

COLLECTORS CORNER

AUGUST 2013



**WHO TO KEEP AN EYE ON
FOR THE SECOND HALF OF THE SEASON?**

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Are Ethics a Lost Art in Sports?

By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888



Last month, I covered the headline news of Aaron Hernandez's arrest on a charge of murder. This month, what is making the headlines? Well, for one, the fact that Major League Baseball has once again had to discipline some of its players with heavy suspensions for the time and time again committed infraction of using prohibited substances... Is anybody surprised? In all honesty, for me, baseball died of the true death when "nos amours" or the Montreal Expos to you non french-canadians, were having an outstanding campaign in 1994 and possibly heading to the World Series when the season was cut short by a strike. To me, that was the final drop in the bucket so you

can imagine what my feelings are about the whole Steroid Era...It's nice to see that there are fans out there who are passionate enough to stick by their favorite sport. I must admit I had started to think that was completely impossible but the winning entry of the latest writing contest made me see that some people still have an undying love for what was once America's favorite pastime. You can read that excellent article on page 18.

As for me, well I'll just wrap up this topic by saying I could hardly believe it when MLB announced the 211 game suspension to Alex Rodriguez who promptly decided to take his case to appeal. I mean cheating by using prohibited substance is one thing, denying you've done it is another and finally admitting it but cry about how you don't deserve the punishment well...words fail me quite frankly. Props to the baseball fans in Chicago for making their hostility towards A-Rod known in what was his first game of the season because yes, since he appealed he was allowed to play...

As if the two above mentioned stories weren't enough, Ilya Kovalchuk also rocked the NHL world by announcing his "retirement" from the NHL. Why at such a tender age? Well, quite simply, by retiring and walking away from your NHL contract, you can play in the KHL instead. So after committing to the New Jersey Devils for 15 years he played 3 of those years and then took off... And for good measure, he announced his decision days after the opening of the free agency market. The end result? Most of the highly sought after free agents had already been signed by a team so the Devils were left with a huge hole in their line-up which they had to try and patch as well as they could. In the end, they signed Jaromir Jagr to a deal but realistically you cannot replace a player in his prime like Kovalchuk by a former all-star whose best days are behind him. I know, you're going to say that given how huge Kovalchuk's contract was the Devils were probably happy to see him leave in a way but I think it shows an incredible lack of professionalism on the part of the player and a complete lack of respect for not only the fans but also his teammates. Worst still, in the days following the announcement, his sister was quoted as saying he would probably return to the NHL one day. Talk about a way to leave a team which is bound to struggle (with Brodeur's upcoming retirement and the fact that they lost Parise to free-agency as they couldn't pay him enough in light of Kovy's huge contract) and be able to choose your team upon return. If you speak French, I invite you to read the article I wrote on this topic on page 59.

The next issue will be out on September 10th, until then, I sure hope you enjoy this issue!



Who to Watch Down the Stretch **By J.R. Lebert aka jrlebert**

It's the dog days of summer, and the pennant races are just now starting to heat up in most of the divisions. The All Star break allowed for a few teams to take a breath and collect themselves, a few to take a look in the mirror to see if they really are contenders, and even one to take a look in the rear view and realize that there is nobody gaining, despite predictions to the contrary at the start of the year. Such is the roller coaster ride of baseball's 162-game marathon.

Yes, baseball is a team game, and it will, no doubt, take all 25 men, and even the 40-man roster additions after August, to make the playoff push. However, all players are obviously not created equal. Some players are more important to their team's success, and as such, the fate of their team's chances of a title rest a bit more heavily on their shoulders. Here are the players to watch during the race to October:

NATIONAL LEAGUE WEST:

The Dodgers have made an incredible run, and have gone from worst to first in just 30 days. The Diamondbacks are doing their best to keep pace, but with the intra-division deadline deal of Ian Kennedy to the Padres, it seems as though they may see the writing on the wall for the division title. While the Dodgers have the star-studded payroll and even deeper bankroll, the division may come down to just a few players:



YASIEL PUIG, OF, Dodgers

No player in baseball has energized their lineup, clubhouse, and even their fan base more than the Cuban sensation, Yasiel Puig. The NL Player of the Month for June, Puig's energy and demeanor have changed Dodger baseball. With a lineup already chock full of All Stars, including Hanley Ramirez, a bona fide MVP candidate, Adrian Gonzalez, Andre Ethier, Carl Crawford, and the oft-injured Matt Kemp, it has been the 22-year old rookie who made the biggest impact. His ability to shore up the outfield, with Crawford, Ethier and Kemp all battling the injury bug at times, is perhaps just as valuable as his rocket arm or blazing speed.

PAUL GOLDSCHMIDT, 1B, Diamondbacks

There may be no more valuable player to their team than the Arizona first baseman. The only player on his roster with double digit home runs OR double digit steals, he also leads his team in runs, hits, walks, and total bases while pacing the entire NL in RBI. While Arizona has to be happy with the season from SP Patrick Corbin, it has been Goldschmidt's ability to pick up the slack from the loss of Justin Upton, the lackluster season from Miguel Montero, and the general lack of power from the rest of his roster to keep his team within shouting distance of L.A.

NATIONAL LEAGUE CENTRAL:

What looked like a two team race has found a third suitor and the Reds, Pirates and Cardinals are three teams that could definitely do some damage come playoff time. The Cardinals are easily the most talent-laden roster in the Central, as



both their starting pitching and starting lineup are loaded. Between perennial All Stars Yadier Molina, Matt Holliday and Carlos Beltran, as well as playoff hero David Freese and budding star Allen Craig, it looks as if a middle infielder could be the key to success. For the Pirates, it seems to be the same old story. They will go just as far as Andrew McCutchen takes them. Looking beneath the surface, however, shows a roster with excellent starting pitching and a stud at the top of the lineup. With the Reds, you get a balanced lineup with power arms both in the pen and the rotation. It may be a rookie fireballer that helps them catch the two rabbits in front.



MATT CARPENTER, 2B, Cardinals:

A first time All Star in 2013, Matt Carpenter is staking his claim as one of the best second basemen in the game. Leading the league in runs and doubles, with an average well over .300 heading into August, Carpenter gave the already potent Birds' offense another weapon to watch out for in October. Drafted by the Cardinals in 2009, Matt is just another example of home grown talent making a major impact in St. Louis.

GERRIT COLE/A.J. BURNETT/FRANCISCO LIRIANO/ JEFF LOCKE, SPs, Pirates:

Yes, four players from the Pirates are the ones to watch if they are to make a run and remind fans of their glory years in the very

early 90s. The four top starters for the Bucs are a curious case: Liriano leads in wins, Burnett in K's, and Locke in ERA. In A.J. Burnett, you have a hardened veteran who was a World Series winner in 2003 and braved the perils of pitching in Gotham for 3 years. Liriano is a reclamation project who has paid off. After averaging 11 losses and an ERA just under 5.00 in his last four seasons, he sports an 11-4 record with a sparkling 2.16 ERA. Locke, who had just 51 IP and one career win entering 2013, has blossomed this season, making the All Star team and putting up a great 2.36 ERA. Cole was the #1 overall pick of the 2011 draft, and has taken a spot at the back of the rotation mid-way through 2013. After winning his first 4 starts, he is just 1-5 in his last 6 decisions, and has seen his ERA rise almost a full run.

TONY CINGRANI, SP, Reds:

Quick pop quiz: Which Reds starter leads the team in K/9? Homer Bailey? Nope. Mat Latos? Nah. It's rookie Tony Cingrani, with a K/9 rate of over 10! The Reds knew they were getting heat with Bailey and Latos, and hoped for (and are getting) solid seasons from veteran Bronson Arroyo and Mike Leake, but Cingrani has been a find for Cinci. His last start, 7/28 vs. L.A., may have been a peak at things to come: 7 IP, one hit and one walk allowed, 11 Ks.



NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST:

As of this article, the Braves are running away with the division, currently up 11.5 games on heavily favored Washington. Not much to see here. With Justin Upton leading the way, the first Braves roster of the AC era, After Chipper, looks like they haven't missed a beat. Their player to watch:



CHRIS JOHNSON, 3B, Braves:

If your reaction is “Who?,” I doubt you are alone. One look atop the batting average race, however, finds a strange name at the top of the NL, Braves 3B Chris Johnson. A career .276 hitter entering 2013, just about the only suspense in the Braves season is whether or not Johnson will win the batting title.

AMERICAN LEAGUE WEST:

With the Angels waving the white flag, it is a two team race in the West. Oakland, yes, Oakland is putting together another incredible run, while Texas loaded up at the deadline to make a final push. With a possible season-ending suspension looming for starters on both teams, Bartolo Colon for the A’s and Nelson Cruz for the Rangers, it will be up to two arms down the stretch for these two teams.

GRANT BALFOUR, RP, A’s:

Dating back to last season, Balfour had converted 44 straight saves before a hiccup vs. the last place Astros at the end of July. He has gotten right back on track, with 2 saves, 5 strikeouts, and just one baserunner allowed in his last 3 appearances. With the A’s playing a ton of close games so far, no player will be more important than their closer.



MATT GARZA, SP, Rangers:

Looking for another top of the rotation starter to go with flamethrower Yu Darvish, they got their man at the deadline, making a deal with the Cubs for Matt Garza. So far, it has paid off, with two quality starts and a 1.88 ERA. The Rangers will need some heavy lifting from Garza, as the back of the rotation has been the Achilles heel for Texas thus far.

AMERICAN LEAGUE CENTRAL:

Even with the Royals making a late run, it seems to be down to just two teams, the Cleveland Indians and the Detroit Tigers. Everyone who follows baseball even casually knows about the big guns on Detroit, Miguel Cabrera, the Triple Crown winner in 2012, and Justin Verlander, the 2011 MVP and Cy Young winner. However, with Verlander having a subpar season and Cabrera battling the injury bug, Torii Hunter and Max Scherzer have stepped up. It’s not any of those four, however, who will be the key to another Tigers postseason run. In Cleveland, Terry Francona’s bunch has served notice that they will be in the mix come playoff time. One hurler, however, will be the key.

JOSE VERAS & JOAQUIN BENOIT, RPs, Tigers:

In acquiring Veras from the Astros, the Tigers are hoping to shore up their one, glaring weakness, their bullpen. Al Alburquerque, Phil Coke, Octavio Dotel, and Jose Valverde have all been spectacular flameouts in 2013. Veras, who saved 19 games for Houston, will be the set-up man. Benoit, who has an ERA of 1.43, has assumed the closer’s role from Valverde. No matter how good the offense, it will be these two at the back of the pen who will determine how far the Tigers go.



JUSTIN MASTERSON, SP, Indians:

It looks like the Justin Masterson that everyone was talking about has finally arrived. In the top 5 in wins, IP, and K's, Justin has given the Indians the top of the rotation starter they have needed since the days of C.C. Sabathia.

AMERICAN LEAGUE EAST:

Sorry Yankees fans. It appears to be a three-team race, and you're not in it. The Red Sox, Rays, and Orioles are all putting a bit of distance between themselves and the Bombers. For the Red Sox, it has been the usual heroics by David Ortiz on offense, and solid efforts by their starters to do just enough. Once it gets to the pen, however, it's been a bit of an adventure. Two players having possible historic seasons highlight the Orioles run. For the Rays, though their rotation, led by Matt Moore, has been key, one rookie will hold the hopes of Rays fans in his hands, and on his bat.



KOJI UEHARA, RP, Red Sox:

Andrew Bailey and Joel Hanrahan have each had their turn as closer, and failed, have been injured, or both. Daniel Bard has been a non-factor, and Franklin Morales and Andrew Miller have both been injured. It's because of all of these issues that the emergence of Koji Uehara as closer that has Boston fans breathing a sigh of relief. He had a very impressive July, with 5 saves and ZERO earned runs allowed in over 15 IP. He will need to be just as sharp down the stretch.

WIL MYERS, RF, Rays:

Since his call-up in mid-June, Myers has been the hottest rookie in the AL. He is hitting .324 with 7 home runs in limited time, and if he can keep his composure down the

stretch, gives the Rays another weapon to pair with Evan Longoria.

CHRIS DAVIS & MANNY MACHADO, 1B and 3B, Orioles:

The corner infielders for the Orioles are the major reason they are in the thick of things in the East. All Chris Davis has done this season is hit 40 bombs, already drive in over 100 runs, and place himself at the top of the list of the most feared hitters in the league. While teams are trying to avoid the big bat of Davis, Manny Machado may just be becoming the best young player in the AL. On pace for over 50 doubles and 200 hits, the first time All Star could be a fixture at 3rd in the Midsummer Classic for years to come.





