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As Summer Is Nearing its End...

By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888

By now, most everybody knows that I am first and foremost a hockey fan, let's be honest, I live and breath hockey. As a result, these pages are more often than not hockey orientated and I will take the blame for that. But this month, we have a treat for the fans of the boys of summer! Yes, if Baseball is your poison, I hope you will enjoy the 5-parter article our own Sean McCafferty concocted for you! This summer, Sean went on a 16 days road trip which was solely focused on baseball and even as a non baseball fan, I really enjoyed reading about his travels and felt it deserved to make the front page this month.

Now back to my area of expertise; hockey. I hope all of you puckheads have noticed the advert on page 2! If you haven't go and check it out RIGHT NOW! OK, now that you've seen it, I can tell you a little bit about it. Each year the hockey team takes pride in running a myriad of contests to not only keep them members busy but also to award the season's grand prize on the boards. It all started with the Race for the Quad (an autographed card of Gretzky, Lemieux, Orr and Howe) and it carried on last year with the Race for the Trio (an autographed card of Bucyk, Orr and Esposito). While last year's prize was a treat for the eventual Stanley Cup Champions fans, this year's will no doubt tickle the fancy of any Habs fan out there! Plus, let's be honest even if you are not a Habs fan, just think of what you could trade this for to one of those Habs fan? I know for a fact that Richard McAdam would trade his right arm to add this to his collection! Keep an eye out on the hockey forum for the launch of the Race for the Price which should happen pretty soon with the first contest being one of our returning favorites, the preseason contest!

That's it for the good news I'm afraid, I now want to take a minute to cover rather darker topics. Firstly, the Crosby situation...any hockey fan has got to be concerned by the fact that Sid the Kid seems rather unlikely to be able to start the season with his teammates. Yes, he is still suffering from post concussion symptoms and no-one (including the finest medical brains) can tell when he will be symptom free.



Let's not kid ourselves here, this is the best player of the NHL right now and he was put out of action by hits to the head...these ought to become a cause of great concern. I invite to read Richard's article starting on page 5 to learn more about the Crosby situation. I will just add that as a fan of the game, I cannot wait to see Sid back to full health and I truly hope that he can resume his career.

Secondly, it has been a gloomy summer for NHL enforcers...Derek Boogaard passed away, then Rick Rypien and yesterday, Wade Belak's death was confirmed. A hat-trick of much too early passings that have got people talking. Talking about what? Pain killers addiction and the steps which the NHLPA could take to assist players who retire and find themselves living in anonymity after spending so many years under the spotlights. Let's hope the discussions lead somewhere and that we do not have to hear about more unfortunate deaths

in the near future. RIP guys, you will be solely missed...



The End of the Line for Crosby By Richard McAdam aka RGM81



Throughout the summer there have been sporadic updates on the condition of Sidney Crosby as he continues his rehabilitation from a devastating pair of concussions he received back in January. The news from the Pittsburgh Penguins that surfaced in early August is that Crosby is still experiencing “some recurrence of concussion symptoms,” according to the team’s General Manager, Ray Shero. This was followed up with word that Crosby had ceased all on-

ice activities of his off-season training regime in Halifax. The latter was disputed by Crosby’s agent, who stated that it was “too early to tell” whether Crosby was going to miss the start of training camp. While we know that each individual’s experience with concussions and post-concussion syndrome varies, to hear that Crosby is still suffering problems over eight months after the two that he received in early 2011[1] is greatly disturbing.

That Crosby was at the point where he was doing on-ice drills during the summer in itself was progress. His previous efforts to come back this past spring to join the Penguins for the playoffs resulted in an exacerbation of the post-concussion symptoms and meant that the on-ice efforts were shut down by Crosby’s doctors. It has been a long, slow process in which progress has not been steady. The setbacks are throwing up red flags. And it all leaves people wondering: will the spectacular, though still young, career of Sidney Crosby be ended prematurely?

Several months ago, I wrote an article for SCF entitled, “The NHL Must Ban All Headshots.” In this article I discussed the science of concussions and pointed out the fact that once a person has suffered an initial concussion, they are more easily susceptible to future brain trauma and that the effects compound with each successive concussion. They can occur from much less forceful jarring contact, and it makes it such that a player can be jeopardizing his own long-term health by stepping on the ice too soon after an injury. While Crosby gets many of the headlines, there are two other active players that also find themselves in limbo.

Marc Savard’s career hangs in the balance after he was seemingly innocuously hit into the boards by Matt Hunwick last spring. The hit was strong, to be sure, but nowhere near matching the ferocity of the blindside hit from Matt Cook the previous year, which gave Savard his initial concussion problems. Savard is still suffering symptoms and has expressed great concern about his current quality of life. He described his fears as follows, “I think the thing that scares me the most are little memory things, where



I forget that I've asked someone a question, or little things like that that scare me. The odd dizzy stuff, so that's also something that worries me." [2] Similarly, David Perron of the St. Louis Blues is also questionable to resume his career and it has already been confirmed that he will not be ready to return at the start of the season. Perron's campaign was ended in November when he took a blindside hit to the head from the elbow of Joe Thornton and was concussed. His progress has been slow, and given that Perron is the same age as Crosby he will find himself asking the same questions about his long-term health and quality of life, and finding out if that can balance with continuing to live his dream of playing in the NHL.

The first concussion-inducing hit laid on Crosby—the David Steckel “accidental” headshot at the Winter Classic—was a pretty tough hit to watch. Crosby's head was the principal point of contact with Steckel's body, and while one could argue whether or not Steckel meant to hit/hurt Crosby, it definitely left a mark. The second concussion, which came from Victor Hedman putting Crosby into the boards and glass on the type of “bear hug” play that Toronto Maple Leafs GM Brian Burke wants to allow back into the game, was much like the Hunwick hit on Savard. On first glance, it did not look to be a severe hit that would result in serious injury. It is only when you watch the replay slowly that you see Crosby's head bounce off the glass that you see why the second concussion occurred. For Crosby, who was already sufficiently dazed during the latter half of the Winter Classic that he missed jumping out on the ice as the extra attacker when the Penguins pulled Marc-Andre Fleury, his brain was already traumatized and the second jarring collision compounded the problems of the first.

So what does all of this mean for Crosby's future? Can he overcome these problems and play out his career as the same dominant figure that he was for his first five and a half seasons? Or will the injuries sustained affect his play and force him to be a more cautious and self-protective player? He has long been renowned for his strength and ability to go to the dirty areas to fish out pucks and win battles along the boards. If he has it in his mind that he needs to watch his head at the risk of serious injury (more so than the “keep your head on a swivel” expected of any NHLer), it will affect his play. To be sure, a Sidney Crosby even at 60% would still be a premier player in the NHL, but even though better than most it's still not Crosby at his best.

It is somewhat inevitable that until Crosby is given a clean bill of health and a positive prognosis that there will be questions about his future.





There will also be premature post-mortems and comparisons to Bobby Orr, a spectacular player that achieved much but could have been even more legendary had his career not been derailed by injury. Crosby is still just 24 years old, and it is incredible to think of all of his accomplishments to date. He has a Stanley Cup ring, a full trophy case, and he scored the goal of a generation in Vancouver in 2010. There are some in the media who are saying outright that he should retire because there “are no goals left for him in the game. At best, all he achieves from now on is more of the same.”[3] While that may be true, it is still a special sight to be able to watch a spectacular player at the height of his dominance. Whether we get to see that in the form of Crosby again is still very much up in the air.

[1] It does bear mentioning that the plural form is taking hold in the media’s talks about Crosby’s troubles. For the first few months they’d only said that he had a concussion, and now it is evident that he suffered two head traumas in early January.

[2] Joe Yerdon, “It’s Official: Marc Savard is done for the season and playoffs with concussion,” Pro Hockey Talk 7 Feb. 2011. 17 Aug. 2011 <<http://prohockeytalk.nbcsports.com/2011/02/07/its-official-marc-savard-is-done-for-the-season-and-playoffs-with-concussion/>>

[3] Cathal Kelly, “Why Sidney Crosby Should Retire Now,” Toronto Star 23 Aug 2011 <http://www.thestar.com/sports/hockey/nhl/article/1043394-kelly-why-sidney-crosby-should-retire-now>





Cooperstown

By Sean McCafferty aka 30ranfordfan

To anyone who's never stepped foot on the hallowed grounds of Cooperstown, the size, setting, and location for the shrine to Baseball's immortals may seem odd. A little village nestled by a lake in Otsego County, there are less than 2,000 residents. In contrast, the Hockey Hall of Fame is wedged into downtown Toronto, Canada's most populous city.

Taking a walk down Main Street, especially first thing in the morning – before the rest of the tourists arrive, I suppose it's like walking down the main street of any other similar sized community in America, or Canada. Most of the city's commercial area is confined to about three blocks, with more shops lining the intersecting streets.

What makes this downtown so unique is that virtually all of the shops and restaurants have at least a little bit of a baseball theme to them. That, plus a baseball field with nearly a 10,000 seat capacity and Cooperstown's main attraction: The Baseball Hall of Fame.



Downtown Cooperstown

My third trip to the hall may as well have been my first.

While there were some exhibits I remembered seeing before (they don't move Babe Ruth or Ty Cobb out of circulation too often) a lot of the artifacts on display rotate from one year to the next. It may not be a museum that one feels compelled to visit every year, but with 3 years in between visits, the amount of new treasures to see and stories to read make the visit worth while.

With several game used bats, balls, and Jerseys on display – Babe Ruth has his own little wing on the second floor. The more you read about The Great Bambino, however, the more you realize that he was much more than a Superstar Baseball Player. He was really a pop-Culture icon, transcending the sport. Always a crowd pleasure; happy to stop and sign an autograph, visit with sick kids with the promise to hit a home run for them, and lots of charity work. He had a hard time saying 'no'.

One particular item on display really shows that side of him. It's the last autograph he ever signed. While in the hospital, on his death bed, Ruth asked his nurse to bring



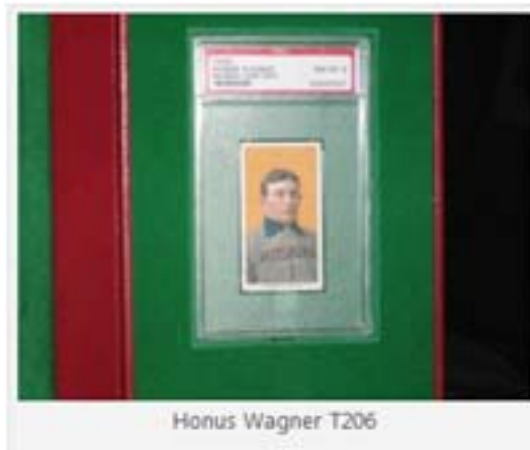
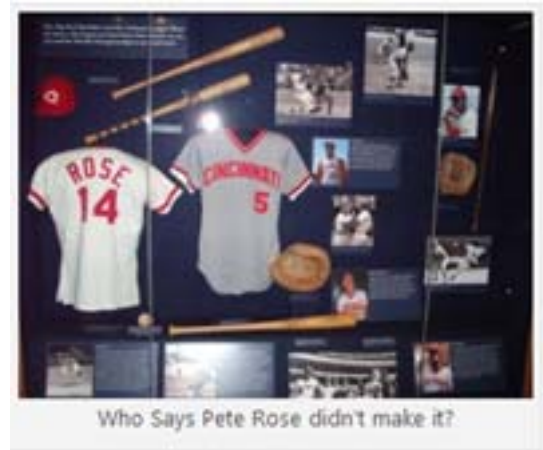
Ruth's Final Auto



him a copy of the book ‘The Babe Ruth Story’, so he could sign the inside cover. Maybe it proves that Babe was also an arrogant man, and a self-promoter, but I’d like to think that he knew millions of people would one day like to see that autograph on display, knowing it was the last one he penned. Rather than signing that one for little Jimmy, he was signing it baseball fans everywhere. Later that night, Ruth died.

Regardless of what era of America’s Pastime interests you the most, there’s something to be seen. One era (well, one specific team) in particular, that has really captured my own interest is the 1970s, and Cincinnati’s Big Red Machine.

The Red’s made four World Series appearances between 1970 and 1976, winning twice. Managed by the late Hall of Famer, Sparky Anderson, the club’s talent was matched by very few teams, ever. In addition to their legendary Manager, the Reds boasted no fewer than three future Hall of Famers: Johnny Bench, Joe Morgan, and Tony Perez. This was in addition to baseball’s all time hits leader: Pete Rose (who’s banishment from baseball, due to gambling while a Manager in the 1980s, prevents him from taking what would have been an obvious place in Cooperstown). Supplemented with Dave Concepcion, George Foster, Cesar Geronimo, and Ken Griffey Sr, anyone who reads baseball’s history books should have an easy time understanding why these Reds are considered to be one of the best teams ever assembled.



Honus Wagner T206

For the baseball card enthusiast, there’s a great little showcase dubbed “The Ultimate Set”. It’s a collection of 25 baseball cards, on loan from Arizona Diamondbacks owner Ken Kendrick. This ‘set’ consists of the 25 cards that Kendrick considers to be the cornerstones of his collection.

These are not modern day baseball cards. There are no autographs on them, no patches from a player’s jerseys. No foil or serial numbering. Just plain old cardboard with a photo on them. What are they? They’re all high-grade vintage cards. Including Rookie Cards of all time greats like Hank Aaron, Joe DiMaggio, Micky Mantle, and Babe Ruth. There’s also the famous T206 Honus Wagner (once owned by Wayne Gretzky).



Bonds' 762 Ball

Not all the artifacts on display belong to hall of famers. There's lots of modern day things, for varying reasons. Some because they were involved breaking a record, others because they were part of a significant milestone. They might belong to future hall of famers, they might not. One of the most famous (or infamous?) would be the baseball from Barry Bonds' 756th (and record setting) homerun.

Purchased for three quarters of a million dollars, fashion designer Mark Ecko donated the ball to the museum, but not until an online poll he held dictated what he'd do with it. Offering three options to fans, 10 million votes later it

was decided that the ball should be branded with an asterisk, and donated to the hall (the asterisk alluding to Bonds' alleged steroid use, giving him an advantage while swinging his bat. The two losing options were blowing the ball up, or blasting it into outer space).

What made this trip to Cooperstown unlike either of the previous two I'd done, was that this was the hall's biggest weekend of the year. It was induction weekend, with the class of 2011 getting their plaques, and taking their place alongside baseball's all time greats.

With all due respect to fellow 2011 inductee Burt Blyleven, this trip was organized specifically to see the inclusion of two former Toronto Blue Jays get their day in Cooperstown. The architect of the 1992 and 1993 World Series Champions: General Manager Pat Gillick, and my all time favorite player: Second Baseman Roberto Alomar.

It was a hot and sunny afternoon for the ceremony but it was really special watching 50 other Hall of Famers, one-by-one, take the stage so they could welcome these three new members to one of sports' most exclusive clubs.

While Blyleven got a great response from the crowd (his story telling abilities may actually be better than his curve ball was) and Gillick was met with a loud applause, it was easy to see that Alomar was the man of the hour. Between

Jays Nation, and a large Puerto Rico contingent, it was easy to tell who most of the crowd came to see.



Alomar & Gillick show off their Plaques

It's impossible to take in everything, if you give yourself only one day in Cooperstown. There's just too much see, too many things to do. One of the years I'd like to find an excuse to spent a whole weekend there so I can try. If you've never had a chance to go, do it. Cooperstown, New York, is a village that's unlike any other. The history, the memories, and the nostalgia make the trip every bit worth it.



Cape Cod

By Sean McCafferty aka 30ranfordfan

Monday morning, after the festivities in Cooperstown will long over, it was time to hit the road and move onto the next stop of the road trip, Cape Cod. Made up of many smaller towns, the Cape is a well know area which is the far Eastern part of Massachusetts. Known for its beautiful beaches, it's a popular summer destination for tourists from all over; The most famous being the 35th President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, whose family made Hyannisport their summer home (and still do today).



Cape Cod is also home to what may be the best amateur baseball league in America. Each summer the best collegiate players from across the country are invited to come and hone their skills playing against other elite talent.

