

COLLECTORS CORNER

May 2013

Where will the
madness end?



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Let the Games Begin...and May the Odds Be Forever in your Favor

By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888

There is, that magical time of the year where all fans, well, not all fans just the fans of the 16 teams who were invited to the big spring dance, can hope for the best. They can hope to get that elated feeling you get when your team gets to raise Lord Stanley's cup as the whole building and country cheers...There is still a long way to go though, to raise the cup, you need 16 wins and as I write this a few of them have 2, some have 1 and an unlucky one has yet to notch a single win.

What has retained my attention so far though is the unfortunate incident in the first game of the Montreal Canadiens vs. Ottawa Senators series. On what was a controversial play, a Sens' player, Eric Gryba, check Lars Eller. Eller's head received some of the impact and he was out cold as he fell to the ice face first. Result? A concussion, a broken nose and a few lost teeth. It's safe to say that Eller will not see action for quite a while. As soon as the hit occurred, analysts from left, right and centre started analyzing the hit and most of them found that it was a clean hit. Nevertheless, when the player safety department examined the play, they found that the head was the main point of contact and that the hit was indeed an illegal hit to the head. We can debate all we want about whether the hit was legal or not but the fact remains, the



league decided to sanction it. Perhaps they did sanction more the result than the actual act but it's time for the players to realize what kind of danger they are exposed to when they ply their trade and to smarten up about it...I for one am starting to think that perhaps players ought to have to wear a full facial protector to play...With one of this on, Crosby's jaw doesn't get broken by Orpik's shot and Eller's injury wouldn't be as bad...

All that being said, I hope we won't see any more injuries of this kind in the playoffs, it is rather hard to see one of your favourite players lying there, lifeless on the ice. So now, it's time to get back to the game we love and its spectacular plays, shots and saves. Good luck to your favourite team everyone and I hope you enjoy this month's edition of Collectors Corner.





Where Will the Madness End? By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888



While we are all absorbed by what is going on the ice in the NHL, the game we love is still being played at many levels in many countries. It seems to me that this year, there have been more and more tragic accidents. About a month and a half ago, a professional player in Switzerland, Ronny Keller, was checked from behind and ended up head first in the boards. The result? He has been permanently paralyzed and will never walk again...

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

About 3 weeks later, Dmitri Uchaykin, a professional player in Kazhakstan, took a check to the head and never recovered consciousness before dying in hospital the next morning. According to the articles I've read about it, the hit was so violent that he suffered a brain haemorrhage. Understandably, there is no footage of the incident available on youtube, but here is he in one of his lasts shifts on the ice.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lyyTjmnvig>



Nothing quite that dramatic has happened in the NHL so far, however, you will all remember that Steve Moore retired after being sucker punched by Tood Bertuzzi back in 2004:

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

Most people will also remember how Marty McSorley's career came to an end after he plain and simply assaulted Donald Brashear, hitting him on the head with his stick:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvDk7jtNNhc>





And years later, how Zdeno Chara hit Max Pacioretty and in the process crushed his head in what can only be described as the “turnbuckle”:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QPHHd6jmMo>

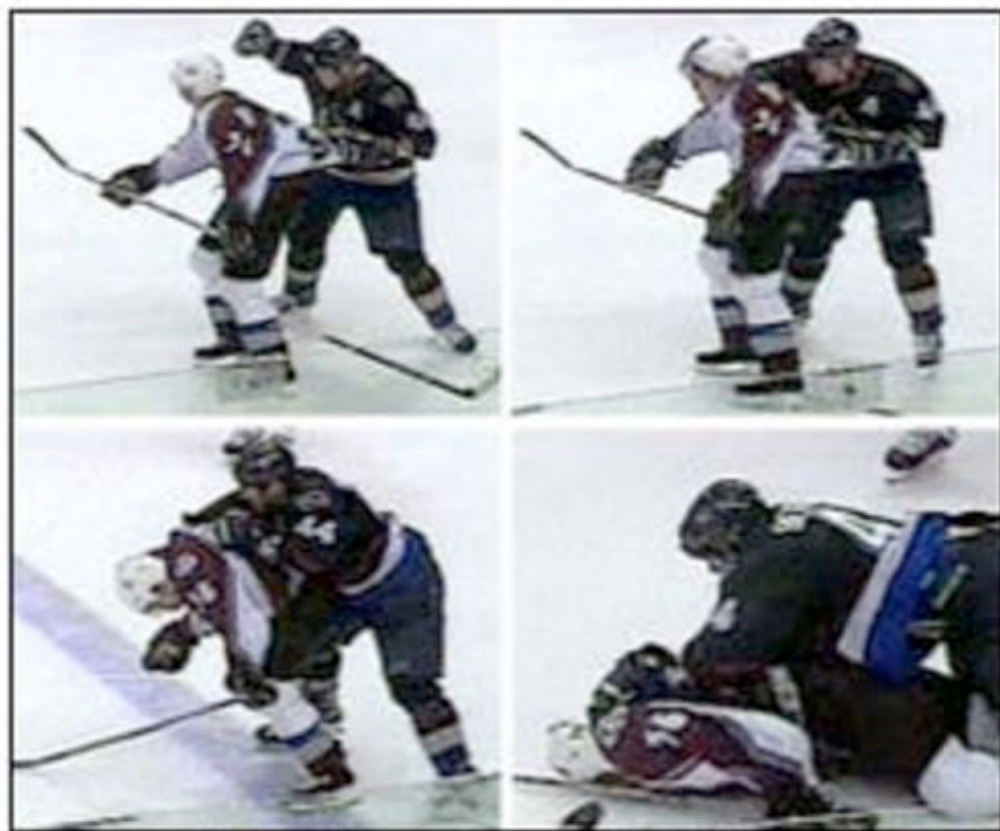
If you ask any Montreal Canadiens' fan about that hit, they will tell you that Chara did mean to put Paccioretty out at that point. His team was down 0-4, he had an history with Paccioretty and a professional hockey player has enough awareness to know where he is on the ice at all time and that means knowing when you are in a dangerous area of the ice.

When incidents of this kind occur, I am left wondering when the madness will end. Don't get me wrong, I love hockey and physical play is a part of the sport but where should the line be drawn? Where does physical play end and madness start? What's the difference between standing-up for a teammate who received a questionable hit in the past and assaulting the player who hit him a while back? This also gets me to question whether or not everything is being done to ensure the safety of the players. Are Brendan Shannahan and his discipline squad enough to “scare the players” and set them straight? Is the threat of missing some games and therefore losing a part of the salaries enough to get them to consider the possible consequences of their actions?

Perhaps, I think the way I do because I work in the legal field, but I strongly believe that more needs to be done before things get even worse than they are now and that could happen, it could happen soon... To me, while I am aware that any person who engages in a sporting activity is well aware of its risks and that they therefore accept those inherent risks, those risks include things like being checked and falling awkwardly, twisting your leg and therefore injuring your knee or receiving a puck in the face after a shot is deflected (much like Sidney Crosby's latest injury: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jj8AbjJqcCM>) or even dive to block a shot and getting the puck in the face (juste like Nate Thompson last night when he attempted to block a Mike Green shot: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QPHHd6jmMo>). These things, are accident so one shouldn't be held responsible for those actions but when a player purely and simply “loses” it and attacks another player, I believe that they should be held accountable for their actions.



There are many who will tell me that it is easier said than done and that it could be problematic to demonstrate intent in those cases. To those, I say that the criminal code is filled with sections that are not of strict responsibility and which require a certain level of mens rea (in other words, the intention to commit the act). Is it always easy to prove it? No of



course not, but that's what the judicial system is about. For this to apply to the NHL however, I do not believe that local police force could be used as there will always be talks of bias. No, I believe the NHL should establish a tribunal and have its own "police force" to enquire and team of lawyers to take the decision to prosecute or not based on the findings. Of course, this is not possible as the NHL does not have the power to apply the rule of law itself. But what if the NHL itself, when seeing such disgraceful act was to refer the case to the police force of either Canada or the USA? At the federal level not provincial or state level to avoid bias claims? I say this because of the reaction when Montreal's police force was looking into the Chara hit on Pacioretty. There were plenty of people claiming that

Montreal's police was attempting to help its Montreal Canadiens in that way.

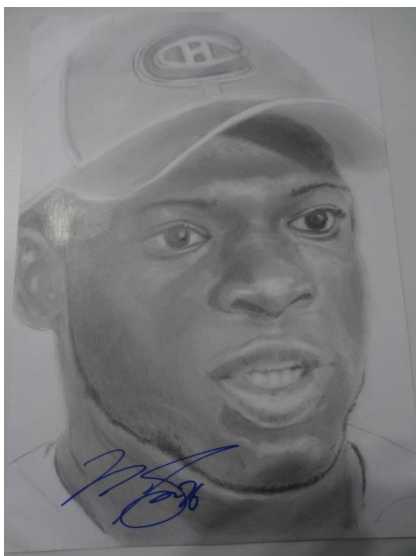
I know that a vast majority of fans will say that what happens on the ice should stay on the ice but to me, it seems like it's time to take some of those actions to the court room before it is too late... Although in the case of Ronny Keller and Dmitri Uchaykin, it is already too late...How many more victims will there be before some serious steps are taken to fix the severe condition which is currently afflicting our sport? You may not agree with me that this is the way to go but I'd be interested in knowing what you think would be the way to address the issue, feel free to write your own article on the topic...





Habathon

By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888, Photos by Sarah Thorpe



A year ago, you would have been hard pressed to find a single Montreal Canadiens fan who was proudly displaying his colors. The franchise was in turmoil and the once glorious Canadiens were at the very bottom of the eastern conference. Fast forward to the 2012-2013 season (well 2013 only really), and the team seems to have regained its power and its pride. With Marc Bergevin at the helm, the Habs changed drastically in the months leading up to January, 19th when the campaign final got on its way. In the summer, Bergevin signed Brandon Prust, who has been nothing short of the heart and soul of the team this year, Colby Armstrong who is by no means a star player but does the job Michel Therrien asks of him and he also inked Francis Bouillon who came back to Montreal for a second tour of duty. The draft also saw the Montreal franchise draft 3rd (its highest selection rank in quite some time) and select Alex Galchenyuk. There once was a time when the Canadiens took things slow with their young players but this is not the case anymore.

As training camp opened and the days went on, it became obvious that both Galchenyuk and Brendon Gallagher would start the season with the Habs. Last but not least, on the opening day of training camp, Bergevin also got rid of some dead wood so to speak when he told Scott Gomez that he would be bought out in the offseason and that until then, he was to stay home. These were all signs of great things in the making but optimistic fans were still a rarity. As the Habs started the season and in the process, started to win some games, the mood changed dramatically in Habs land and the fans could once again believe...



And so the table

was set for a fantastic season and for some serious cases of Habs fever. Enter Hockey Helps... Hockey Helps organizes many autograph signing events in the aim of helping charitable causes and on April 7th, 2013, it held such an event in Place Vertu, ville Saint-Laurent, Montreal. Wessley Perisa, the founder of Hockey Helps, teamed up with the Montreal Canadiens' Children Foundation to organize the event and it was therefore decided that a large part of the proceeds would go to the foundation. The event was clearly designed in the hope of satisfying fans of all ages. Not only were there players of the current edition of the Canadiens but the morning session featured some of the legends of the past. Guy Lafleur, Henri



Richard, Réjean Houle, Yvon Lambert, Yvan Cournoyer and Bobby Rousseau were all on hand to please fans. The way the event had been set up was that the general admission ticket entitled you to receive a picture of the old Montreal Forum which each of the legends would autograph for you. If you wanted to have your own item autographed, you had to buy another ticket (\$20 – to get a personal item signed by two legends) coupled with the general admission ticket price (\$24) it was quite an affordable endeavor. As expected, the event was rather popular and I was glad I left Quebec city at 7.30 AM to make my way to Ville Saint-Laurent. I got to Place Vertu at 10.00 AM and started queuing to buy my tickets. I was by no means the first one on site though and I had to wait in line for nearly an hour before I finally had my tickets in hand and I was able to

make my way to the signing area. Of course, I had purchased the tickets for the afternoon session at the same time (\$31 for a picture of the inside of the Bell Centre which all the current players would sign and a further \$30 to get a personal item signed by 2 players were the rates). As I wanted to get Carey Price and P.K. Subban to sign personal items, I had to spend an extra \$60 as they were paired up with Travis Moen and Brandon Prust respectively.

The legends signing session started promptly at 11.00 AM and I only had to queue for about 45 minutes before I had my picture of the old Forum signed by all the legends. The current players signing was slotted to begin at 3.00 PM but I wisely decided to quickly go for a bite and come back to start lining-up. I was not to regret my decision as it meant that I was quite near the start of the line and that I would be able to start the drive back to Quebec earlier than expected. However, as there were also VIP packages sold on site, it meant that all VIPs could get their autographs and pictures with the players before the people who had bought general admission tickets. Thankfully, the organizers decided that the picture sessions could be done first and they did that between 2.00 PM and 3.00 PM. The players were all on site in time for that, well, aside from P.K. Subban who turned up at about 4.00 PM. As a result, he was not featured in many of the pictures and plenty of people had left by the time he arrived. Personally, I had already been to the signing area prior to his arrival and I was rather disappointed not to get my Subban portrait signed. However, after I was done getting all of the other players' autographs, I went over to Wessley Perisa to see if he knew whether or not Subban would be showing up. He informed me that Subban was indeed on his way and that he would shortly be there while promising that if I hung around, he would take my item to number 76 and get him to sign it. About 10 minutes later, Subban did show up and Perisa kept his word to me.

While I cannot help but be pleased with my day and congratulate the organizers on a very well set-up and ran event, I feel it must be said that Subban's lateness was unacceptable. I do admire his skills and talent as a





hockey player but this was a complete lack of both professionalism and respect for his fans. There were easily 2,500 people on site waiting for autographs on that day and most of them did want a P.K. Subban autograph. Worst still, many of those who showed up early to be absolutely certain that they would get their autographs before the players had to leave and were therefore at the front of the queue left without the young defenseman's autograph. When you think about it, this also means that Subban wasted his teammates' time as well as they were all there on time but were made to wait for a while before the organizers decided to start the event if Subban had yet to arrive.

I strongly believe that Subban would do well to realize that while the fans do love him, the tide can turn quickly in Montreal. While he stayed home at the start

of the season because of stonewalled contract talks, there were numerous hockey enthusiasts who were starting to say that he could stay home all he wanted since their team was winning anyway and they felt he wasn't needed. Of course, they were made to eat their words since as Subban is the most dominating defenseman on the Habs blue line this year and has been since his return but I cannot believe that he was not made aware of the fanbase's annoyance. If he was, turning up late at an event of this importance in the fans' eyes is a very poor way to make amends. I should however state that on his arrival, part of the crowd did start chanting:

"P.K., P.K., P.K." but there were also those like me who were done queuing up and who realized that they had missed their chance to meet the Canadiens star D-man. I am grateful to M. Perisa for taking my item to Subban and making him sign it but considering that this was a drawing which a friend of mine had made, I would have loved to see what Subban would have had to say about it and be able to report his comments to my friend. I guess it just wasn't meant to be though...

Enough negativity already, all in all, it was a great event and most fans left with a more than respectable bounty which included signed jerseys, pucks, photos, sticks, cups...you name it, it was probably signed on Sunday. As for me, I drove back with my autographed pictures of both the Forum and the Bell Centre, a flag bearing Desharnais and Moen's graphs, a centennial jersey autographed by Carey Price, a regular Habs jersey signed by Prust and of course, my signed P.K. Subban portrait.