New Super Collector: RGM81 - Josh Gorges

Ladies and gentleman introducing, from Kelowna BC, the latest inductee in the SCF Hockey Collector Hall of Fame™: RGM81 who you may also know as therealRGM81 or just as plain Richard. We are delighted to finally give this much deserved nod to Richard for his outstanding Josh Gorges collection. While it is never easy to reach a collector's goal of having a complete collection, it is harder still when the player you've elected to collect plays for what is arguably the most popular and most collected team in hockey. Without further delay, here is the breakdown of Richard's amazing Josh Gorges collection:

- * Total Unique cards owned of this player 169/232 - 72.8%
- * Total Unique cards owned of this player minus 1/1s 161/176 - 91.5%
- * Total Unique True Rookie cards: 12/12
- * Total Unique cards with Auto: 23/34 - 67.6% - all outstanding autographs are 1/1s
- * Total Unique cards with GU: 41/46 - 89.1%
- * Total Unique base cards: 22
- * Total Unique Inserts: 55
- * Total 1/1: 8/56
- * Total Oddball/unlisted: 23
- * Total Misc./memorabilia: 8

Memorabilia

Autographed Game-Used Gloves
 Autographed Game-Used Stick
 Autographed Kelowna Rockets Alumni Game-Used Jersey
 Dual Autographed 16x20 Photo - Crease Defenders - with Carey Price
 Triple Autographed 8x10 Photo - Centennial - with Carey Price & Travis Moen
 Autographed 8x10 Photo - Goal Celebration
 Autographed 8x10 Photo - Close Up
 Autographed 8x10 Photo - Slap Shot
 Autographed Kelowna Rockets 2004 Memorial Cup Champions Puck

Numerous in-person autographed cards.

Pictures, link or site to the collection:

<http://opg.sportscardforum.com/scf/i...ort/name/pc/1/>

If you have more then one link

please add one link per line here:

<https://www.facebook.com/RGM81/media...8913355&type=3>

Why you think you are a super collector:

I have what I fully believe is the most complete and best collection of Josh Gorges that you're likely to ever see. It is a long-running project that has brought me tremendous enjoyment ever since I got back into the hobby in 2008. Through a



lot of dedication and patience, and thanks to many fantastic collectors throughout the world, I've been able to accumulate more than 90% of the cards produced of Gorges. Given his increasingly prominent role on the most popular team in hockey, this is no small feat.

I have in my collection just about everything that SCF looks for in determining a super collector: a complete The Cup rainbow, numerous low-numbered and SSP'd cards, all of the player's true RC's, and a collection that spans many years and includes a strong array of all types of cards. You'll notice through the numbers that I have more "oddball" stuff of him than standard-issue base cards -- this comes through looking for those hard-to-find Expo releases, team sets, and items only released in Montreal.

Another facet of this collection is how many of the short-printed cards that I have multiple copies of in my hands. Because they've made themselves available, I enjoy getting more than one copy of his rare cards for my collection, particularly those that have a great look to them. I have 7 of the 10 copies produced of the 2007-08 Upper Deck High Gloss. I have 3 of the 12 copies made of the 2012-13 SP Game Used Supreme Patches, which I think are some of the most stunning cards ever produced.

In addition to having many of the most desirable cards produced of Gorges, I have a good number of fantastic BGS graded cards. The highlights include:

2005-06 The Cup RC BGS 9.5 w/10 Auto

2005-06 The Cup Black Rainbow 1/1 BGS 8.5

2005-06 SP Authentic RC BGS 9.5 w/10 Auto as well as a 9.0 w/10 Auto

2005-06 Upper Deck Ice Rookie Premieres Patches BGS 9 w/10 Auto

In summary, I have a stellar Josh Gorges collection that I believe deserves to have recognition in the SCF Super Collector Hall of Fame. I owe so much of this collection to the great members here at SCF.

Why did you start collecting this player:

I've been watching Josh Gorges play hockey since he was 16 years old, when he debuted with my hometown WHL team, the Kelowna Rockets. I've got a long-running attachment to him, as he was the captain of the team when they won the Memorial Cup in 2004 and his image was plastered on a 7-storey office building in Kelowna. I've always had a special sentiment for BC-born players who play with the Canadiens, as it's no coincidence that Gorges, Carey Price, and Brendan Gallagher are three of my favourite players. Another thing that I respect about Gorges is something that we have in common: neither of us were ever drafted by an NHL team. Granted, he's played almost 500 games in the League now.

When he was traded to the Canadiens in 2007, I was probably the only person who really knew what the team was getting: a guy that always gives 100% effort on the ice and carries himself like a true pro off the ice. He's not flashy, he doesn't put up a lot of points, but he busts his tail every night and has earned himself a permanent spot on the Canadiens roster.

If you wish to add, list anything else, here's your last chance:

There are two cards on the Gorges checklist in the SCF Inventory that were never produced; unfortunately, they are both excellent cards:

2005-06 Hot Prospects Autographed Patch Variation Gold #211 Josh Gorges 1/1 Shield



2005-06 SP Game Used Autographs #160 Josh Gorges /5

I have received confirmation directly from Upper Deck that these two cards were not produced. For many years, it seemed as though another card--2007-08 SP Game Used SIGNificance--would not be made, but it was finally produced earlier this year.

This has been a very long-running project that will continue for many years to come. I am beyond thrilled that Upper Deck and Panini are finally produced enough cards of him for this player to be eligible to have consideration for collectors. Though there is increased competition with his greater visibility, I still strive to keep my collection #1 out there, and it will be a great honour and feather in my keep to earn the Super Collector badge should my submission be approved.

Collection Stats:

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- * Total Unique cards owned of this player minus 1/1s 161/176 - 91.5%
- * Total Unique True Rookie cards: 12/12
- * Total Unique cards with Auto: 23/34 - 67.6% - all outstanding autographs are 1/1's
- * Total Unique cards with GU: 41/46 - 89.1%
- * Total 1/1: 8/56

Still not quite convinced? Well, take a gander at these beauties!

Top Ten!

1. 2005-06 The Cup Black Rainbow Rookies #159 1/1 - BGS 8.5

Truly the pinnacle of every post-2004 lockout rookie collector's collection. You simply cannot top this.



2. 2005-06 Upper Deck Ice Premieres Auto Patches #4/10 - BGS 9 w/10 Auto

An absolutely beautiful card. Stellar patch, incredibly rare. Could have had a 9.5 on it if not for the surface sub-grade being so low.

#1, #3, #4, #5, #6, #8, #10 /10

Yeah, seven of them! I'm fortunate that so many of these have surfaced over the years. It's been a good while since I last saw one, so who knows if I will ever get another, but they sure do look impressive together!

3. 2007-08 Upper Deck High Gloss #410 -





4. 2012-13 SP Game Used Supreme Patches - #4, #7, and #9 /13

Much like the display above, I couldn't just pick a single copy of these. Big thanks to Pat LeDuc for grabbing a copy of this and sending it free to me. You're a real pal!

5. 2013-14 Upper Deck Trilogy Signature Pucks

This one is such a recent acquisition that I don't have the card in-hand yet. This is Josh's first hard-signed autograph card since his rookie year, and naturally it's an SSP.



6. 2005-06 The Cup Gold Rainbow #159 - #4/6

One of the toughest finds of any rookie player out there. More scarce than Ovechkin from the same year even. Fortunately I didn't have to pay quite that much. Huge thanks to Joel Carry for making this happen way back in the day.

7. 2005-06 The Cup Printing Plates Cyan #159 Josh Gorges AUTO

You gotta love a 1/1 plate from The Cup, of The Cup RC.

8. 2011-12 Titanium Game Worn Gear Dual Patches #47 - #5/15

What an absolute beauty. The Gorges part of this card is stellar. It's a part of the shoulder patch on one of the Canadiens Centennial jerseys. I believe another copy has nearly the full logo, but this is fantastic.



Thanks to Ryan Quirk for swapping out my previous copy for this.

9. 2012-13 SP Game Used Authentic Fabrics Fives Patch #AF5LBBR Josh Gorges / Lars Eller / P.K. Subban / Carey Price / Tomas Plekanec - #4/9
A few years ago I probably couldn't have dreamed of



seeing Josh on a card with these guys. It wasn't gonna happen ever it seemed. Then this came along. A masterpiece of a card as every player is featured with a multi-coloured patch.

10. 2007-08 SP Game Used SIGNificance - #1/50

On first glance, there's really nothing special about this card. What makes it special and important in this collection is that for five years after the release of 07-08 SPGU, this card did not exist. I had long ago given up hope on ever getting it fulfilled, and requested a replacement about three years ago. I'd written it off entirely, so imagine my absolute shock when earlier this year this card came up in an eBay search. Jaw dropped. BIN hit. Owned.



I must say, this is a lot harder than I thought it would be to pick just ten **cards** to showcase in this thread. There's 3-4 other cards I would have loved to highlight, but these ones all have a special meaning of some sort and so they get the nod. You can always check out my Inventory to see what other **cards** are in there.

Well you've seen the cardboard, now here's some REALLY cool stuff!





Ka-BOOM!

Some words of thanks.....

I owe so much of this collection to the great people here at SCF. I've had people send me so many cards without even asking for something in return. I've had a Cup Printing Plate 1/1 and a Cup RC that I got graded a 9.5 sent to me by Mark just out of the blue. The people that have made it so easy to make deals for these cards are too many to list. I am grateful to all of you. This project has taken many years and I am so happy that I finally get my Super Collector wings. I take so much pride in this collection because I have so much respect for the player. It's going to be a magical day for me when Josh gets named captain of the Montreal Canadiens. I will be the first to order up a jersey with a C on the front of it, let me tell you that.





A Right or a Privilege?

By Ethan Shippen aka TheBoxBreaker

During the 2013 Stanley Cup Playoffs, the National Hockey League announced the implementation of new rules to be either tried out or used during play for the 2013-14 pre-season. One of those rules dictate that the current size of goaltender equipment should be smaller, trying to increase the number of goals scored in each game. According to the stats at quantnhockey.com, goal scoring in the NHL was at its lowest in 2012-13 since the late 90s when the NHL experienced a big decrease in goals scored. But is shrinking the size of the goalie's equipment really the answer?

It's not the first time that the NHL has tried to downsize goalie equipment: in 2003-04 the NHL limited goalie pads to 38 inches in length. If a goalie's pads exceeded that length, his team would be fined \$25,000. As if this wasn't enough, further changes were implemented following the 2004-05 lockout season. Pads, blockers, catching gloves, jerseys were all cut down in size. Pads could now not be wider than 11 inches while blockers were downsized by an inch, and catching gloves by three inches.

A few inches might not seem like a big deal to most people, but hockey is often defined as that game that is "defined by inches". Not that this has always been respected, though. The late Jacques Plante once tended goal for the Montréal Canadiens in a game in Chicago versus the Black Hawks. He noticed something rather strange about the nets: He swore that the goal that he was patrolling 2 periods out of 3 was taller than the one the home team used. A representative got out on the ice and measured the bars, and sure enough, Plante was right.



In the past goaltender equipment has changed tremendously. From the 1950s where goalies barely wore any protective gear whatsoever (let alone a mask) to the 1990s where equipment modifications were popular. A good example is Garth Snow of the Philadelphia Flyers (depicted). The shoulder pads he wore were huge, angular and basically made sure that he could keep the puck out of the net.

According to Hockey Hall of Fame's Book of Goalies it was in 1996 that the NHL began random spot checks where many goalies were caught cheating under the new and envisioned rules. In 1998 a two-minute penalty was to be assessed to a goaltender if he violated the new rules in any way. Dave Dryden once stated the following in an interview regarding shoulder pads in the NHL: "The guys for a while were really abusing it. They were puffing that stuff up, putting wood in there, doing everything."

According to the official NHL rulebook found at NHL.com, rule 11.1 regarding the goaltender's equipment reads as follows: "With the exception of skates and stick, all the equipment worn by the goalkeeper must be constructed solely for the purpose of protecting the head or



body, and he must not wear any garment or use any contrivance which would give him undue assistance in keeping goal.” In other words, a goalie’s equipment shall only serve as protective gear rather than puck-stopping material. This seems completely fair to most people, but despite guys like Zdeno Chara and Shea Weber having over 100 mile an hour shots, equipment is still regularly being downsized. Everyone who has personally been a hockey goaltender knows that such shots hurt (sometimes a lot), despite wearing equipment.