Very popular amongst the local population, I got the feeling that the Cape Cod league was really an afterthought for tourists. It's a shame. Roughly 15% of all MLB players came through this 10 team loop, and statistically speaking – at any given game you're likely watching 6 future Major Leaguers. Sluggers like Ryan Braun, Jacoby Ellsbury, Buster Posey, and Evan Longoria, plus Pitchers like Shaun Marcum, Brian Wilson, Barry Zito, and Billy Wagner all spent time here.

With only three nights to soak in as much of this league as possible, the plan for Monday night was easy. I really wanted to try and find a way to do a double header, and while the league is not very conducive to watching back-to-back games (the league is run by a team of hard working volunteers, volunteers that all have day jobs – making daytime games impossible to schedule) you can do it if you're willing to move quickly, and (unfortunately) sacrifice a couple of innings when necessary.

With a 5:00 PM start time, the Brewster Whitecaps were hosting the Hyannis Harbor Hawks. Being the first game I'd ever been to in this league, I wasn't exactly sure what to expect when I showed up to Stony Brook Field.

Using a GPS for directions, once you're on the right block, you realize very quickly that Stony Brook Field is named for the elementary school that owns it. There is certainly no confusing it for a major league stadium, but the facility is superior to anything standing in my hometown of Cam





bridge, Ontario. Between the bleachers and area on a large hill, there is room for about 4,000 people to take in a game. The field is also complete with an electronic scoreboard in left-centre, and a press box for the PA announcer, score keeper, media, and scouts, plus concessions and merchandise sales.

The home team jumped out to an early 1-0 lead in the second inning, when catcher Chase Anselment scored off outfielder Andrew Toles RBI single. The lead was short lived though, with the Harbor Hawks putting three runs on the board in the top of the third inning.

Through the next four innings, the pitchers were the story of the game, as neither team was able to score another run. I used the 7th Inning Stretch as a good time to take off, wanting to get to a second game that night (missing the first couple of innings of one game, vs the last couple of another, is really a coin toss. No idea where you're going to see the better game). Did find out later that the shut-out innings continued to pile up, until the top of the ninth when the Harbor Hawks scored two more, to get a 5-1 victory.

The ball park in Brewster was only a ten minute drive away from their nearest competition, in Orleans. Eldredge Park (a city own baseball diamond) was the site of the hometown Firebirds taking on Falmouth Commodores. The park had seating for only 300 (bleachers that fill up very quickly) but with lots of space on the adjacent lawn (and hill) the Firebirds can have as many as 4,000 spectators.

The pitching was once again pretty dominant. The two teams combined for just four runs in the game, with John Brebbia getting the win over Kent Emanuel, as the home town Firebirds won the game.

Without knowing any of the players, it's sometimes hard to get real excited over any particular play. I was aware of whom the league leading pitchers and hitters were, but essentially I was really just out there cheering for a good game. I won't pretend to be some sort of amateur scout, or claim to have a great eye for talent, but I'd like to think I've seen enough baseball in my life to know when a player has really carried his team to victory.

At four games in Cape Cod, there was really only one time a player left me thinking just that, and it was this stop in Orleans where I saw him.

As good as the pitching was, Firebirds Short Stop Anthony Gomez really stole the show for me. He went 2-for-4 at the plate (a single,



Anthony Gomez, Future Star?



and a solo-Home Run) but also showed great power (near HR's) in his other at bats. In addition to leading his team at the plate, he made no fewer than five spectacular plays in the field. A Junior out of Vanderbilt, I'm going to be interested in seeing where (if??) he's drafted in a couple of years, and what kind of a career he'll have. I'm convinced this kid will be playing in the majors one day.

The next day lent itself for an opportunity to do more of the traditional touristy things in Cape Cod. In addition to the obvious destination (the beach) I also spent a little time in the morning visiting the Cape Cod Baseball League's Hall of Fame.

Located in downtown Hyannisport, the CCBL's museum is actually located in the basement of the Kennedy Museum. Not a large museum by any means, but it provides a great venue to display artifacts from the last 50 (or so) years, as well as creating a forum for the league to honor the best players, managers, and other officials, who have seen their careers take a trip through the CCBL.



That evening, it was back to the baseball. Without much to go on, as far as picking which game to go to, the decision was made to go see the Hyannis Harbor Hawks host the Bourne Braves. The (statistically) best pitcher in the league, Scott Firth, was starting this evening for Hyannis.

Firth pitched well, but didn't put up the kind of performance he was accustomed to. He allowed a pair of runs over four and a third innings. His team didn't provide him with much help at all either, managing only two hits through the first four innings. That 2-0 score stayed until the bottom of the sixth. That's when the game took a crazy turn.

What could only be described as a comedy of errors, the bottom of the sixth looked more like my slo-pitch team than a group of elite level NCAA players. While the official scorer only tagged the Braves with three errors (a less forgiving scorer could have easily added two more) by the time the inning was over, the Harbor Hawks had brought thirteen batters to the plate, scoring nine times. Only three of the runs were earned. There were over throws, late throws, dropped flys, and bobbled balls. It was a little bit sad, and a whole lot of funny all at the same time. Nine runs would be more than enough for the Harbor Hawks to get the win, the Braves made it a little bit close in the eighth and ninth, scoring two then one runs – with the game ending in a 9-5 final.

The next day marked the third and final day spent on this trip in the Cape. Looking to get an extra game in, since the chance was there, a noon 'AA' game (well outside Cape Cod, but more on that game later) was in order, with plenty of time to get back for a game that evening.



The fourth and final game to take in during the trip was in Wareham, where the Gatemen played host to the Cotuit Kettleers. Like the game the night before, this game was chosen based on one player's individual stats: Cotuit DH Victor Roache. A junior out of Georgia Southern, he was leading all CCBL hitters in AVG, HRs, and RBI.

Wareham isn't really situated in Cape Cod, it's just west of the Cape, back in the Massachusetts mainland. It's close enough though, that it's certainly not much of a different looking town than any of the others I'd already visited.

Located on the campus of the local High School, Spillane Field in Wareham was the CCBL Park (of the four I saw) with the closest to a big league feel. Certainly nobody would confuse it for the home of an MLB team, but with bleachers along both sides of the infield, and a large bleacher area in the outfield, Wareham had capacity for several thousand spectators, and very little room for the lawn chairs and blankets that were so plentiful at the other parks I visited.

Sitting out in the bleachers in left field, it was a much different vantage point than I'd used at the three previous games. Certainly not an angle that I hadn't used before at a game, it was nice to mix things up a little bit. It also put me right next to the home team bullpen, providing a great view of the pitchers warming up.

Doubles by the leadoff and number three hitters, LJ Mazzilli and Robert Refsnyder, followed up with a Refsnyder stolen base, and a single by five-hitter Johnny Field (how's that for a great baseball name?) put the hometown Gatemen up 2-0 in the bottom of the first.



Those two runs would be all Wareham needed. What ended up being a game dominated by the pitchers saw only one more run scored, by Cotuit in the top of the 7th.

Victor Roache, the Kettleers DH that made this the game to come see, went a disappointing 0-4 that evening. To my surprise though, there was another name there I recognized (well, at least an unmistakable last name). That would be the name of Cotuit Outfielder Michael Yastrzemski.

Not exactly a common last name, I had to do a little digging after the game. It didn't take long to confirm that Michael is, in fact, the Grandson of legendary Red Sox Catcher Carl Yastrzemski. He was actually drafted by his Grandfather's former team, in the 36th round of the 2009 draft. He opted not to sign with the big club though, and instead plays for Vanderbilt in the



Stars like Ryan Braun came through Cape Cod

NCAA. He'll get another shot at the MLB draft in a couple of years.

Thursday morning brought an end to my stay in the Cape, and time to head south. Four was enough for me to get what I think was a good read on the league. It appears to be a pitcher's league (likely due to the use of wooden bats, as opposed to the aluminum that the hitters are used to in college) but filled with players who can clearly play the game, but still a little raw and prone to mistakes. This community oriented league is a winner in my book.



McKeon Park, Hyannis



The Minor Leagues and the Journey South By Sean McCafferty aka 30ranfordfan

After spending a couple of days in Cape Cod, it was time to head back to the main land, and take in a 'AA' game, before returning to the Cape for a fourth CCBL game that night.

When I had originally started to map out the route I'd be traveling for these two weeks, I had planned on finding a way to take in a game in Manchester, New Hampshire. I'm a Blue Jays fan, and the New Hampshire Fischer Cats are the Jay's 'AA' affiliate in the Eastern League. They're loaded with enough burgeoning talent to help propel the Jays farm system to a #3 rank overall.

Unfortunately, a game in Manchester just wasn't in the cards. They were on the road Monday when I was leaving Cooperstown to head to Cape Cod, and while they were back home Thursday night (after I'd left Massachusetts) that was simply too far North, too late into the week, for the weekend I had planned. Luckily, a Fischer Cats road game was the next best thing.

The New Britain Rock Cats, the Twins 'AA' team, were hosting the Fischer Cats at Noon. New Britain Stadium was less than a three hour drive, so even if I did have to cross over a couple of state lines to get to Connecticut, it didn't seem like it'd be all that big of a deal, and it certainly wasn't.

When I arrived at the game, I was a little surprised to see how big the crowd in the parking lot was. My past experience was MiLB games has been that weekends there are usually big draws, and week days ones not so much. Day games? Usually you can count the fans in the hundreds. I



quickly realized that it was because what must have been every day-camp in the city had shown up. Really filled up the place, as they were mostly sitting in the second deck (which otherwise would be have been near empty).



No matter, walking up to the box office proved as successful as it had always been in the past. Ask for a seat near the visitor's dugout "How 'bout front row?" was the response! It's one of the things I love about MiLB games. For about \$10 you can get a great seat, and really great seats are almost always available.



The home team jumped out to an early 2-0 lead in the bottom of the first, off a two run homer by Joe Benson. A few hits in the second inning pushed that lead to 3-0, and it was 4-1 Rock Cats after the third. Not exactly the performance I was looking for from the first place Fischer Cats.

New Hampshire stormed back in the top of the fifth, putting up three runs off hits from Adeiny Hechavarria, Callix Crabbe, and Anthony Gose, plus a Fielder's Choice for an RBI from Mike McDade. All tied at four.

The bottom of the fifth brought about a long over-due thrill for me. I figure I've been to at least one hundred baseball games in my life, and never once have I caught a foul ball. Sitting right behind the dugout, wearing a Blue Jays jersey (probably the only one in the Stadium that holds nearly 7,500 fans), at the end of the inning, on the way back to the dugout after a double play, Fischer Cats first baseman Mike McDade tossed the ball right at me. My excitement only lasted a few moments, because I realized the handicapped kid right behind me was pretty disappointed the ball didn't go a little farther. With only a few seconds to react, I quickly turned around and gave him the ball (for which both he and his father were very appreciative).

I'm going to be honest. If I had spent any length of time thinking about it, I probably would have kept the ball. I know it sounds selfish, but I think I really would have. I'm happy that getting the ball made this kids day, but really – I'd been waiting for one of those balls a lot longer than he had. Being 31 years old doesn't make that ball park souvenir any less special than if you're 13.

You know what though? Maybe it was just dumb luck, or maybe it was Karma saying "Good Job!", but in the bottom of the eighth, Rock Cat Deibinson Romero fouled off a Clint Everts pitch, into the crowd, off a railing, bounced off the Fischer Cats dugout, and was an easy grab for me. I was really pleased with myself this time (actually catching a foul was much more satisfying than getting one lobbed into the stands) and the ball wasn't going anywhere. Now I could be happy for being nice to the kid a couple of innings before, and not beat myself up for giving away the ball.



My First Foul!

The only problem was that by this point, New Britain had tied up the game, scoring two in the bottom of the seventh. The game stayed tied until the bottom of the eleventh, New Britain completed the upset when (who else?) Deibinson Romero scored the go-ahead run on a base hit by Chris Parmelee. Rock Cats win 7-6.

Leaving the park, I was still pretty excited over finally catching a foul ball. I also left thinking that could have modified my plans to be a little bit better. Turned out that



while the Noon game was always scheduled to be played that day, a second game had been added that night due to a rain out earlier in the week. The double header explained by star prospect Travis d'Arnaud wasn't in the line up for the Fischer Cats. In addition to d'Arnaud playing in the evening, it also marked the first 'AA' start from recently promoted 2010 First Round Pick Deck McGuire. A game that the Fischer Cats would go onto win 17-3.

Certainly nothing to complain about though. With the foul ball now stored in my trunk, it was time to head back to Cape Cod where I'd spend my third night before heading south.

Thursday morning came, and a long drive was ahead of me. The plan for Thursday was to get to Bowie, Maryland, for a 7:00 ballgame, before heading down the road another couple of hours to Fredricksburg, Virginia, for the night.

Sometimes though, despite your best made plans, things don't always work out.

The drive to Bowie was about eight and half hours. Tossing in time for a couple of stops, ten should have been plenty. I was on the road at 8:30 AM, giving myself ten and a half to get there.

The problem with driving in an area of North America I'm not too familiar with, is I don't know the best routes to take. Printing off or writing down direction, plus having a map on-hand, has worked great in the past, but a GPS makes everything so much easier. Problem with a GPS though, it looks at distance and speed limit and determines the quickest route.

What I should have done was followed the I-95 along the coast, taken the 287 and followed it until it met back up with the I-95 in south New Jersey. Instead what I did was just follow I-95 straight into the Bronx, through New York City, over the George Washington Bridge, to the New Jersey Turnpike. Google will tell you the 287 route takes about twenty minutes longer. Instead I was driving by Bowie at about 8:30 that night, long after the game has started. Had great intentions, but a ball game just wasn't happening for me that night.



Friday morning brought nearly another seven hours in the car, before I reached my destination; meeting up with a friend in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

Myrtle Beach, for those that have never been there, is pretty much the ultimate tourist town. Great



place to visit for people of any age. Nothing but long, sandy beaches, the Atlantic Ocean at 80+ degrees, hotels, restaurants, bars, golf courses, gift shops, and outlet malls. All that, and BB&T Coastal Field, home the Texas Rangers 'A' affiliate: The Myrtle Beach Pelicans.

We had two nights booked here, and while we made sure to allow for plenty of time soaking in everything else Myrtle Beach has to offer, we were hitting up the Pelicans games both Friday and Saturday night.

BB&T Coastal Field is a cool little park. It holds 6,600 people, but it's got something very unique in the building materials. It opened back in 1999 when the Braves were affiliated with the team. In an attempt to drum up extra interest in the club, bleachers from old Fulton County Stadium in Atlanta were used for much of the seating.

The Winston-Salem Dash (White Sox 'A' affiliate) were in town for a weekend set. Neither game we went to was particularly well attended. I'd estimate that fewer than one third of the seats was filled either night, and I'd be surprised to learn that the Sunday game fared any better. We were treated so some pretty good baseball though.

Friday night the Dash got to Pelicans starter Robert Ross early, scoring two runs off him in the third. Ross was lights out after that, only allowing only one more hit through to the bottom of the seventh. In the meantime the Pelicans were able to tag Dash starter Thomas Furnish for a run in the fourth, and they scored another off Dash reliever Andre Rienzo in the sixth.

Myrtle Beach made a pitching change at the top of the eight, and reliever William Kelly walked the leadoff batter, Tyler Saladino. As few pitches later, Saladino was able to take second on a passed ball, and then easily score on a Jared Mitchell double. Mitchell was later caught stealing, and a strikeout plus a ground out ended the eighth quickly, but the damage was done. The Pelicans would be unable to score in the eighth or the ninth, and Winston-Salem left with a 3-2 win.

Saturday night was even worse for the home squad. With four walks in the top of the second, along with a couple of hits and stolen bases, the Dash jumped out to a quick 3-0 lead. Pelicans started Miquel De Los Santos didn't even make it out of the second inning, and it was really obvious that the Pelicans were in trouble. The Dash continued to score. They added another three runs over the fifth and sixth innings, taking a commanding six run lead. Myrtle Beach broke the shut out in the seventh, but a 6-1 final was as good as they could do. Not the kind of performance you hope to see, but with little routing interest in the game, not like we really left disappointed.

The beach and the weather are the big attractions in Myrtle Beach, but BB&T Coastal field is a really nice spot to take in a ball game. For a few bucks it's a great way to spend an evening, and I'd suggest it to anyone who's going to be in town. Two days isn't exactly a lot of time to spend in a place like Myrtle Beach, but it was all the time we had. Sunday morning was time to hit the road again and drive to the Sunshine state: Florida.