As a hockey collector, I must admit that the whole day felt like a pure treat and that I am very grateful to the Hockey Helps people for giving me the chance to improve my collection for such a modest price. If you are a Habs fan in the Montreal area and you failed to attend this one, I sure hope they will repeat the event next year for your benefit!





Why I Still Collect

By Richard Perkins aka papaperk

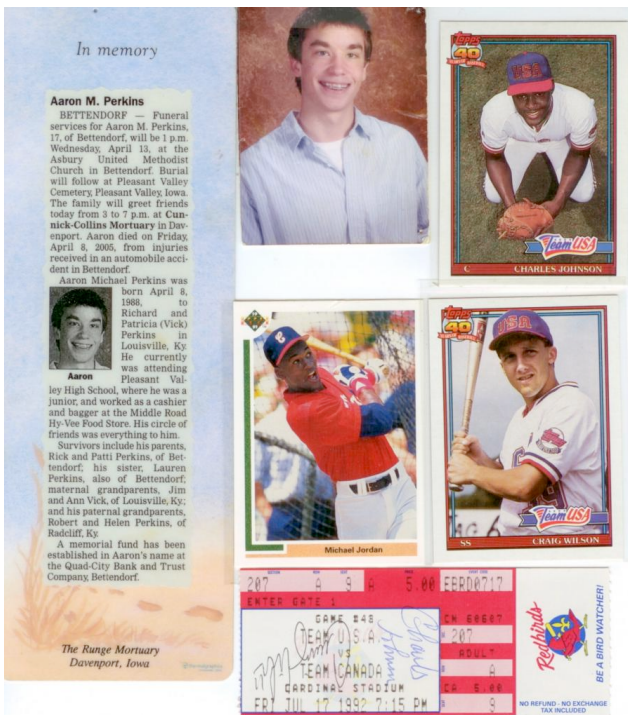
My son was four years old, my daughter was 6, when we attended our first baseball game as a dad out with his kids. Team USA was playing Canada in Louisville KY. We had a blast. Team USA won and I would like to think it was all because of our chants of “We want a pitcher, not a belly itcher”, “Hey batter, batter, batter, ssswwiinngg!” and “Hey Ump, clean your glasses”!

After the game fans swarmed the wall looking for a chance to get an autograph from the next big phenom. My kids and I went down by the third base line near the backstop and we watched arm after arm, loaded with cards, balls, and sharpies begging for someone to sign something, anything! We didn’t have any item for the players to sign so we just watched the ball players making their way past the out stretched hands. I will never forget what happened next.

Charles Johnson, the catcher, came over to us and said to my son: “What’s up little dude?” He didn’t know what to say except “We won and I saw fireworks!” Charles smiled and asked if we had anything we would like for him to sign. All we had were the ticket stubs and no, we didn’t have a pen. Without batting an eye he reached over next to us and grabbed a pen from some anonymous hand and signed my son’s ticket stub and then my daughter’s. Then he handed the pen over to Craig Wilson so he could sign them also. Wilson said some kind words about how cute the kids were and he hoped we had a good time. We sure did!

The next day, I went to a local card shop and bought cards with both players in their Team USA uniforms and placed the stubs and cards in protective plastic holders. That started my collecting adventures with my son.

I had collected baseball cards in the late 60s and early 70s when I was a kid but at that time, I was really only interested in the gum and how many cards I could clothes pin to my bike frame so that the cards would make a cool noise as I rode around the neighborhood. Yes, players like Joe Morgan and Tom Seaver had a short life expectancy when it was time to ride like the wind.



Collecting with my son was different. I knew that one day any cards we collected would be his along with the memories that came with them. His first big “special” card was a Michael Jordan insert from ’91 Upper Deck baseball (still have the complete set and card). It was nice to spend time with him busting packs, arranging sets and just getting excited about getting any cool rookie card. Plus as a father I learned that it helped him learn his numbers. Doesn’t hurt to have a hobby that can be, if only a little, educational.

Years would pass and our collection grew, stashed away in his closet, on the floor, in the bathroom, under his dresser. We had fun. After he discovered girls our collecting slowed but we still managed to find some time for it. A pack here and there. Still getting excited at pulling that special rookie we needed or common card to finish off a set.

This past Christmas I gave away almost every sports card,



autographed baseball, Pokemon card, except for a few, to great nephews and kids of friends and co-workers. Still have the ticket stub autos, Michael Jordan insert, and a couple of sets we put together. Wanted to give the rest a new purpose and a new home.

My son's obituary hangs just above the computer so that every time I turn it on and log in it helps me to keep my perspective. He was killed by a drunk driver on the night of his 17th birthday. I quit collecting because it just wasn't important to me and I didn't have my "collecting buddy" to enjoy it with. Hopefully his cards will bring a smile to someone who would look at them, read them, trade them, have fun with them.

"Perspective" was a word I saw in one of the first posts I read after joining SCF. Hit me like a ton of bricks.

Changed my perspective. Got bitten by the collecting bug again a couple of months back but decided to just do it for fun.

Maybe one day my daughter will bless us with a grandchild and I can give them the new cards I have. Until then I am going to continue to give cards to kids, be it for good grades or just a smile. Perspective! I still get excited about pulling a simple old fashioned rookie card. Not every pack is going to have a gold dusted, diamond filled autograph numbered 1 of 1 and it won't be delivered on a satin pillow resting on the butt of a unicorn. We are going to get a lot of "useless" cards **but**, give a kid a useless card and that card finds a new purpose.

My sons death taught me to enjoy the simple things in life. I miss the day when we would sit in the family room, cards all over the floor, furniture, the dog. But if I can still get a little rush out of finding a good card then it takes me back and makes me remember my son, Aaron, our first baseball game, our first special card, his excitement and laugh. That's why I collect now. To remember and to keep my perspective.

Thank you for allowing me to write about my hobby, and most importantly my son. I think he's proud of his old man and the cards "we" now have. I've had interactions with some very nice people here on the forum. Each trade and post lets me have him back if only for a while and for that I thank you!

The last words I said to my son were "Never get too big to hug your old man. I love you". I encourage all of you to hug those important to you, tell them you love them, and keep perspective in mind. One day our collections might be gone but the memories we make with others are much more valuable....priceless.

Chajones (SCF member) thank you for putting the word "perspective" in your sig. Charles Johnson and Craig Wilson thank you for being so nice to my kids and giving me a memory I will take to my grave.





What a Difference a Year Makes! By Richard McAdam aka RGM81



A year ago at this time, give or take a few days, I was a very disappointed fan. The Club de Hockey Canadien had just endured what can only be described as a thoroughly humiliating season. Last place in the East, organizational disarray throughout the season (remember when they fired Jacques Martin on the morning of a game day?), a popular if under-performing player traded in the middle of a game, and the utter ignominy of knowing for months that the team would not be playing in the playoffs. In all my years of being a Habs fan, I honestly cannot recall a lower point in the franchise's history.

As I sit here on the morning of April 28th, I can only marvel at the rapid turnaround of the Canadiens' fortunes both on and off the ice. Regardless of the outcome of the Ottawa Senators-Boston Bruins tilt this afternoon, and its certain profound impact on the Canadiens' final playoff seeding and opponent, I am so proud of this group of players and the staff that has helped them bounce back and re-emerge as a legitimate contender. When this lockout-shortened 2012-13 season finally began, I went in with a cautious optimism and would have been happy to see them merely contend for a place in the post-season. They have blown away all of those expectations and continuously raised the bar throughout this campaign, to the point that myself and many other Habs fans have viewed them as a threat to compete for the Stanley Cup. That little stumble down the stretch may have tempered things a little bit, but no matter what, when you compare the overall mood of Canadiens fans this year to last year, it is literally day and night.

The turnaround for the Habs began three days before last season ended, when the team fired Pierre Gauthier. It had become clear that he was part of the problem in Montreal, from his role (as then-GM Bob Gainey's assistant) in bringing the bloated Scott Gomez contract to the team to his avoidance of the media to his irrational decisions. Long-time readers



will recall an article I wrote for Collector's Corner last year entitled "Nobody Left to Fire," and the summary of Gauthier's final year as GM speaks volumes to just how bad things were in Montreal a year ago this time:

Gauthier in the past year has made two good moves (Cole's signing and the Gorges long-term extension) and at least three moves that are fire-able offences: the Markov contract, retaining Scott Gomez, and trading for Tomas Kaberle. One can debate whether the Budaj signing also meets that standard. It is bizarre that the Canadiens ownership has not acted sooner to remove this problem. The Canadiens are floundering both on and off the ice, putting out a deplorable product on a nightly basis that is rivalled only by the ineptitude displayed by the front office. The team has lost 22 games in which they have had a lead – that speaks to the coaching. It is a problem that started under Martin and has continued under Cunneyworth. The role of the general manager is to ensure that the coach has the on-ice talent to win hockey games on a consistent basis.

I am happy to say that the acquisition of Peter Budaj has turned out to be a very good move by the Canadiens, and that has been reinforced by the new 2-year contract extension Budaj received earlier this month. Who would have expected (especially after his first outing this year against Ottawa) that the capable backup would have captured 17 of 20 possible points in those games where he was the goalie of record? While there's obviously no goalie controversy in Montreal, it is very nice to know that the Habs net is in good hands on those nights where Carey Price needs a night off.

Immediately after Marc Bergevin was hired to become the new Canadiens GM, fans felt a strong sense of change for the better. Though Bergevin had never been a general manager before, his experience with the great organization in Chicago

proved a valuable understudy and that has only grown this year. He deftly handled the negotiations of new contracts for Carey Price, Max Pacioretty, and P.K. Subban, ensuring that the core of the Canadiens will be safeguarded for the long term. His mid-season acquisition of Michael Ryder (and a third round draft pick) in exchange for a dispirited and under-performing Erik Cole was a fantastic trade. He stood pat at the trade deadline, not making any high-





impact trades while making a solid depth acquisition in Davis Drewiske. He has been involved with the media, the antithesis of “The Ghost” Gauthier, and he has brought stability and pride to the Canadiens front office. More importantly, he has demonstrated strong confidence in his club. On a recent episode of 24CH, the RDS/TSN program that is a Habs-oriented documentary in the same vein as the HBO 24/7 series of the past, Bergevin gave his roster a ringing endorsement that really must be seen by fans. A partial quote:

When we talk things over, we all put our heads together and look for ways to improve the team without causing long-term damage. My goal is to bring a first class team to Montreal, not just for one year, but for many years to come.

He gives a ringing endorsement of his existing roster and acknowledges that he is very happy with the team’s on-ice performance this season, that it has far surpassed his expectations. All but the most delusional of fans would likely share that sentiment.

The Canadiens have been bolstered this season by their key players performing at the levels that one reasonably expects to see a team’s key players. Price, Pacioretty, Gionta, Plekanec, Subban, Markov—all have been tremendous throughout the season. Subban’s name is in the centre of discussions for the Norris Trophy as the NHL’s top defenceman. The team’s balanced attack—there are 8 players with 10 or more goals—has overcome many of the concerns that fans had about a lack of offense in recent years. The blue line corps has been stellar throughout the year, and Alexei Emelin had been a revelation prior to his injury in a game against the Bruins, sealing off teams from constant pressure and making nights easier for Carey Price. Price has done his part this year, stepping up and reaffirming his position as one of the NHL’s elite goalies while also climbing the rankings on the Canadiens’ list of all-time wins by a goalie; he finished the season alone in 7th place with 145 career wins, and there are only legends left to surpass.

While the veterans have excelled, it has been two rookies that have added an extra dose of enthusiasm to this team and given fans even greater hopes for the future. Brendan Gallagher and Alex Galchenyuk have been simply incredible in their freshman campaign. Both finished the regular season in the top five in rookie scoring, with Gallagher finishing 2nd in goals and Galchenyuk finishing 2nd in assists. That they have done this while having their ice time managed by the coaching staff to avoid being overplayed and exposed to unfavourable situations is all the more incredible. They both forced their way into prominent roles in Montreal this year, and it has earned Gallagher some serious consideration for the Calder Trophy. Galchenyuk has given glimpses of his amazing talents this season, showing his incredible stick-handling skills and speed in some key situations. I would rank Gallagher’s shootout winner against the Bruins in late March as one of the top three highlights of the Canadiens’ season. Suffice to say, the rookie cards of the two Gallys will be among the hottest collectibles of the 2013-14 season.

Also deserving of special mention in improving the Habs performance this year is Brandon Prust. A few people loudly questioned why the team would give a 4-year, \$10M contract to what was perceived as simply a third- or fourth-line player. Brandon Prust has proven he is no ordinary bottom six forward. He hits, he fights, he goes to the hard areas on



the ice, and he serves as a key motivator for his teammates. His acquisition last July has proven to be just one of many excellent personnel moves by GM Bergevin.

Finally, it would be a major oversight to not discuss the effect of Michel Therrien and the coaching staff. I will admit to being skeptical about the decision to bring him back to coach the Canadiens, but it has proven to be an excellent move. Therrien has advocated for a five-man unit at all times, that the players support each other and promoted a fast transition game that puts much more emphasis on offence than we have seen in recent years in Montreal. I previously mentioned the 22 blown leads of 2011-12; Therrien has had his charges continually press the attack and not just sit back to defend a one-goal lead. The Canadiens finished fourth in scoring this year. As a reference, in the past three seasons they finished 20th, 23rd, and 26th, respectively. That is simply an incredible jump, and truly speaks to the coaching staff getting the most out of its players and encouraging them to push hard to win games. Like Subban and Gallagher, Therrien absolutely deserves to have his name mentioned in discussions for an award this year.

Everything has come together at the right time for the Canadiens in the 2012-13 season. They were in the thick of the hunt for the Eastern Conference #1 seed until mid-April, and on the last day of the season there is still a strong possibility of winning the Northeast Division title and the #2 seed. Regardless of whether they play the Senators or the Maple Leafs in the first round of the playoffs, this year has already been a success. The goal is always to win the Stanley Cup, of course, but for a club that a year ago was competing only for a high draft pick – well, let's say that it's been a great ride and I think that every Canadiens fan out there should be so proud of what this club has done in a short time to turn things around. We know that they have the pieces for success in the short- and long-term, and seeing it come together this year has been a delight. What a difference a year makes!





Hot and Cold: The First Month of the Baseball Season

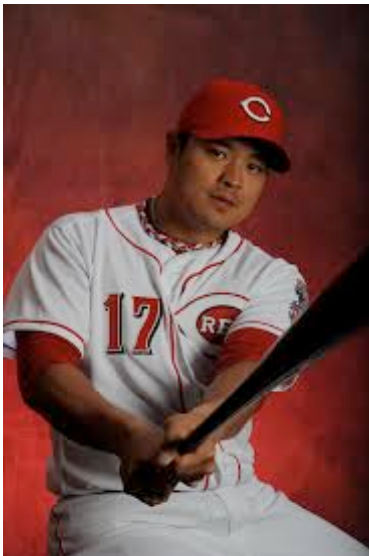
By J.R. Lebert aka jrlebert

The marathon has begun. Baseball's Opening Day is a national holiday for many sports fans, and the kickoff of a 162-game journey through spring and summer. Sure, there is a good chance that Justin Verlander will wind up with 17-20 wins, Craig Kimbrel will save 40 games, and Joe Mauer will hit above .300. Hot starts by big-money players should be the norm, and in addition to the aforementioned players, Prince Fielder, Robinson Cano, Miguel Cabrera, David Wright, Adam Wainwright, Cliff Lee, and Felix Hernandez, all well-paid superstars, have started out hot. Not yet well paid, but definitely a superstar in his own right, Bryce Harper may very well be the MVP of the NL's first (almost completed) month.

In 2012, Andrew McCutchen, Edwin Encarnacion, Gio Gonzalez, and Lance Lynn all served notice that they belong among the game's elite. Who will the breakout stars of 2013 be?

