she is still the exact type. I fear for her.

I would like to pass this story onto every collector just as it was passed on to me.

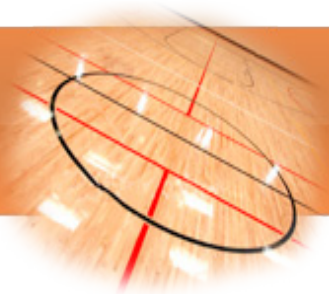
There are 2 courses of action to avoid this frivolous accident, made by any uneducated, yet lovable family member. One moral would

simply be to keep the collection away from mom, the wife, or whomever. Our second, more effective option would be to never let them out of sight, while constantly reminding yourself of this story.

I am glad I could share this with all of you, and I wish all of you happy and safe collecting!



Courtside



Basketball Section is Heating Up!

*By John Broman
aka XxViSiOnxX*

Well, it's that time again: summer. Even though the basketball season is over, the basketball section is just heating up!

In the basketball show and tell forum, there's a weekly contest going on that consists of entering a sports card based on a theme that is selected. It's super cool - there are always some awesome entries.

Swing by and vote on the best card each week!

In other news, in the basketball chat forum, there's been a lot of discussion about the Miami Heat's new "big three": LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, and Chris Bosh! I'm sure it will be interesting to see how that works for Miami.

So, come by the basketball area and browse through the forums for the latest news and talk in the NBA. Get involved: I'm sure you will enjoy it!



A Word From the Editor



Wrap Up

*By Khendra Murdock
aka JammingJames23*

The issues keep getting bigger as more of you contribute articles, which is really great. If you want to join the general writing team, just let me know via Private Messaging so I can add you to the regular

contributors list.

Also, as usual, if you have any comments or suggestions pertaining to the magazine (choice of articles, layout, etc.), let me or Kerry know so we can best serve the interests of the magazine's readership. Happy collecting!