Florida

By Sean McCafferty aka 30ranfordfan

Sunday morning in Myrtle Beach came, and it was time for yet another long drive. Unfortunately, this one started out a little hung over, and we had a little better than nine hours of car time ahead of us; the destination being Zephyrhills, Florida. What's in Zephyrhills? Well, not a lot apparently, other than a free place to stay and close proximity to a lot of baseball.

It turned out to be a relatively easy drive, but a very long day. We didn't get the chance to do much that Sunday, other than a long stretch of I-95 stretching from South Carolina, into Georgia, and then Florida.

Monday evening it was time for more baseball. The Dunedin Blue Jays were taking on the St. Lucie Mets. Not a big game on the schedule, and like typical 'low-A' team, neither were filled with well known prospects the way a 'AA' or 'AAA' team would be, but this was a pretty special part of the trip for me.



Dunedin Field

This was my first time stepping foot in what is the Blue Jays spring training complex, and the Dunedin Blue Jays are the only Minor League team to have been affiliated with the Toronto outfit for the big club's entire history. Dunedin Stadium replaced Grant Field back in 1989, and has been the spring training home of the Jays ever since. It's the only other ball park, besides the dome in Toronto, which every single member of my favorite team has walked through, and played in, during the last twenty two years. Weather player of conversation are today's stars like Jose Bautista, up and comers like Brett Lawrie, or the stars from the World Series years like Robbie Alomar, this park has been home to all of them.

The home team didn't disappoint us. Jays had a quick three-up-three-down inning in the top of the first, and then the bats started to go to work. Brad McElroy and Ryan Goins started the bottom of the first off with a pair of singles, and a few batters later they'd both score on a Ryan Schimpf triple. Schimpf would score off a Brian Van Kirk single before the end of the inning.

The Mets were able to get one back in the top of the fourth, but another base hit by Van Kirk eventually let him make his way home, and the Jays quickly restored their four run lead. St. Lucie wouldn't get any closer.

Home Runs by Van Kirk, Ryan Goins, and Bradley Glenn would be the highlights as the Jays piled up five more runs over the next three innings. It was a 9-1 blowout, and it looked like the only thing that could save the Mets from getting beat up any worse was divine intervention.



Fortunately for the Mets, that's exactly what happened. A pretty intense rain storm rolled in, and the tarp had to be rolled onto the field. After about thirty minutes, the game was called. There was simply too much water down, and too much lightening still in the sky. I suppose the eight run difference probably helped make the decision a little bit easier.

It was a great time, even if we didn't get to see a full nine innings. I was also very pleased that both of us walked away with a foul ball. I guess that good karma thing from New Brittan was still working!

Tuesday morning I set out to check out another game. This time I was going down yet another level, and watching the Gulf Coast League Yankees take on the Tigers, at the Yankee Complex. These rosters are filled out with rookies, players just drafted. Since the Jays were too far away that day, and the Yankees so close by, they seemed like the logical choice.

I arrived at the facility just in time for the first pitch, but the parking situation was a little confusing. In front of what looked to be a Yankee office building, there was a small parking lot, with a few empty spaces. After getting out of the car, I quickly realized that all the other cars had parking passes, so I figured I should probably look for somewhere else.



There was a large empty field next to the lot, so I moved my car over there (beside 30 or 40 others) and started to wonder around the area, trying to find the right way to the game. (It's a fairly large facility, with about half a dozen diamonds, and the game was being played on the opposite end).

Very innocently, I walked behind the main office building, and saw a few guys (looked like trainers, or coaches, or something) sitting around, so I figured that was a good direction to move in. Pretty quickly I was told that I needed to go back around the building, and a couple of drive ways down there was another big field, that had an entrance to the diamond where the game was being played. I was also

informed that I wasn't allowed to park in the player's parking lot, and had to move my car.

Finally in the spot where I was supposed to be, I walked down the left field path with the game to the left of me, and an empty diamond to my left. The GCL doesn't charge admission, there are no concessions, and I was expecting a pretty small crowd. There were less than a thousand fans in attendance the night before in Dunedin, and I assumed the combination of it being Rookie Ball (instead of low-A) and a noon game, my guess was a hundred, or so, would be watching.

I didn't expect to show up and find that the bleachers ran only ten rows high, and only extended from third base to about half way to home plate. I certainly didn't expect to find that I'd be the only one in



attendance! That's right. There was a full complement of coaches and trainers for both teams. There was a guy to operate the electronic score board in right field. There were even a couple of guys from the media, doing a story on Dante Bichette Jr. Fans? Just me. I was shocked.

I have to admit though, after getting past the initial surprise, it was kinda cool. It was like I was watching these two Minor Professional teams play, and they were playing for my personal enjoyment.

Enjoying I was. I'll admit I could have used more water than the one large jug I brought with me (the Florida sun is pretty hot) but it was a fun game to watch. Close enough to the field that you can see the third base coach spit as he's barking out orders at the players on the field. Close enough that you can hear the catcher swearing after his bad throw leads to what I call "the bunt tipple" (that's when a perfectly executed but down the third base line leads to the catcher overthrowing first, and the speeding runner taking both second and third afterwards).



Yankees & Tigers play for Just Me?

The Tigers won the game 6-3, and I walked away pretty pleased with what I thought was a fun way to spend an afternoon. I'm still scratching my head trying to figure out why nobody else was there!

Tuesday night it was back to a ballpark, and this time it was the Major Leagues. Sitting front row, right behind third base, we were taking in the first of a pair of game in Tampa Bay, where the Rays were hosting (who else?) the Toronto Blue Jays.

Before the first pitch had even been thrown, we knew that we'd be in for a treat. Jays ace Ricky Romero was taking on David Price, so a low scoring pitcher's duel was expected. While neither pitcher disappointed, I'm happy to say I made the correct call with a tough pre-game decision. I own both Romero and Price in my fantasy baseball league (a league where I'm hopelessly near the bottom) but I couldn't possible start both. I made the call the bench Price, and count on the Jays coming through.



Romero Warms Up

As expected, it was a low scoring affair. There wasn't a run until the top of the fourth, when Jose Bautista hit his league leading thirty second home run of the year. The Jays were on top 1-0. It wasn't a big lead, but it was a lead.



Yunel Escobar extended the lead in the top of the sixth, when his leadoff home run made it 2-0. We were on our feet with our second round of high fives, and I was starting to get pretty confident that my pick of Romero, and not Price, was looking pretty good.

Romero, thus far, had been brilliant. I've had the pleasure of watching him live about five times, and this game seemed to be very reminiscent of an early 2010 game against the White Sox, when he took a no hitter into the ninth. He wouldn't come that close to history on this night, with his bid for the no-no being broken up when Desmond Jennings led off the bottom of the sixth inning with a home run, tying the game.

The Jays added an insurance run in the seventh, when Rajai Davis singled home Travis Snider, to put Toronto up 3-1. That would be all that Romero and the Jays would need. Ricky finished his night in the eighth, and John Rauch came on in the ninth inning to get his tenth save of the year. We were leaving the building happy, as the Jays were now within half a game of the Rays for third place in the AL East.

Wednesday night was another night back at Tropicana field. We were still riding high off the win the night before, and excited about the Jays finally moving up in the standings after being locked in fourth place most the season.

Tropicana Field, I need to mention, is really undeserving of all the bad things that people say. I've always been led to believe that 'The Trop' was a bit of a dump. Not really a great place to watch a baseball game, something worthy of the Crusty-Brand seal of approval: "Not Just Good, Good Enough!" It's really an unfair label to place on it. While we did have pretty good seats both nights, I could tell from the time I spent walking around the concourse that there really isn't a bad seat in the place. The sight lines are good from every angle. Furthermore, it's almost like a modern miracle when you feel how comfortable the air is inside. Quality air conditioning like that, in a dome that size, in that climate, is a pretty impressive feat.



The second game didn't go nearly as well for the Jays. The first inning produced nothing for either team, but the Rays got to Toronto starter Carlos Villaneuva quickly in the second inning. Ben Zobrist hit a home run, which got the ball rolling on a four run frame for the home team.

The Jays looked like they were ready to answer back, when JP Arencibia got them on the board with a solo-shot of his own. The 4-1 score at the time though, would be as close as the Jays would get.

The Rays chased Villaneuva out of the game in the third



inning, when home runs from Casey Kotchman and Robinson Chirinos tacked on four more runs for an 8-1 lead. It was pretty clear that the Rays had picked this game to snap out the hitting slump that local sports stations had been talking about so much.

James Shields, who's always pitched great against the Blue Jays, was certainly on his game that night. He allowed only three hits over his 7.1 innings worth of work that night, and really the only true blemish being the home run to Arencibia. Jake McGee and Brandon Gomes came on to finish the game. The Jays were able to muster up a couple of more hits, but couldn't get another runner across the plate. Sadley, the Rays won the game with a 9-1 final score.

Thursday morning came and it was time to hit the road again. As tempting as the rubber match between the Jays and Rays was, there was also the desire to mix things up, and see another ball park. The drive down I-75 is a fairly pleasant one, and the long stretch through the Everglades was much different than any stretch of highway I've ever been on. (I don't normally see hundreds of miles of fencing, designed to keep gators off the road).

Staying in Ft. Lauderdale, we were able to take advantage of the beautiful beach for a couple of hours in the afternoon. It actually seemed even a little warmer than Myrtle Beach was, and certainly much more clear.

That evening, it was off to another game. We had seats right behind the visitor's bullpen, as the Florida Marlins played host to the St. Louis Cardinals at Sunlife Stadium. No real routing interest in this game, but I was looking forward to getting another look at Marc Rzepczynski, a reliever the Jays had dealt to St. Louis at the trade deadline the week before, as part of a multi player / three team swap.



Sunlife Stadium

Sunlife Stadium, the rebranded Dolphin's Stadium, is much different than most other MLB fields, as its primary use is actually for football. It shows. A lot of the seating seems to be on funny angles for trying to watch baseball. The other thing that becomes really obvious is how empty the place is. A losing baseball team has a very hard time packing a building that was built for 75,000 people (though the Marlins keep fewer than 40,000 of those seats open for baseball).

A Matt Holliday three-run blast in the top of the first inning made quick work of any notion that the visitors might have been looking past the lowly Marlins as they fight it out with the Milwaukee Brewers for first place in the NL Central. 3-0 and we were only through half an inning. The home team didn't let that last long.



The Marlins started the bottom of the first with back-to-back doubles by Emilio Bonifacio and Omar Infante, cutting the lead to 3-1. A pop-out and a walk later, Logan Morrison came to the plate and hit the Marlins' third double of the inning, scoring Infante and Gaby Sanchez. Just like that, the game was all tied up.

The pitchers settled down for a little while after that. Florida starter Clay Hensley and St. Louis starter Kyle Lohse were both able to get out of the second without allowing another run, though Lohse need a double play with two on and only one out, to keep the score tied.

The top of the third saw the return of the Cardinals big bats. Jon Jay started the inning with a lineout, but then Albert Pujols singled, and matt Holliday reached after being hit by a pitch. Lance Berkman was up next, and a single to right field loaded the bases for David Freese. The result? Hensley hit his second batter of the inning, putting the Cardinals up 4-3, and ending his night.



Octavio Dotel in the Cardinals Bullpen

Burke Badenhop entered the game in relief, and didn't fare much better. Skip Schumaker immediately hit a double, scoring two more Cardinals runs. Florida played their cards right after that, intentionally walking catcher Gerald Laird, to get to Kyle Lohse. Badenhop struck him out, and then got Rafael Furcal to ground out and end the inning. The damage was done though.

The Marlins were unable to cut into the lead in the bottom of the inning, and the fourth saw the Cardinals extend the lead a little more. Slugger Albert Pujols hit a home run, bringing the lead to 7-3. The Marlins were in trouble.

The eighth inning saw the game's final run. Florida was able to make it a little bit closer after loading the bases. Greg Dobbs singled, and scored Mike Cameron. 7-4 Cardinals and it was time to call it a night. Sadly the next morning was going to bring the end to my stay in Florida, starting the final chapter in my two week vacation, the long drive home.



The Voyage Home

By Sean McCafferty aka 30ranfordfan

Friday morning came, after three great nights of baseball in Florida, but the 1,468 Miles separating me from home were suddenly looking a lot farther than they had months earlier when I planned this trip. I basically had a 24 hours of driving ahead of me, with three days to get it done. I had to stop back into Zephyrhills to drop my friend off (he flew into Myrtle Beach where I met him, and was flying out a couple of days later from Tampa) so I wasn't even taking the most direct route on the first day.

I've done lots of lengthy drives in the past. Sometimes I try to do the "break it up" think, and other times its been trying my best to hammer through it, and do the distance as quickly as possible. Considering I was back to doing a solo drive (other than the first four hours) there was really no choice this time. I had to break it up. And what better way to do that, than with a couple more baseball games?

Friday evening I rolled into Jacksonville, to see the 'AA' Suns (Florida Marlins affiliate) take on the Chattanooga Lookouts ('AA' affiliate of the LA Dodgers) at the Baseball Grounds of Jacksonville.

The ball park is actually very large by Minor League standards. Across the street from EverBank Field, home of the NFL's Jaguars, the Baseball Grounds holds up to 11,000 fans. It wasn't a packed house by any means, but I figured there was likely somewhere in the range of 4,000-5,000 people there, which was certainly a healthy sized crowd.



The Baseball Ground in Jacksonville

The visitors took the crowd out of it early, when a bases clearing triple by Kyle Russell scored two runs in the top of the first. The game stayed close for another inning and a half, but Chattanooga's offense was too strong in the third for Jacksonville to handle.

Alex Castellanos lead off the inning with a walk, and then advanced to second on a Scott Van Slyke single. Kyle Russell was up next, and jacked a home run over the right field wall. After Corey Smith singled, and Matt Wallach doubled, Suns started Joseph O'Gara's night was over. Down 5-0, he'd faced five batters this inning, and all had reached base.

Jeff Allison came on to replace him, and was able to stop the bleeding. He did retire the next three batters, but Ivan Ochoa's sac fly scored Smith, and the game was now 6-0.

In the bottom of the third, a single by the new pitcher Allison got the Suns their first hit of the night. He was advanced to third on a Kevin Mattison double, and then a Paul Gran sacrifice scored him. Jacksonville had their first run of the game, and the crowd finally had something to cheer about. It didn't last long.



The visitors continued to wear out their welcome in top of the fourth. Lookouts outfielder Kyle Russell came to the plate again, and smacked another triple. He was 3-3 with a home run and two triples at this point in the game, and the triple scored Elian Herrera, restoring the 6 run lead.

With a relatively uneventful fifth, sixth, and seventh inning, it was pretty clear that this game wasn't going to be a close one. Chattanooga made sure to end any hope of a late inning come back, when they put two more runs on the board in each of the eighth and ninth. Jacksonville? That lonely run they scored back in the third would be all they could get. 11-1 Suns final.

After the game was over, I still had a couple of hours of driving left in me. I was getting out of the Sunshine state, and spending the night in Savannah, Georgia. I had shaved about a third off my drive home. Two more night still on the road ahead, but only one more game.

Saturday proved to be what was probably the nicest drive of the entire trip. I left Savannah early in the morning, and headed North through Tennessee. As the day wore on, it was time to stop for a few hours, when I pulled into Johnson City to watch the home town Cardinals take on the Bluefield Blue Jays.

This Appalachian league game (another league of 'A' affiliated teams) had much more of a minor league feel than the game in Jacksonville the night before. Howard Johnson field holds only 3,800 people, and I'd estimate that fewer than half those seats were filled. Regardless of the size of the crowd, I was happy to be taking in one last ball game before the trip ended, and even more happy that I could watch yet another Jays' MiLB team in action. I was even happier when I found out that one of the few prospects on Bluefield I had heard of was starting, pitcher Aaron Sanchez, who the Jays drafted in the first round back in 2010.

Sanchez didn't have a great first inning. He hit the first batter he faced, and Steven Ramos was later able to score on a Tyler Rahmatulla single. In total, the first four Cardinals batters reached base, but Sanchez was able to settle down, and keep the home team to just the one run.