Here are the hottest and coldest players through the first few weeks of the year (All stats through April 26th)...

Offensive Studs:



Two players seem poised to take the leap to stardom based on their production in the first few weeks of 2013: Shin-Soo Choo and Justin Upton. Changing the scenery for both guys, with Choo moving from Cleveland to Cincinnati, and Upton from Arizona to Atlanta, seems to have done the trick. Both of these players have tasted success at a fairly high level, but this may be the year they raise expectations for the future.

All Choo has done is solidify an already solid Reds lineup. With Choo at the top, pitchers can no longer duck Joey Votto, Brandon Phillips, Jay Bruce and others. Choo has been the perfect table setter, leading the majors in on-base percentage and times on base while batting a cool .360. He is tied for the major league lead with 1.7 offensive WAR with...

Justin Upton, reunited with his brother, B.J., in Atlanta, Justin has been the big bat in the middle of the Braves lineup, helping to ease the loss of franchise icon Chipper Jones. He currently leads all of baseball in home runs (11 in just 22 games), slugging, and total bases. Not surprisingly, Atlanta has started 15-7 and sits atop the NL East.



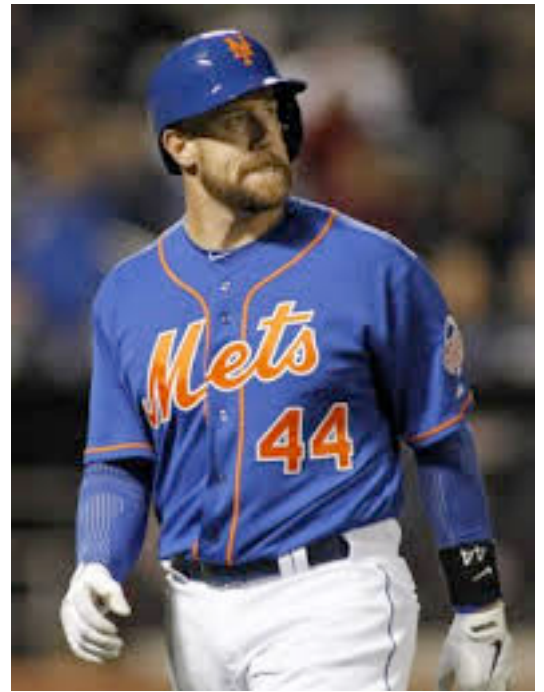
Quick pop quiz: Who leads the National League in RBIs through April 26th? Upton? Votto? Braun? Kemp? No, the correct answer is Mets journeyman catcher John Buck. Playing for his fourth team in 5 years, Buck has been the



currency in the middle of the Mets lineup, with 22 RBI's and 7 home runs so far.

Though it hasn't been done since Ted Williams in 1941, Chris Johnson is attempting to become the first player to hit .400 in a single season. Wait, who? A throw-in as part of the Justin Upton trade to Atlanta, Johnson is in just his 5th full season in the bigs, never before having played 100 games for one team in a season. He currently leads the majors with a .403 average. Baltimore's Chris Davis was all the rage during baseball's opening week, and hasn't let up. He homered in the first four games of the season, while driving in 16 runs. Yes. Six. Teen. Runs. He has 4 more HRs since, and has gotten on base at almost a 45% clip.

Mike Napoli has long been thought of as a solid, middle of the pack catcher. An All-Star (somewhat undeservingly) in 2012, many thought 2011 would be the breakout year, as he batted .320 and hit 30 bombs. Just as in 2011, 2013 has brought a change of scenery, going from Texas to Boston, and, so far, he is everything the Sox needed. Leading the majors in doubles and RBI's, can Napoli finally prove himself an everyday catcher?



Offensive Duds:

.203-0-4, with four errors in the outfield. On my best day, maybe, possibly, this just might be my line if you let me play in 17 MLB games. If you are a fan of the budding franchise cornerstone of the Miami Marlins, Giancarlo Stanton, this is NOT what you wanted to see. Already upset with the front office for gutting the roster before the year started, Stanton has let these issues affect every aspect of his play. He is, far and away, the LVP of the 2013 season thus far. 2012 was a breakout season for Josh Reddick. After toiling on the Red Sox bench, he led the Oakland A's to the AL West crown while hitting 32 HRs, taking home a Gold Glove, and finishing top-16 in AL MVP voting. He has followed that up by hitting just .159 with one home run, and the A's are already 3.5 games back in the division.

A roller coaster ride would be the perfect analogy for the career of Braves OF Jason Heyward. After an All-Star rookie year, he regressed badly in his sophomore season. He rebounded again in his 3rd year, 2012, but his production has taken a nose dive in 2013. In 58 AB's, he has just 7 hits and 5 RBI's.

This was definitely not the start to 2013 that the Angels' front office was expecting when they signed former MVP Josh Hamilton to a deal for 5-years and \$133 million. His power has been non-existent, with just 2 HR's and five total extra base hits in almost 100 plate appearances.





B.J. Upton has not had the smooth transition to life as a Brave that his younger brother, Justin, has had. After 8 seasons as a rather enigmatic but athletically gifted CF in Tampa, B.J. has found life in the NL tough. He is hitting just .146, not a good sign for a player who has struggled to hit above .246 in the last four seasons. He has averaged 39 stolen bases in his last 5 years, but has just three so far in 2013.

Plus Pitchers:

Mets fans are hoping this is 1985 all over again. After a decent start to his career in 2012 (70 Ks in 59.1 IPs, 2.73 ERA), Matt Harvey has put the rest of the NL East on notice. He has already out-dueled Roy Halladay and Stephen Strasburg, and has a line of 4-0, 1.54 ERA, and 39Ks in 35 innings to go with his ML-leading WHIP.



Through late April, no starting pitcher has an ERA lower than the 1.04 put up by Tampa Bay's Matt Moore. His record sits at 4-0, and along with David Price, the reigning CYA winner, Jeremy Hellickson, and Alex Cobb, the Rays have four solid starters under the age of 28.

Another pitcher looking to solidify his place near the top of the rotation is Boston's Clay Buchholz. Already in his 7th season at age 28, he finally looks to have put it all together. His line is a sparkling 5-0 with a 1.19 ERA. Another player on the breakout watch list in 2013 is Cleveland's Justin Masterson, and so far, he has not disappointed. Despite playing on the 5th place Indians, who sit at 8-11, Masterson is 4-1 with a 1.85 ERA as the ace of the staff. Despite playing for 6 different teams over the course of his 11-season, 14-year career, the Pirates' Jason Grilli is the breakout closer of 2013. He leads the majors with 9 saves, has a 14.4 K/9 rate, and has the same ERA as I do this season, 0.00.

Finally, St. Louis appears to have re-tooled their rotation quite nicely. Already solid at the top with Adam Wainwright, now NL Central teams have to deal with the duo of Lance Lynn and Shelby Miller. Combined, they have started 7-1, and have 60 strikeouts in 54 innings. Lynn is 26, and Miller just 22, so the future appears bright for the Cards' starters.

Throwing Snowballs:

The list of pitchers who have started 2013 cold looks like an All-Star roster. Both of last year's CYA winners have not enjoyed the success they were used to last year. R.A. Dickey was dealt to Toronto in the off-season, and the move back to the AL has not been kind. He has already racked up three losses, and his ERA is well over four and a half. To put it in perspective, he didn't lose his third game in 2012 until the first week of August!

David Price has struggled mightily in the season's first three weeks. Last year's ERA champ currently sports one of 5.52. Ouch. He has zero wins through five starts, and is on pace to give up over 30 HRs.

Last year was a dream season for the Giants' Matt Cain: A perfect game, a WS championship, and career bests in wins and ERA. 2013 has seemed more like a nightmare. He has not registered a win, has an ERA above 6.50, and has given



up 6 HRs in just 28.2 IPs. He gave up just 9 HRs in 221.2 IPs in 2011.

This was supposed to be the year for Cole Hamels. Finally touted as the ace of a staff including recent 200-game winner Roy Halladay and former CYA winner Cliff Lee, it was Hamels who was tagged as the Opening Day starter. He has also been tagged by opposing hitters, with an ERA of 5.40 and an 0-3 record. He seems to be righting the ship, with an ERA under 3.00 in his last 3 starts, but only time will tell.



While his ERA is still solid at 3.16, the Nationals' Stephen Strasburg has not been his usual dominating self in 2013. He leads the league with 4 losses, and his K/9 rate is down from 11.1 in 2012 to 8.0 in 2013.

Finally, the fairy tale ride for the White Sox' Philip Humber appears to be over. After pitching a perfect game early in 2012, he endured a rocky finish to the year, as he was demoted to the bullpen and finished with an ERA of 6.44. 2013 has been even uglier, with an ERA of 7.99 and losses in all 5 of his starts, including a start at Cleveland where he lasted just 1/3 of an inning while giving up 8 earned runs.

Yes, it's only April, and there are roughly 140 games to go, but how you start can definitely determine how you finish. Just ask last year's L.A. Angels.





Courtside

By Bryce Doody aka bdoody42

The NBA playoffs are under way and off to an exciting start. All results are up to date as of April 27th.

East

1. Miami Heat vs. 8. Milwaukee Bucks

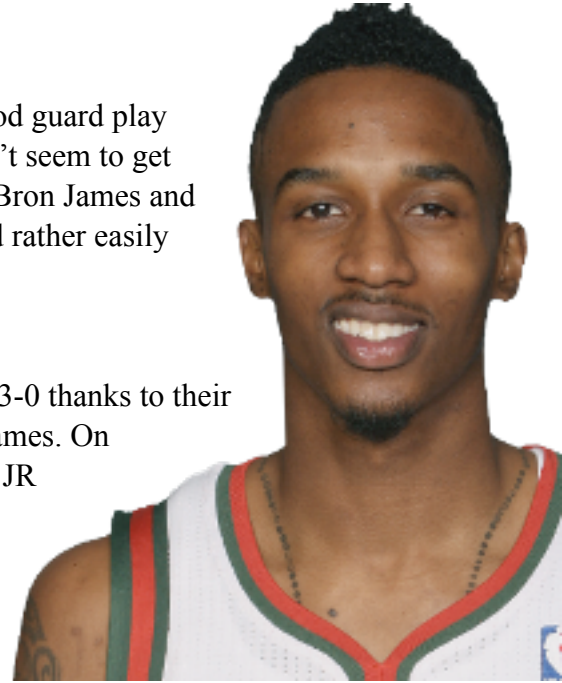
The Heat are up 3-0 in this series. The Bucks have played well in spurts with good guard play from Brandon Jennings and Monta Ellis. Their problem however is that they can't seem to get everyone to have a good game on the same night. The Heat have been led by LeBron James and his amazing all-around game. The heat should be able to advance the next round rather easily and prepare for their next opponent.

2. New York Knicks vs. 7. Boston Celtics

The Knicks couldn't ask for this series to be going any better. The Knicks are up 3-0 thanks to their stifling defense. The Celtics have been held below 80 in each of the first three games. On offense the Knicks are getting a lot of perimeter scoring from Carmelo Anthony, JR Smith, and Raymond Felton. The Celtic are without Rajon Rondo and turnovers and getting quality shots have been huge issues.

3. Indiana Pacers vs. 6. Atlanta Hawks

The Pacers are up 2-0 after winning both games at home. Paul George has been playing at a superstar level including triple double in game one. George Hill and Roy Hibbert have also been playing well for the Pacers. The Hawks are struggling to stop the Pacers' offense and if that doesn't change the series will be over fast.



4. Brooklyn Nets vs. 5. Chicago Bulls

The Bulls are up 2-1 in the series with the next game also at home. The Bulls stole game 2 in Brooklyn with a great team effort. Luol Deng and Carlos Boozer are leading the way for the Bulls. The Nets have been led by Deron Williams and Brook Lopez. This series is setting up to be a good battle.

West

1. Oklahoma City Thunder vs. 8. Houston Rockets

The Thunder are up 2-0 in the series but by no means is this series over. They were lucky to steal game 2 in the last minutes. Injury

problems have hit both teams during this series. Jeremy Lin was unable to play in game 2 and his return date is unknown. Russell Westbrook has a meniscus tear on his right knee that will require surgery and his return date is





completely up in the air. The Thunder will need Kevin Durant to really take over if they are to hold off the James Harden led Rockets.

2. San Antonio Spurs vs. 7. Los Angeles Lakers

The Spurs are up 3-0 after they blew the Lakers out Monday for the teams worst playoff loss at home in team history. The Lakers are without their undisputed leader in Kobe Bryant due to his Achilles injury. The injury bug didn't stop there either; Steve Nash, Steve Blake, Jodie Meeks are all injured leaving the Lakers backcourt in shambles. Tony Parker and Tim Duncan have Spurs eyeing a sweep and getting some rest before the next round of the playoffs.



3. Denver Nuggets vs. 6. Golden State Warriors

The Nuggets have lost two in a row and are down 2-1 in the series. This series has been an up-tempo offensive battle. After David Lee went down in game 1 Stephen Curry has been on a tear including twenty nine points and 11 assists in game three. Denver has a pretty good point guard as well in Ty Lawson. In game 3, he had thirty five point and ten assists. This series has been and should continue to be one of the most entertaining and hard fought.

4. Los Angeles Clippers vs. 5. Memphis Grizzlies

The Clippers hold a 2-1 series lead with all three games being won by the home team. The Clippers jumped out to a 2-0 series lead behind Chris Paul and great bench production. The Grizzlies countered in game 3 by turning up the defensive intensity and Zach Randolph having a great game offensively. This series has been a battle so far and should go down to the wire.



NBA Awards

A couple NBA Awards have been announced already. Marc Gasol was announced as the 2012-2013 NBA defensive Player of the Year. Gasol averaged 1.7 blocks and 1 steal per game. He was the center piece to one of the league's best defenses in Memphis. JR Smith was announced as the NBAs Sixth Man of the Year. He scored a tad over eighteen points a game which was good enough 17th in the league. He also added over 5 rebounds a game and shot 36% from the three point line.

April Box Breaks

With Panini releasing a ton of different products over the last few months box breakers have been very busy. Jprt opened 2 boxes of 12-12 Totally Certified and pulled a Magic Johnson totally back signatures auto 1/1. In another Certified break he pulled a Damian Lillard Totally Certified green rookie



numbered just to 5!!! The_man opened three boxes of Select and pulled an Anthony Davis rookie auto /149. Select was a popular break this month that many other members busted including 44 magnum. In his box he pulled a Michael Kidd-Gilchrist rookie auto /149. Golden Schaub opened a mini box of Select and hit a Kenneth Faried black 4 color rookie patch auto 1/1. muelleur opened two boxes of Select and pulled a John Wall gold prizm /10. darkshadowdog123 opened one box of Certified and got a Ivan Johnson black base 1/1. JaMarchand 2012 busted a box of Marquee that didn't yield much to his liking so he decided to trade in some random cards for 3 more packs and he hit an Anthony Davis rookie auto. the guru opened a box of Michael Jordan UNC Master collection and pulled a nice UNC patch set with one of the Jordan cards being an auto. ronfir who often lists his box breaks here on SCF pulled some nice hits this month. First he broke some boxes of Marquee and received a Kobe Bryant auto. ronfir also opened some Select and found a Stephen Curry gold prizm /10 and a Derrick Williams gold hot rookies numbered to /10 as well.