A look at the stats provided by Quant Hockey, goal scoring always increased during the periods where equipment was downsized. However, it always decreased (sometimes dramatically) after less than a decade, meaning that the goalies adjusted well.

It has never been easy to be a hockey goaltender; being the lone wolf with a completely different task than all other players. People pay for tickets to see goal scoring, not to see the men who prevent goals. Therefore rules have often been in favor of forwards and defenders. According to Hockey Hall of Fame’s Book of Goalies, tenders weren’t allowed to go down into the butterfly position or even fall down onto the ice until 1917-18 and couldn’t force a face-off by holding onto the shot for decades afterwards. Hall of Famer Clint Benedict tried bending the rules by telling the referees he had accidentally fallen onto the ice because he had lost his balance, and more often than not he would get the benefit of the doubt.

Another goalie who proved skeptics wrong was when Jacques Plante donned a goalie mask on November 1st, 1959. Almost everyone mocked his attempt, saying that he was a coward and that his new flesh-colored mask scared children. However, after the Habs went on an 11-game winning streak with Plante playing with a mask, the coach of the Canadiens, Toe Blake, let him wear it.

According to *A Breed Apart* by Douglas Hunter, Hall of Famer Gump Worsley was quoted as saying: “You’re wearing up to forty pounds of padding as you stand there in front of a cage that is four feet high and six feet wide, and you’re expected to be as agile as a ballet dancer.”

And that’s it, isn’t it? By downsizing equipment, all you’re doing is forcing the goalies to be more agile, quicker, more flexible and read the play even better.

Glenn “Mr. Goalie” Hall once compared goalies to monkeys, because all in all they felt like an animal dressed up in loads of equipment. You almost just had to place yourself in the net and hope for the puck to hit you. That’s not possible anymore. You’re forced to constantly stay on top of the game, and this has made goaltenders quicker and more agile.

Goalies have always found a way to counter the adversity they face, whether it be downsized equipment, bending the rules or trying to implement new ones. When the game and the odds were against them, they always found a way to fight back and get better. No other sport has seen a revolution so major in such a short amount of time within a single position of the sport as hockey’s goaltenders, and to be the best in the game and have a 15-20 year career, you need to know how to get better all the time. New up-and-coming youngsters who are better at butterflies, trapping, consistency and with better reflexes constantly surface, and the low goal scoring numbers confirm that all too well.

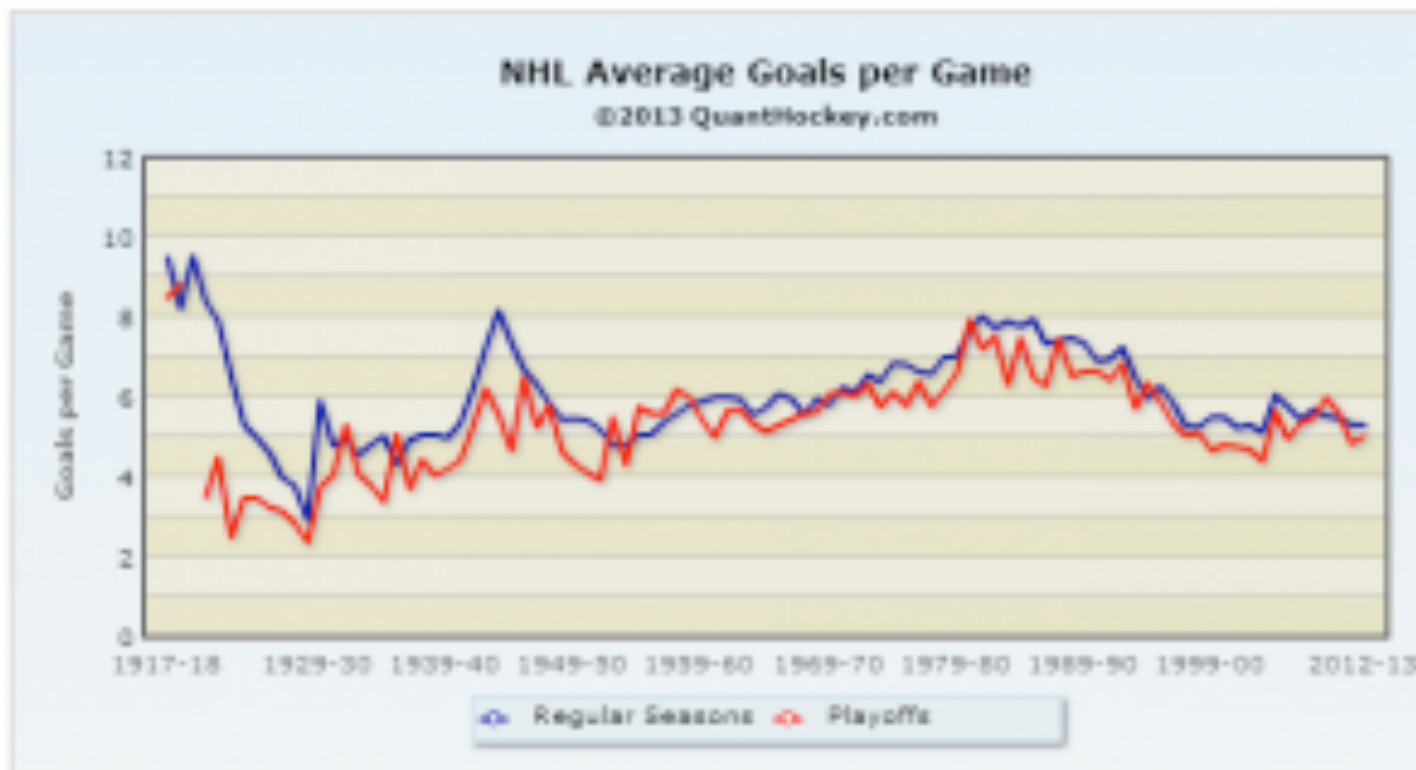


Just the fact that goal-scoring has always gone down a few years after downsizing equipment speaks for itself. The goalies have adjusted. The shooters haven't.

So no, down-sizing goalie equipment isn't going to solve the matter if you want to see high-scoring games. Quite the contrary. Taking away something from the net minders forces them to get better, so when the NHL will face a similar problem in 10 years, what are they going to do? Increase the size of the net?

The beautiful game of hockey has never been better. Ratings are going through the roof and the whole world watches the NHL every night. Especially watching the 2013 Stanley Cup Playoffs and seeing so many entertaining, action-packed, low-scoring OT games where both teams had a legitimate chance to win. Isn't this the game that we all fell in love with?

A message to the National Hockey League: Leave the game as it is. You can't improve on perfection.





Why Baseball Still Matters to Me By James Friedman aka JFried1029

It seems that many of the headlines surrounding sports in general these days, and baseball in particular, are the types of things one would read on police blotters or front pages; not on sports pages. In particular, the resurgence of stories regarding Biogenesis and steroid usage in baseball have dominated the sports pages and talk radio shows of late.

While it is disappointing to see my favorite sport wash with such controversy again, baseball has survived many previous issues and came through the other side. I suspect it will again. Baseball has survived depressions, recessions, player strikes, claims of owner collusion, free agency and the resulting competitive imbalances, drug scandals, and even a year with no World Series. Every time there has been a challenge to the game, it has returned stronger than ever.

I can recall the infamous 1994 season when a player strike ended the season prematurely and resulted in there being no World Champion. For the rest of that year and the following year, there were many people who were disgusted with the game and the inability of the owners and players to reach a compromise. In many ways it was the fans who suffered most.

Many people lost interest in the game in 1995. I was asked various times how I could maintain my enthusiasm for the sport. My answer was that I loved the game of baseball- not the owners or the players in particular, and that I was not going to let these spoiled people stop my love of the sport in general.

For me, baseball offers a unique mixture of statistics, history, and strategy that is unmatched by any other sport. While I love football, basketball, and hockey, there is nothing like a tense late season baseball game with a close score for suspense and action.



A while back, I read an interesting perspective on the whole baseball drug scandal. I cannot recall the source but the premise of the story was that Mickey Mantle, an icon of the sport and arguably the king of the card collecting hobby abused alcohol during his playing career, a drug if you will, that served to diminish his abilities and hasten the end of his career. In spite of this, Mantle to this day is universally loved and revered among sports fans.

On the other hand, Barry Bonds, if he did in fact knowingly take drugs, took drugs that would enhance and lengthen his career and make him a better ballplayer, and a greater spectacle for fans. While drug taking is



arguably cheating, one could say he risked long-term health effects and years off his life to be a better player. Yet he is now universally reviled as a villain of the steroid era.

In the end, baseball and its players are a reflection of society as a whole, with a cross-section of people from varying backgrounds. They suffer through many of the same errors that we as a people do—it's just that their lives are played out on a stage before us.

It is in some ways the flaws and humanity of the very people who play the sport that make it such great theatre for us all. The drama of imperfect people playing a near-perfect game is part of what makes the game of baseball so attractive to us.

The rich tradition and history of the sport is a large part of our American heritage and has become a significant part of childhood the world over. All of the scandals in the history and future of the game does not tarnish memories or great plays, players, games, and seasons.

Sometimes we have to awaken the little child that still lives in all of us to remember why we love the sport. If negative headlines about baseball discourage, go to any little league field or sandlot on a summer day and watch the kids playing for the pure enjoyment of the sport.

On the other stage of the spectrum, listen to older people tell tales nostalgically about the star players from their eras: DiMaggio, Williams, Musial, Jackie Robinson... In the end, sports in general and specifically baseball is one of the greatest bridges across generations that we will ever have. And that is and always will be worth preserving.





The Golden Seal that Never Was By Joe Simanis aka GHCHambone

The National Hockey League has had its fair share of lopsided trades over the years. Eric Lindros was drafted by the Nordiques and then traded to the Philadelphia Flyers for Kerry Huffman, Steve Duchesne, Ron Hextall, Mike Ricci, Chris Simon, Peter Forsberg, future draft picks and an undisclosed (but rumored to be around ten to fifteen million dollars) in cash. The Vancouver Canucks sent Cam Neely along with a first-round draft pick to the Boston Bruins for Barry Pederson. That first-round pick was used to select Glen Wesley, who went on to play over 1,400 games in the NHL. Kris Draper was traded by the Winnipeg Jets to the Detroit Red Wings in 1993. The Winnipeg Jets received...one dollar. However, the most lopsided trade in NHL history involved hockey in Oakland, the last North American professional sports franchise to fold, and a young hockey player by the name of Guy Lafleur.



Kris Draper was traded from the Winnipeg Jets to the Detroit Red Wings for the grand sum of one dollar.

The California Golden Seals...not exactly a household name. Most people probably would have no clue even what sport they played, and even for die-hard hockey fans the memories of the Seals are probably fading. The Golden Seals began their short NHL history in 1967, entering the league as part of the very first generation of expansion teams. Initially, they were named the California Seals and were eventually renamed the Oakland Seals, and then the California Golden Seals in 1970. The Seals never drew much of a crowd and the hockey wasn't much better, with the Seals never experiencing a winning record in their nine season history. Contrast this with the Montreal Canadiens, the most decorated team in hockey history with 24 Stanley Cup wins and a powerhouse for many years in the National Hockey League. Guy Lafleur, one of the most iconic players in Canadiens history, was very nearly a Golden Seal.



The Seals are more remembered for their white skates than their hockey talent.



By 1970, the Seals were struggling both at the gate and on the ice. They were purchased by Oakland Athletics owner Charlie O. Finley, but marketing gimmicks such as changing the team name, using new colors, and providing players with white hockey skates failed to bring more fans to the arena. The Canadiens, however, were fresh off Stanley Cup wins in 1965, 1966, 1968, and 1969. At the end of the 1970 NHL season, the California Golden Seals traded their first round pick in the 1971 NHL draft and Francois Lacombe to the Montreal Canadiens for Ernie Hicke and the Canadiens first round pick in 1970. Neither Hicke nor Lacombe went on to have illustrious careers, and the Golden Seals utilized their new first-round pick to draft Chris Oddleifson. Oddleifson would go on to score 286 points in 524 NHL games; however, none of them would be for the California Golden Seals. The Golden Seals would go on to finish in last place in the 1971 season, meaning that the Canadiens would have the first pick in the National Hockey League Draft.



Guy Lafleur, playing the eventual remnants of the Golden Seals, the Cleveland Barons. The Barons would cease operations in 1978 and merge with the Minnesota North Stars.