Bluefield finally gave their pitcher some run support, scoring two in the top of the fourth inning. Kevin Pillar doubled to get things started, and scored on a Christopher Hawkins single. Hawkins didn't last long on base, after Melvin Garcia grounded him into a fielder's choice. Garcia was able to steal second though, and after Peter Mooney walked, Aaron Munoz singled to score Garcia. 2-1 Blue Jays.





The lead didn't last long though. Sanchez got a quick fly out to start the inning, but then ran into control issues, walking the next two batters. With two on, Jonathan Keener came to the plate, and hit a ball over the right field wall, to put Johnson City back into the lead. It was 4-2 Cardinals, and the end of the fourth also meant the end of the night for Aaron Sanchez.

The Cardinals continued to be mean hosts in the seventh, much to the delight of the home town crowd. They roughed up Jays reliever Myles Jaye, who had been very effective up until that point, for another three runs. They weren't all earned. With two outs and only two in, Jaye tossed a wild pitch that advanced David Washington to second. Ronard Castillo was able to reach on an error by Bluefield third baseman Andy Fermin, which scored Washington and the lead was 7-2.

The Jays answered back with one more in the eighth. Walks to Fermin, and Art Charles, set the table for Melvin Garcia to pick up an RBI single. It narrowed the Cardinals lead to four, but 7-3 was the final score.

It was a little disappointing to see the Jays lose, but it wasn't like I didn't leave the ballpark without any good memories. While out having a smoke during the sixth, a foul ball popped out of the park, and one hopped into my hand. That brought my previous career total of zero to three fouls over the course of the trip.

After the game I had a few more hours of driving ahead of me, as I needed to chop another couple of hundred miles so the drive wouldn't be so daunting to close things out on Sunday. After a late night rock-out to some John Denver (yeah, I'm a sucker for clichés like that) I stopped in Summersville, West Virginia for the night.

Sunday morning, I hoped in the car for what was going to be the final nine hours of drive time of my trip. I had been having reasonably good luck with the driving, other than the stretch through New York, so I suppose I was due. I was getting very close to the Canadian border, when an accident on I-90 held me up in traffic, on my way through Buffalo. It was a bit of a bad way to end off what had been a great trip, but I'd rather just be happy that it happened when I wasn't really in a rush.

The route I took is listed as 3,967 miles by Google, but with all the extra driving around in towns, the back and forth to get from hotels to ball parks, the millage ended up being much closer to 5,200. 16 days on the road, and 14 baseball games. It was one heck of a trip, and for as tiring as the driving sometimes got, I'm very happy to say I did it.





At the time of going to press, these release dates were accurate but as you know, release dates do change...

September 2011 Releases

HOCKEY

07/09 - Panini Dominion

09/20 - UD Artifacts

FOOTBALL

09/07 - Topps Platinum

09/13 - UD SP Authentic

09/14 - Panini Absolute Memorabilia

09/21 - Panini Timeless Treasures

09/28 - Topps Prime

BASKETBALL

09/21 - Panini Elite Black Box

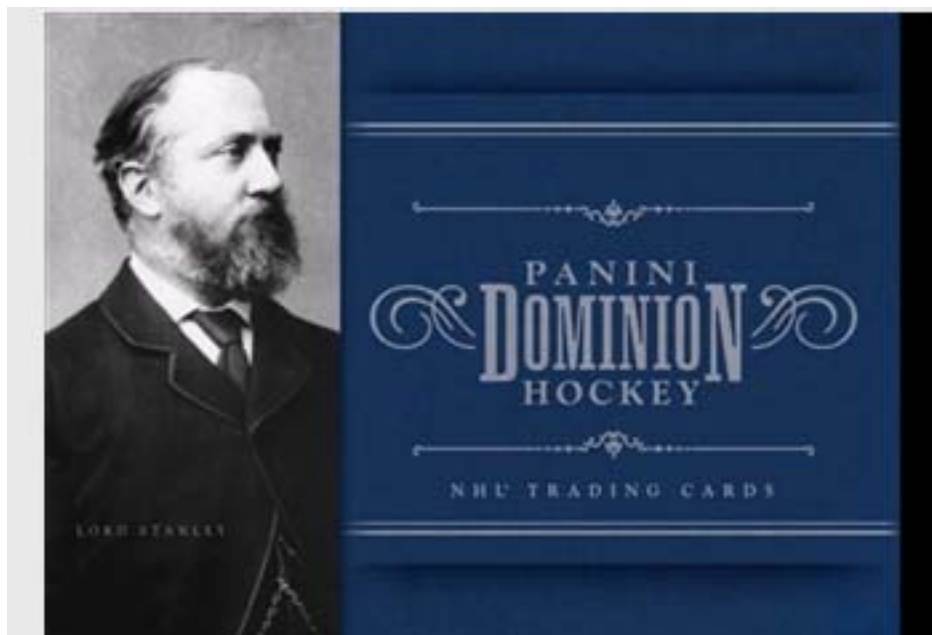
09/28 - UD SP Authentic

BASEBALL

09/07 - Topps Chrome

09/21 - Topps Heritage Minor League Edition

09/28 - Topps Triple Thread





2010/2011 Panini Zenith
By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

First and foremost, I'd like to thank our sponsors at Panini for providing us with this box.

Product Description

10 packs per box
 5 cards per pack
 Current Retail Price (online): \$74.99 - \$89.99

You say you love Rookie Cards?
 With more than 200 -yes, 200!- RCs Zenith is the product that prospectors have been waiting for!

Box Break

- Three autographs/memorabilia per box (at least one autograph)
- One Zenith Z-RC
- Four short printed Legends
- One Dare to Tear box topper
- One Red Hot parallel
- One Gifted Grinders, one Crease Is The Word

What we Pulled

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pthr-9OaTKI>

Box Topper - Dare To Tear 5x7
 Sidnev Crosbv (rinned)



Epix Tyler Ennis RC





- Base - 36/115 (31.3%)
- Legends SP - 4/25 (16%)
- Rookies /999 (1) - Brandon Mashinter
- Red Hot (1) - Rick Nash
- Chasing The Cup (1) - Carey Price
- Crease Is The Word (1) - Corey Crawford
- Gifted Grinders (1) - Scott Hartnell
- Mozaics (1) - Montreal Canadiens (Pouliot/Pacioretty/Price)



Ryan McDonagh RC/Auto /999



Mozaics Nik Antropov/Eric Boulton/Ondrej Pavalec Jersey



Mozaics Mikael Backlund/Miikka Kiprusoff/Jarome Iginla Jersey



Final Ratings

- Base - 4/5
- Design - 4/5
- Fun - 4/5
- Value - 3/5
- Rebuy - 3/5
- Total - 18/25 (72%)



Continuing a line of rehashing products from yesteryear and making them "new" to hockey, Zenith makes a return. At one time, it was a popular product among collectors in other sports. The base cards stand out as the players are featured on a white background. No glitz and glamour outside of the brand logo and team logo at the top of the cards. There are 115 Veterans, 25 Retired SPs and 85 Rookies that comprise the base set. A Red Hot parallel can be found virtually once per box, only replaced by a White Hot Parallel that falls one per case.

Another exciting aspect is the Dare To Tear box topper. Each box contains one 5x7 oversized card. Within this card is a regular sized card. Collectors have a choice to make, keep the box topper intact or rip it open and reveal the contents. You might simply find another base card or rookies from other Panini products, some of which are autographed.

One insert will appear in every pack that does not contain a Retired SP, Rookie or Parallel. Chasing The Cup and Gifted Grinders follow the design idea of the regular cards in that they are set on a white background, which brings out the player photos. Crease Is The Word (Olivia Newton-John flashback) and Mozaics take a different approach. Each card uses a foil covering which is meant to enhance the look. Bad on scanners but easy on the eyes.

On average, you will find three autographs or relics in every box. There are rookie short print autos numbered to 199 of players such as Taylor Hall and Jeff Skinner. Another great auto set is Yours Truly, featuring some of today's best players inking their signature directly on the card.

Zenith appealed to the masses in the late 90s through parts of the 2000s. A neat aspect I miss seeing is the individual packs sealed inside a tearaway flattened cardboard box. That just gave a better sense of anticipation. The base set is cut and dry while some of the inserts and "hits" are jazzed up. Dear To Tear is a concept that has been around for years, but a fun one nonetheless. Issues I have found are you need to know that it is much easier to open it from the bottom and there are problems with the card inside being bent due to the flimsy oversized card.

Each pack contains a bonus of some kind, whether it is an insert, SP, parallel, etc. This even goes for the packs with "hits". Always nice to get something extra when you open a pack. But not seeing a lot of these being numbered is somewhat of a buzzkill. With three "hits" along the way, it doesn't match up well with the price point. There is bound to be a lot of dissatisfaction among collectors after opening a box unfortunately, which in turn leads to less interest in getting more.

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at Panini for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release. For more information on all their products, visit them today at www.paniniamerica.net.



2011 Panini Rookies and Stars
By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

First and foremost, I'd like to thank our sponsors at Panini for providing us with this box.

Product Description

24 packs per box
 8 cards per pack
 Current Retail Price (online): \$79.99 - \$89.99

Box Break:

- 4 Autographs/Material Cards (at least one autograph)
- 24 rookies
- 4 Parallels
- 1 Rookie Revolution
- 1 Studio Rookies
- 2 Other insert/parallels



What we Pulled

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_2KGmIfVsvc

Base: 148/150 (98.7%)
 Dupes: 11
 Rookies: 24 (Including Terrelle Pryor???)
 Longevity Gold /49 (1) - Fred Jackson
 Longevity Silver /249 (2) - Greg Jennings, Vernon Davis
 Longevity Silver Holofoil /99 (1) - Brian Cushing

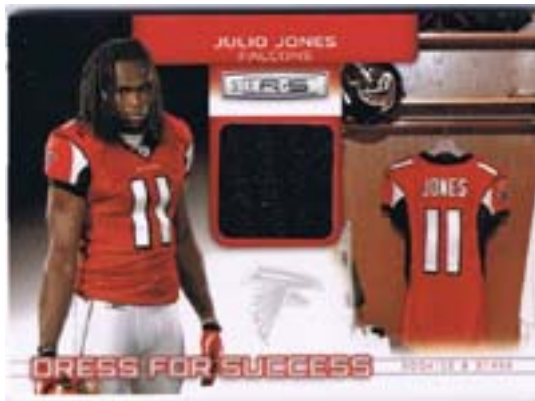
Rookie Revolution (1)
 Rookie Revolution Gold /500 (1) - Marcell Dareus
 Studio Rookies (1)
 Studio Rookies Gold /500 (1) - Mark Ingram

Kris Durham Autograph /350





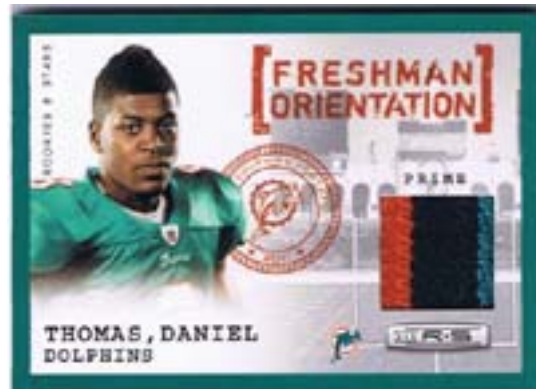
Dress For Success Julio Jones Jersey /299



Dress For Success Clyde Gates Jersey/Autograph / 50



Freshman Orientation Prime Daniel Thomas
3-color Patch /50



Final Ratings

- Base - 4/5
- Design - 4/5
- Fun - 4.5/5
- Value - 4/5
- Rebuy - 4/5
- 20.5/25 (82%)

Another great staple product for football with Leaf Rookies and Stars. Panini has kept the design straightforward and simple as always. They have also come back through with the parallel we all remember as longevity, broken down into Gold, Silver, Holo Foil. As from past years this year it seems to have a better design and more flare to the look on the card. Rookie Revolution comes in silver and gold parallels which has a very simplistic design.

Again keeping with past years themes they have brought back the Dress for Success game variations as well as the Freshman Orientations. Looking at the Dress for Success game used card we pulled along with the signed version the card appearance of the locker view with the helmet and jersey almost makes you think, could that be the same jersey the piece on the card came from? Highly unlikely but a good marketing and image scenario by Panini. When looking at the Freshman Orientation jersey we pulled it has a better look to it than in past years, with the team stamp in the middle of the card and the



Freshman orientation in red within the brackets. It gives it a great look and a nice pop to the overall design of the card. The auto we pulled may leave a little to be desired. The photo almost seems a little to up close and personal which makes the sticker auto, yes I said sticker auto, a little too small sitting underneath the oversized picture on the card. We'll have to wait and see more breaks to assess if this was the overall design of the autos they produce.

Overall for almost making a full complete base set and a good chunk of the rookies in this set it looks to be a great buy for the price and a lot of fun to bust open.

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at Panini for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release. For more information on all their products, visit them today at www.paniniamerica.net.





ITG Baseball "Hits" Series 2
By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

First and foremost, I'd like to thank our sponsors at In The Game for providing us with this box.

Product Description

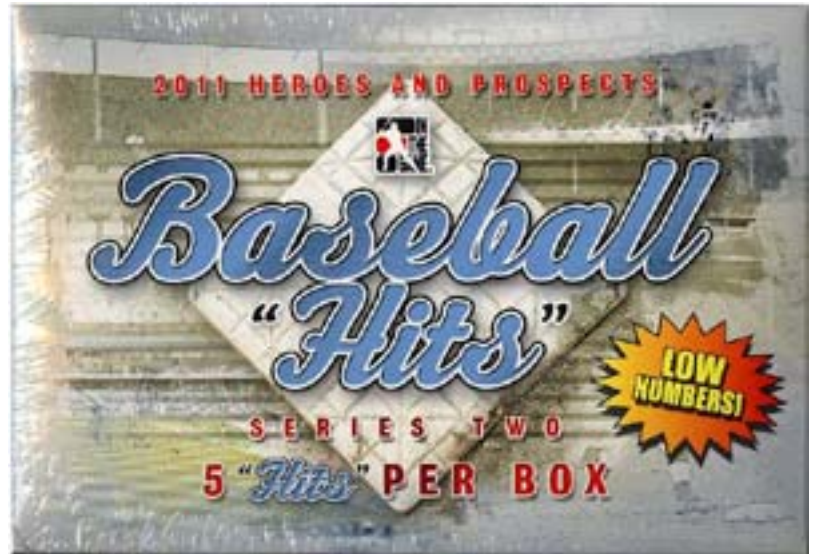
5 cards per pack (Individually encased in top loaders)
 Current Retail Price (online): \$79.99 - \$89.99
 Heroes & Prospects Baseball Hits Series 2
 Low Numbers, Where Baseball's Future Stars Meet Baseball's Legends

Product Highlights

- Each Box contains five "Hits"
- On Average, one 1/1 in each 12-box case
- On Average, six Heroes inserts in each 12-box case

What we Pulled

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qwVeAVzxxJY>



Zack Wheeler Auto Silver Version /390



Yorman Rodriguez Auto Silver Version /390





Up Close And Personal Cito Culver Autograph
Silver Version /190



Affiliation Jordan Akins/Jake Skole/
Martin Perez Triple Autograph Silver Version /19



Country Of Origin Philippe Valiquette Autograph Silver Version /40





Final Ratings

Base - N/A

Design - 3/5

Fun - 3/5

Value - 3/5

Rebuy - 4/5

Total - 13/20 (65%)

Yes the company that is most known for its great hockey products has dipped its foot in the baseball pool. Without having an mlb license in the game did the best they could with what they had to work with. The design is rather bland as without the use of logo's there's only so much you can do, the lack of having anything other than autographs might hurt this product also. I would've gone higher on the fun factor, but when you open a box that has only 5 slabbed autographed cards, yes it is fun just not long lasting fun. As far as the value goes it is like any other product in that it will be hit and miss, but with double and triple auto's thrown in it is a plus to get anywhere from 5 to 8 auto's per box. As for rebuy there are enough different autographs to make buying more than one box worthwhile, as if you feel you didn't get something good in your first box I'm sure the second box will be better.

once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at In The Game for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release. For more information on all their products, visit them today at www.itgtradingcards.com.





2010/2011 Panini Gold Standard

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

First and foremost, I'd like to thank our sponsors at Panini for providing us with this box.