2012-2013 Final Stats



Scoring Leaders

1. Carmelo Anthony 28.7
2. Kevin Durant 28.1
3. Kobe Bryant 27.3
4. LeBron James 26.8
5. James Harden 25.9

Assist Leaders

1. Rajon Rondo 11.1
2. Chris Paul 9.7
3. Greivis Vazquez 9.0
4. Jrue Holiday 8.0
5. Deron Williams 7.7

Field Goal Percentage Leaders FG%

1. DeAndre Jordan .643
2. Dwight Howard .578
3. JaVale McGee .575
4. Serge Ibaka .573
5. LeBron James .565

Rebound Leaders

1. Dwight Howard 12.4
2. Nkiola Vucevic 11.9
3. Omer Asik 11.7
4. Zach Randolph 11.2
5. David Lee 11.2



Block Leaders

1. Serge Ibaka 3.03
2. Larry Sanders 2.83
3. Tim Duncan 2.65
4. Roy Hibbert 2.61
5. Dwight Howard 2.45

Steal Leaders

1. Chris Paul 2.41
2. Ricky Rubio 2.40
3. Mike Conley 2.18
4. Monta Ellis 2.06
5. Kemba Walker 1.95





Re-Drafting 2004: Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the 2004 NFL Draft

By J.R. Lebert aka jrlebert

It seems like just yesterday... I remember watching every moment of the first 3 rounds of the 2004 NFL Draft, the first such draft I watched so intently. A high school classmate of mine, Matt Ware, a junior defensive back from UCLA, had declared for the draft, and was supposed to go anywhere from late first round to mid-third. I agonized over every pick after the first twenty or so. Some reports had him going 27th overall to Philadelphia, but when the Eagles came and went, my stomach turned. They would be a bit prophetic, those early reports. Mat did indeed go to the Eagles, with their 27th pick... in the 3rd round. He would go on to have a decent NFL career, playing in two Super Bowls among his over 100 NFL games played. Those memories of waiting, agonizing over when his name would be called, are now 10 years old.

To celebrate the 10th anniversary of an incredibly solid draft class, with the benefit of hindsight, let's look back at the draft, critique the first round, and evaluate the top players eligible to be drafted in 2004.

First Round Busts:

Of the 32 players taken in round one, all but four played in 50+ games. 20 of the 32 played in 100+ games. 15 of those 32 made the Pro Bowl at least once, as compared to just 17 others from the entire class of 2004, including those undrafted; more on those undrafted below. And half of the first round is still active in the NFL, 10 years later. For varying reasons, this makes the following 6 players stand out as true busts of 2004's 1st round.

Reggie Williams, WR, 9th overall pick, Jacksonville Jaguars

An uninspiring career stat line of 189-2322-18TD's, Williams underperformed in a class of extremely productive WRs. Though he was the second WR taken, 9 wideouts (and 3 TE's and 2 RB's) all went on to record more career grabs than Reggie.

J.P. Losman, QB, 22nd overall pick, Buffalo Bills

This pick would set the Bills franchise back quite a few years. The Bills jettisoned Drew Bledsoe after his 2004 season to open the door for J.P. After 5 unproductive years in Buffalo, amounting to just 10 wins, the Bills have not been above .500 since.

Marcus Tubbs, DT, 23rd overall pick, Seattle Seahawks

One pick after Losman, Tubbs lasted just parts of three seasons with Seattle. He registered just 7 sacks in 29 career games, while Pro Bowlers Darnell Dockett and Randy Starks sat until the 3rd round.

Ahmad Carroll, CB, 25th overall pick, Green Bay Packers

Terrible cover skills and occasional legal issues plagued Carroll's NFL tenure. He started 28 games in his first two seasons, and 0 games after, registering just 3 INT's and multiple illegal contact penalties. He did retire on top, however, calling it quits after winning the CFL's Grey Cup in 2012.





Chris Perry, RB, 26th overall pick, Cincinnati Bengals

While the RB class was not exactly deep in 2004, it would not be hard to exceed Perry's production in his 4-year stint in Cincinnati. He started just 9 games, and finished his NFL career with this unimpressive line: 606 rushing yards and 4 TD's. Eight RB's (and one QB) have rushed for more yards.

Rashaun Woods, WR, 31st overall pick, San Francisco Giants

One season, 14 games, and zero starts, with a career stat line of 7 grabs, 160 yards, and one lone touchdown, sums up the NFL flash-in-the-pan of Rashaun Woods. Few WR's have had more productive college careers, and less productive NFL ones. To put it in proper perspective, here is his line from his senior year game for Oklahoma State at Southern Methodist: 13 catches. 232 yards. SEVEN TD's.

The 2004 draft class was a particularly deep draft class. 33 players have made at least one Pro Bowl, and 11 have made an All-Pro First Team. A handful of them are even on their way to Canton. There are a good number of players at each position who have made a considerable impact over the course of their careers.

Quarterbacks:

Philip Rivers, 4th overall, New York Giants

Matt Schaub, 90th overall, Atlanta Falcons

Both Rivers and Schaub have enjoyed incredibly productive regular seasons, but have yet to taste postseason success as two others in the class have. Schaub is the Texans' franchise leader in every major category, and Rivers trails only HOF Dan Fouts for most Chargers' passing records.



Running Backs:

Julius Jones, 43rd overall, Dallas Cowboys

Michael Turner, 154th overall, San Diego Chargers

Willie Parker, UNDRAFTED, Pittsburgh Steelers

Jones and Parker, while their careers were relatively short, were extremely productive. Jones is one of four players from the class to rush for over 5,000 yards, and had a 1,000 yard season with Dallas in 2006. The undrafted Parker ranks 3rd in Pittsburgh Steelers history with almost 5,400 yards rushing, and added two Pro Bowl honors, and 2 Super Bowl rings. Turner has had an excellent career, notching over 7,300 yards and 67 TD's, a touchdown total that is tops in Falcons' franchise history.

Wide Receivers / Tight Ends:

Roy Williams, 7th overall, Detroit Lions

Lee Evans, 13th overall, Buffalo Bills

Jerricho Cotchery, 108th overall, New York Jets



Kellen Winslow, Jr., 6th overall, Cleveland Browns

Chris Cooley, 81st overall, Washington Redskins

While Winslow and Williams may not have produced as much as their high picks would have justified, both enjoyed long, solid careers, and each earned a Pro Bowl nod. Evans' yardage and touchdowns rank 3rd in Bills history, and his grabs put him 4th. Cotchery had almost 400 grabs and 5,000 yards over his nine years in the NFL. Cooley became one of the faces of the Redskins franchise over the last 9 years, and his grabs rank 5th in franchise history.

Offensive Line:

Max Starks, 75th overall, Green Bay Packers

Nick Hardwick, 66th overall, San Diego Chargers

Shawn Andrews, 16th overall, Philadelphia Eagles

Scott Wells, 251st overall, Green Bay Packers

Starks enjoyed a long career on the line, playing in 123 games over the course of his career. Hardwick is, by far, the best center of the 2004 draft, and the only one to make a Pro Bowl. While Andrews' career was reduced to just 63 games because of injury, he was able to make 2 Pro Bowls and an All-Pro First Team. Wells may have been the best bargain of the draft, playing in 118 games, making a Pro Bowl, and winning a Super Bowl ring with Green Bay.



Defensive Line:

Shaun Phillips, 98th overall, San Diego Chargers

Will Smith, 18th overall, New Orleans Saints

Jason Babin, 27th overall, Houston Texans

Antonio Smith, 135th overall, Arizona Cardinals

Randy Starks, 71st overall, Tennessee Titans

Tommie Harris, 14th overall, Chicago Bears

Cullen Jenkins, UNDRAFTED, Green Bay Packers

Phillips has had an extremely productive career, making a Pro Bowl and notching 69.5 sacks. Will Smith has 67.5 sacks in his career, and two double-digit sack seasons to go with his Pro Bowl berth. Babin has had a bit of an up and down career, playing for 5 teams, making 2 Pro Bowls, and registering 18 sacks in 2011. Antonio Smith has enjoyed a long career, making a Pro Bowl and playing 125 regular season games. Starks and Harris have each registered over 30 sacks from the DT spot, but Harris' edge lies in Pro Bowl nods, 3 to 1. Somehow, every team missed drafting Jenkins, who out-produced both Harris and Starks in sacks (38.5), and won a ring with the 2010 Packers.



Linebackers:

Jonathan Vilma, 12th overall, New York Jets

D.J. Williams, 17th overall, Denver Broncos

Karlos Dansby, 33rd overall, Arizona Cardinals

Vilma and Williams were picked just 5 spots apart in 2004, and entering 2013, just 11 solo tackles separate the two. Williams has more sacks, but Vilma has 3 Pro Bowl trips. The first pick of the second round, Dansby is his class's leading tackler, at 711, and has over 30 sacks in his career.

Defensive Backs:

Sean Taylor, 5th overall, Washington Redskins

DeAngelo Hall, 7th overall, Atlanta Falcons

Bob Sanders, 44th overall, Indianapolis Colts

Nathan Vasher, 110th overall, Chicago Bears

Taylor's career was cut short tragically, but not before registering 12 INT's and 2 Pro Bowl trips. Hall has enjoyed the best career of any DB from 2004, with 39 picks and 3 Pro Bowl nods. Sanders' body gave out from injury, but he was one of the best safeties in the

game when he played, making 2 First Team All-Pros. Vasher gave the Bears excellent value for the 110th overall pick, with 20 INT's and a Pro Bowl berth.



Special Teams:

Nate Kaeding, 65th overall, San Diego Chargers

Andy Lee, 188th overall, San Francisco 49ers

Kaeding led the NFL in points in 2009 en route to a First Team All-Pro selection and 2 Pro Bowl trips. Lee may be the 2nd best punter in the game today, tallying three of both Pro Bowl and All-Pro First Team selections. And now, the top ten players eligible for the draft in 2004.

10 – Darnell Dockett, DT, 64th overall, Arizona Cardinals: Dockett has 3 Pro Bowls and 36 sacks, while anchoring the Cardinals defense for 9 seasons. He has started 140 games in his career.

9 – Jason Peters, T, UNDRAFTED, Buffalo Bills: The Bills struck gold with the undrafted Peters, hitting on a player who would go on to make 5 straight Pro Bowls and an All-Pro First Team.

8 – Chris Snee, G, 34th overall, New York Giants: All Snee has done in 9 years with the G-Men is make 4 Pro Bowls, a First Team All-Pro, play in 138 regular season games, and win 2 rings, all while being married to the coach's daughter!



7 – Steven Jackson, RB, 24th overall, St. Louis Rams: It must be a deep class when a RB with over 10,000 yards, who leads his franchise in rushing despite having Eric Dickerson and Marshall Faulk also play for them, registers over 400 grabs, and 64 total TDs, only ranks 7th on the list.

6 – Vince Wilfork, NT, 21st overall, New England Patriots: Wilfork has been wreaking havoc in the middle of the line for New England since he took the field in 2004. A former Super Bowl champ, Wilfork has 5 Pro Bowl's to his credit.

5 – Jared Allen, DE, 126th overall, Kansas City Chiefs: K.C. must not have known what they were giving up when they let Allen get away after the 2007 season. Since joining the Vikings, he has 5 straight double-digit sack seasons, including 2011's total of 22. He is a 4-time First Team All Pro, the NFL's all-time leader in safeties with 4, and his total of 117 sacks rank him 16th in NFL history.

4 – Larry Fitzgerald, WR, 3rd overall, Arizona Cardinals: Larry has six 1,000 yard seasons and two 100-catch seasons on his resume, along with 6 Pro Bowl trips. His receptions, yards, and TD numbers are all in the top 35 in NFL history.

3 – Ben Roethlisberger, QB, 11th overall, Pittsburgh Steelers: In drafting Big Ben, the Steelers received their franchise QB. He has led them to two Super Bowl wins, and is poised to crack both the 200 TD and 30,000 yards passing marks next year.

2 – Wes Welker, WR, UNDRAFTED, San Diego Chargers: Yes, you read that correctly. Wes Welker went undrafted in 2004. After three unproductive seasons, he found a home in New England, registered an incredible five 100-catch seasons over the last six years, and becoming the class's receptions leader. He has made each of the last 5 Pro Bowls.

1 – Eli Manning, QB, 1st overall, San Diego Chargers: Chargers fans can only wonder "What if?" when it comes to the career of Eli Manning. The subject of a draft day swap between he and Philip Rivers, the younger Manning has gone on to pass for over 30,000 yards, 211 TD's, and lead his team to two Super Bowl wins, one more than his much celebrated brother.





Pushing the Limit: Why practice in auto racing is like no other sport By Stephen Taylor aka race crazy



Tony Bettenhausen; Neil Bonnett; Scott Brayton; Paul Dana; Richie Evans; Kenny Irwin; Adam Petty; Eric Martin; Billy Wade. This list is one of great racing car drivers who died doing what they loved but they were not racing. They were simply practicing to race. This is why racing is different than any other popular sport. Extreme sports like bull riding or mountain climbing are the only other sports where their inherent danger in practice is known and also necessary in order to improve. A common person would surmise that practice in racing should be like other sports where one does not necessarily go as hard as they would in the actual game or event and it makes sense to a common person. LeBron James probably does not go as hard trying to win a practice pickup game as he would in the playoffs. People must realize one thing about racing drivers: their brains are wired different than the rest of us.

In order to find the ultimate speed required to win one must “find the limit” as it is known in racing. This simply means that one is pushing the vehicle as fast as it will go on the edge of out of control before it snaps. Due to this racing drivers often teeter and find the edge and go over it. This is usually done in practice. The art of finding the edge of out of control is what practice is for. It is pushing one’s self to go as hard as possible to find a speed



advantage. Practice in racing is a competition of the driver's fortitude and gumption. Pushing the car to the very edge of disaster is required in order to find all the speed required in order to win the next day. Therefore practices often contain accidents, some with fatal consequences.

These days great safety advancements have been made to better protect the drivers and fatal practice accidents and fatal accidents in general are a lot less common, but the risk is always there for injury or death to occur. Racing drivers strap in knowing the risks, accept them, and still go out and push the vehicle as hard as possible. Practicing for a racing event is an art in speed, control, and who is braver than the other driver. To some drivers, particularly those back in the tragic days of Formula 1 where safety was a complete afterthought and 1 out of every 3 drivers would perish during the year due to an accident, the difference between bravery and stupidity was a fine line. Jackie Stewart was one of the best Formula 1 drivers to ever live but he also was one of the smartest. Stewart knew the line between bravery and stupidity. He would still push the car on the limit sometimes with bad consequences (he barely escaped death in the 1966 Belgian Grand Prix) but he was also smart enough not to be blinded by what on earth the risks were. He watched many a driver and friend die while he stayed alive because he knew when enough was enough and due to this he is still alive today to talk about it.



Since those days the art of practicing in racing and finding the limit has greatly changed. As a sport it is much less dangerous than it was even 10 years ago. New advancements in computer and video game simulation have mimicked realism so well that drivers practice finding the limit on them instead of in their real machines so no real consequences take effect. Most Formula 1 teams have their own simulators and the drivers are required to put in time before every race weekend. In the case of other series the Iracing online simulator is often used by drivers to practice finding the limit along with race craft. These advancements make practicing safer. However pushing the limit in practice will always be necessary in order to win in auto racing and the consequences are greater than other sports. It is why racing drivers are the coolest athletes in the world.





SCF Official Review: 2012/13 ITG Between The Pipes

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.

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- 18 packs per box with 9 cards per pack*
- Authentic Game-Used Memorabilia Cards 1:8 packs**
- Autograph Cards (Goaliegraphs) 1:7 packs**
- Masked Men 5 Cards 1:6 packs**

*Featuring "call it what you want" technology. Some call it Refractor, some call it Chromium, some call it Metal, and some call it Prism. In The Game just calls it "fabulous". This year's Masked Men 5 cards will simply be "fabulous".

- He Shoots; He Saves Program is now even easier with only 150 points required or keep the points cards & collect the puzzle pieces!