The Montreal Canadiens wisely used their number one pick to draft Guy Lafleur (although Marcel Dionne, who went second to the Detroit Red Wings, wouldn't have been a bad choice either). Lafleur would go on to play 17 seasons in the NHL, become the Montreal Canadiens all-time leading scorer with 1,246 points, be a part of five Stanley Cup winning teams, and secure his name in the Hockey Hall of Fame. The California Golden Seals had a much different story. The Seals would move to Cleveland in 1976 after nine years of losing seasons and low attendance figures in California. The Barons fared even worse and lasted for only two NHL seasons. With both the Cleveland Barons and the Minnesota North Stars in danger of folding, the National Hockey League allowed the two teams to merge. The Minnesota North Stars were the surviving team and many of the Barons joined the North Stars roster. The Cleveland Barons remain the last North American professional sports club to fold. Although the Seals endured bad fortunes, hockey returned to the Bay Area with the San Jose Sharks in 1991. If the Seals hadn't traded their 1971 first round pick, would they still remain? Would Guy Lafleur be known as the man who saved the franchise? Would white hockey skates become the standard of the National Hockey League? Hockey fans can speculate, but the world will never know.



Live Fast, Die Young By Gregory Sanchez aka Sugarpoooper



Last week the Anaheim Ducks twitter account sent out the following tweet to all of its followers, “Paul Kariya’s unforgettable goal in Game 6 of the 2003 Stanley Cup Finals moves on to the next round in our Honda Center 20 Top Sports Moments.” It is a memorable moment indeed, but for me it is the constant reminder of the brutal hits my childhood idol took over the course of his career. Paul Kariya retired when his doctors advised him to stop playing, due to potentially having Post-concussion Syndrome(PCS). The good news for Kariya fans is that earlier this year in an interview with the Denver Post, Kariya mentioned he wasn’t showing any signs of PCS. Luckily the National

Hockey League has changed its rules and regulations, and now hits, elbows, or cross checks directly to the head are deemed illegal instantly. However, hockey is a game that will always be one of the most intense sports of all time.



I could recall at least three different incidents which involved Paul Kariya getting blatantly elbowed or cross checked in the face, and not a single referee would call a thing. Gary Suter, Chris Chelios, & Scott Stevens were all enforcers that were constantly trying to run over Kariya, just to name a few. Although old time, gritty hockey was slowly starting to become a thing of the past, the late 90s and early years of the new millennium were still filled with late checks and some really tough hockey. The Mighty Ducks of Anaheim were a perfect example of what could happen if you didn’t have an enforcer on the team to stick up for your star players. In Anaheim’s case, their enforcers at the time were relatively new and simply weren’t getting the job done, enabling the opposition to get a hold of Paul Kariya and Teemu Selanne. Even this

year, the

Anaheim Ducks were outfought by the Detroit Red Wings in seven games. According to Orange County Register journalist Eric Stephens, current General Manager of the Anaheim Ducks, Bob Murray said he “didn’t like that the team didn’t address hits by Jarret Stoll on Cam Fowler in February or Abdelkader’s hit on Lydman.”

On June 6th 2013, also former Ducks & Blues player Andy McDonald retired at the age young age of 35, citing concussion issues as the main reason he chose to hang up his skates. Another one of my childhood idols having to retire. I





remember going to a Ducks vs Avalanche game as a kid and Andy McDonald scored the game winning overtime goal, with literally seconds remaining. The game was so close to being over, that my dad was already walking out of the Arrowhead Pond of Anaheim (now known as the Honda Center.) He was upset because he thought the game was about to end in a tie, shoot outs still weren't around then. Andy McDonald found the puck with his speed with only seconds remaining, the puck somehow going past multiple bodies. It was brilliant and I have been a huge fan of his ever since. There is nothing I love more than seeing a good scrap center ice, but it always hurts to see a player go down hard after a questionable hit. The playoffs this year was a perfect example of it. We all saw Eller from the Habs take a nasty hit near center ice and Tony Lydman from the Anaheim Ducks being run over by Justin Abdelkader. The league has stepped up in dangerous hitting though, handing out suspensions left and right.

A huge part of the reason why I despise that Steven's hit on Kariya in game 6 of the Stanley Cup finals so much is because it is practically one of the very few highlights available online featuring Kariya. However, in reality the majority of Paul Kariya's goals were absolute dandies. I'd like to be clear and state that the last thing I want to do is take away anything from such a great moment. Not just a great moment for the Anaheim Ducks organization, but for NHL Playoff hockey in general. However, questionable late hits that probably should have been deemed illegal shouldn't be tolerated, and now I can see exactly why the league has changed. Paul Kariya himself has openly stated his opinion on dangerous hitting in the NHL, stating "You have the best player in the game (Sidney Crosby) playing on the same team as a guy (Matt Cooke) who is ending guys' careers with those hits. Hopefully, things will change."





The Fallout from PEDs – and How it Affects our “Investment” By Guy Mitchell aka sweetg1

Before I start, I will add the disclaimer that I am not saying that I agree with this, but this writing is to make you think and hopefully, create discussion.

You have your Lance Armstrongs and you have your Mark McGwires. You have your Alex Rodriguez, Roger Clemens, and your Barry Bonds. We all know what they have in common. They have cheated the game at some point. Some have been proven guilty and some not so much. But in the court of public opinion, each and everyone of them is guilty. The list continues to grow, as we recently have seen with Ryan Braun. While some aren't totally forthcoming as to the extent of the drug usage, you have Andy Pettitte, who came forth and said he was sorry for his involvement...and he was forgiven. McGwire eventually did the same, but it took him longer to come forward.

When we look at those who didn't apologize for their involvement as it came to light, you look at the anger that came as a result. We vehemently stood up for Lance Armstrong for so long, right? He couldn't possibly be guilty and he was a national hero to many, given his comeback from cancer, which in itself is amazing. But we watched him threaten those around him, only later to be found guilty. We watched Ryan Braun swear that he didn't do anything wrong, only later to find out that he was guilty. The apologies after the fact ring hollow, in my mind.



Then I ask, how does this affect guys like you and me, who seek their sports cards. Some of us collect because they play for our favorite team, some because we like the individual and what they stand for. Some actually collect because they see the dollar signs that can come from collecting an individual's cards. Who doesn't like going to pay \$1.25 for a pack, hoping to pull a Yasiel Puig that we could sell for \$1,000 on eBay? Many are stockpiling individuals like Puig, Mike Trout, Bryce Harper in baseball and guys like RGIII and Andrew Luck in football. They did the same thing for Bonds years ago, only to be let down and watch the value of their stash go by the wayside.

Now comes the question and comment: I am completely surprised that we have not seen lawsuits in the sports card market as a result of the indiscretions of the players. I'm not necessarily saying that there should be lawsuits, but I think it's fair to say that it could quite easily happen. As we watched Bonds approach hallowed ground as he neared 755, his cards continued to soar. Then as the court appearances increased (along with the denials), his card values began to falloff. I can only assume that Ryan Braun's cards will also see many down arrows, if they have not already done so.

The up arrows and down arrows are normal in this industry. If a player saves a baby from a burning building, then we perceive him to be a “good guy” and more fans want to seek his cards, regardless of what he does on the field. Likewise, a player does drugs or hits his girlfriend, then he's a “bad guy” and he and his cards lose appeal, as well they should in my opinion. But I believe that cheating is different. When Andy Pettitte came clean and apologized, people seemed to understand his plight. However, those that continued to deny they cheated, only to find that they lied meant that they not only hurt themselves, but they hurt our industry, and in some cases, the collector's investment.



I ask this: What is the difference between a stock dropping significantly in value, negatively

affecting the investor, which may bring on a class action suit? If the company executive knowingly does things illegally and it can be proven, then the investor has a good chance of winning. This isn't new. Why is this any different in the sports card industry. If I invested thousands of dollars in A-Rod 10 years ago with the though that he might break Hank Aaron's record (sorry – the record belongs to Hank – we can debate that another time), only to find out that he knowingly did illegal things that would not only affect his team, but also the collectors, why couldn't I say that he negatively (knowingly) impacted my investment?



Again, I won't be filing any lawsuits, because my collection isn't the type of collection that is based on investment. I collect older players whose legacy has already been established. But I provide these comments as a discussion point in order to make us think, and possibly allow us, as collectors, to see what's could be coming in the coming years.

Your thoughts are appreciated.

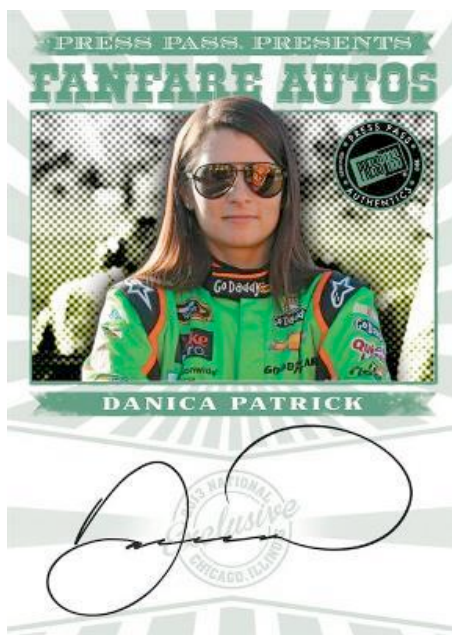
Happy Collecting everyone!





Looking Forward to Press Pass Fanfare

By Stephen Taylor aka race crazy



July 31st marks the release of Press Pass Fanfare into the racing card market for the 2013 season. Entering its 3rd year as a set Fanfare has proven to be perhaps Press Pass' best new hit with collectors and joins the ranks of Showcase and the regular Press Pass release as far as popularity. Why has Fanfare been so successful? Here are the reasons Fanfare as a product works and they need touched upon so hopefully others will follow suit in the collecting world.

1. **Bang for the Buck**-Fanfare is a mid-level release and retails between 120 and 140 dollars depending on where you buy from. However with 8 hits per box-including 4 autographs-and also quite a few base cards and inserts and a chance to hit parallels-it is a significant bargain for any collector. Whereas Press Pass Redline is a bit cheaper it is a tin-packs are not really opened and although there are 6 hits Fanfare just seems more fun.
2. **The Inclusion of All Three Series**-Fanfare as its name states is for the fans. The inclusion of the normal Sprint Cup Series drivers is added onto with Nationwide Series regulars and Camping World Truck Series Regulars and a few collectable legends like Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt and a 5 card Young Guns subset thrown into the base set for good measure. This makes the set itself unique and collectable for set collectors while also allowing new collectors the ability to find fresh faces in the set and new autographs to chase. In the 2013 edition for example up and coming names like Kyle Larson, Jeb Burton, and Dylan Kwasniewski make their first major appearances in a racing base set.
3. **Power Packs**-Power packs are something Press Pass has done over the last year as an incentive to those who open more product. Although some collectors might feel left out the Sapphire (#d to 20) and Diamond Die Cut (#d to 5) Parallel Cards along with the Fanfare National Exclusives (#d to 3) are sure to be among the most sought after and hard to find cards for driver collectors and for set collectors looking for a distinct challenge. As someone who just finally completed Fanfare's 2011 offering in regards to parallels of a driver it is both challenging and extremely rewarding.
4. **Looks**-Fanfare as a set has never seemed too busy. The design is rather simple and basic. It produces a clean looking card both for base and insert sets. Press Pass usually does a great job with the look of their sets but Fanfare stands out from the pack in most cases. This year Rookie Stripes Autograph cards make their return and are sure to be popular with the two rookies being Ricky Stenhouse Jr. and his girlfriend Danica Patrick-who some have apparently heard of. Fanfare this year also spices it up with a new Autograph Set called Signature Rides-which displays the new generation 6 cars prominently on the cardboard along with the driver signature. It is sure to be a hit set and also includes some unique names and lesser collected drivers like Casey Mears, Paul Menard, Regan Smith, and Scott Speed for those fans to chase.



Overall as a racing product Fanfare is right up there among my favorite releases alongside Press Pass' main set and Legends. It is creative yet subtle and its ability to appeal to many areas makes it a strong release year in and year out. For anyone looking to get into racing collecting or wanting to open a box of racing Fanfare is your recommended buy. I cannot wait.

20 Down 16 to Go-Ranking Your Championship Hopefuls

Don't look now but the Nascar season is already at race 20 of 36. There are only 6 races until the Chase kicks off and many contenders like Jeff Gordon and Tony Stewart still find themselves struggling just to get into the top 10. Here is your breakdown and grade of the top 12 drivers in the standings and their chances to win the championship entering the Brickyard 400.