Product Description

1 pack per box

12 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): \$139.99 - \$169.99



Box Break

- 3 Autographs (#'d to 299 or less)
- 2 Memorabilia Cards (#'d 299 or less)
- 4 Golds(Commons) #'d to 299 or less
- Three Other Inserts

Find Instant-Win Golden Tickets!

Good for one of 5 unique prizes including a face-to-face meeting with Kobe Bryant!

What we Pulled

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-zht6Od8ErQ>

Base /299 (3): Luis Scola, Chauncey Billups, Alonzo Mourning



Gold Crowns /299 (1): Deron Williams

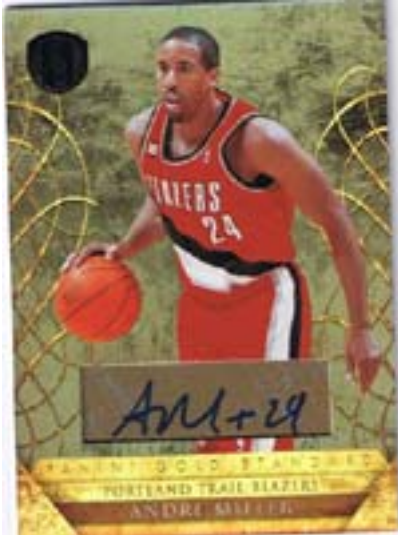
Gold Medalists /299 (1): Dwyane Wade

Gold Nuggets /299 (1): Antawn Jamison

Golden Threads /299 (1): Sam Jones/Rajon Rondo



Andre Miller Autograph /199



Gary Forbes Autograph /299



Champions Richard Hamilton Jersey/
Autograph /49



Gold Crowns Serge Ibaka Jersey /249

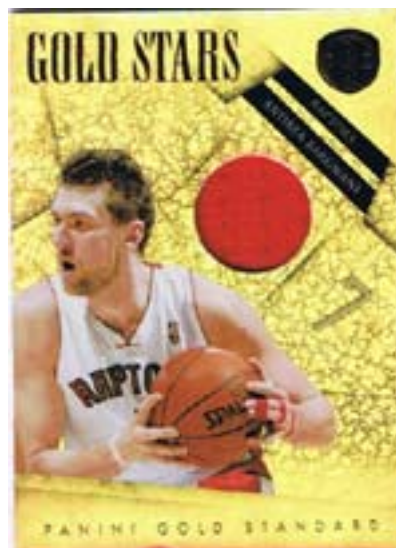




Gold Stars Andrea Bargnani Jersey /99

Final Ratings

Base - 4/5
 Design - 5/5
 Fun - 4/5
 Value - 3/5
 Rebuy - 2.5/5
 Total - 18.5/25 (74%)



Hoping to raise the bar among mid to high-end releases, Panini unveils a nugget called Gold Standard. To accentuate the theme of Gold Standard, each box is designed in the shape of a gold bar. Inside, there's one pack containing 12 cards. There are three base cards, four insert and 5 relic or autographs. A huge bonus is all cards are numbered to 299 or less.

All the various subsets carry the theme of "Gold". It works really well for sets such as Gold Nuggets and Gold Medallists, but then there are stretches with Gold Crowns and Golden Threads. With USA Basketball always being at the forefront of Summer Olympic followers in the US, Gold Medallists is a great encapsulation of the athletes who have represented the red, white and blue.

There was a lot of hype that came with Gold Standard, including a story by ESPN. However, if this is the "gold standard", then collectors are in store for a future of subpar products. There's always an air of excitement when cracking open a box with only one pack. The feeling of multiple hits and great cards all in one shot is a huge turn-on for collectors. But while the design and the look are nice, I really question the subjects. I realize not every box is going to be the proverbial "slam dunk" box, but when I think of the "gold standard", I imagine a set where guys like Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Derrick Rose, etc., are the focus of the release. Instead, we are treated to insert sets with Antawn Jamison and hit sets with Richard Hamilton and Andre Miller. No offense to those athletes, but they are not the "gold standard" in basketball. While I know there are some who will break multiple boxes and/or cases and some who will love this product, for most collectors, this is one they are likely to pass on.

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at Panini for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release. For more information on all their products, visit them today at www.paniniamerica.net.



2011 Press Pass Showcase
By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

First and foremost, I'd like to thank our sponsors at Press Pass for providing us with this box.

Product Description

3 packs per box
 5 cards per pack
 Current Retail Price (online): \$159.99 - \$179.99



ONE HIT PER PACK INCLUDING..

- Masterpieces Ink - Autographed Multi-Swatch Memorabilia Cards
- Showroom - Oversized Sheet Metal Cards
- Premier Prospects Ink - Short-Printed Autographed Rookie Cards
- Prized Pieces Ink - Autographed Memorabilia Cards

ALSO NEW IN 2011:

"CHAMPIONS" Plastic insert featuring the sport's title winners (also look for autographed parallel)
 "MASTERPIECES" Two, three and four-swatch memorabilia cards
 60-CARD BASE SET With four levels featuring background color changes.

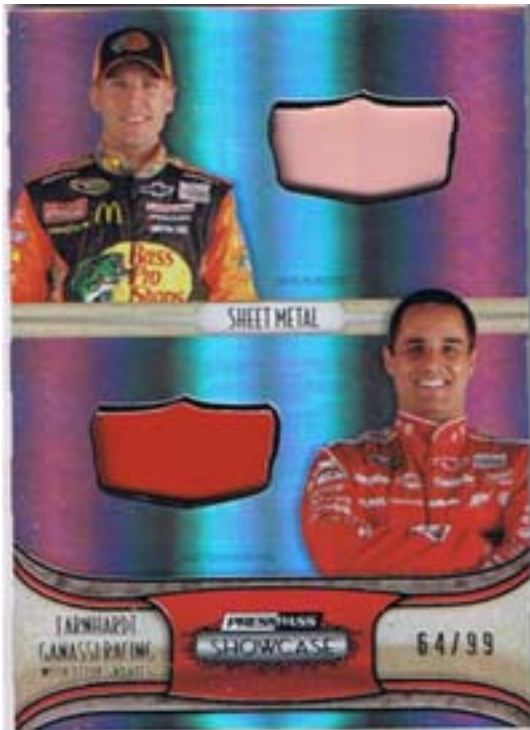
What we Pulled

Base /499 (7): Tony Stewart, Joey Logano, Jeff Burton, Bud Moore, Mark Martin MP, Tony Stewart MP, Roush Fenway Racing CC
 Gold /125 (2): Dale Earnhardt, Ned Jarrett
 Champions /499 (1): Bobby Labonte
 Showroom /499 (2): Jeff Gordon, Mark Martin





Classic Collections Jamie McMurray/Juan Pablo Montoya Dual Sheet Metal /99



Elite Exhibit Ink Denny Hamlin Autograph /50



Prized Pieces Jimmie Johnson Firesuit /99





Final Ratings

Base - 4.25/5

Design - 4.5/5

Fun - 5/5

Value - 3.5/5

Rebuy - 3/5

Total - 20.25/25 (81%)

Two years ago, Press Pass appeased the racing collecting masses and produced a high-end product known as Showcase. While still in its infancy, it remains a popular product. With a streamlined checklist, the base set only contains 60 cards. The regular version is numbered to 499 with parallels going as low as numbered to 1. The cards are on a foil board, which creates a rainbow prism effect when viewing them. There are only two insert sets, Champions and Showroom. One insert will be found in every pack. Champions is devoted to those who had the opportunity to hoist the trophy at the end of the season. Showroom showcases the cars driven by some of today's best and most popular drivers. The regular version is numbered to 499, with parallels running just like the base cards.

Each pack yields one relic or autograph. The relics come in many shapes and varieties, such as an oversized firesuit swatch to a small piece of sheet metal. Autograph cards are done on acrylic cards to accentuate the signature. In addition, there are relic/autos in which the autograph is signed directly on the card. A high-end product with no sticker autos...hmmm...While Press Pass has produced other sets to fall in the high-end territory, Showcase was first and continues to make strides. The shortened base set, focusing on top-tier drivers and teams is a welcomed break from products with lot of fluff and fodder. I do question why the insert sets are numbered the same as the base set at 499. More than likely, it's to balance out what is packaged into packs, but inserts should always have a lesser print run than base card. That's what helps to make them special.

Showcase succeeds in making every pack exciting. You know where the "hit" is located, so there is a sense to slow down right before revealing it. The packaging is trimmed down and not overly verbose. It's enough to securely surround the three packs and still look like it's a higher priced product. The big stickler is the price point. While the cards look wonderful and you are guaranteed a "hit" in every pack, it's still a lot to put down on a product. Especially when you turn and look at the secondary market and you see that between 95-98% of boxes registers in the loss column in regards to return of investment. Now I agree that this should be a hobby and the focus stay on collectors, not resellers, but you still have to keep the secondary market into consideration as it helps drive the products.

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at Press Pass for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release. For more information on all their products, visit them today at www.presspassinc.com.



Around the Rink
By Richard McAdam aka RGM81

Is it hockey season yet? Unfortunately, no, there's still another month until the puck drops on the NHL's 2011-12 regular season. Fortunately, training camp begins pretty soon and pre-season action is just a couple weeks away. It has been an interesting summer for free agency, the salary cap, potential changes to the game, and so forth, but nothing compares to actual game action. Here's hoping September breezes by quickly so that we can see our teams re-take the ice and begin a new quest for the Stanley Cup!

Even though there's been little action in the hockey world, the SCF Hockey Team has been working to bring our valued members a great new contest for 2011-12. We are very excited to announce this year's season-long contest: The Race For The Price! SCF has gotten in touch with our good friends at StarSide Signatures (<http://www.starsidesignatures.com>) and acquired a very special piece of hockey history. On February 16, 2008, Montreal Canadiens goaltender Carey Price recorded his first NHL shutout, blanking the Philadelphia Flyers 1-0. StarSide Signatures has commemorated that event by having Carey Price autograph a limited number of jersey embroidered with the event, date, and score; SCF is lucky to have received limited edition jersey #32 (only one off of Price's jersey number!) of that set to give away as a grand prize in our Race For The Price Contest! Aaaaaaand here it is!





A huge thanks to our friends at StarSide Signatures! Be sure to check out their affiliate site, Legends Depot, which can be found at: <http://www.auction.legendstdepot.com/index.php> for all your authentic hockey memorabilia needs! Keep your eyes peeled on the Contests section, as we will begin The Race For the Price very, very soon!

As we eagerly await the arrival of the 2011-12 product line, please take a few minutes to participate in the SCF 2010-11 Product Year End Awards. We are collecting feedback from you, our valued SCF hockey fans and collectors, that will be used to produce the best of 2010-11 awards (as well as give the card companies some serious food for thought) in an upcoming issue of Collector's Corner. You can check out the thread here in the Hockey Card Talk Forum: <http://www.sportscardforum.com/showthread.php?t=1456014> We sincerely appreciate your input!

By the time you're reading this, The Cup will have been live for a few days and we will all be eagerly awaiting the arrival of Dominion. Upper Deck and Panini's high-end offerings will treat collectors to some of the most incredible cards of the year – can Dominion live up to its hype as ‘#CupKiller’ or will UD's super-premium product remain the king of the mountain? Check out the Box Breaks Forum and share your feedback!

Will you be attending any games—pre-season or regular season—in the coming months? If so, SCF wants to hear your story! There is nothing quite like the experience of attending an NHL game live in person, as you get to see and hear things that many people on TV may not know about. We would love to hear your event reports – please share them in either the Hockey Chat or Show & Tell sections!

That's all from the Hockey Team for this month. Until October rolls around, keep your elbows in and your sticks on the ice!





Racing Happenings
By Stephen Taylor aka race_crazy

Looking Ahead to the Fall Collecting Season and Beyond

After winding down from the summer busting and spending frenzy that Press Pass Showcase produces, racing collectors get a month to regroup before Press Pass Fan Fare, a new product for the 2011 collecting season, hits the shelves. It looks to be an interesting release with its race-used guarantees and it will indeed entice a lot of people to try their luck since the product is relatively well priced considering how many hits it produces. The common complaint from this product from collectors has been and more than likely will be the chances of pulling a lesser driver race-used card that is only valued at a few dollars. Other sports have had this issue for years-especially basketball and baseball. Nascar in a way is better in this aspect because there are really only about 30 drivers from each series to incorporate into a race-used release, however to most the set should contain only about 25 to 30 drivers (the top drivers as usual followed by 15 lesser but collectable drivers-think Justin Allgaier, Danica Patrick, Jeff Burton, etc) This should rotate per release in my opinion. Stealth did a great job this year as an example of how to mix it up with the right combination of drivers, but Fan Fare will look to capitalize on producing race-used cards of more drivers within the sport. Hopefully it will be a fun release.



After Fan Fare in October comes the always popular Legends release. The early shots and checklist again look to be strong, well-rounded, and very well designed. Legends is an always popular release among collectors and besides regular Press Pass is usually the most well received in the community. Part of Legends' success is its ability to mix the past with the present rather seamlessly. It is always fun to open and its guaranteed hits make it a good value most of the time. The checklist for legends has some mainstays as you would expect but the collectors

seem to have some influence as to who is included in the rest of the set which makes it great fun. Collectors of older drivers who could be considered legends of the sport but not true hall of famers (think people like Ricky Rudd, Ernie Irvan, Dave Marcis, Buddy Baker, etc) love legends for this very reason. It gives them something to look forward to and to continue to collect and keep their collecting interest despite the lack of cards produced of their drivers in recent years. This is why Legends will continue to be a hot and always anticipated release in the Press Pass Racing lineup for years to come.



Brad Keselowski-Nascar's Newest Superstar?

Where did Brad Keselowski come from? Don't look now but the once cocky and self-asserting driver known as "Bad Brad" is becoming a Nascar Cup Series superstar. After numerous run-ins in both the Cup Series as a rookie and during his Nationwide title run in 2010 (most notably with Carl Edwards and Kyle Busch) Keselowski is in position to make the chase and possibly contend during it in only his



2nd year as a full-time Cup Series driver. At the beginning of the year no one really saw this coming. Penske as a group struggled mightily last year as did Brad in his first year in Cup. Despite his lower level Series success no one thought highly of him as a Cup series driver, including most of the Cup drivers themselves. However over the last few months Keselowski has seemed to gain a new sense of speed, respect, and fanfare. Although his first Cup win of the year at Kansas came on fuel mileage Brad was the driver who conserved enough when others ran out. He became primed for a wild card spot and contending in the top 20 when his season looked to be over after a devastating testing crash at Road Atlanta a few weeks ago which obliterated his #2 Dodge and sent Brad to the hospital with an avulsion fracture in his ankle and his back completely bruised. However the kid from Michigan vowed not to get out of the car and to tough it out for his team. In his very first race since the crash Brad drove the race of his career, holding off Kyle Busch and flat out beating everyone to win at Pocono with a bruised and beat-up body. A week later at Watkins Glen Brad put in another performance worthy of victory before Marcos Ambrose passed him on the final lap.

Since his injury Brad has not finished worse than 2nd in a Cup Series event. In a way it is shocking to most fans but it also is appealing. Brad is becoming likeable to more than just his own diehard fans. Carrying the American flag after victories and saluting the troops in victory lane interviews, being honest and talking with the fans on Twitter and sharing his opinions on every race, and most of all not being afraid and being tough have allowed Keselowski to become one of Nascar's newest superstars. The famed Miller Lite Blue Deuce looks to be in secure and talented hands for the foreseeable future.



Game On!

By Matthew Lamb aka BradyFanatic1224

With the lockout settled, it created a frenzy among teams to sign free agents and draft picks. As training camps began and preseason games started, we saw familiar faces gracing new uniforms. From big names to undrafted rookies being signed, it all had an impact in the movement of the hobby world. Collectors started to get an idea of who would have a spot on the team and who wouldn't. Here's a short list of some players who've had to search for new homes this off-season.

Name	Old Team	New Team
Nnamdi Asomugha -	Raiders	Eagles

With the Eagles secondary getting a total makeover this off-season, the best free agent landed in the nest. This move paired with getting Rodgers-Cromartie should sure up the defensive backfield. After flirting with the Jets and Cowboys, Asomugha settled in with the city of brotherly love. Even though the Raiders have struggled the last few years, they have some of the most loyal collectors. His cards haven't really showed any movement from the move. Although if Philadelphia brings home a Super Bowl win, you can expect Asomugha's cards to get a boost.