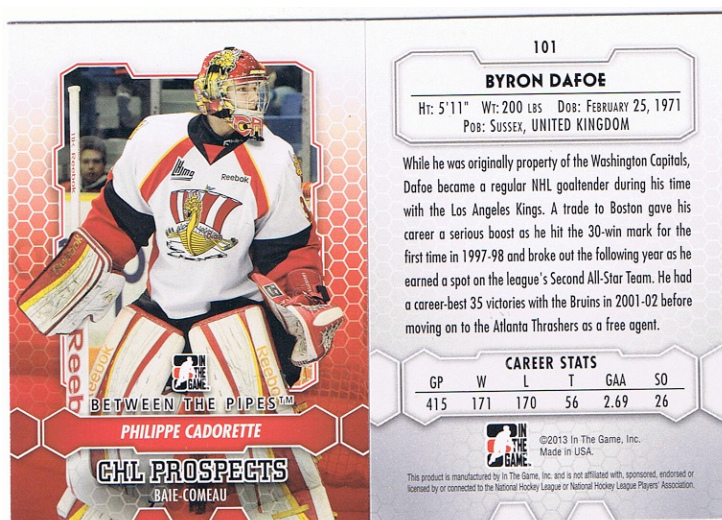
* eight base cards plus one decoy card or game-used memorabilia card

** insert ratios are based on the entire production run and are not guaranteed in any individual box or case

WHAT WE PULLED

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n3E6Y0u_rvI

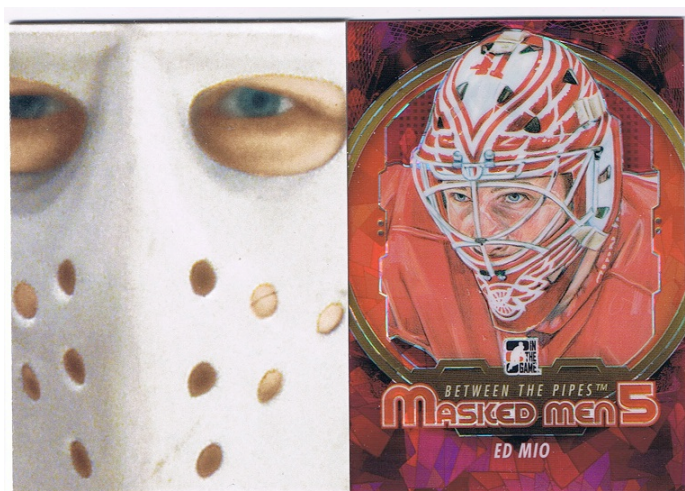
Base - 138/200 (69%)





The 200-card base set breaks down to 78 CHL Prospects, 18 Stars Of The Game (Current NHL Goalies), 84 Decades (Former NHL Goalies through the years), 10 Record Breakers and 10 International Stars (Goalies who shined in International Play). The design of the cards has a nice touch with a honey comb look to represent the net in the background. The Record Breakers subset also has the look of shattered glass. Interest side note, this box had a perfect split of base card in that there were 69 card each from 1-100 and 101-200. One noticeable drawback, like H&P, is the exclusion of AHL players.

He Shoots, He Saves (15)
Masked Men 5 Ruby (3)



Much like its predecessor Heroes and Prospects with the He Shoots, He Saves Program, collectors can use the He Shoots, He Saves cards in one of two ways. Cards are pictured with a piece of a puzzle that can comprise the picture of numerous subjects. You can opt to put the pictures together or redeem the cards. Unlike previous years, it will only take 150 cards in order to qualify for a redemption of a specially made, slabbed auto or relic piece. There are 30 cards in this set with a print run of 20. A fan favorite is back for another go around with the inclusion of Masked Men 5 (1:6 Packs). There are three levels, Ruby (Red), Silver and Gold. There hasn't been an announced print run yet on the Reds, but the Silver is 50 and the Gold is 10. There is rumored to be a Rainbow level that will be numbered to 1, but I have not seen a confirmation on it yet. No other inserts/chase sets leaves the box lacking excitement as most packs will just yield base and the HSHS Puzzle card.

GoalieGraph Brandon Whitney Autograph

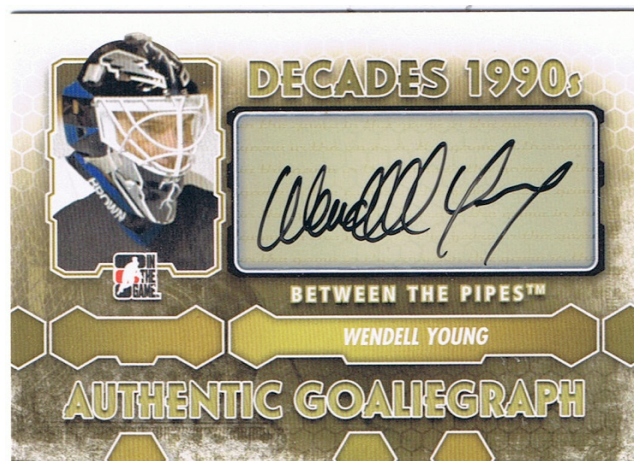




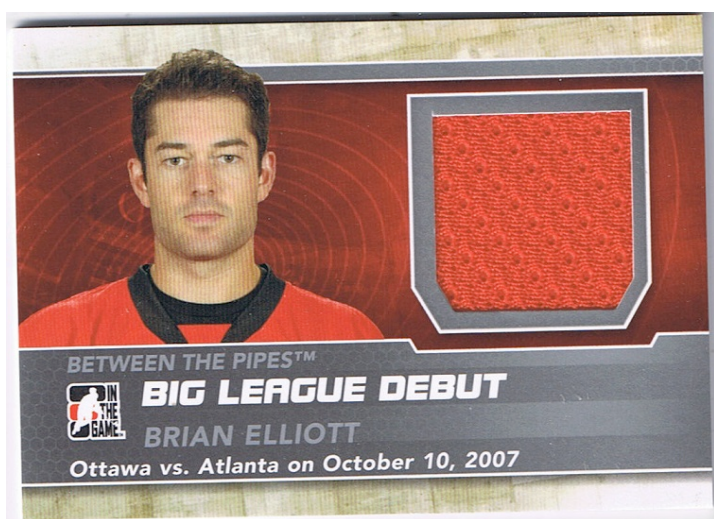
GoalieGraph Jacob Gervais-Chouinard Autograph



GoalieGraphs Wendell Young Autograph



Big League Debut Brian Elliott Jersey Silver Version /100



Game Used Jersey J.P. Anderson 2-color Patch Silver Version /140



On average, boxes will yield 2 autographs and 2 relics. But it is possible to see more based on the insertion odds, 1:8 packs for the Relics and 1:7 packs for the Autographs. There are a multitude of relic pieces to be found from jersey swatch to glove and pads, some of which will be found in combination together. The GoalieGraphs checklist is extensive. Be on the lookout for short prints and super short prints. In addition, there are other types of autograph cards which include some paired with relics or other players. A full checklist can be found on ITG's Website. Yes, there are sticker autographs, but the trade off is no redemptions other than the obvious Made to Order Program.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Base - 4.5/5
Design - 4.5/5
Fun - 3/5
Value - 4/5
Rebuy - 4/5

Overall - 20/25 (80%)

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 before it hits stores. For more information on all of their products, you can visit them at www.itgtradingcards.com.





SCF Official Review: 2013 Topps Tribute By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

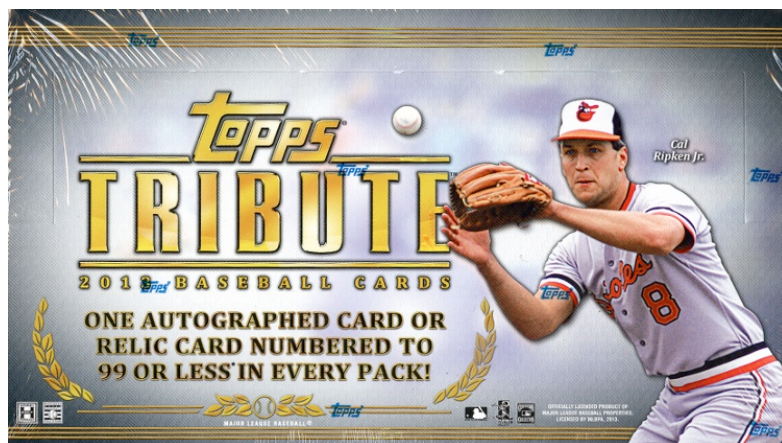
First and foremost, I'd like to thank our sponsors at Topps for providing us with this box.

Box details

6 packs per box

5 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): \$324.99 - \$374.99



PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

AUTOGRAPHED CARDS

Autographed Cards

Cards will be signed on card and sequentially numbered to 99 or less.

- Blue Parallel numbered to 50.
- Sepia Parallel numbered to 35.
- Orange Parallel numbered to 25.
- Gold Parallel numbered to 15.
- Red Parallel numbered to 5.
- Purple Parallel numbered 1/1.
- Framed Printing Plates (signed on the plate) numbered 1/1
- Onyx Parallel (signed in silver pen) numbered 1/1.

Tribute To The Stars Autographed Cards

Autographed cards of top retired and active stars. Cards will be sequentially numbered to 24.

- Purple Parallel numbered 1/1.

Tribute To The "Best Of The Best"

Autographed cards of top retired and active stars who were/are among the best at their respective positions. The front of each card will have a unique material associated with their specialty. Sequentially numbered to 5. NEW!

- Pitchers - Card front will be a baseball with seams showing.
- Hitters - Card front will be wood.



The Rundown On



- Base Stealers - Card front will be base material.
- Great Fielders - Card front will be leather glove material.

Framed Mini-Tribute Autographed Cards

Featuring active and retired players.

- Numbered to 25. NEW!

Timeless Tribute Autographed Cards

Dual Autographed cards pairing veteran and retired players who have similar playing styles. Numbered to 24.

- Purple Parallel numbered to 1. NEW!

Cut Signatures

- 1 of 1.

RELIC CARDS

Batting Gloves

Relics of game-worn batting gloves. Numbered to 2, featuring a glove from each hand. NEW!

Tribute Transitions

Dual Bat Relic cards of active and retired stars, showing images of two of the teams they have played on.

Cards will be sequentially numbered to 99. NEW!

- Bat Knobs - 1 of 1. NEW!
- Bat Plates - 1 of 1. NEW!

Commemorative Cuts

Celebrating the significant moments & achievements from a player's career. Sequentially numbered to 99.

Retired Remnants

Single relics of retired stars. Sequentially numbered to 99 or less.

Famous Four-Baggers

Dual relics of renowned power hitters. Sequentially numbered to 99.

Superstar Swatches

Dual relics of top active players. Sequentially numbered to 99.

Relic Parallels

- Blue Parallel numbered to 50.
- Orange Parallel numbered to 25.
- Gold Parallel numbered to 15.
- Red Parallel numbered to 10.



- Purple Parallel numbered 1/1.

Prime Patches

Patch cards of Superstars and Hall of Fame players. Cards will be sequentially numbered to 24 or less.

- Purple Parallel numbered to 1.

Tribute To The Stars Relic Card

Relic cards of top retired and active stars. Cards will be sequentially numbered to 99 or less.

- Orange Parallel numbered to 50.
- Green Parallel numbered to 40.
- Gold Parallel numbered to 25.
- Sepia Tone Parallel numbered to 15.
- Red Patch Parallel numbered to 10.
- Purple Patch Parallel numbered to 1

BASE CARDS

Veterans & Retired Stars (100 Subjects) - 100 of the best retired and active players in MLB!

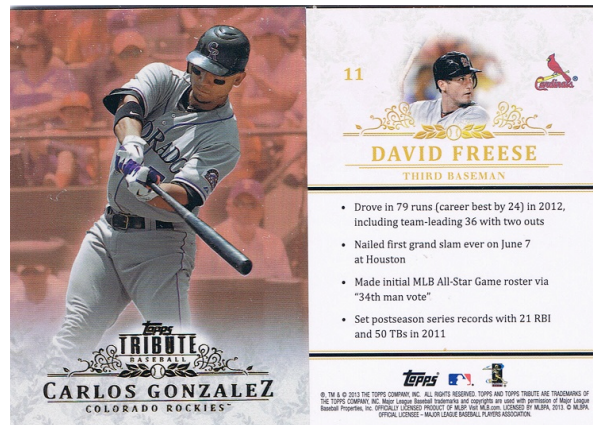
Base Card Parallels

- Blue Parallel sequentially numbered to 99.
- Green Parallel sequentially numbered to 75.
- Orange Parallel sequentially numbered to 50.
- Gold Parallel sequentially numbered to 25.
- Red Parallel sequentially numbered to 5.
- Purple Parallel sequentially numbered 1/1.
- Framed Printing Plates numbered 1/1.

WHAT WE PULLED

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2ev9TOU-vo>

Base - 22/100 (22%)

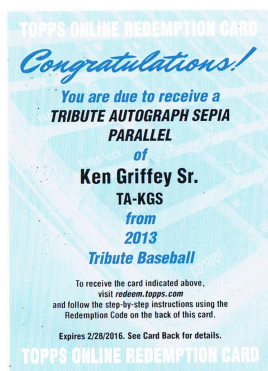




Tribute contains a 100-base card set. Typically, you will get 22-23 base cards in a box as the parallels and hits will comprise the rest. As in past years, the cards are on a thick stock utilizing a foil board to give a sleek chrome look. What I don't understand is how these cards are not numbered, considering this is one of the highest priced baseball products throughout the year.

You can expect 1-2 parallels in every box. They have different color backgrounds and range in print run from 99 to 1. There are six levels as well as Printing Plates. These are all the "bonus" cards you will find as there are no inserts in Tribute.

Yonder Alonso Autograph /99



Ken Griffey Sr Sepia Autograph Redemption /35



Juan Marichal Gold Autograph /15



Cole Hamels Tribute To The Stars Jersey with Pinstripe /99





Matt Kemp Tribute To The Stars Sepia Jersey /15



Albert Belle Tribute Transitions Dual Bat /99



Each box will yield 3 autographs and 3 relics. All the cards will be numbered to 99 or less. Be on the lookout for parallel versions of all the cards. And as an added bonus, on-card signatures! And what seems to be a continuing theme, here's another product with Bat Knobs and Bat Plates that are 1/1s.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Base - 4.5/5
 Design - 5/5
 Fun - 4/5
 Value - 3/5
 Rebuy - 3/5

Total - 19.5/25 (78%)

NPN Information

NPN 2013 Topps Tribute BB
 PO Box 765
 Pittston, PA 18640

Limit 1 Request per household

Postmarked By: 6/5/13
 Received By: 6/12/13

Canada Skills: $7 \times 11 + 3 - 12 = ?$

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at Topps for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release. For more information on all of their products, you can check them out at www.topps.com.



SCF Official Review: 2013 Press Pass Ignite By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

20 packs per box

5 cards per pack

Bonus Power Picks Pack via boxes from B&M Stores

Current Retail Price (online): \$84.99 - \$99.99

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

AT LEAST ONE AUTOGRAPH IN EVERY BOX! LOOK FOR:

- Ignite Ink Authentic Autograph Cards - Three Levels To Collect

EACH HALF-CASE (10-BOX CASE) WILL ALSO INCLUDE ONE BONUS AUTOGRAPHED MEMORABILIA CARD! LOOK FOR:

- Great American Treads - Autographed Daytona 500 Tire Cards
- Supercharged Signatures - Autographed Quadruple Memorabilia Cards

AT LEAST ONE RACE-USED MEMORABILIA CARD IN EVERY BOX! LOOK FOR:

- Hot Threads - Race-Used Firesuit Cards
- Double Burner - Dual Race-Used Cards
- Also Look For Randomly Inserted Hot Threads Patch Edition Cards

SPECIAL INSERTS

- Danica Patrick Daytona 500 Pole Winner - One Per Half-Case (10 boxes)
- Davey Allison Tribute - One Per Half-Case (10 boxes)
- 2013 Hall Of Fame Inductee - One Per Box

POWER PACK PROMOTION

The Power Pack Promotion Gets An Added Boost Starting With 2013 Ignite. Each Promotional Pack Will Include...