1. **Jimmie Johnson**-Johnson has been the points leader most of the year and by a significant margin. The 5-time champion has 4 wins (including the first season sweep of Daytona since Bobby Allison) plus an All Star race victory to his credit but he has probably squandered at least 3 other potential victories. Johnson dominated at Dover, Michigan, and Kentucky only to be plagued by untimely restarts or bad luck. There is no doubt who the fastest car and best team is every week-it's the 48. The rest of the field might be in trouble. Championship chance grade-**A+**
2. **Clint Bowyer**-Wait? Clint Bowyer is second in points? When and how did that happen? That is most Nascar fans reaction to Bowyer who is remarkably sneaky at racking up solid finishes. Although winless this season his MWR teammates have both broken long winless droughts recently and Bowyer should find victory lane soon. The likeable Kansas native is a riot outside of the car but inside he is all business and usually gets the job done. The chase tracks also appeal to Bowyer's strengths and he has already finished 3rd and 2nd in points in his career. (Again this is often lost on Nascar fans). Bowyer is sneaky-if the stronger teams falter Bowyer is there. Championship chance grade-**B**
3. **Carl Edwards**-After a disastrous 2012 campaign cousin Carl is back to his top 5 ways this year with new crew chief Jimmy Fennig. Edwards leads the charge for Roush Fenway Racing and Ford and he has most of the year despite Penske and defending series champion Brad Keselowski coming under the Ford banner. Edwards started out the season pretty strong with an early win at Phoenix but since then has just been putting solid to okay finishes together. At some tracks (Michigan, Richmond, Phoenix) his car has seemed to be the best one out there this year but others they have struggled mightily-most notably Dover and Martinsville-two tracks that are in the chase. Both Edwards and Ford in general do not have the speed



at the moment to compete with the Toyotas or Chevys but Carl's ability to salvage good finishes out of bad days makes him a contender. Championship chance grade-**B-/C+**

4. **Kevin Harvick**-The lame duck driver at Richard Childress Racing has been very good all season in an odd and complex situation. It shows Harvick's and his team's ability to focus on the task at hand. Although 4th in points thanks mostly to some bad luck at big tracks Harvick has 2 wins this season and is almost a lock to finish in the top 10 every week. This is a huge skill to have and if he can string together 10 top 10 finishes in the chase he will be right in contention. The only things holding Harvick back are the questions that will surround him come chase time about him leaving next year and also if he can sustain his temper. As we saw at Loudon Harvick has a tendency to lose his cool with other drivers and it could result in payback or trouble for him down the line. Championship chance grade-**B+**
5. **Dale Earnhardt Jr.**-Junior nation's favorite son has come a long way since a few years ago as he has been a perennial chase driver for the last few seasons now but winning races still seems to be a significant problem. Jr. is with the best team in racing and his fans expect much more from the team than 5th to 15th every weekend. Although he appeared strong enough to win 1 or 2 races this year Earnhardt has mostly been quietly finishing races and earning points. He has not set the world on fire and at this point is not in the same zip code as fellow garage mate Jimmie Johnson. Junior Nation hopes for good things but if Jr. wins the title it will be a big shock. Championship chance grade-**C-**
6. **Kyle Busch**-The enigma that is one Kyle Busch is hard to predict come chase time. Every year the talented driver has made the Chase either his team has screwed up or the driver has screwed up. Last year he put the last 10 races together but was not in the chase. Busch's Joe Gibbs Racing Toyota has been extremely fast this year and Busch has been knocking off 2nds and 3rds left and right along with 2 victories. However when Shrub does not win he is not happy. One must remain patient and poised and accept some days that you do not have the winning car. Busch has come a long way but his challenge to accept less than 1st along with Toyota's potential reliability problems still lingering over the team knock him down from an A+ grade. Championship chance grade-**A-**
7. **Matt Kenseth**-The newest driver to the Joe Gibbs Racing fold has been nothing short of spectacular this season with 4 victories and plenty of speed to contend on most weekends. Toyota's reliability problems along with a few wrong place wrong time moments at Daytona, Charlotte, and Bristol have Kenseth down in the points right now but come reset time with his 4 victories he will be tied for the top spot. Kenseth is a driver in the ilk of David Pearson. He tends not to push his equipment early and come the end of the race he is contending. Oddly Kenseth only has 4 top 5 finishes all season-they just happen to be wins. If his equipment can stay together and Kenseth can get through Martinsville where he struggles and the crapshoot of Talladega his chances are as good as anyone else not named Jimmie Johnson. Championship chance grade-**A**
8. **Greg Biffle**-Roush Fenway Racing's senior driver finds himself in position to make the chase but outside of Michigan where he claimed victory (after all 4 Hendrick cars fell out) the 16 much like his 99 teammate and the other Ford drivers, have not shown the speed required to contend consistently on a week to week basis. Biffle has the ability but when his car isn't there he has a tendency to blowup over



the radio and can be a detriment to the team morale. Do not expect Biffle to contend for the cup. Championship chance grade-**D+**

9. **Brad Keselowski**-The defending champion has been in a mad scramble to get back in the top 10 in points and finally had his first solid weekend in months at Loudon. The 2 team started out like gangbusters but when crew chief Paul Wolfe was suspended for illegal modifications the team went into a slump of bad luck, slow cars, and horrible finishes. The two team has shown last year that they are capable to run good enough to win the championship but this year consistency and luck haunts them. A repeat at this point seems unlikely. Championship chance grade-**C**

10. **Kasey Kahne**-The favorite driver of the teenage fan girl crowd has been a case study in bad luck this year yet is still 10th in points. Kahne is with the best team in Nascar with Hendrick and has a win this year at Bristol, and he has been blistering fast at many tracks this year (Vegas, Charlotte, Michigan, Kentucky) only to come up short. Kahne has speed and he has the right team in place to do great things. If he can shed his bad luck the 48 and 20 might need to watch the 5 car. Championship chance grade-**B+**

11. **Martin Truex Jr.**-Truex holds down the first wild card spot to qualify for the chase thanks to his win at Sonoma earlier this year. The win snapped a winless drought that dated back to 2007 and Truex has had his most successful season since 2008 to this point in regards to championship standings. He and his team and crew mesh well. Truex's main problem seems to be getting solid finishes out of bad weekends. Whereas teammate Clint Bowyer can salvage 10th to 15th Truex is 20th to 25th. Those points matter. The 56 has certain tracks where he will be very fast and then some weeks be completely off. If the pattern holds true the chase should be one of up and down moments for the team. Championship chance grade-**D+**

12. **Tony Stewart**-As of now Tony Stewart holds down the 2nd wild card position thanks to his unlikely win at Dover. Stewart and his race team have struggled mightily all year but the 3 time champ's driving ability and his ability to fight through adversity have enabled the 14 team to remain with a shot to make the chase. Stewart's 2011 campaign started in much the same way but one setup trick later Stewart found himself winning races and the championship. Never count Smoke out-if his team finds something he will be there. Championship chance grade-**C+**

12B. Jeff Gordon-As of now Jeff Gordon is not in the chase. He is winless this season and the whispers of retirement always seem to come to the forefront now. Let us not forget just because Gordon is not winning 10 to 13 races a year like in the mid 1990's does not mean he is washed up. Gordon still has the best equipment out there and the ability to win. He has had a plethora of bad luck so far this year but has shown the ability to put solid finishes together. His chance is unlikely but to write a 4 time champion off completely is silly. Championship chance grade-**C-**



Was a Misfortune for the Best? By Remington Scott aka ajdingerfan

“Driver AJ Allmendinger has been temporarily suspended from NASCAR competition, based upon notification of a positive A test NASCAR received from its medical review officer”. Those were the words NASCAR Senior Vice President of Racing Operations Steve O'Donnell said on July 7, 2012 in Daytona Beach, Florida. A NASCAR driver, who happens to be my favorite, suspended for drugs? Very few NASCAR drivers have been suspended for drugs, due to NASCAR's strict policy. Unlike the NFL, instead of a slap on the wrist, drivers are suspended indefinitely. Would AJ Allmendinger's qualifying lap at Daytona the day before be the last time the world saw him in NASCAR?



AJ's NASCAR career has been full of ups and downs. He jumped over to NASCAR in 2007 to join the newly formed Red Bull Racing after winning 5 races in Champ Car the previous season. 2007 was a tough year for AJ, failing to qualify for 19 races and had a best finish of 15th. The beginning of 2008 showed that it would be much like 2007. Allmendinger failed to qualify for the first 3 races, resulting in him being sidelined for Mike Skinner for 5 races. When he returned, things were still how they were. Allmendinger won the Sprint Showdown later that month, earning him a spot in the Sprint All Star race,

where he went on to finish 17th. Red Bull Racing released AJ after Kansas in October, where he posted his first top 10 finish. He went on to finish the season with Michael Waltrip Racing and Gillett Evernham Motorsports.

In 2009, GEM turned into Richard Petty Motorsports, and AJ was hired to drive the #44 Dodge. He kicked off the season with a 3rd

place finish in the Daytona 500, NASCAR's version of the Super Bowl. His finishes slightly improved and he finished the year with 6 top 10s and 24th in the standings, despite being arrested for driving drunk in October. In 2010, Allmendinger was moved over to the famous #43 car, where he won 1 pole, 2 top 5s, 8 top 10s and finished 19th in the standings. He also led 143 laps at Dover, where he would go on to perform strong there.

2011 came along and that proved to be his best NASCAR season, almost winning a few races and





almost making the Chase for the Sprint Cup, NASCAR's version of the playoff's. He was released from RPM at the end of the season and signed with Penske Racing for 2012, what he called a dream come true.

Allmendinger started what many thought would be a career season with a win in the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona. Before his suspension, he placed 2nd at Martinsville, a career best.

After he was suspended, many thought the young driver's career was over, he was worth nothing, nobody would ever hear from him again. He was released from Penske later. What did he have left? He had basically nothing, but he was determined to overcome what happened. In October, AJ was back racing for James Finch towards the end of the season.

2013 showed up and AJ had nothing but the Rolex 24 Hours at Daytona, where he went on to finish 3rd, on his '13 schedule. That was all about to change. The man who changed that was the man who fired him last year, Roger Penske. Penske hired Allmendinger for 5 races in the IZOD IndyCar Series. One of those included the Indianapolis 500. Allmendinger, who's racing roots were in open wheel, said it was a dream come true to race in the Indy 500 for Mr. Penske. Many thought he had a chance to win it in his first start in the historic race. AJ led 23 laps and may have won it all had his seat belt not come loose while leading. He went on to finish 7th.

Roger Penske also hired him to drive the #22 car in the Nationwide Series at Road America and Mid-Ohio. AJ won the pole and went on to win the race at Road America, leading 29 of 55 laps. It was his first NASCAR win in 6 years. He did it for the same owner who was forced to release him just one year ago. Since his suspension last summer, Allmendinger has said numerous times that he is a better person, he is a lot happier with his life, and he no longer puts as much pressure on himself. Was failing a drug test, what could have been a career ending event, a blessing? In this case, I certainly think so, and AJ Allmendinger made the most of his 2nd chance.