Kevin Kolb -	Eagles	Cardinals
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The question of if Kevin Kolb would be traded wasn't a mystery, the question was really who he would end up with. After the Cardinals struggled last year with consistency under center, they acquired Kevin Kolb from the Eagles. He now steps into a starting role and big expectations. Going from the week 1 starter last year to being Michael Vick's backup and now back to a starter; his cards have seemed to rise back up to where they were before the season last year. Collectors are showing optimism for the Kolb-Fitzgerald combination to click and finally putting the dreams of Kurt Warner returning to bed.

Chad Ochocinco	Bengals	Patriots
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We all saw what Randy Moss did, or didn't do, with the Raiders. Then he was traded to the Patriots and he became the receiver that he was in Minnesota again. Ochocinco has had a great career, but has had his statistics drop dramatically in the last couple years. He's now surrounded by Tom Brady, Wes Welker, Rob Gronkowski and Deion Branch. Can Brady revive Ochocinco's career? Will Ochocinco really refuse to celebrate when he scores? These are all questions that we look forward to seeing as the season approaches. With Ochocinco moving from Cincinnati to New England, Patriot collectors have begun scooping up his cards. Look for his cards to continue to move if his production increases from the previous two years.



Randy Moss Titans Retired

With his tenure in New England ending after week 4 of the 2010 season, Randy Moss struggled the rest of the year for the Vikings and Titans. Looking for a new employer this year, he couldn't find any offer that fit his needs. Looking back on his career with the Vikings, Raiders, Patriots, Vikings and Titans, there wasn't ever a dull moment. From spectacular catches to touchdown celebrations, Randy Moss entertained the fans. He leaves the game 2nd in touchdown catches and holds the record for most touchdown receptions in a season (23). His cards have always had a great following from collectors and his autographs are hard



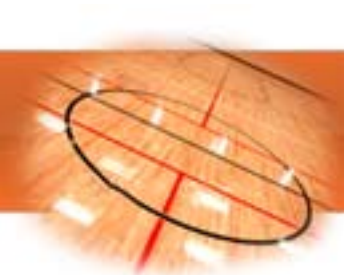
to find.

While prices haven't changed much, there has been quite a few of his harder-

to-find cards appearing up for trade or sale. With speculation that he might return to a contender, we may not have seen the last of Moss yet.

With all the player movement and familiar faces in new places, the NFL season is right around the corner. As midseason approaches, we'll take a look at these players again to see if anything has changed on the hobby front. All the teams will soon start to take their place in the race for Super Bowl XLVI. Let the games begin!





Basketball Happenings By Jay Weger aka Jay520

Contests & Winners

Thanks to all that entered the 2011 NBA Lockout contest!! In AuGUst there were some nice cards entered into the Theme Weeks contests. Theme Week #20 saw FoRCe Majeur win the voting for his amazing full rainbow of MaRCus Camby refractors, X-fractors, superfractors and plates from 05-06 Finest. Theme Week #21 was multi patches (3 or more) and tristan20 got the win with a sick MJ/Pippen/Rodman triple patch from UD Premier. Theme Week #22 Camaropat took the win for best photo on back of card of Karl Malone looking goofy in the pic. Theme Week #23 was for best multiplayer autos which jordan23 won with a MJ/Pippen/Rodman auto from Trilogy. As always if you think you have the best card for the Theme Week contests be sure to enter. And lastly look for Serial number Contests in Sept. in the basketball contests forum.

Basketball Hobby News

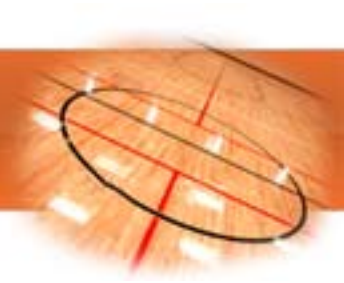
This last month saw Panini National Treasures released to collectors in search of Kobe Bryan autographs as he now only signs for them. RPA's (Rookie Patch Autos) were also the big draw from National Treasures as well this month with some great patches to be had from Wall and Cousins amongst others. All-Time Greats from UD debuted to good and bad reviews because of the college theme. Also the market flood of MJ stuff from this product has MJ auto collectors grumbling that it will hurt his auto value (same can be said for Kobe autos from NT). MJ's UNC college autos are slightly falling but his Bulls autos are gradually selling at a premium. In other MJ news his 90's inserts are catching fire all over the net. Inserts that could be had at \$5-\$20 are now selling for \$20-\$50+ and the high-end inserts numbered to 100 or less are skyrocketing in the range of \$1000 to \$2500+. Will MJ inserts continue to stay hot or level out in the near future? Only time will tell.



NBA news

By Kevin Rhyne aka Tarheelsnipe

The Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame welcomed its newest members on AuGUst 12th in Springfield, MA. The inductee list included:



Teresa Edwards – 2x ABL All Star, Kodak All America, 4x USA Basketball Female Athlete of the Year.

Artis Gilmore – 6x NBA All Star, 5x ABA All Star, ABA ROY, Career FG% - .599 (NBA record), College Rebounds per game - 22.7 (NCAA record).

Herb Magee – All-Time winningest college coach (922 games so far).

Chris Mullin – 5x NBA All Star, 4x All NBA, 2x Olympic Gold Medal, 3x Big East POY.

Dennis Rodman – 5x NBA Champion, 7x NBA All-Defensive Team, 7x NBA Rebounding Leader (NBA record).

Arvydas Sabonis – Olympic Gold Medal, 2x European POY.

Tom Sanders – 8x NBA Champion, elected as a contributor.

Reece Tatum – “Clown Prince of Basketball”, member of Harlem Globetrotters.

Tara VanDerveer – 2x NCAA Champion, 9x PAC-10 Champion, 2x National Coach of the Year.

Tex Winter – invented the “Triangle Offense”, 9x NBA Champion as assistant coach to Phil Jackson.

No NBA season? No problem! – sort of. Yes, there probably won't be an NBA season. What will we miss around the boards this year?

The SCF Fantasy League! I know many of you were looking forward to joining.

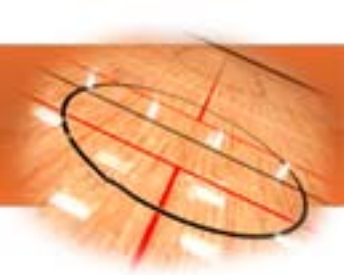
The classic threads between the Celtics and Lakers fans.

How are LeBron's elbow, Garnett's knee, Kobe's finger/knee/foot/ankle, and Wade's migraines?

Does Dallas have the juice to repeat their title run?

MVP – Durant, Nowitzki, Rose and Griffin would have made some noise this season.

So how does the lockout impact basketball? There's the obvious – we all miss a season of play. Thinking long term, some of the superstars will not have a chance to add to their legacies. Kobe is just



over 1,000 points away from moving ahead of Shaquille O’Neal into 5th place on the all-time scoring list. Dirk Nowitzki has a chance to break into the top 20, needing just over 900 points. Twelve of the players will have one less championship, 24 stars will have one less All-Star game,you get the idea. Ultimately, this lockout hurts some of their legacies.

Now that I’ve depressed you, lets look at some silver linings.

College games should get more attention this year. After all, basketball fans have to go somewhere. The NCAA has a real shot at winning back some of the college basketball fan base that has waned over the past decade, particularly between Monday and Friday (football is king until January). There should be some solid talent across the NCAA to evaluate. Several NBA prospects decided to stay another year, while the new freshman class will lace it up under the national spotlight for the first time.

The 2012 Summer Olympics! Basketball fans worldwide have wondered how good the American team would be if the players had the opportunity to train and play together for longer than a few weeks. This year we might get to find out. Another unknown is how rusty the players will be after taking an entire season off. Remember MJ’s comeback in 1995?

Finally, how about the overseas exposure that the NBA players will bring to the European leagues? Many of our members on the other side of the pond are no doubt intrigued by the prospect of having some solid NBA talent joining their leagues. It should make overseas basketball leagues very exciting this year!

By the numbers:

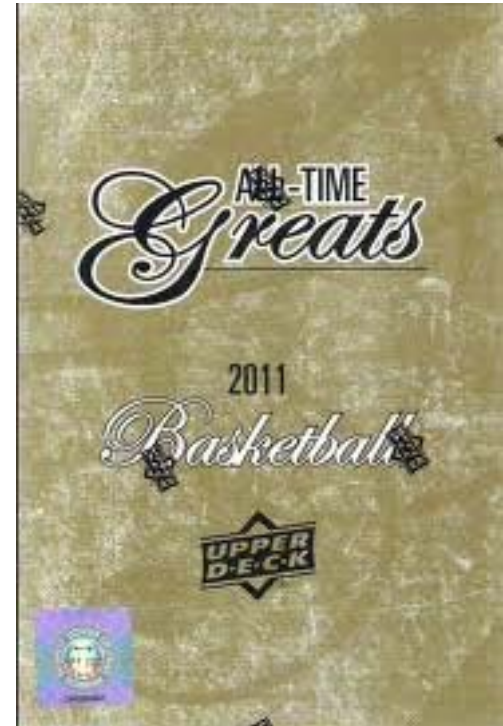
38 – Number of NBA players with overseas contracts.

18 – Number of NBA players WITHOUT an opt-out clause.

0 – Number of titles LeBron will have at the end of the lockout.

3.8 – Amount of money in billions that the NBA is estimated to lose because of the lockout (based on last year’s basketball related revenue).

303 – Number of Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame members.





208 – Number of days I was deployed and away from my collection (Glad to be back!)
Packs/Box & Group Breaks

Breaks

By John Broman aka XxViSiOnxX and Jay Weger aka Jay520

As the summer heats up so has the Basketball Group Breaks and Box Break Sections. Recently released products such as Gold Standard, Elite and National Treasures have been flying off the shelves and into eager collectors hands and also hitting the hungry secondary market. Recent Notable Breaks are from Gold Standard with Kobe Bryant 24K Auto/Patches numbered as low as #/10 WOW, So come on down and take a look at our Group Breaks and Box Breaks Sections who knows maybe you will catch the Summer Fever.

In August Panini National Treasures was the product of choice to bust and there were several outstanding hits that were pulled! joritz1012 broke several boxes and walked away with a George Gervin base /5, Blake Griffin base gold patch/25, Chris Bosh NBA logo patch auto/10, Blake Griffin Biography GU auto/10, Chris Paul Timeline prime patch/25, RPA's(Rookie patch auto) of Elliot Williams/25, Grievis Vasquez/99 and Ekpe Udoh/99. He also pulled 2 Kobe redemptions: base GU auto/25 and another for a Signature patch auto/49. Dewwen hit a Mutumbo Colossal GU auto/25 and a Kobe Colossal GU auto/20 redemption from just 1 box. ShtHairMcGee broke 2 boxes and pulled a LamaRCus Aldridge Timeline patch/25, Steve Nash All-NBA patch/25, Brandon Jennings GU auto/25, Kevin Mchale All-Decade auto/25 and RPAs/99 of Gani Lawal and Wesley Johnson. saintsfan20 opened 1 box and got a Landry Fields Colossal RC GU auto/25, Bill Lambeer Colossal # GU auto/25 and Pen Pals triple RC auto of Aminu/Monroe/Hayward/15. dauber01 got a Joe Dumars patch/25, Larry Bird All-Decade GU/49, Ray Allen base auto/25 and a RPA of Derrick Favors/99 from 1 box. RedBaron16 pulled a Kevin Love GU auto/15, James Harden patch/10 and a sweet John Wall RPA/99. velvethoop pulled an Emeka Okafor patch auto/10, Grant Hill auto/25, RPA of Lazar Hayward/99 and a nice Daniel Orton RC NBA Gear dual laundry tags/5 out of 1 box. TheWiz98 got an Okafor GU auto/25, Bosh patch/25 and a sick Durant NBA Gear triple GU auto/5 redemption. telicious broke 3 boxes over a week time span and pulled a Wall RC NBA Gear GU/99, Vasquez RC NBA Gear triple GU auto/25, Al Jefferson Colossal patch/10, Bill Walton Celts patch auto/49, Dan Issel ABA auto/25, Blake Griffin Colossal GU/25, Kobe All-NBA auto/99 redemption and a sweet Chris Kaman NBA Logoman 1/1!!

There were a few people who opened a case or 3. cdpowell34 got a 4 box case and did nicely getting these hits Kobe base GU/25, Jason Kidd base prime GU/25, Dan Issel patch/25, Horry Colossal GU/25, Wall Colossal RC GU/99, Isiah Thomas HOF auto/25 redemption, Ben Gordon prime GU auto/10, Pen Pals Derrick Favors/Damon James dual auto/25, David Thompson Notable Nicknames auto/99, RPA of Pondexter/99, Paul George/25 and 2 sweet Lakers hits of Magic Johnson patch auto/10 and Odom/Gasol dual Logoman 1/1!! boombaby rm31 broke a whopping 3 cases(12 boxes) and came away with these hits: 2 Luke Babbit RC Colossal patch auto/25, Ewing All-NBA patch/25, Westbrook



Biography GU auto/10, Trevor Booker RPA/5, Grant Hill patch auto/25, Patrick Patterson RPA/99, George Gervin HOF auto/25, Aldridge Timeline patch/25, Cousins Colossal RC GU auto/25, Harden Timeline patch/25, George Mikan GU/25, Aldridge Notable Nicknames auto/25 redemption, Vasquez RPA/99, BoGUt Timeline GU auto/10, Dom. Jones RPA/99, Earl Monroe All-NBA GU auto/25, Kevin Martin Bio. prime GU/25, Paul George Colossal prime GU auto/25, Steve Nash auto/25, Earl Monroe HOF auto/25, Rick Barry HOF auto/25, Kobe Colossal GU/49, Marion base GU/25, Xavier Henry Colossal auto/25 redemption, Aminu RPA/99, Kobe Bio. patch/25, Lazar Hayward RPA/99, Al Jefferson Bio. prime GU/25, David Robinson All-Decade auto/25, and case hits of Wall NBA Gear laundry tag combos GU/5 redemption, Bill Russell HOF auto/10, Durant Timeline team name patch/10, Robert Parish Colossal # patch auto/7, Kobe/Phil Jackson Champions dual auto/5 redemption.



All-Time Greats from Upper Deck hit the market in August as well touting MJ and LeBron autos at around \$300 a box with just 4 cards. ronfir hit a Drexler Illustrious auto 10/10 from 1 box. harkey1345 hit a MJ Signatures auto/25 from his 1 box. RyU hit a MJ 1/1 Illustrious auto(best hit of his life) from 1 box. ABC Collectableshit a nice LeBron LeBron 1/1 Illustrious auto. GreenGoblin782 broke 2 boxes getting a Magic Johnson Signatures auto/15 and Bill Russell Signatures auto/5. giznig opened a case and got a Havlicek 1/1 auto, MJ auto/15 and Alonzo Mourning auto/5. Dewwen got a case and hit a Dr. J Illustrious auto/3, Drexler Illustrious auto/10 and LeBron Illustrious auto/15. telicious did a case and hit a MJ Illustrious auto/5, Alonzo Mourning 1/1 auto and a sweet Steve Nash/Grant Hill booklet dual auto/5!! joritz1012 opened 3 random boxes and a case to pull these hits: 2 MJ Signatures auto/25, David Robinson Signatures auto/15, Walt Frazier auto/5, MJ Illustrious auto/15 and a John Havlicek/Bill Russell booklet dual auto/5!! And while at Nationals someone pulled the 9 player booklet auto 1/1 of AT9-2 Larry Bird/David Robinson/Magic Johnson/LeBron James/Bill Russell/Jerry West/Julius Erving/Michael Jordan/Hakeem Olajuwon!



Should a Pitcher Win the MVP? By Brad Wingate aka BBonds25

Since 1931, 20 pitchers have been voted as their league's MVP by the Baseball Writers Association, with the last one being Dennis Eckersley in 1992. But with the incredible season that Tigers starter Justin Verlander is having, we just might have another pitcher taking home the hardware.

But, should a pitcher be awarded the MVP?