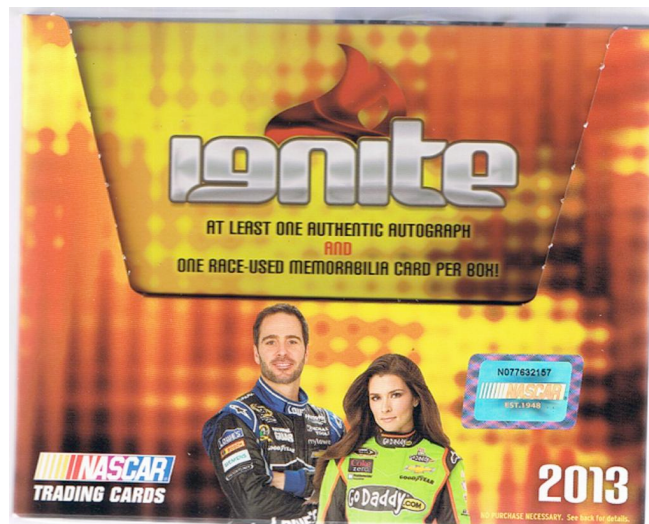
- A Power Pick Base Card

Plus

- A Power Pack-Exclusive Hot Threads Firesuit Card

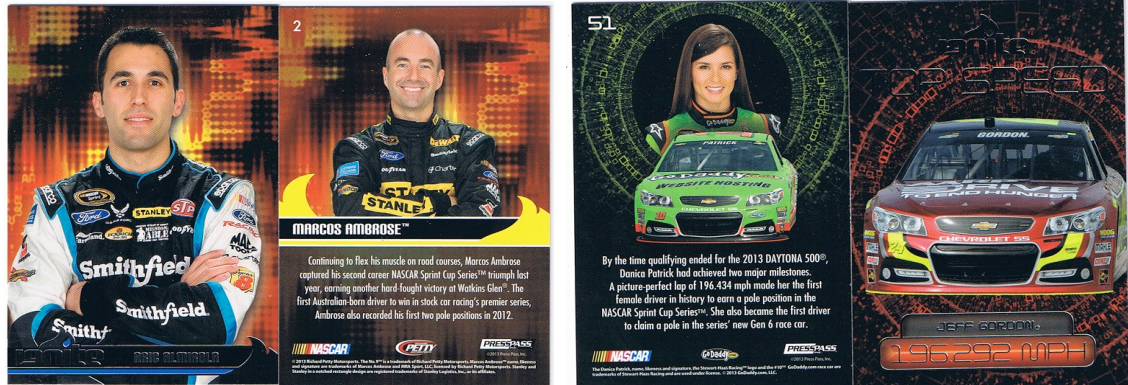
WHAT WE PULLED

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



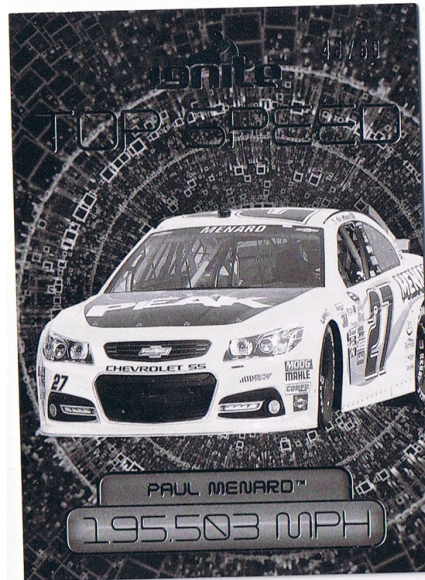


Base - 70/70 (100%)
Dupes - 20



Ignite returns with a new design that surpasses the previous releases. While the posed pictures of the drivers are the same, the background is noticeably different. The backdrop seems to incorporate the idea of a mix of fire/flames with gas vapors. All three main racing circuits are covered with drivers from cards 1-50. The final 20 cards are devoted to a subset called Top Speed. It highlights the top twenty qualifying times for the 2013 Daytona 500. You should fully expect to complete the base set in one box.

Color Proofs Black /50 (1): Paul Menard



The Color Proofs continue to appear as they have for a while now. There are hobby versions and retail versions. You will find the Black /50 and Yellow /5 in hobby, while Cyan and Magenta can be found in retail products. The hobby version will appear 1:20, basically one per box.

Header #0 Card: Danica Patrick





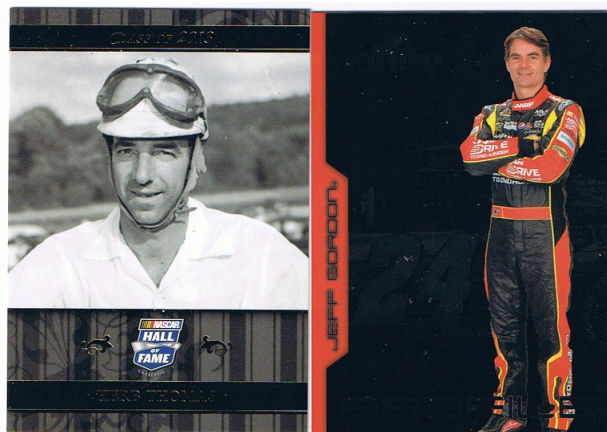
Much like the regular Press Pass release, there is a 0 card for Ignite. This is sometimes referred as the header card. Collecting enthusiasts will consider a base set incomplete without this card. This one features Danica Patrick and her historic Pole at Daytona. This card appears 1:200 packs, so 1 per 1/2 case (10 boxes).

Convoy (2)

NASCAR HOF (1)

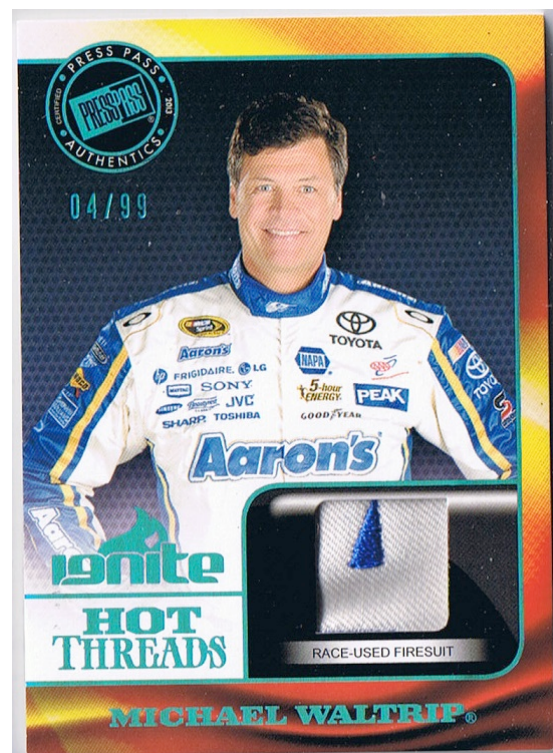
Profile (2)

Turning Point (2)



Convoy cards pertain to the massive trucks that haul the racecars and the equipment from race to race. These fall 2 per box, 1:10 packs. Turning Point is dedicated to pointing out a pivotal moment in the career for the drivers that led to their success. You will find these at the same rate as the Convoy cards. The NASCAR Hall Of Fame cards are a continuation of a program that started a couple of year ago. Each year, the new HOF Class is featured in the set that expands across many products during the year. Each box should yield one of these, but you may also find parallel versions. Then there is Profile, which is simply designed to showcase a full photo of the drivers by their cars with some backdrop info on the reverse side. There are five SPs in this set, so keep your eyes open. As some previously mentioned set, these will also appear two to a box. Another hard to find continuation set is the Davey Allison Tribute Set. There are ten cards in the entire set, but only two cards will appear in various releases. You can find one in every half case.

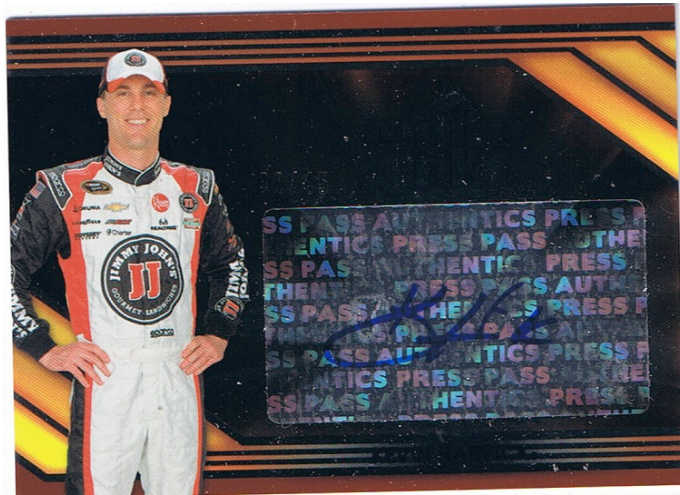
Hot Threads Blue Michael Waltrip 2-color Patch /99





Ignite Ink Black Kevin Harvick Autograph /45

Each box of Ignite should yield one autograph and one relic. However, there are bonus auto cards that can be found that fall at one per half case such as Autographed Tire cards from Daytona or multi-driver autographs. In addition, there is a oversized patch card under the Hot Threads umbrella /25 or less that will appear 1:400 packs, so 1 per full case. This is the only release during the year that Press Pass uses stickers for their autographs. The reason is Press Pass tries to appease the collectors by featuring drivers in their current firesuit/sponsorships. In order to do that and get the cards produced with little to no redemptions, they must use stickers for the autos.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Base - 5/5

Design - 4.5/5

Fun - 3/5

Value - 3.5/5

Rebuy - 3/5

Overall - 19/25 (76%)

NPN Information:

NPN 2013 Press Pass Ignite
9805 NorthCross Center Court Suite H
Huntersville, NC 28078

Limit 1 Request Per Household

Postmarked By: 8/10/13

Received By: 8/17/13

Canada Skills: $50 + (2 \times 4) - 10 = ?$

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 of their products, visit them today at www.presspassinc.com.



Passing the Torch By Guy Mitchell aka sweetg1

As we embark upon the new season, I'd like to share what the 2012 season meant to me and my son.

On June 24, 1976, my dad changed my life when he took me to my very first baseball game. I remember the event well. We were in Houston on vacation and we went to the Astrodome to see the Houston Astros play the Los Angeles Dodgers. But it was not only the game that I enjoyed, but the entire experience. I remember staying at a hotel close to the Astrodome and thinking that the Dodgers were staying there before the game. Imagine a nine year old kid, thinking about seeing guys like Steve Garvey, Dusty Baker, and Ron Cey and asking for their autograph wearing a Houston Astros hat. I recall thinking that if I ever saw a player, then I'd quickly remove my hat before asking them to sign. Unfortunately, having run around the entire hotel, I didn't see one Dodger. I'd convinced myself at the time that some of the Dodgers might have seen me wearing the Astros hat, and hid from me.



I remember the game fairly well. When we attended, it happened to be Cesar Cedeno night. They gave away a Cedeno picture and some really cool things that, unfortunately, I no longer have, as they were lost when we moved. We had great seats along the first baseline (for only \$3.50 per ticket!). The Dodgers ended up winning the game 5-1. I thought I remembered Dusty Baker hitting a HR that game, but all of the sources that I've found show that he was 1-4 with a couple of long outs. I think I saw how far he hit the ball and couldn't believe how far the ball went. Some aspects of the game were fuzzy, but you always remember the hot dog that you ate and how good it made you feel.

That memory stuck with me a long time. The players were so close you could almost touch them. Baseball became more important to me after that game. Looking at the back of baseball cards became important to me. How they determined ERAs and Batting Averages became important to me. These





events became so important in my life that I ended up studying Mathematics and Statistics in college because I liked determining how numbers worked with one another. It became my way of life and a big part of my career.

Last year, my six year old son asked me if I could take him to a Colorado Rockies game. Naturally, the excitement of taking my son to his first game brought me back to my dad taking me to my first game and I wanted to leap through the roof that he asked ME to go (as opposed to me dragging him when he was 2 months old and claiming it was his first game – which of course, for all of you that do that, my apologies, as no offense is meant). I just always envisioned that my son would remember his first game like I remembered mine and that his first memory of the game wasn't his 19th ball game.

I was fortunate enough to have a neighbor who has season tickets and told me that any game I wanted to see, just ask him. His seats were also along the first baseline (like my first game) and they were 4 rows up from the field. What great seats, I thought! How do you explain to someone who is 6 years old that these aren't your every day seats and how most guys spend their life up in the rafter?? It was beyond his comprehension.

I don't know what he'll remember from this game, but here are my takeaways:

- He probably won't remember that Pittsburgh won 6-2 (he remembers that the Rockies lost).
- He probably won't remember that Andrew McCutchen hit his 73rd career HR in what could have been his MVP season (he didn't get the MVP, but he was voted Most Outstanding Player in 2012).
- He won't remember the joy on his dad's face when I asked if he was tired in the 5th inning and if he was ready to go home. He wanted to stay for the entire game!

What he may remember:

- The foul ball that went over our heads – he says that was the most exciting part of the game!
- The "First Game" button that the usher gave to him and how nice everyone was.
- That the stadium staff would not put him on the Jumbotron when he was dancing between innings – everyone around us was rooting for





him to get on – he danced his heart off!

- Taking his Rockies foam finger and his baseball mitt to the game.
- High-fiving Dinger, the mascot as he walked by.
- Watching ourselves on TV after the game – we actually saw ourselves!
- Getting an actual game ball – the usher told us to go down to row 1 when the couple left after the 6th inning – he liked being in row 1. I remember running around Mile High Stadium for years trying to get an actual game ball during the minor league days of the Denver Bears in the 70s, only to come up empty every single time. I have to admit that I was both pleased for my son and jealous at the same time!
- The cotton candy, the lemonade slushy, and of course....THE HOT DOG!

It was a good day! My only thought is if it could ever impact his life like my first game impacted my life.

Let the 2013 games begin!





Now Batting for the Minnesota Twins, Kiiiiiiiiirby Puckett!

By Ryan Kalmoe aka SWOWannabe

I still remember sitting on my hideous fake brown leather couch watching Game 6 of the 1991 World Series between the Minnesota Twins and the Atlanta Braves. With the game tied and going into extra innings and the Twins' championship hopes on the line, my father was more than willing to let a much younger me stay up well past my bed time to watch the end of the game. I was 6 at the time, and starting to doze off...but I managed to wake up for the bottom of the 11th inning. With a 2-1 count, Charlie Leibrant delivery was promptly rerouted by Kirby Puckett into the seats in left field. I was ecstatic, bewildered, and tired, all at once.



Jack Buck promptly called the game with his now-famous line, "And we'll see you tomorrow night!" The image of Kirby rounding second base with his fist pumped in the air is one I default to whenever I think of baseball. The Twins went on to win the Series in game 7. Puckett's performance that year was nothing short of brilliant. 1991 was the first year I can remember my father bringing home baseball cards after work, along with a Twins binder and we'd go through the cellophane-wrapped cards looking for Twins players, and especially Kirby Puckett.