SCF Official Review: 2013 Panini Prestige By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

24 packs per box

8 cards per pack

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

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

- Three different on-card autographs of the 2013 RPS Class, no other \$4 SRP product delivers more opportunities to get the Top 2013 Rookies signatures on-card
- The 1st images of the 2013 RPS class in their pro uniforms along with autographs & materials
- Four different die-cut acetate insert chase cards; NFL Shield, Stars of the NFL, Inside the Numbers and Fantasy Team; two per box
- Limited Rookie Card Signature extra point parallels inserted one per box
- Two Micro-Etched Inserts featuring the 2013 Rookie Class; Prestigious Picks & NFL Draft Picks; six per box



BOX BREAK

- 4 Autographs / Memorabilia (at least two autos)
- 24 Rookies
- 3 Parallels
- 3 Prestigious Picks
- 3 NFL Draft Picks
- 3 NFL Draft Tickets
- 3 NFL Draft City Destinations
- 3 NFL Passports

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

THE TOP ROOKIES FROM THE 2013 ROOKIE PHOTO SHOOT WILL BE FEATURED IN THEIR NEW NFL UNIFORMS

Rookies

The new one per pack 2013 Rookie Class is featured here making the transition from the NFL Draftees to NFL Rookies. Look for limited Extra Point parallels & Printing Plates



1st Impressions Signatures

The 2012 Class made a huge 1st Impressions on the NFL; Andrew Luck, Robert Griffin III, Russell Wilson, Doug Martin all put up impressive rookie numbers

Micro-Etched Inserts

Micro-Etched inserts; NFL Draft Picks & Prestigious Picks featuring the top 2013 Rookies

Rookie Extra Points Signatures

The new 2013 Rookie Card signatures with the top RPS rookies. Look for limited Extra Point parallels

Die-Cuts

Four different clear acetate die cut chase inserts; NFL Shield, Stars of the NFL, Inside the Numbers and Fantasy Team

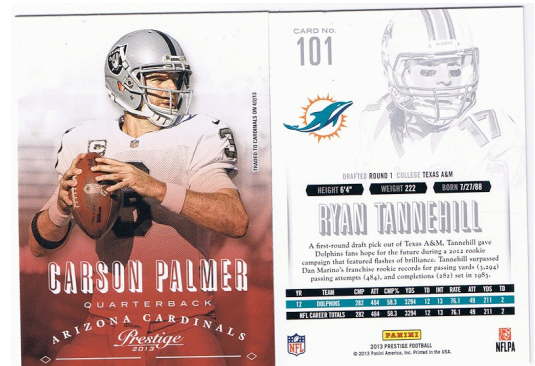
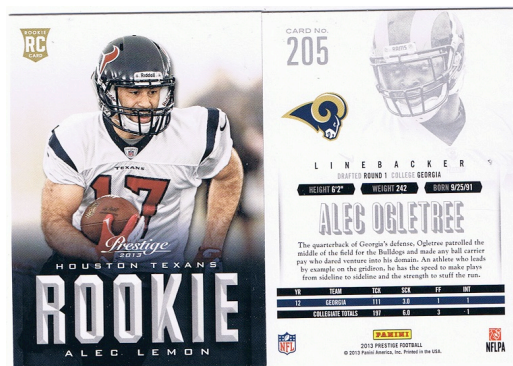
On-Card Rookie Autographs

On-Card Rookie Autographs from the 2013 Rookie Photo Shoot; includes Draft City Destinations, NFL Draft Tickets & NFL Passport

WHAT WE PULLED

Base - 146/200 (73%)

Rookies - 24/100 (24%)



Prestige contains a 300-card base set that consists of 200 veterans and 100 rookies. Players are featured on a white-out background with a bottom splashed with the color of their current team. Rookie cards are different as a huge "ROOKIE" is seen at the bottom of the card. Rookie are shown in their NFL uniforms. Each pack should yield 1 rookie. There are only 9 that are short prints.

Rookie Extra Points Red (1)

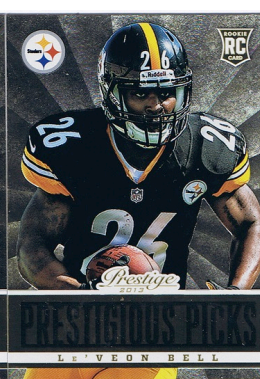
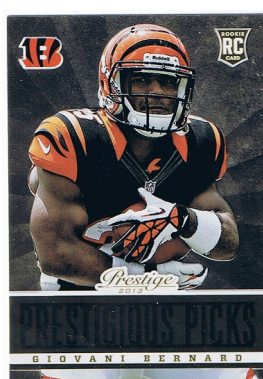
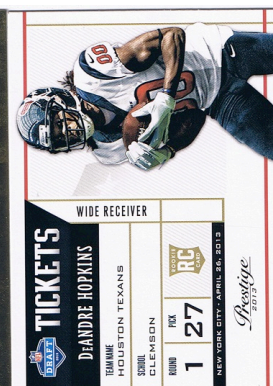
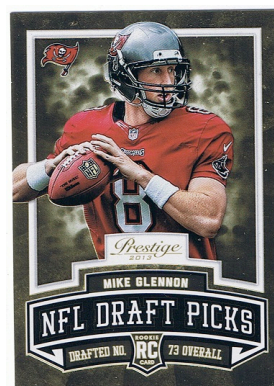
Rookie Extra Points Purple /100 (1): Alec Lemon





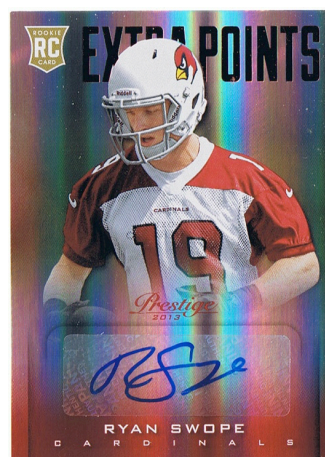
Extra Points has been a mainstay as the base parallels for years. This year, the veterans have two versions while the rookies have five. All are numbered to 100 or less outside of the Rookie Red, which is unnumbered.

- Draft City Destinations (1)
- Fantasy Team (1)
- NFL Draft Picks (2)
- NFL Draft Tickets (4)
- NFL Passport (4)
- NFL Shield (1)
- Prestigious Picks (4)



Prestige has a wide variety of inserts, though most are rookie based. There are a lot of carryovers from last year and previous years. It is quite interesting to see the rookies in their photo shoot uniforms in the NFL Draft sets and in their actual NFL uniforms in the starburst Picks sets. Just seems to lack continuity especially since the rookie cards are in NFL uniforms, not photo shoot (the "00" jerseys). Some of the sets have a parallel version (Holokote) numbered to 100 or less. Four sets are acrylic and die cut. These look great. Would love to see a release with nothing but these.

Rookie Extra Points Red Ryan Swope Autograph





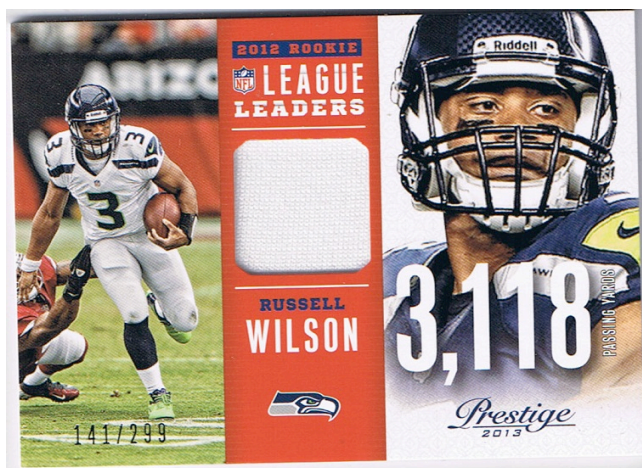
NFL Draft Tickets Joseph Randle Autograph (on-card)



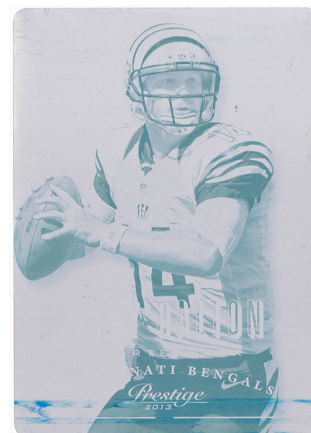
Prestigious Picks Gold Marcus Lattimore Jersey /399



Rookie League Leaders Russell Wilson Jersey /299



Andy Dalton Printing Plate Cyan 1/1



Prestige contain 4 autographs or relics on average with at least guaranteed to be autos. There are a myriad of autograph and relic set throughout Prestige. Be on the lookout for multi-player versions as well. As seen, Printing Plates are treated as an additional hit instead of replacing one.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Base - 4.5/5
 Design - 4/5
 Fun - 3.75/5
 Value - 4/5
 Rebuy - 4.25/5

Overall - 20.5/25 (82%)



NPN Information

NPN, 2013 Panini Prestige Football
5325 FAA Blvd Suite 100
Irving TX 75061-3601

Limit 2 Entries Per Household, Mailed Separately

Postmarked By: 9/4/13
Received By: 9/11/13

Canada Skills: $677 + 360 / 180 \times 287 - 494 = ?$

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





SCF Official Review: 2013 Topps Tribute World Baseball Classic Edition By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

6 packs per box

5 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): \$199.99 - \$249.99

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

AUTOGRAPHED CARDS

World Baseball Classic Autographed Cards

- Blue Parallel numbered to 50.
- Sepia Tone Parallel numbered to 35
- Orange Parallel numbered to 25.
- Gold Parallel numbered to 15.
- Red Parallel numbered to 5.
- Purple Parallel numbered 1/1.
- Onyx Parallel numbered 1/1.

World Baseball Classic Heroes Autographs

Autographed cards featuring the best-performing players from the first two World Baseball Classic tournament

Tribute to the International Legends Autographs

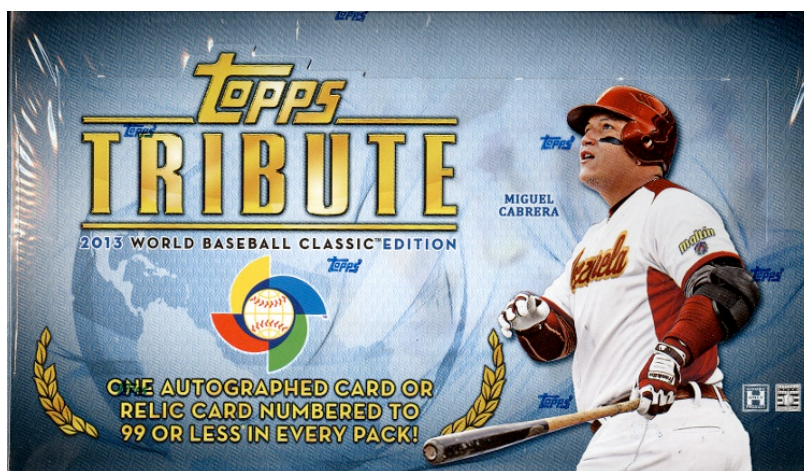
Top retired players from countries around the world who could have played in the World Baseball Classic if it had existed when they played. #d to 15.

RELIC CARDS

World Baseball Classic Prime Patches Cards:

Relic cards of World Baseball Classic players, featuring a game-used patch cards.

- Blue Parallel numbered to 50.
- Green Parallel numbered to 35.
- Orange Parallel numbered to 25.
- Gold Parallel numbered to 15.
- Red Parallel numbered to 10.
- Black Parallel numbered to 5.
- Purple Parallel numbered 1/1.





World Baseball Classic Full Jersey Redemption
Jerseys from the 2009 World Baseball Classic

World Baseball Classic Flag Patch
1/1 card containing the player's large country flag jersey patch.

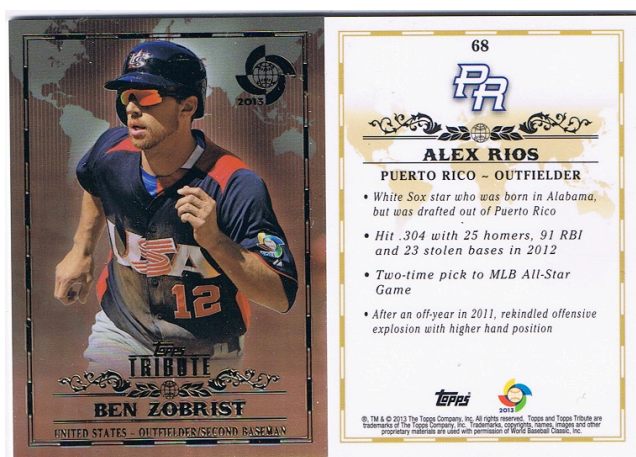
World Baseball Classic Logo Patch
1/1 card containing World Baseball Classic logo patch from the back collar of the player's jersey.

BASE CARDS (100)

World Baseball Classic Players: (100 Subjects)
- Gold Parallel Sequentially numbered to 25.
- Red Parallel Sequentially numbered to 5.
- Purple Parallel Sequentially numbered 1/1.