This season, Verlander is 20 and 5 with 218 strike outs and a 2.38 ERA. He is the clear cut American League Cy Young winner, and has a very good chance of winning the pitching Triple Crown. But for someone who plays every 5 days, he either has to be something really special, or the rest of the league has to be sub par.

If you take away Verlander's 20 wins, the Tigers fall from 1st to 4th in the AL Central. OK, so maybe it's not that easy, but it's a start. Let's compare who I consider to be the top 3 AL MVP candidates to see how the stack up.

Curtis Granderson (121 R, 107 RBI, 38 HR, 24 SB, .278 AVG):

The only player in the Major Leagues with over 100 runs, 100 RBI, 30 HR, and 20 steals. He in fact leads the majors in home runs and RBI. In a year in which Alex Rodriguez, Mark Teixeira, and Derek Jeter have not lived up to their names, and the pitching staff, short of Sabathia, has looked more AAA than All-Star, Granderson has helped keep the Yankees in contention for the AL East crown. He plays an excellent center field, creates runs with his speed, and has come up with several big hits in key moments.

Adrian Gonzalez (90 R, 103 RBI, 23 HR, 1 SB, .345 AVG): The new first baseman for the Boston Red Sox has made a huge impact with his new team. Second to Granderson in RBI, and to Tampa Bay rookie Desmond Jennings in batting average, Gonzalez has helped the BoSox stay at or near the top of the AL East for most of the season, even in a year that has seen the teams pitching staff take a step back from its usually dominant form. He is currently the only other AL player with over 100 RBI, and with a strong final push to the season, has a chance to top 30 home runs and 100 runs.





Justin Verlander (20 W, 5 L, 218 K, 2.38 ERA, 0.90 WHIP): There is no denying JV's dominance, and besides his season stats, he also threw a no-hitter against Toronto in May, and took to other no hitters into the 8th inning, and opponents are hitting just .190 against him this season. He is also averaging almost 7.5 innings pitched per start, which helps to keep his bullpen fresh (the next closest Tigers starter averages just over 6 innings per start).

So those are the numbers. Hard to pick a clear cut winner at this point, so let's look at one more stat: Wins Over Replacement (WOR). This is a number that presents the wins a player added to his team over what a replacement player (i.e from AA or AAA) would add. Verlander leads the list of these players with a 7.3 (8+ is considered MVP quality). Gonzalez comes in second with a 6.0, followed by Granderson's 5.4.



Now that we have all the numbers, let's pick a winner. For me, Granderson has done more for the Yankees than Gonzalez has for the Sox. Even though Gonzalez has some good numbers, he also has Jacoby Ellsbury (23HR/82RBI/95R/36SB/.312), Dustin Pedroia (17/71/84/24/.308), Kevin Youkilis (17/78/64/.266), and the resurgent David Ortiz (27/86/71/.311), so I think the Sox would still be in contention without Gonzo. But the Yankees would be in more trouble if not for Granderson. The combination of Cano, Teixiera, A-Rod, and Jeter have combined for 76 home runs, 295 RBI, and 290 runs, which falls short of what the numbers the Sox big hitters are putting up. So out of these 2, I feel that Curtis edges our Gonzalez.

So between Granderson and Verlander, who would you pick? They are both clearly dominant, and have both helped their teams to lead, or be near the top of their respective divisions for the entire season. But the initial question was not who will win, but should a pitcher win the MVP award? Should a player who appears every 5th day be eligible for the league MVP, or should there also be a pitching MVP award? I think that if he exemplifies what the award stands for, then yes, he should be eligible. In this case however, at this point in the season, I think Granderson edges out Verlander. I wish I could say that my team's best pitcher should win, but even more so, I wish Granderson were still a Tiger. But this is his year, and I feel it is his award to lose. Of course, if he does lose it, I hope it is to Verlander.

I guess we'll have to wait and see how the games play out.



Impressive Collection Galore **By Mike Greene aka Indyreds**

For years I have collected sports cards autographed through the mail. I just wanted to take a moment and say thank you to all the members of the SCF autograph community. Sportscardforum has provided me with a place to share my collection with many others and the ability to enjoy their collections as well. It is amazing to see some of the collections that are posted and you can literally see them built right on the forums. I realize that we have plenty of collectors of sports cards and some truly amazing collections in all the different forums on SCF. I just can never get over the different types of collections in the Autograph Central area.

I challenge anyone to take the time to look through the collections of cards that members have made in the customs area and not be amazed. The creativity of members like Bigga and the professional and totally original designs are inspiring. You wonder how that type of collection could ever be topped? Look further and you will find members like Rockiesfan33 who not only makes original designs, but also gets a great number of them signed by the players he creates cards of. Mmalpedo takes solace in building his 1965 Topps set into an autographed set while serving our country. Druce26 has kept us all updated on his progress in obtaining the members of the 1980 American Olympic Hockey Team. Jerseyman1992, Riggs, 203gunner and others have built and display collections that have earned them TTM Super Collector badges. Gordon24 must send off and receive more fan packs than anyone I know. I would guess that he has more team schedules than the Hall of Fame does.

I have been tempted many times to step away from the autograph though the mail hobby and just get drawn back by the collections of others in the autograph community here. Just when I feel my collection is good and maybe it is time to stop mailing someone will post a success that I have to try to duplicate. One request will lead to another and I am mailing regularly again. SMVintage and his success of the month program definitely will make someone attempt to mail to the biggest stars. The autograph returns that have won the monthly contest are amazing. The prizes have been good, but the entries make the contest worth checking out just to see some amazing memorabilia.

I have been drawn back to the hobby in the last year by getting successes from players like Gary Payton, Shaq and even Peyton Manning! How could a sports fan not take a chance to get legends like these to sign an item for them for the price of two stamps? Thank you again for all the time members take in helping make the TTM Database the best free autograph resource on the internet and for helping each other grow such amazing collections. I know that my collection would never have grown to the size it has without all the help from members here and I hope that myself and others on the staff have helped with your collections as well. Best of luck as baseball starts to wind down and our attention switches to football and hockey signatures. I am looking forward to seeing all your successes and hope your mailboxes will be full!



The Art of the Deal By Kevin O'Connor aka rainman67ko

I am an advisor or moderator on the SCF Disputes Team. I will be writing articles related to the Disputes process, best trading practices, and online trading execution, which is the follow through after the trade is confirmed and completed.

This month I am going to address the topic of fair trading.

What is a fair trade? How does book value (BV) or sale value (SV) a trade? What does trading up or down mean?"

Fair Trade: A trade where both traders get what they wanted and is of relatively equal value. No one should feel like they got taken advantage of. You don't win a trade by alienating a person. You only end up losing a future trading partner. In the end if you feel good about your trade you are inclined to leave positive feedback and trade with that person again.

Book Value: For many trades, book value, or what a value card is listed at, is a good starting point for any negotiations. It places a dollar value on a card. In a trade, if both cards book at \$18 - \$20 dollars, I generally accept this as a fair trade. However, if a person offers a card of \$10 for my \$20 card this is not acceptable and perhaps I would ask for another card in the deal. Trading one card of higher BV for 2 or more cards of lesser BV is an example of trading down. Trading up would be the reverse.

Sale Value: Many collectors and dealers alike can agree that BV is not always an accurate representation of what the card will sell for. With many cards, say in the \$150 - \$300 range, the market will often dictate an actual sale price in the middle to high end of that cards listed BV. If a hobby interest has risen in recent weeks or months the actual sale price may exceed that of the listed value. Dealers and sellers often have to consider other factors that will affect the sale price of a card. These include population or print run of a card, quantity in the market, and recent sales trends.



Best practices: Communicate and negotiate respectfully. You don't want to be low-balled on your cards and winning at the expense of losing a trade partner is not a win for anyone.

Please contact me at SCF with any questions regarding the SCF Disputes process or trading execution and I will try to answer immediately. I may also incorporate ideas into future articles published here in the Sports Card Forum magazine.



Hockey, It's in our DNA
By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888



A few months ago, the whole country breath a sight of relief when it was announced that the Atlanta Thrashers were moving north of the border to Winnipeg. Canadians are serious about their hockey, they live it, breath it and you could almost say that the eat it. The more teams are in the great white north, the better it is for them. While Winnipeg struck gold however, Quebec city is still waiting and while it waits, hockey is still front page news. Whether it be the huge controversy about the new arena being built with public funds without any public consultation or the new exhibition which was put together at Espace 400ème and opened up in early August.

I made my way downtown today to see what all the fuss was about and I must say that I was rather impressed. A lot of ground is covered throughout the exhibition from the time line displaying the evolution of the game itself to the evolution of the equipment, the Canadian teams and sections devoted to both Maurice “the Rocket” Richard and Patrick Roy. For those near to Quebec City, the exhibition is on until the 27th November and it will set you back \$20 to see it during the week while it will cost you \$24 to do exactly the same during the weekend.

I made my way throughout the various sections in an hour and a half but had I been alone, I think I would have taken a closer, longer look. There is definitely enough material there to keep you entertained for at least a couple of hours. The entry fee includes an audio guide which narrates part of the exhibition as you walk through. Of course, this is solely for hockey fans, someone who is not overly interested in the “coolest game on earth” as the NHL would say, would probably consider this a bit of a waste of money.

The exhibition is arranged in a chronological order so you obviously start with the time line depicting the evolution of the game and how it came to be very popular in the country before covering the early days of the NHL (briefly but still) and being told about the Maurice Richard riot in 1955. This section is particularly interesting as it includes archive footage of the riot itself in which you can actually see Clarence Campbell watching the game at the old Forum and being thrown various items by the angry fans. There are of course plenty of picture of Richard as well as some pieces of equipment.

After the Richard section, you get to take a closer look at the evolution of the equipment as a whole, the skates and the sticks. This is quite a visual section as there are plenty of piece of vintage equip





ment on display. Had to take a close look at the stick display, and knew without even reading the sign who the Easton aluminium stick belonged to...The puck section is also worth taking a look at, from horse manure, to potato, wood and plastic, that essential part of the game sure has come a long way!

This being Quebec city, you are then taken to a section devoted to the Canadiens-Nordiques rivalry and a topic which is still a hot one here even after nearly 25 years; whether Alain Côté's goal was good or not. You can watch the highlights or the match on a giant screen up to the end of the second period and you are then taken to a replica of the Habs or the Nordiques locker room depending on your allegiance. Once inside the locker room, you get to see a video of either Jean Perron or Michel Bergeron pumping up their team prior to the third period just like they did back in '87. You then move on to another room



where you are showed THE goal and asked to vote on whether or not it was good. A month into the exhibition, the votes stand at 67% saying it was good and 33% saying it was not. Remember though, the exhibition is held deep in Nordiques' territory so this is hardly a surprising result.



Once you've had your dose of the good old Battle of Quebec, you get to marvel at what is arguably the most fascinating piece of equipment in the game; the goalie mask. On display there are replicas of the mask of Plante, Cheevers, Dryden and Roy to name a few and this section is narrated by Roy himself. Then, as you exit the room featuring the masks, you see a picture which is dear to any Habs fan's heart; Roy's famous wink to Sandstrom in the '93 Stanley Cup final. This marks the start of the section focusing on Roy himself as he accepted to collaborate with the organizers of the exhibition and lent them pieces of his personal collection. As a Roy fanatic, needless to say that I was in heaven. Stunning paintings, a collection of his All-Star Game jerseys, the equipment he wore in his last season with the Colorado Avalanche and finally, an impressive array of the miniature replicas of some of the trophies he won during his amazing career...It's safe to say that this is the area I spent the most time in.



Finally, you are taken to a recreation of 4 typical Quebec living rooms through the ages. One from the 40s where the room revolves around the radio as that's how people enjoyed the game back then. The second one is set in the 70s and in that one, an extract of a Canada-USSR game is showed on a loop on the television, of course, you get to see Paul Henderson's goal. The third room is a rather more modern one which only takes you back to 2010 during the Vancouver Olympics and yes, of course you get to relive Sid the kid's golden goal which notched the ultimate prize for Canada. Unsurprisingly, you regularly hear cheers in that section of the exhibition. The last living room showcases part of a Toronto-Montreal game in 3D, I admit, that is breathtaking...I'm afraid I will soon have to shell out on a 3D TV even if it is just for hockey watching purposes!

Overall, I would recommend the exhibition to any hockey fan who is in the Quebec city area. You will definitely learn a few things and get a chance to admire things that will be worth your while! It may be a while before Quebec gets a hockey team back (yes I am optimistic) but in the meantime, there are still plenty of hockey related things to do around these parts, you just have to know where to go!





A Lesson to Pass Along
By Pedro Maicazo aka metsmagic18

One of my earliest memories of getting autographs was in San Diego in the summer of 2009, when I first got serious about collecting. The exact date was August 29th I believe...I was a visitor in San Diego which by all means is a very nice city. It has some fun features including a sandbox in right field that is open early on game days, and non-game days. Fan-friendly, and maybe if you're lucky you'll see a good game. Nonetheless, it's a fun place to be.

At that time, San Diego was dead, they were out of the hunt, down Jake Peavy, and had minor leaguers starting (similar to now). Pre-game, I caught a home run ball from Kyle Blanks, and had a nice conversation with Heath Bell about San Diego. Some other guys were saying that it's a great city, but they have so little fan support that's it's hard to stay positive in these rough times (referring to their team's state). I thought about Adrian Gonzalez, and how he should be pulling the team together. After venturing down to my seat right behind the dugout, a kid looked at me and said, out of the blue, "Do you want Adrian Gonzalez's autograph?" I looked at him incredulously and responded, "We all want things, kid. It's a matter of what we actually get." (I was trying to sound like a wise old man, pretty lame huh?) In those days, Adrian Gonzalez was the Elvis of San Diego. He never signed EVER. It was like Albert Pujols signing. I also noticed that this kid was the only one trying for autographs. The Padres dugout was like a ghost town.

"No, really! I bet he'll sign today. He hasn't signed one for me this whole season though..." Out of respect, I said good luck, but what was going through my head was; "Is this kid nuts? He thinks Gonzalez is going to sign for a random guy at a crowded Padres game!" I didn't have anything to do but to keep this kid company and watch the end of batting practice so I sat with him. He proceeded to tell me about how much he loves Adrian, Adrian this, Adrian that, blah, blah, blah. As batting practice concluded, and it didn't appear A-Gonz would be doing any signing, he sprinted for the dugout. He had hit a truckload of home runs and had the fans on their toes even though it was only batting practice.

The kid yelled out:

"Could you sign a few Adrian? It would mean a lot!"

Adrian squinted through the afternoon sun, and nodded. He placed his bat down and signed a baseball for me and the kid. When the kid yelled thanks, he replied that he doesn't sign a lot because he always gets crowded. Immediately after, every kid, man, woman, dog, (maybe not) came rushing to Adrian with requests. He quickly sprinted back into the dugout. They all stared at me wide-eyed and all heck broke loose. People screamed and shouted, whined and pouted, as their hero passed them up for 2 random Joes in the crowd who ASKED.



“Could you give that to my son? He’s a big fan.”

“I’m Adrian’s cousin! He wants me to have that baseball!”

The kid stared at his baseball beaming and looked back up at me: “Positive attitude sir. That’s all it takes. You have to believe in yourself and keep your confidence high. Anything can be achieved with hard work and a good effort. Don’t give up.”

I thanked him, nodded, and went back to my seat, having learned an important lesson about positivity. I NEVER give up on an autograph. No matter how tough. Whenever I miss out on someone good, I see the kid smiling and giving me a positive lecture. Johan Santana took time, Jimmy Rollins took time, Pudge Rodriguez took time. Effort, my friends is the key to autographs, “You miss 100 percent of the shots you don’t take.” as Wayne Gretzky once said. I take the shots, sometimes I hit and sometimes I miss, but you don’t know until you try.





The Problems with Baseball
By Andrew Hoyer aka Andrewhoya



Disclaimer: Some of my views may seem crazy and I guarantee I will have views that you do not agree with. We all have opinions on topics. I will respect your opinion and ask that you do the same in return.

I love baseball. Watching, playing, coaching, cards, anything that has the word “baseball” in it. However, there are countless problems, whether small or large, that burden the game. For the sake of time, I am not going to go into every problem that I have with the MLB. But I may write a Volume 2...