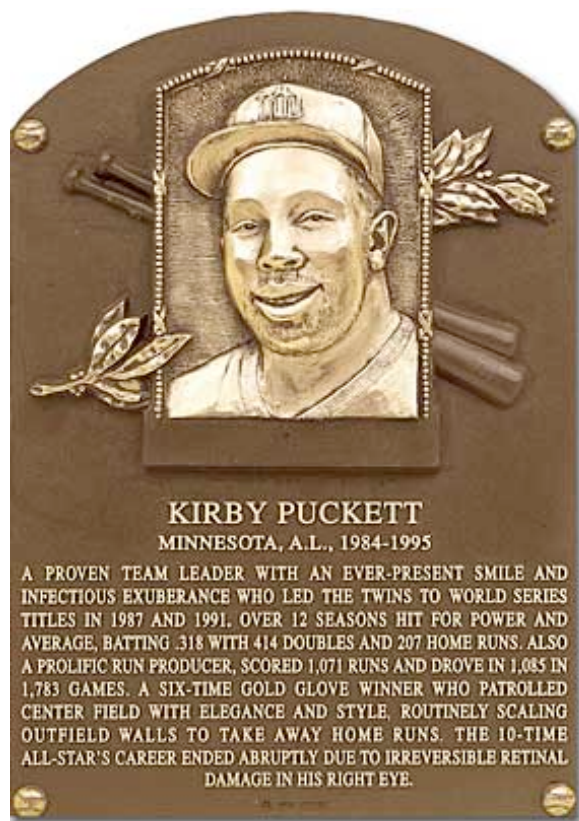
Flash forward to September 28th, 1995. A wild pitch by Dennis Martinez struck Kirby in the jaw and broke it. Despite having an impressive display during spring break, the Twins' beloved outfielder woke up on March 28th, diagnosed with glaucoma, Puckett was placed on the disabled list for the first time in his career. Twins Territory collectively held its breath for an excruciating three and a half months until finally, on July 12th, 1996, Kirby Puckett announced his retirement at the age of 36. I remember going over to my grandmother's that day. My dear old grandmother, still more enamored with Kirby than any other person to this day, and I talked about the unfortunate turn of events, what this meant for our Twins. Several tears were shed by all, even my aunt and cousin, both whom had the "hots" for Chuck Knoblauch but still loved Kirby.

Like all good things, Puckett's career had come to an end. While I may be biased, his baseball prowess was unmatched by any other player in his time. He needed only twelve short seasons to become the Twin's all-time leader in career hits, runs, doubles, and total bases. Kirby boasts 10 All-Star game appearances, 6 Gold Gloves and Silver Sluggers, an AL batting title, an AL season RBI leader, a Branch Rickey Award and Roberto Clemente Award. His success on the field, as indicated by the latter two awards, did not prevent him from giving back to the community so generously with his



time and finances. He had a niceness about him that can only be described as the famed "Minnesota Nice." In short, there simply aren't many players who were as talented at baseball and all-around nice guys as Kirby was.

While I've grown to admire other ball players since my childhood, I suspect there will never be one that will surpass Kirby as my all time favorite. Between having watched the magical 1991 World Series, witnessed Kirby play in person at the Metrodome before his retirement, and his presence in my childhood collection of Twins baseball cards, there is simply too much nostalgia to replace any possible hype that a player could generate. With the recent passing of my father, I've spent a lot of



time reminiscing on my childhood. That magical night and seeing Kirby pump his fist in the air gives me chills to this very day. One of the highlights of going to the beautiful Target Field to watch my beloved Twins play is passing by Gate 34 and seeing Kirby immortalized in a statue. I can't wait to take my children to Target Field some day. We'll go past Kirby and I'll point and say, "That's Kirby Puckett, one of the greatest baseball players to play the game. When I was your age I got to see him play." I want to tell them the stories of what made Kirby so great, how he worked hard both on and off the field.

Yes, all ball players must retire at some point. For most, it may be an agonizing decision to hold that press conference at the beginning of the year. I wish Kirby had been given that opportunity. He was not the first, and nor will he be the last who's career met an untimely end. His name and story reminds us of other greats such as Lou Gehrig and Roberto Clemente. It is right to honor those players whom are able to select when they retire from baseball, but we can't ever forget the ones who's careers and lives were cut short.



NFL Safe or Sorry?

By Brett Johnson aka Chargerfan46

The greatest game ever invented, played by finely tuned athletes who know the risks inherent to the game. A sport I grew up loving and dreaming of playing as soon as I was old enough. A sport with tough guys like Dick Butkus, Jack Lambert, Lawrence Taylor, Mike Curtis, Chuck Bednarik, etc. A sport that requires the player to put their health and well being on the line with each and every snap. A sport that captivates an audience that is looking for the big play or that big, bone jarring hit. A sport that glamorizes the big hits and immortalizes players that deliver them in highlight videos and pictures. A sport like no other. Oh wait, that was the NFL I grew up loving and hoping to play in, not the current NFL with new rules for “Player safety” seemingly popping up each



week.

I have no problem with the focus on player safety and the emphasis on concussion prevention and treatment. This rule is understandable and I applaud their hardline stance. Hopefully this will lead to safer equipment not more game play rules. (I remember the days of the ammonia tablet that was snapped open, stuck under the nose to clear the fog, then the player was sent back in. That should have never happened but in those days it was an acceptable practice.) My problem started when they began to tweak the rules each year. First it was to create more scoring opportunities because people like to see points on the board. Soon receivers were allowed to run free down the field and defensive backs were at a huge disadvantage. Then it went to protecting the QB because he was the “face of the franchise”. Tom Brady abused every QB protection rule by whining every time a defensive player breathed on him after he released the ball. Then it was protecting a defenseless receiver. No



big hits to jar the ball loose. This led to more receivers making catches receiving records began to fall. Now they are telling the ball carriers that they can not lower their heads while running with the ball. WHAT???? If you lower your shoulder to protect yourself or get the forward body lean to gain more yardage, your head naturally lowers. From Pop Warner to the Pros, players are taught to lower their shoulders "Low pad level", to create a more powerful position and protect themselves. What will happen now? Will we see more injuries to running backs because they are afraid to lower their shoulders? Will they be more exposed? (To clarify, I am NOT an advocate for leading with the players eyes on the ground. Be it a defensive player or ball carrier.) Don't referees have enough



to watch already? Now there is talk to make both offensive and defensive lineman get off the ball from a two point stance. REALLY? I would love to see those short yardage situations using the two point stance. Where is football going? What is it becoming?

What will the NFL dream up next? Will it become the NTHTFL (National Two Hand Touch Football League)? Defensive players may only contact the runner between the mid thigh and base of the sternum. Contact must be made with an open hand and both hands must touch simultaneously. No extra tag force may be used ie; tagging hard enough to alter the runners course of direction causing him to fall. Or will it become the NFFL (National Flag Football League)? Players may only grab the flag in a non-violent manner making sure to avoid contact. Ball carriers may not, spin, jump, hurdle, juke or stiff arm. Blocking may only be used after the defensive line counts to eight alligators.

While I never reached my goal of making it to the NFL, I was fortunate enough to play for twelve years (four in Pop Warner, four in High School and four in College), and have now coached for the past 25 years (one in college and 24 in high school). My grandfather played, my father played, I have played and both of my boys are playing. When we signed up, we knew the risks and potential outcomes associated with our choice. Do I want the sport to be safe? Of course. But, safety should come from quality coaching of proper technique not additional rules that change the feel and flow of the game.



Moss Over Rice? I Say Yes

By Dalton Hays aka DHays12

Right off the bat I am going to admit that this is an opinion, and I anticipate many skeptics, but this is what makes sports amazing, the ability to debate. Randy Moss was drafted by my favorite team in 1998, when I was just five years old. Unlike some Minnesota Vikings fans, I am still a Moss supporter; in fact, he is my favorite athlete of all time. I became a Randy Moss fan when I was in 3rd grade. Randy Moss was the type of athlete you wanted to play like. From eye popping catches to off the field antics, he always kept it interesting.

A few days before the 49ers vs. Ravens game, Moss came out and declared himself the greatest of all time, which to say the least caused a huge media uproar. I am here to tell you why he is correct to make that assumption. To start off, I am going to address the topic that everyone jumps to first, compare the stats. It is true that Rice leads Moss in most stats, but the stat that matters most is that Rice played in the league longer, and is not far ahead of Moss in some categories. If Moss was given the chance to play as many years as Rice, then maybe the Moss supporters would be saying compare the stats to the Rice supporters. Stats are not everything, especially if you take a look at who is throwing them the ball.

Here is a list of the quarterbacks who have started a game with Moss oppose to a list of the quarterbacks who have started a game with Rice:

Moss:	Rice:
Brad Johnson	Rob Johnson
Randall Cunningham	Matt Cavanaugh
Spergon Wynn	Marques Tuiasosopa
Todd Bauman	Ty Detmer
Daunte Culpepper	Jeff Brohm
Andrew Walter	Mike Moroski
Aaron Brooks	Steve Stenstrom
Kerry Collins	Matt Hasselbeck
Vince Young	Rich Miner
Rusty Smith	Jeff Kemp
Matt Cassel	Steve Bono
Jeff George	Elvis Grbac





Tom Brady	Jeff Garcia
Brett Favre	Rich Gannon
	Trent Dilfer
	Kerry Collins
	Joe Montana
	Steve Young

As you can see, despite playing more than 5 seasons more than Moss, Rice has only 4 more quarterbacks on his list. Not to mention that Rice played with Joe Montana and Steve Young for the vast majority of his career. There is no arguing that Jerry Rice had a far superior supporting cast for the majority of his years in the NFL. With Joe Montana and Steve Young throwing to Randy Moss for the majority of his career, his numbers would have been unreal. With Tom Brady, he was able to catch 23 touchdowns in a single season, going up against Darrelle Revis twice that year. Randy Moss was able to create nightmares for every defender in his way; he even had an entirely new defensive strategy created in hopes of covering him. Jerry Rice might have been a better leader than Moss, but he could not stack up to Moss' hands, speed, agility, and vertical jump. Moss said it best in an interview in the early 2000s; "If I can't get to it, nobody can get to it!" I would even go so far as to say Randy Moss' 1998 and 2007 seasons were more impressive than Jerry Rice's entire career.



To say someone is better than another based off championship rings is not accurate and is being used way to often in today's sports world. To claim that one is better than another based on rings is simply flawed. How many people think that Brandon Jacobs is better than Adrian Peterson, or that David Tyree is better than Larry Fitzgerald or Calvin Johnson? Should Jeremy Shockey be considered a greater tight end than Tony Gonzalez based on rings? I didn't think so. It is funny how people can state who is better than who based on championship rings, are they trying to imply that football is an individual game? In order to get that ring you have to be with a supporting cast that is capable of winning the big one. If I was given the choice to start a team with Randy Moss in his prime, or Jerry Rice in his prime, I would give the nod to Moss. Plenty more research can be done on this topic, and I could keep adding to this paper until it reaches hundreds of pages, but I'm not going to make anyone have to read for hours when they have other things important going on. Randy Moss is the definition of my childhood, and maybe that is why my opinion (or Rice supporters opinions) is how it is. I honestly believe Randy Moss is the greatest of all time, but everyone has the right to their own opinion. For me it is the impact left on the game that outweighs stats. Although stats are very important, they can depend on who is surrounding you during the time you spend in the league. I will end my rant with this simple math statement that just about sums everything up for me..... 84>80.



Moss Over Rice? I Say No **By J.R. Lebert aka jrlebert**

I can certainly respect debate about who is better at many positions in the NFL. Some of the higher profile skill positions are certainly up for rather impassioned discussions. Is it Barry, Emmitt, Jim Brown, or, now, Adrian Peterson at running back? When it comes to signal callers, the debate rages between Montana, Peyton Manning, Brady, or Elway. One position, however, that of wide receiver, is as easy of an open and shut case for the number one spot as exists in all of professional sports. Jerry Rice is clearly the greatest of all time.

There are many different factors when considering the greatest wideout ever. Simple counting stats are definitely a part of the equation. Championships are certainly a factor. Longevity, impact on the game and physical attributes should certainly be considered as well. Lastly, one's team and cast of teammates are also worth discussing.

Personal opinions aside, there can be no debate. It's Jerry, and nobody else. I will even go as far as to say that the debate for the #2 pass catcher of all-time, whether it is Randy Moss, Marvin Harrison, or even Tony Gonzalez, is a MUCH closer debate than that of #1. To reply directly to Dhays12, however, I will keep the comparisons between Rice and Moss, for the most part.

I'll tackle the attributes in the order I listed them above. First, there are the statistics. No matter how you slice it, Rice destroys Moss up and down the line. Total catches: Rice leads Moss by 567 grabs, 1,549-982. To put that in comparison, only 77 other players in NFL history even have 567 catches. That's more grabs than Hall Of Famers Lance Alworth, John Stallworth, Kellen Winslow Sr., Don Hutson, and Tommy McDonald. Receiving yards: Rice leads by 7,603 yards. Think about that... that is seven more years of 1000 yards receiving for Moss, something he already did TEN times in his career. It's also more yards than HOFers Bob Hayes, Elroy "Crazy Legs" Hirsch, and Dante Lavelli. Though Randy ranks second in receiving TD's, it's 41 touchdowns behind Rice. Perhaps if he would have caught more than just 8 TDs in his last three years, from 2010-2012, despite playing in 32 games, he would be closer to Rice.

Yes, it's absolutely true that Moss played in far fewer games than Rice. Jerry's total games played, 303, ranks 6th in NFL history, compared to Randy's 218, putting him 132nd as of the end of the 2012 season. If Randy truly was better, however, his per game average would show vastly superior numbers, right? Well... that may not be the case. Rice has a better yards/game average, 75.6 to 70.1, with Rice's number ranking him 5th all-time. Rice also has a better receptions/game line, 5.1 to 4.5. Where Moss does have better numbers is TD/game, besting Jerry .720 to .686.

It must be Moss' season totals that separate him, instead of career or per game totals! No? Jerry Rice led the league six times in yards/game and receiving yards. He also led the league twice in catches. Randy Moss NEVER led the league in any of those three categories. Rice had a dozen seasons of 80 grabs or more, while Moss had just half as many, six. The same can be said for 100 catch seasons, with Jerry holding the edge 4 to 2. While he was certainly a TD machine, Moss still comes up short in league leading TD seasons, 6 to 5. Rice had a total of 14 seasons with over 1,000 yards receiving, including an incredible 11 straight from 1986-1996. Randy had just 10 such seasons, and his best streak stops at six.



Personal accolades are never something that a player strives for, but when you have a great career, they tend to add up. Jerry Rice has been named to 13 Pro Bowls, and, more importantly, 10 AP 1st Teams. Randy Moss was named to less than half as many Pro Bowls, six, and just four AP 1st Teams. Jerry was also named the AP Offensive Player of the Year two times, an award Moss never won.

Championships, while not attributable to any single player, help to create a more complete body of work for anyone up for the title of best ever at their position. For that very reason, Dan Marino isn't in the conversation for best QB of all time, just as Charles Barkley is out of the talk of best power forward of all time in the NBA. Even with Tom Brady at the helm for a 30-year old Randy Moss, at the peak of his best season as a pro, in his most important game he would ever play in, on the best team he ever played on, Randy was largely a non-factor. Through the first three quarters, Randy was held to just one single grab for 18 yards. He finished with a ho-hum line of 5-62-1 TD, in a disappointing loss, the only such loss for New England that year. As a 35-year old mentor/3rd WR for the 2012 49ers, Moss caught just two balls for 21 yards in another loss. Moss's career Super Bowl record: 0-2.

When it comes to the Super Bowl spotlight, no wide receiver performed like Jerry Rice. Rice won the first 3 Super Bowl's he appeared in. He put up box scores that were simply staggering, despite being the first offensive option on all three teams, and having the opposition game plan to stop him. His totals from those three contests: 28 catches, 512 yards, and SEVEN touchdowns. He was also named the Super Bowl MVP in 1998. Despite playing in the 2002 game at age 40, Rice still put up solid numbers. While he was held without a catch in the first half, he came back strong with a 5-77-1 TD line in the second half.