WHAT WE PULLED

Base - 22/100 (22%)

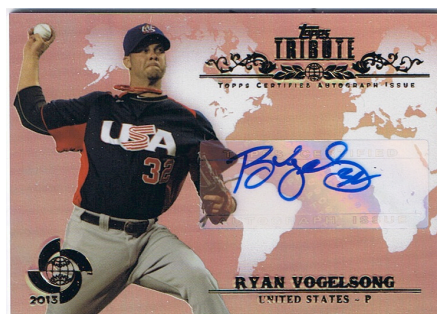


Tribute utilizing the same type of card stock as seen in the regular release. The front is a foil/chrome and features a full body shot of the player as well as a world map in the background (minus Antarctica as it wasn't represented at the WBC). Would really be a plus had the background marked in the country the player is from. For instance, using the scan above, the United States could have been darkened in to show where the country is located. Or possibly, the country's flag could have been used for the background. Subjects are featured in the uniforms of the country they played for. There are numerous parallels ranging from being print run numbered as high as 50 and as low as 1. These are not guaranteed per box, so it is possible for boxes not to have any while other may see 1-2 appear.

Nelson Cruz Autograph

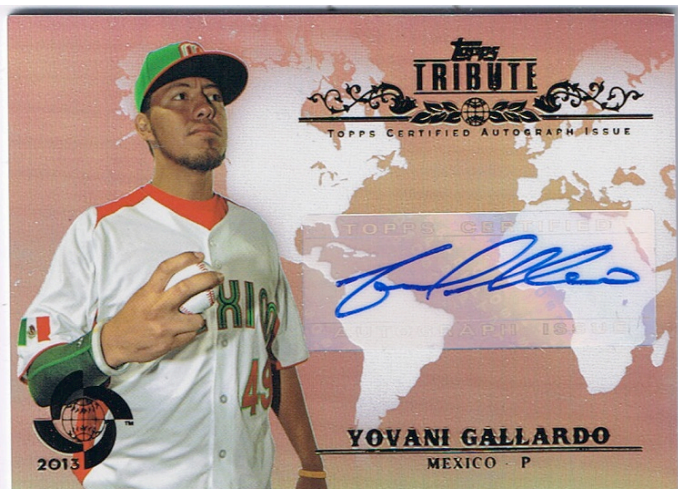


Ryan Vogelsong
Autograph

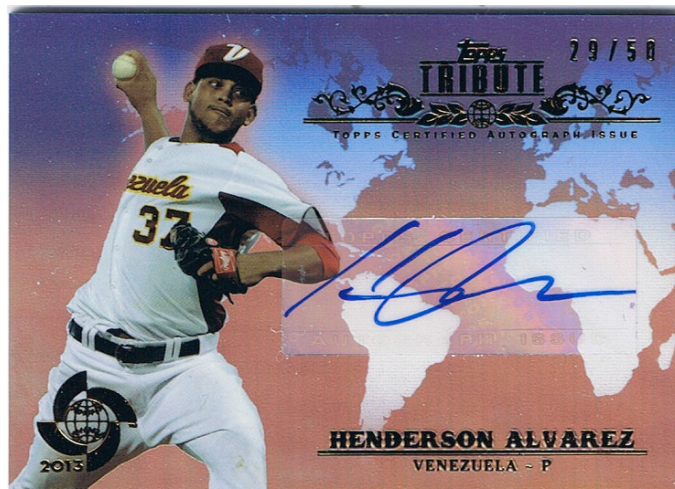




Yovani Gallardo Autograph



Henderson Alvarez Blue Autograph /50



Craig Kimbrel 2-color Patch /131



Fernando Rodney Purple 3-color Patch 1/1



Topps Tribute WBC features 6 autographs or relics in every box. In essence, 1 hit per pack. There is an error that Topps had announced with the printing on the box. The box states each pack is guaranteed to have an autograph or relic numbered to 99 or less. In late June, Topps announced that this was an error as the base autographs were unnumbered. It appears what happened is that notation was not removed from boxes as they used the layout of the regular release, where that statement is true. It is a bummer that the box statement is a mistake as it takes away from the appeal of the release. There are a slew of parallels for both the regular autograph and jersey/patch sets. In addition, there are redemptions for full jerseys from some of the players as well as flag and logo patches from the jerseys numbered as 1/1s. Other autograph sets include one that honors great players who participated in the first two WBCs as well as retired players who would have most likely represented their country had the WBC been played while they were actively playing.



FINAL THOUGHTS

Base - 4/5

Design - 4.75/5

Fun - 4.5/5

Value - 3.5/5

Rebuy - 3/5

Overall - 19.25/25 (77%)

NPN Information

NPN Topps Tribute 2013 World Baseball Classic Edition

PO Box 2008

Duryea PA 18642

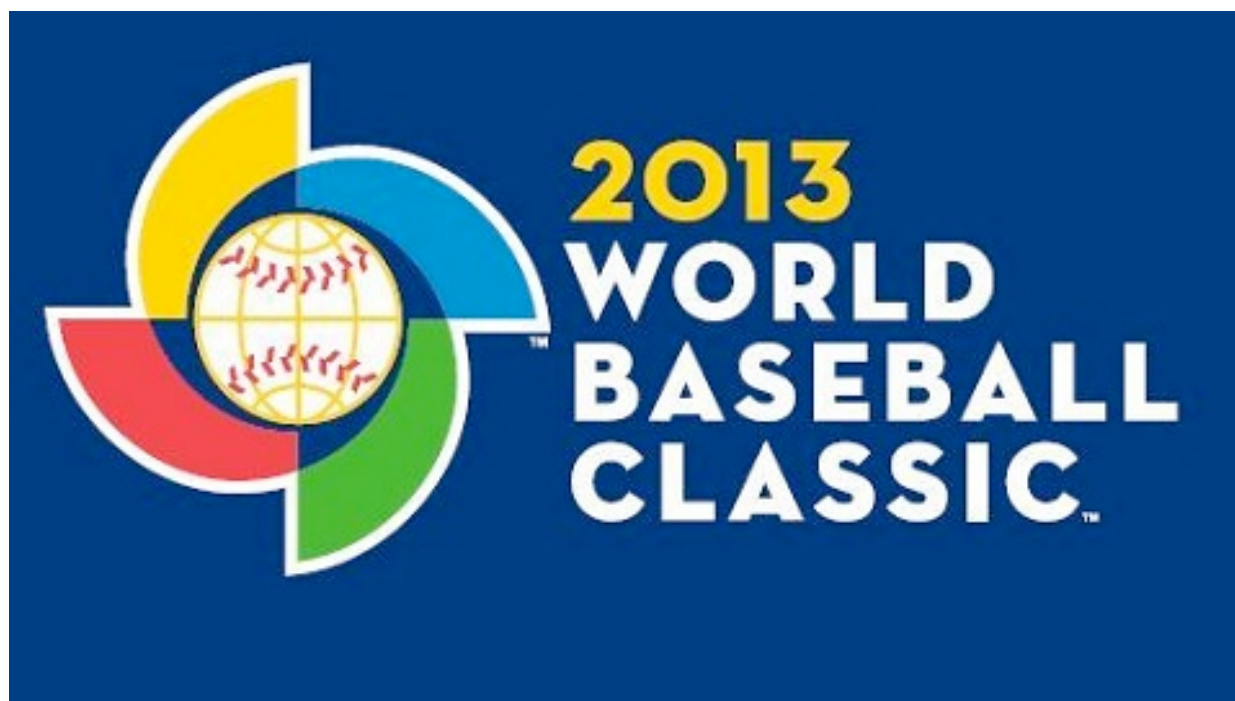
Limit 1 Request Per Household

Postmarked By: 9/25/13

Received By: 10/2/13

Canada Skills: $6 \times 9 + 4 - 3 = ?$

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, visit them today at www.topps.com.





Canton Gets it Right By J.R. Lebert aka jrlebert



Amid stories of NCAA violations, MLB suspensions, and NFL murder trials, one thing became unmistakably evident during the first week of August: the NFL knows how to do a Hall of Fame induction. In a year where there was no real star power being inducted, the NFL Hall of Fame still managed to showcase why it is fast becoming the most relevant of the major sports meccas in the United States. With all due respect to Springfield and Cooperstown, Canton, Ohio may be the place to be on induction day.

Major League Baseball, one small note: You have to induct living players in order to stay relevant. It's not as if there are no qualified players that aren't in! Some, even though they are quite deserving, aren't even on the ballot anymore – Bobby Grich, Ted Simmons, Lou Whitaker, Jim Kaat. Some cannot be

voted on at all – Buck O'Neil, Pete Rose and Shoeless Joe Jackson. Still others are, for some reason languishing on the ballot year after year – Tim Lincecum, Craig Biggio, Alan Trammell, and Jeff Bagwell.

That's not to say that other sports don't have plenty of guys who are not yet in, but who deserve to be. It's a point of debate for a fan of any sport, and usually a hotly contested one. But when you open the process up for a vote, and those cast with the responsibility of putting deserving people in FAIL TO DO THEIR COLLECTIVE JOBS, we have, to put it mildly, a problem. Yes, the Steroid Era has clouded Major League Baseball permanently, but the names listed above have had NOTHING to do with it!

There have been other times in its history when the Baseball Hall of Fame has had its voting issues, too. There were the "Friends of Frankie Frisch", the rather open bias towards Yankees from the 60s and earlier, and the joke that was the Negro League Special Commission. To not elect anyone, however, hurts everyone involved. Cooperstown could have easily redeemed itself with a fantastic idea for this year's ceremony, however even that fell flat.

See, because of wartime restrictions, 12 players, including two of the absolute all-time greats, Lou Gehrig and Rogers Hornsby, plus the entire class of 1945 selected by the Committee on Old Timers: Roger Bresnahan, Dan Brouthers, Fred Clarke, Jimmy Collins, Ed Delahanty, Hugh Duffy, Hughie Jennings, King Kelly, Jim O'Rourke and Wilbert Robinson, never received formal induction ceremonies. What better way to deflect attention from the Steroid Era and the lack of living inductees than to celebrate some of the earliest superstars of the sport, along with the two megastars, Gehrig and Hornsby? As someone who watches the MLB Network every night, how much coverage did I see of this? None. To put it in the parlance of our times; FAIL. Would it have hurt to showcase these legends to a new and different generation of young fans whose only news they seem to hear of MLB is steroids, denials, and trials?



Springfield's version of the Hall of Fame is a great place, but as an American, it's a little tough to celebrate some of the inductees because of the relative distance away that they made their impact. I am all for a Hall of Fame that celebrates players, contributors, coaches, and teams from all eras and places. In a way, however, that is the exact reason that the Basketball Hall of Fame isn't quite as relevant or impact full. It's all over the map, quite literally.

I do love the fact that the Basketball Hall of Fame inducts whole teams, such as the 1992 Dream Team. But what hurts is that it is not the NBA Hall of Fame. Rather, it is the Basketball Hall of Fame, a much bigger fishing net from which to pluck candidates.



In Canton, however, at least for 2013, everything came together swimmingly. While there was not one player that would be considered an absolute superstar, there were plenty of greats, and transcendent personalities to boot. The Pro Football Hall of Fame is not afraid to induct players on the first try, unlike MLB. Larry Allen and Jonathan Ogden were two of the very best offensive linemen to ever put on very, very large uniforms, and both were in on their first try. The same can be said for Warren Sapp, possibly the best defensive tackle ever. Sapp's brash personality, widely compared

to that of basketball hall of famer Charles Barkley, was on full display, although he treated the ceremony with class and humility.

Then there is the opposite end of the spectrum. Canton finally corrected its most glaring injustice on the offensive side of the ball, electing WR Cris Carter on his 6th try as a finalist. Imagine baseball's 4th most prolific player at any position, or basketball's 4th best forward or center, having to wait 6 years, and you begin to realize the absurdity of Carter's exclusion. No eligible player had more grabs or touchdown catches as Carter at the time of his induction, yet players with lesser numbers (Art Monk, 72 fewer touchdowns?!?) got in over him. No wonder his speech was so fiery, emotional, and passionate.



Bill Parcells, Curley Culp, and Dave Robinson rounded out another fantastic class that proves the Hall knows what it is doing. Yes, there are a few glaring omissions. Jerome Bettis, who baseball purists would call a compiler, was, at the very least, the best "compiler" this side of Emmitt Smith. Only 5 men have more yards rushing, and only 9 have more touch downs on the ground. Tim Brown, maybe one of two notches below Carter all-time, and his 100(!) touchdown grabs are still out. The best retired punter, Ray Guy, best special teams player, Steve Tasker, and the two best receiving backs ever, Larry Centers and Roger Craig, also wait. Kevin Greene, Leslie O'Neal, and now Michael Strahan, three of the most feared ends ever, with a combined 434 sacks, can't wait to be sized for a bust.