1. The Designated Hitter

Possibly the worst rule in baseball is the designated hitter rule. I am glad that it is only in the AL, however it

would be much better if they removed it. I recently started a thread about this on the forum, and the poll on whether to keep it or not was pretty much even. Then came the perfect post by Stl_Cardinals_Fan: “You guys are missing the simplest point of all. For those of you defending the DH, do you believe the NL should adopt it?”

The simple fact is, for those who want to keep it as it is...what makes you think that your AL pitchers deserve to be exempt from batting while NL pitchers have to do it? It’s quite simple. For those who want to leave it the way it is, answer that. What makes your pitchers so much better than the NL pitchers that they shouldn’t have to swing the bat like EVERYONE ELSE on the team.

I realize that if the DH goes away some guys who have no talent on the field (Ortiz comes to mind) but can still swing would be out of a job, but honestly if you can’t field the ball you shouldn’t be on the team. Every baseball player should be capable of doing basic baseball fundamentals:

- Field the ball. If you can’t field the ball, you shouldn’t be on the team. There’s a reason players who make 30 errors a season don’t stick around long – especially in the NL – if you can’t defend, you don’t play. Baseball, as has been said, is offense and defense and you have to be able to contribute to both.



There's no "designated thrower" who only goes out to play defense and then sits when it's his turn in the lineup. Everyone has to do everything. Though I suppose AL pitchers are sorta like "DTs" in that sense but they aren't just put on the field to defend...

- Run. You have to be able to run. This goes along with fielding the ball. To whoever said pitchers aren't supposed to run...are they supposed to stand on the mound and make no move to the ball? What about to cover first? Or back up home on a wild pitch? If the pitcher is capable of running to and from then he can run on the base paths (assuming he even gets a hit).

- Hitting. Again, everyone has to do it, so why not the pitcher too? There are many pitchers who are very good hitters: Zambrano, Wainwright, Owings, Marquis, just to name a few. Again, you don't pay someone just to field a ball, so why pay someone just to try and hit. Pitchers are quite capable hitters and many are even turned into slugging position players (Jack Clark and Rick Ankiel both come to mind) so it's obvious that the notion "pitchers aren't born to hit" is wrong...

For those of you arguing "oh well, it's too dangerous to put a pitcher in the path of a ball where he might get hurt and wreck his career." Guess what, pitchers have the same odds of being hit as any other player on the team, and any other player's career on the team is just as important. Are you saying Albert Pujols or A-Rod's careers are less important than say Chris Carpenter or Cliff Lee because they don't pitch? I think you'd lose the argument on that one...

And everyone seems to be forgetting that the DH wasn't even invented until 1973...it seems to me that all the great pitchers (Bob Gibson, Hoyt Wilhelm, Dizzy Dean, Babe Ruth, etc...) had no problems hitting for themselves. They also had no trouble going the distance. Pitchers nowadays are so soft that people feel they need to be protected with "pitch counts" and "designated hitters"...why I guarantee you if you tried to take Bob Gibson out after he hit say 90 pitches he'd push you back into the dugout...and I guarantee you if you had brought up the notion back in the 50s to let the pitchers avoid hitting, you'd have been laughed at.

It's simple. Everyone on the team is held to the same rules of conduct because they're all playing the same game...they should have to hit the ball just like the rest of their teammates."

Wow. You can't argue anything there. In fact, a previous member who posted who was in favor of the DH replied with "...great points in your post and hard to argue with." One of the main problems that people had with the NL is boredom of seeing a sacrifice be laid down by pitchers. It's part of the game. Even WITH the DH, bunts are laid down. Pitchers aren't the only ones to bunt. Bunts are strategy, just like double switches, hit-and-runs, and more. Are those boring, too? People were also worried about pitchers getting hurt batting or running. Stl_Cardinals_Fan laid down everything about running. As for batting, if you aren't fit enough to swing a bat, you shouldn't be pitching. Anyways, pitchers get hurt more on the mound than batting (http://mlb.mlb.com/video/play.jsp?content_id=18159983)



Pitchers should have to hit. It needs to be part of the game.

2. Salaries

Salaries are a killer in my mind. Do they really need to be making \$20 million a year? Not at all. They don't even have one of the toughest jobs on earth and yet they make more in one year than most Americans do in a lifetime. Granted, many players donate a chunk of their salary, but many do not. I have this problem with every sport, not just baseball. What is the point of having millions of dollars just sitting in the bank? You don't need it.

3. Instant Replay

Replay is needed for foul balls and safe/out calls. It just is. People complain all of the time about missed calls, yet they complain about the threat of replay in baseball. Kind of contradicting yourself, aren't you? For those who say it will make the game too long, no it won't. There are plenty of ways to reduce game time, whether it is getting the players to hustle on/off the field (like they do in little league), not adjusting batting gloves every two seconds, glaring at the batter before you pitch it (Jonathan Papelbon), and relievers not throwing 10 pitches on the mound after they already warmed up in the bullpen. Fans want the correct calls made- so why not add what every other sport already has?

4. Suspensions that Fit the Crime

Suspensions are all over the place, and some players seem like they are always let off easy. A player gets the same suspension for touching an umpire as a guy who starts a brawl? Come on now. It seems like the suspension workers pick a number out of a hat, and that is the number of games a player will get suspended for. Which brings me to another problem.

5. Appeals

Really? This actually may be the worst rule, close to the DH. Appeals need to go. Now. You did the crime, do the time. I hate how players automatically appeal and get a game or two off. Just accept the darn penalty!! You deserved it! Well, most of them at least.

6. Eliminate divisions, expand playoffs

I hate divisions. There really is no point of them. If 3 teams in a division are better than a division leader, why should one be shorted? Also, the more teams in the playoffs=more fans that are happy, as well as more money for the teams and MLB.

7. Egos

Enough said. Kids look up to these guys.

I could go on and on, but these are the seven major problems in baseball.



Tracy Hackler - A Man Who Is Changing the Hobby

By Michael Barton aka MonticelloCards



Without going into too much personal detail, I have had a very interesting life in my 35 years on this earth. Through the good and bad, I have persevered and kept a smile on my face even during the hardest of times. I am a firm believer in karma, and this week Tracy Hackler earned my admiration and respect unlike anyone before in this hobby. And he earned uber karma in the process.

Oftentimes, I find collectors truly need to put the shoe on the other foot and look at what actually goes into the thoughts, concepts and eventual production of each and every single trading card release. It takes a lot of manpower, and even more time and effort, to create just one single product. In regards to customer service, patience and kindness (I have always found) go a much longer way than complaining. But I have never in all my years in the hobby met someone quite like Mr. Hackler, whom I have had two conversations with my entire life. Those two conversations helped remind me why I love and adore

this hobby so very much.

I had been patiently waiting a number of months ago for two redemption cards from Panini, so I sent a quick message via twitter to Mr. Hackler, and he literally responded within ten minutes. After a few direct messages and an email or two, he assured me the problem would be taken care of immediately. At the time, and relying on my prior experience with card companies, I must say that I was sceptical. The next morning, I was surprised to not only see that Mr. Hackler had taken care of the redemptions, but had also replaced each one with what I considered to be an upgrade. Three days later, these cards arrived and I was very satisfied with the way things were handled. I have been a Panini supporter ever since. But that is nothing compared to what happened today.

I have been going through one of the more difficult periods of my life recently. I struggle with things that most take for granted, but that is how my hand was dealt, and I play it as best I can. So after Panini's Guess The Autograph Contest on their blog – The Knight's Lance – I had sent Mr. Hackler a tweet about how I have been out of work for over two years and dealing with some serious personal issues during this time of my life. After talking further, he asked me for my address. I figured a Panini calendar or sample cards were on their way, and let me tell you, I have learned to appreciate the small things in life.



I am sitting in my apartment this morning and there is a knock at my door. It was FedEx with a delivery for me! I saw who it was from and I opened it as if I were enjoying my first Christmas. What I saw inside the box simply blew me away:



It was the first hobby box I had seen in months, much less had the opportunity to open! (Picture Ralph from A Christmas Story getting his Red Ryder BB Gun and you will get the idea.) I tore into this box with abandon, and for a little while, nothing else mattered. Pack after pack was as enjoyable as it was when I first got into this hobby a few decades ago. I posted a quick product review on my blog as soon as I was done opening the box, but when I saw SCF's writing contest, I knew that I had to write this article.

So what is wrong with customer service? Each company has different issues for sure. But Tracy Hackler at Panini America is one of the good guys in this hobby, and I wish we all had his passion for not only trading cards, but for humanity as well. Thank you for the 100th time today, Mr. Hackler – the kindness of your simple gesture will not be forgotten by this collector.



Should the Rules Governing Rookie Cards Be Changed?

By Richard McAdam aka RGM81

It has happened to all of us, either directly or vicariously through watching someone break a box of the latest product. We have all experienced at one time or another that terrible feeling that creeps up the back of your head when you come to the realization that you have pulled a bunch of dud rookies from your break. While not every box break has an A-level pull like a Steven Stamkos or a Taylor Hall, there are just too many breaks where people pull nothing higher than a B-minus rookie and all too often that may be a generous grade. We can argue that it is the luck of the draw, we all know what we are getting into with a box break, all those other cliché statements, but really the problem boils down to there simply being too many rookie cards in every product.

The reason this issue exists is due to the lax regulations enforced by the NHL and the Players Association. Currently, all that is required for a player to receive a rookie card is for him to play in a single NHL game; for goaltenders, they simply have to dress and sit on the end of the bench as the back-up goalie. A player can play one shift of an NHL regular season game, and he is eligible to be inserted into every single product for that year's card releases. This rule is absurd.

Envision a scenario, if you will, whereby a player plays in 3 NHL games in late 2009 because he is an injury call-up and the team needs to have a warm body to fill a spot on the fourth line. Over the course of the three games he logs a combined 13:10 TOI, is -2, and has 0 shots on goal, and is soon returned to his AHL team where he remains for the rest of the year. He spends the entire 2010-11 campaign with the AHL team. That player had 10 rookie cards in 2010-11 products, starting as early as Victory but going as late as Ultimate Collection, and along the way his SP Authentic RC was an autographed card and he also had the auto-patch parallel. At the end of the season, the club does not renew his contract and he finds work with another team.

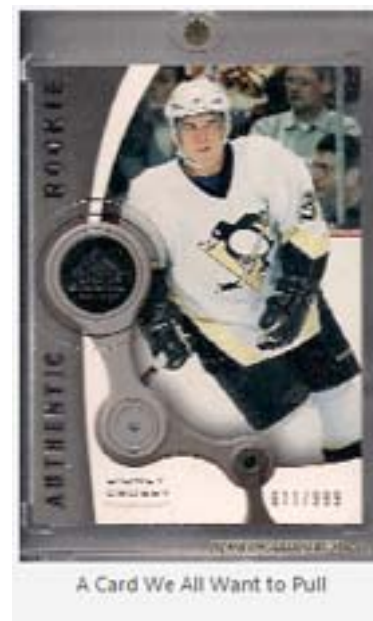
The above scenario is not hypothetical; it is based off of the experience of a prospect who is projected to have a potential ceiling of being a third-line NHL player. This prospect played for a very popular team which also had an incredibly popular rookie in 2010-11 products. How many collectors' eyes lit up seeing that logo thinking, "It's the big one!" only to see a very different face and name that elicits a "Who?" response? I am not trying to denigrate the player or show him any disrespect, but the very notion of including a player such as this in mid-to-high end products is borderline insulting to collectors. A case hit of a rookie player should be considered desirable by collectors, a card that will fetch a





decent return should it be put on the owner's tradelist. While there is pretty much a market for every player on every team these days, sometimes you have to look really, really, REALLY hard to find someone to take a card such as the one described above off your hands.

The hockey card hobby market is driven by rookie cards. Every autumn, we gear up in the hopes of pulling Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, John Tavares, and Taylor Hall calibre RCs. They are the primary sellers of nearly every product, whether it's a beautiful Young Guns, a superb Crown Royale Rookie Silhouette, or of course the supreme gem: the /99 hard-signed auto patch in The Cup or Dominion. Sure the current and retired superstars of the NHL and their signatures and game-worn memorabilia help sell some extra product, but the big hunt is for the rookie cards. There is a very good reason that 2005-06 products are still so highly priced and so fun to break, and it is all due to the possibility of hitting the Crosby, Ovechkin, Lundqvist, (or in this weirdo author's case, Gorges) RC that totally justifies the higher price of the boxes.



I have no major issue with the current milieu in which the rookie card reigns supreme. People want them, and that is just fine. I got back into the hobby at a time when the hottest card on the market was any number of Carey Price rookie cards. When a player can burst on the scene at a young age and take over the NHL, it is great for the marketing of the game to the people. Kids grow up emulating these fellow youngsters and it helps them get into the hobby. The game and the hobby benefit from having exciting, young, marketable, and personable talents.

What I do have an issue with is how over-the-top simple it becomes to be licensed to print a rookie card. The scenario illustrated above exemplifies my issue with rookie cards. Too many players that will likely never establish themselves as full-time NHL players get massive amounts of cardboard dedicated to them. Another case in point: I recently broke a box of 2007-08 Upper Deck Series 2. The product contains 6 Young Guns, many of which are mid-season call-ups with the occasional top gun held over from Series 1, and one Rookie Materials jersey card. Three of these 7 hits are of full-time NHL players, one just became a full-timer in 2010-11, and the other three? One is looking to be a career AHL'er, one played 16 games before bolting to the KHL, and the other (who really has haunted many of my breaks) played 11 NHL games and is now in the Finnish League. It could certainly have been worse, as it could have been a much more high-end product that only has 1 RC in it and said RC could have been one of those three guys.

When the rule was made that a player had to suit up for an NHL game, it did many people a big favour. Previously, there was nothing governing RC designations, so you would see guys that had played for the Latvians at the World Junior Championship getting cards made and being considered rookie cards. It is a true anomaly to see a Jarome Iginla RC being from 1994-95 even though he did not play an NHL



regular season game until 1996-97. The market is better off today for that change having been made. Now, to further aid the market, it is time to go to another step for instituting a minimum games played guideline for rookie cards to be made by Upper Deck and Panini.

This is the difficult question: What should that number be? Should it be set at the same number that the NHL allows clubs to use young players before sending them back to their junior club without using a year of contract eligibility? Nine games seems a reasonable number. If Ryan Nugent-Hopkins gets a nine-game tryout in 2011-12 and is then returned to the Red Deer Rebels, would it necessarily be a bad thing to hold off on issuing the usual torrent of rookie cards until 2012-13? If he will not be seen for the remainder of the 11-12 campaign, how much sense does it truly make to have him as the featured rookie card for an entire year? In my view, this change would benefit the hobby to a great extent.

There are, of course, problems associated with making a change from one game to nine games as the rule for making rookie cards. Early season releases would have to be held back while the manufacturers wait to see whether their projected checklists can move forward to production. Instead of being able to release the fresh Young Guns in early November, Upper Deck would have to wait until later in the month, or perhaps even into early December to wait and see which rookie accrued the nine games required. The disruption could also affect planning for the high-end releases that come out at the end of the hobby season. We know that a product such as The Cup is in the early development stage within weeks of the season starting. New rules would present new challenges and logistical issues for the companies that compel them to alter their planning involving rookie cards.

This new process could have a great benefit in that it would force the companies to devote more time to promoting the veteran stars of the game and their cards. Currently there are products where rookie cards are not the main focus; what if they were dropped entirely from some sets? If you could no longer get a non-auto'd, non-memorabilia rookie card in SP Game Used, but the actual game-used memorabilia hit content was upped substantially, would that not make for a better product? I have often written about the potential for a company to make a "super set" that combines the best elements of one or more discontinued products into a single release. SPGU, often maligned by collectors for its price point and lack of ingenuity in some areas, could be a major beneficiary of such a program.

To conclude, it is my belief that we do not need to have 22 rookie cards on the market, nor do I find it a key selling point for a product to boast 200 rookie cards on the checklist. If the companies had new rules in place that restricted the opportunity to make rookie cards, we collectors would end up with stronger checklists that give us more bang for our buck. There will always be demand for RC's, but having fewer of them out there—in terms of both the number of players and the number of sets that produce rookies—will benefit the hobby by making those RC's that continue to be made more desirable. Limit the supply, and demand will increase accordingly. In a time where some collectors are being turned off by the glut on the market of certain cards, changing the rules may be a way to reel those collectors back into the fold.