Rice was incredibly lucky, as he was able to play a difficult skill position at an extremely high level for an abnormally long time. Part of being able to do so is staying injury free. With the exception of Jerry Rice's 1997, both players missed very little time due to injury. It's essentially a wash there. Another large part of it, however, is having the physical attributes to last many seasons in the NFL. There is absolutely NO DEBATE that Randy's pure physical gifts allowed him to dominate in his younger years. No wideout in NFL history came in to the league with the set of gifts that Moss did. His leaping ability and speed were unquestioningly superior than Rice's ever were. Moss did have excellent hands, but Jerry's rank up there with some of the best ever. Moss was also taller, by two full inches. However, Moss's physical make-up, a bit thinner than Rice, may have contributed to his career being quite a bit shorter.

Assuming 2012 is Randy Moss's last season, he ends his career in his 35-year old season. Moss had very little meaningful production after his 32-year old season, 2009. After that, he played in just 32 games in three seasons, sitting out 2011 entirely. His line after 2009, and after his age 32 season: 56-827-8 TDs. Oh boy...

Assuming Jerry Rice doesn't attempt a comeback at age 50, he ended his career in his 42-year old season. He definitely hung on one year too long, but his production from ages 33-41 are downright legendary. While Moss was floundering in his 33-year old season, shuffling between three teams, Rice had one of the great seasons of all-time, putting up this video game-like line: 122-1848-15 TDs. Moss NEVER had as many grabs or yards in ANY season. Rice's line after his age 32 season, 729-9620-66 TDs. That line would be a HOF career for any wide receiver. Also, Randy had a two year head start on Rice, drafted into the NFL during his age 21 season, while Rice was 23.



It also cannot be debated that having legends like Joe Montana and Steve Young for the large majority of your career certainly helps, but Rice was always the first offensive option on just about every team he played for, just like Moss. Moss did have seasons playing with Tom Brady, Brett Favre, and Randall Cunningham, and definitely helped to make some of his other quarterbacks better, but Rice did have a very clear advantage in terms of signal callers. Randy did play on two of the NFL's all-time best teams, the 1998 Vikings and 2007 Patriots. However, these are also two of the most disappointing teams in NFL history, with Minnesota not making what seemed to be a pre-ordained trip to the Super Bowl in Moss's rookie year (not his fault), and the 16-0 Patriots losing their only game in their biggest game (see above on Moss's role).

Wherever he went, Jerry Rice was a clubhouse leader. The same cannot be said about Randy Moss. He personified the high-maintenance diva wide receiver, wearing out his welcome in Minnesota in 2004, Oakland in 2006, New England in 2009, and, astonishingly, three different teams in 2010, to the point he wasn't even offered a contract in 2011. Only after he had a complete change of heart was he offered a shot in 2012. From all reports, he was a fantastic clubhouse guy, and someone whom younger receivers relied on heavily for his leadership and guidance. Definitely a major change for Moss, but it might be too little, too late.

To me, there is no possible way to put Moss ahead of Rice, unless you are taking only their physical gifts early in their career into account. Yes, in terms of uniform numbers, 84>80. But despite missing fewer games due to injury, starting two years earlier in age, having far better physical gifts, and playing more years in a pass-heavy offensive era than Rice, Jerry still comes out on top. It only takes looking up each player on pro-football-reference.com, where it lists all kinds of information, including nicknames. Under Jerry Rice, it says "The G.O.A.T." Under Randy Moss, it says "The Freak." Sorry... Jerry Rice is #1.





Dark Sky, Dark Water, a Dark Night

By Drew Pelto aka *censored*

Twenty years ago, my view of baseball-- and life as a whole-- changed forever.

On the morning of March 23, 1993, I woke up, had an Eggo waffle with cinnamon and sugar sprinkled on it, and prepared to enter another day of the hell known as third grade. Sitting on the couch in my living room in the far-east Cleveland suburb of Painesville, Dan Patrick delivered the morning's sports news. Baseball season was only a few weeks away as I started my first Little League practices. My Cleveland Indians were still in the middle of a lengthy rebuild. But on this day, they were the lead story.

As Steve Olin's photo popped up on the screen, I was mystified. One of my favorite players was the lead story? Wow, awesome! And then the words came:

"Three members of the Cleveland Indians were involved in a one-boat accident at 7:30 last night."

And then it became obvious: Olin was one of the three. I only recall a few words here and there after that. Olin was killed instantly. Free agent signing Tim Crews died hours later from injuries sustained in the crash. Bob Ojeda was in critical condition from head injuries.

At eight years old, I hadn't experienced much death-- only my 88-year old grandfather, an aunt who had cancer, and another aunt who was killed in a car/train accident (self inflicted, though I was too young to know it at the time). Death was something that only happened to the aged, the sick, the frail. It wasn't supposed to happen to athletes in the middle of their careers.



And yet, here it was right in front of me as this fan favorite, a submarine-tossing closer and a big piece of the future for the Tribe, was gone in an instant. The team was shocked. Major League Baseball held a moment of silence at every ballpark. It was the first death of a player during a season since the 1979 plane crash that took the life of Thurman Munson in Northeast Ohio. The Indians wore a commemorative patch on their jerseys recognizing Olin and Crews. The Dodgers, Crews' previous team, also honored him with a sleeve emblem.



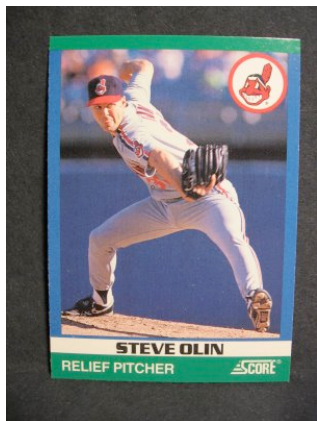
"Death wasn't supposed to happen to athletes in the middle of their careers."

The Indians had an off day on March 22. Tim Crews lived near the team's Spring Training facility in Winter Haven and invited the players, coaches, and staff over. Many had already made plans with family, but three members-- Olin, Bobby Ojeda, and strength coach



Fernando Montes-- went out. As they got ready to go out and hit the lake for some fishing, the group realized they left a few items back up at the house. Montes lost the game of rock-paper-scissors, and off he went back to the house while the three pitchers launched the boat to take a couple laps around the lake. Minutes later, Montes was with Tim's friend Perry Brigmond, pulling three severely injured bodies from Little Lake Nellie.

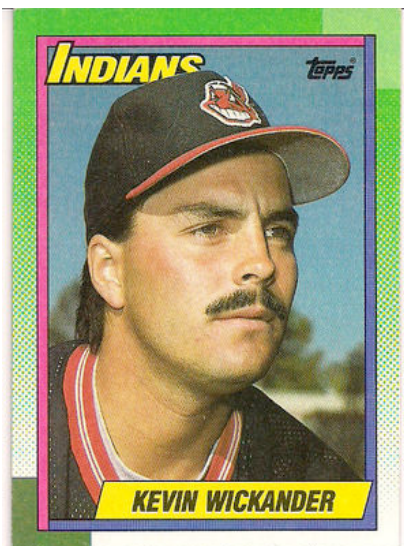
Olin had always told his wife Patti that he wanted the Garth Brooks song "The Dance" played at his funeral. It was his favorite song, and the video for it showed people who died following their dreams. The deaths of Olin and Crews didn't just affect their families. It also derailed another young career and life, and heavily weighed on Ojeda, the lone survivor of the crash.



Bobby was the lucky one, as odd as it sounds. Slouched just slightly in his seat on Crews' boat, the lower distance was just enough to keep him from joining the fates of his teammates, only shaving off the top of his head instead of taking a direct blow to the entire thing. Ojeda had a long bout with the "Why Me?" that survivors often feel following a tragedy taking place around them. He spent time in Sweden to get away. He no longer called himself a ballplayer when asked, just a former ballplayer. He wanted nothing to do with rehab, physical fitness, or even holding a baseball. It took months before he was even willing to throw a ball with his physical therapist-- which also took him weeks to decide to visit.

And how many near-misses could a man have? Ojeda had already survived driving off a bridge on a mountain bike as a kid. He and his dad barely avoided shots from some crazy guy who just decided to fire off fifteen rounds at them in California-- while they were on a boat, no less. And there was the time as a teenager that he tried to light a charcoal grill with gasoline and the can went up in flames in his hand. Or the time he was riding in a Corvette that managed to end up wrapped around a telephone pole. Or when an ambulance plowed through the trunk and into the back seat of another car he was riding in. Or when he sliced his finger off with hedge trimmers as a Mets pitcher. Or all the times he drove around his neighborhood on his Harley, still dressed in the suit he wore out from the ballpark. Eventually, he decided he was going to try to make his way back to baseball. The fates hadn't gotten him yet, and he wasn't going to just roll over and let them end his career. Not unless it was on his terms.

Kevin Wickander wasn't even at the party that day. He wanted to go, but had already told his wife and kids he would take them to Disney World. But Olin was his best friend through their years in the minors, the best man at his wedding, his chief competitor in the annual bullpen gum chewing contest: he was completely distraught by Olin's death. The two had always been there for each other. But this was a time where Wick couldn't be there for his friend. Wickander made sure the team kept Olin's locker the exact way it had been before his death, almost obsessively so. A month into the season, the loss of his best friend still heavy in his mind, the Indians sent Wickander to the Cincinnati Reds to give him a new start. The big lefty never regained his form. After a couple of brief stints in Detroit and Milwaukee, including a 1995 season that turned a few heads for a while, he was out of baseball. Having had drug and alcohol problems early in his career, and now dealing with the end of a baseball career and the loss of Olin, Wick ended up back on drugs, developing a severe meth addiction. Turning to crime to make the money required to feed his addiction, he was eventually arrested and imprisoned for theft. Released in 2006, he has been clean ever since and is living in Phoenix. He says his most prized possessions are his college baseball championship ring, his wedding ring, and a watch of Steve's



that his widow Patti gave to him at the funeral. Even after all the post-career problems, he still says that March 22, 1993 was the worst day of his life.

His inability to be there for his best friend haunted him

On August 7, a young pitcher named Julian Tavarez made his major league debut. After allowing five runs in three innings, manager Mike Hargrove went to the bullpen for a lefty. Bobby Ojeda made his return to the mound. He would only pitch in nine games that season, then in two with the 1994 Yankees. But the most important thing was that he was back.

For the entire 1993 season, anytime I wore my Indians jersey, I made this patch out of paper and taped it to my sleeve

For the next seven years, the Indians never had a day off during Spring Training, just to keep something like this from happening again. The team continued on. Two weeks

later, the Yankees crushed them 9-1 on Opening Day. They finished sixth of the seven AL East teams, going 76-86. Eric Plunk, Jeremy Hernandez, Derek Lilliquist, and Jerry DiPoto stepped into the roles vacated in the bullpen, but the Tribe still had the fourth worst ERA in the American League. The team played their last game at Cleveland Municipal Stadium and prepared for a move to the new downtown ballpark in the Gateway neighborhood. A month after the conclusion of the 1993 season, one final tragedy: another young pitcher, Cliff Young, was killed in a car accident in his home state of Texas.



Twenty years later, Ojeda refuses to talk about the accident.

Twenty years later, Montes refuses to play rock-paper-scissors.

Twenty years later, Patti Olin refuses to visit Little Lake Nellie.

Aside from Dave Winfield wearing it 1995, no Indian wore Olin's 31 until 2000. Two and a half years after Olin and Crews' deaths, on September 8, 1995, the Cleveland Indians raised the Central Division banner as they clinched their first playoff berth since 1954.

"The Dance" played over the Jacobs Field speakers.

*"Our lives are better left to chance,
I could have missed the pain,
But I'd have had to miss the dance."*



Around the Rink
By RGM81 aka Richard McAdam

It's playoffs time! As this issue of Collector's Corner reaches your hands, the Stanley Cup Playoffs are underway and the first round action should be providing fans with tremendous levels of drama and excitement. This is what every team gears up and prepares year-round for, and it's great that it is that time of year again. A lot of the experts seem to think that a Penguins-Blackhawks Finals is inevitable, but there's always a surprise or two along the way—could an underdog like the Islanders shock the world and go on a deep run? You just never know!

One thing that you can count on is that SCF has stepped up big time to provide our members with the opportunity to participate in some great contests! As part of the larger Jaunt for the Jersey Contest—in which one lucky member will win a team-signed Edmonton Oilers jersey!—we have three new playoffs-themed contests up and running!

1. Playoffs Bracket Challenge – participants will predict which teams will advance through each round of the playoffs and how many games it will take to knock off their opponents. At stake are valuable points and an ITG Captain C Stick and Jersey card of Stanley Cup Champion Mike Modano!
2. Playoffs Predictor Challenge – participants use their crystal ball to guess the path to the Cup, post-season scoring leaders, and much more! A very cool “surprise” contest prize is at stake here that will be worthy of the effort!
3. Guess The Score – a daily contest in which participants attempt to predict the outcome of a pre-selected game for each night of the playoffs, with the winner taking home valuable points and an Artifacts Dual Patch card of Jordan and Eric Staal!

SCF strives to give its community the best prizes and contests as a reward for their participation in making SCF the best trading site and community you can find. We hope that you've enjoyed the contests presented so far this season and those yet to come!

In addition to the great action happening on the ice, the hobby is heating up off the ice! April saw the release of Upper Deck Fleer Retro, and it has been a hit with fans looking to bolster their collections with updated versions of some of the greatest insert cards of the 1990's. The Precious Metal Gems cards—in Red, Blue, and Green parallels—are visually stunning cards to behold, and they are absolutely the highlight of the product. One eBay seller must have been very happy to see his Chris Kreider PMG Green /10 sell for \$400, while a Blue /50, that of Wayne Gretzky, sold for more than \$150! I have only seen a Red in-hand myself, and I must say that they are quite beautiful to look at for your collection. They may not have autographs or memorabilia, but aesthetically speaking they're some of the nicest cards you'll see all year.

April was also a very good month for In The Game, as they celebrated the release of their always-popular Between The Pipes release. As always there is a formidable line-up of top-notch memorabilia cards featuring goalie stars of the CHL, NHL, and retired legends of the game. The Masked Men 5 cards look very nice this year, with an added chromium/refractor effect, and one memorabilia subset that caught my attention was the Big League Debut jersey card series that spotlights the first games played by the biggest stars in the NHL today. As always, there are stunning MTO cards to be



pulled and the HSHS redemption program is once again in effect, allowing collectors to obtain a very special limited edition card in exchange for 150 points cards.

Panini had no product releases in April, nor do they have any scheduled for May. They have had some big announcements regarding future products, however, as collectors can look forward to the inclusion of a 2-card pack of Dominion included with their boxes of Prime when that high-end product is released in August. Panini has also announced that Rookie Anthology, due for release in June, will for the first time in hockey include Prizm, a very popular product in basketball. Big things are on the horizon for Panini, to be sure!

Of course, the major event of May (beyond the hockey playoffs) is the Toronto Spring Expo, and collectors are very excited to participate in all the redemption programs being offered by the card companies. ITG will have freshly released Ultimate Memorabilia 12 and a special set of redemption cards for that product as well as others from their current year lineup. Upper Deck will be there with their popular Priority Signings autograph cards. Panini has been mum on their Expo plans to date, but will certainly be there in force. It promises to be a great time for collectors to interact, talk hobby, talk hockey, and just have a lot of fun.

That's all the action around the rink for this month. Enjoy the playoffs and see you again next month!

-- The SCF Hockey Team