Four quarterbacks whose numbers are easily inside the top 20 ever are still waiting the call, or even the chance to be a finalist: Drew Bledsoe, Vinny Testaverde, Boomer Esiason, and Dave Krieg. The two most prolific scorers in NFL lore, Morten Andersen and Gary Anderson (no relation) are still waiting to “kick” down the door in Canton. Scores of others, including Andre Reed, Ken Riley, Henry Ellard, Irving Fryar, Terrell Davis, Ricky Watters, Steve Atwater, Will Shields, Aeneas Williams, and Charles Haley, still await their deserving place.

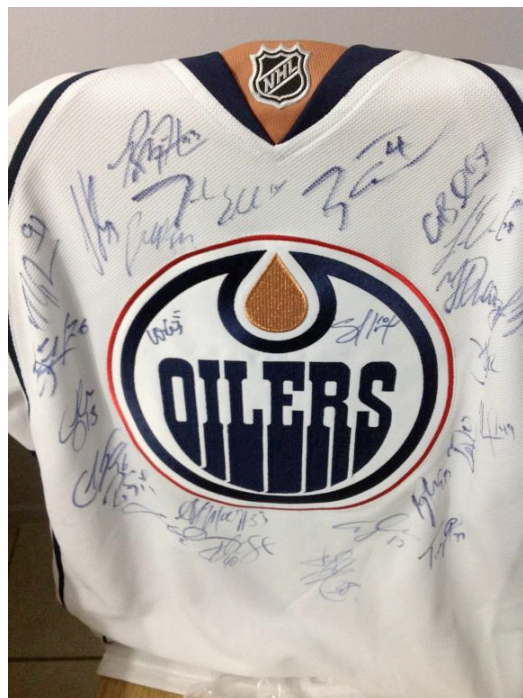
Because of its exclusivity, emotion, and still-intimate setting in Canton, as well as the absolute seriousness its voters take in the process of electing someone who has sacrificed their body, and as we are too quickly seeing, their mind at times, too, the NFL has raised the status of its Hall, its members, and of the game as a whole. Now if only they could do something about that whole Pro Bowl thing...





The Dog Days of Summer

By Richard McAdam aka RGM81



For our first order of business this month, all the members of the Hockey Team would like to extend our congratulations to member mikepro44. He is the grand prize winner of the season-long Jaunt For The Jersey Contest, sponsored by Ramjak Sports. For his efforts throughout the season, Mike is the recipient of a team-autographed Edmonton Oilers jersey. The jersey, as you can see, features autographs of such young stars as Jordan Eberle, Taylor Hall, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, and many more. Congratulations to you Mike, and thank you to all members who participated in this great contest. We are already underway planning next season's contest!

August is probably the least interesting month on the calendar for a hockey fan. Most of the major free agent signings are already completed, there's usually no trading, and training camp is still a month away. Yes it is the time of the year that the prognosticators start issuing the annual magazines previewing the season ahead, proclaiming which stars will break out and which teams will be bound for glory. But beyond that, as far as action related to the ice, it's very slim pickings unless stories of players visiting their new locker rooms for the first time is exciting to you.

Fortunately the hobby is a year-round affair that has no true off-season. The past few weeks has seen the beginning of the Dual Rookie Class, and by all indications, the hobby is about to get up off the mat and enjoy a stellar campaign the likes of which it has not seen in many years. There are still one or two more products to be released from the 2012-13 schedule, but collectors are primarily focused on the new line of 2013-14 products. Upper Deck has delivered a home run with Trilogy, giving collectors the first rookie cards of the players who debuted in the shortened 2013 season, and collectors are eagerly snapping them up as quickly as possible.

There are certainly some rookies that are already establishing themselves as the cream of the crop, and these values appear to be sustainable throughout the entirety of the 13-14 release calendar. As expected, Nail Yakupov, Alex Galchenyuk, and Brendan Gallagher are leading the way, posting high sales values across the board for all of their first licensed products. The three tiers of Trilogy RCs are a strong hit, with some of the /49 copies going well into the three figures. As much as some people complain about sticker autos, other collectors are speaking with their wallets and grabbing these cards for their collections.



While Upper Deck has delivered a high-end hit to the masses, Panini has done so on the opposite end of the spectrum with their release of the overhauled Score. No longer a \$1 per pack entry-level release, Score's jumbo hobby configuration delivers two autographs and an eight-piece jersey card in every box, along with



40 rookie cards. The increased price point has meant higher value in the product, and people are responding accordingly. The scarce parallels, including the rack pack exclusive Reds and the Hobby exclusive Alternate Backs, are drawing in people and it is not uncommon to see star players commanding pretty good money on the secondary market. As just one example, a Carey Price Alternate Back sold for \$40 on eBay recently. That type of value is definitely appreciated by collectors.

Things do not slow down at all for the double rookie class, as August will see the release of the hobby staple O-Pee-Chee. With a huge base set, desirable parallels (including the return of the wrapper redemption program in Canada), the incredibly popular Team Logo Patches, and a surprisingly strong autograph checklist, this release will be popular as always.

While many are excited about the DRC products, August will also see the release of a hotly desirable set in Canada, Upper Deck Team Canada. This product will check in at the same price point as Upper Deck's signature release, but will deliver incredible value. There will be two autographs per box, as well as the chance to pull a 1/1 printing plate or other low-numbered parallels. Canadians take tremendous pride in hockey players that have represented the country on the international stage, be it the World Junior Championships, the World Cup, or of course the Olympics. With Sochi on the minds of fans and collectors alike, the timing on this release is ideal. The product boasts over 200 players who have worn the venerable Team Canada jersey in the course of their careers. If at some point your favourite Canadian born player has played for his country, expect to see them represented here. To me, this product has Montreal Canadiens Centennial type success potential. It is rumoured to be short-printed, and that UD hasn't gone out of its way to promote it recently since the announcement in May suggests that it may be already a sell-out at the distributor level. I know that I will be eagerly breaking a box of this on release day.

And finally, the Hockey Team would like to welcome back to the squad, 30ranfordfan. Sean had previously served as the Hockey Team Manager but had to step down to some real-life commitments putting major constraints on his SCF time. We are very happy to have him back!

See you in September everybody, when it's time for training camp! Till then...





Courtside By Jay Weger aka Jay520

Box/Pack Breaks

The big breaks from July came from the big \$ products like National Treasures and Gold Standard. To start things off 13stepper opened a box of 2013 All-Time Greats to hit a Larry Bird base/23, Jordan base/150, Jordan base/23 and a Jordan/Bird dual auto 23/23!!! theguru opened a 3 box case of 12-13 National Treasures to pull NBA Gear dual of Andre Igoudala/99, Al Jefferson auto/49 and Mario Chalmers auto /10, NBA Gear triple Kobe/49, Matchup Materials of Shaq/Duncan/49 and James/Anthony/49, Materials Colossal Bill Cartwright/25, Material Treasures Kobe patch/25, RPA of Chandler Parsons/199, Terrence Jones/99 and Markieff Morris/



99, 11vs12 dual auto of Fredette/Green/99, Hamilton/Harkless/49 and a sick Irving/Davis/25, Notable Nicknames of Toni Kukoc/99 and Harrison Barnes/49, 12-13 GS Gold Rush 1/1 Printing plate Mario Chalmers, Preferred Panini Sigs red 1/1 Printing plate Hakeem Olajuwon, NBA Logoman Sigs 1/1 Printing plate Steve Nash and a RPA 1/1 Printing plate Kyrie Irving. skeen got some hits from a group break in Ryan Anderson Gold Strike auto/299, Darius Miller gu auto and a sweet Anthony Davis rc gu auto from 12-13 Gold Standard. palantri opened a box of Gold Standard to pull a Brook Lopez White Gold gu/99, Mother Load auto of Michael Ray Richardson, Jimmer Fredette gu auto and a nice 1/1 Black John Havlicek. mugmasher opened 5 boxes to get Black Gold gu of Metta Wolrd Peace/149, Patrick Ewing/99 and Thad Young 3/5 patch, White Gold gu of Dirk/99, Gold Strike autos of Kawhi Leonard/249 and Jimmer Fredette/199, Marks of Gold autos of David West/99 and Raymond Felton/49, Mother Load Blake Griffin auto red. And nice 14K Gold Rush card of Raymond Felton/25. theguru opened a box of 12-13 Momentum to get a Irving rc, Derrick Rose silver foil parallel/49, RC auto of Maurice Harkless, Monumental Marks John Havlicek auto/25 and Jerry West auto/25. lopezhm got 4 boxes of 12-13 Fleer Retro to pull these big hits of Court Masters of Bill Russel, Thrill Seekers of Wilt Chamberlain, Starring Role of Larry Bird, PMG of Jason Kidd/100 and D. Wilkins/50 along with Credentials of Antoine Walker/4 and MJ/42.



Other products opened in July were Preferred and Crusade which had JaMarchand2012 get a Crown auto of Isaiah Thomas, Panini's Choice auto of MarShon Brooks and a LeBron booklet/199. theguru opened 2 boxes of Preferred to get Silhouette gu of E'Twuan Moore patch/25, Panini's Choice auto of Marcus Morris/25, Bookie booklet of Davis/Gilchrest/Beal/Irving/Williams/Kanter/249 and Lottery booklet Griffin/Hansbrough/Harden/Evans/Curry/DeRozan/Jennings/199. jlai624 got a box of Crusade to get Quest gu of Harrison Barnes and M. Kidd-Gilchrest, Majestic auto of Larry Johnson and Crusade Gold insert of Joe Johnson/10. JaMarchand2012 got 2 boxes to pull Quest gu of Kyrie Irving and Tristan Thompson, Quest autos of Bradley Bealand Chris Copeland and a sick 1/1 Majestic auto of Alex English. SnakeEyez did a box as well to net Quest auto of Isaiah Thomas, Quest gu of Harrison Barnes and Villanueva patch/25. SnakeEyez also got a box of 12-13 Brilliance to pull a Marks of Excellence Jerry West auto/





149. JaMarchand2012 opened one as well to get rcs of Irving, Davis and Lillard to go with an Anthony Davis rc auto. And lastly cavsfan hit a Magic Johnson auto from Brilliance.

Contest/Winners

Be sure to see if you can Guess the Serial # in the basketball contest area to win CC and possibly a card prize before they are gone. Also check back next month to see what 13-14 contests are scheduled.

Hobby News

It is still too early in the off season for Panini to announce products for the upcoming 13-14 season but Innovation and Intrigue are still yet to hit shelves for the 12-13 season. National Treasures seemed to be well received by collectors when it came out on July 31st. The high-end product returned with Rookie Patch Autos and this time 1/1 printing plates from all of its other products from this year.

NBA News

By Bryce Doody aka bdoody42



This summers NBA offseason has seen a lot of new players who will be wearing new uniforms this year. This summer's biggest free agent drama revolved around what Dwight Howard would do. Howard decided to leave the bright lights of Los Angeles and sign a four year eighty eight million dollar contract. Adding Howard gives the Rocket high expectations for next season.

Chris Paul decided he wanted to remain in Los Angeles with the Clippers. He signed a five year maximum contract. The Clippers also decided to acquire coach Doc Rivers from the Celtics in exchange for a future first round pick. The Clippers were not done and also added J.J. Redick and Jared Dudley.

The Celtics decided it was time to rebuild and traded Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett, Jason Terry, and D.J. White to the Nets for Kris Humphries, Gerald Wallace, MarShon Brooks, Kris Joseph, Keith Bogans and three first round picks. They also signed Butlers coach Brad Stevens to lead the rebuilding job.

The biggest draft day trade involved the Sixers trading Jrue Holiday to the Pelicans for the rights to draft Kentucky big man Nerlens Noel. The Pelicans also traded for Tyreke Evans.





The two time defending Champions Miami Heat decided to amnesty sharpshooter Mike Miller. The team also signed Greg Oden to a two year contract. Chris Anderson will also be returning. The Western Conference Champion Spurs have resigned Manu Ginobili and Tiago Splitter. Marco Belinelli signed with the Spurs as well this offseason.

The Pistons look to become one of the must improved teams this year by the signing of forward Josh Smith and trading for Brandon Jennings. They also signed former star Chauncey Billups. Indiana Pacers acquire Chris Copeland, Luis Scola, and C.J. Watson to help bolster their bench.

The Lakers also had a busy offseason. They signed center Chris Kaman. The club also amnestyed Metta World Peace. The Knicks then picked up

Peace off waivers and also resigned J.R. Smith and Kenyon Martin.

Other notable transactions.

O.J. Mayo signs with the Milwaukee Bucks.
 Monta Ellis signs with the Dallas Mavericks
 John Wall signs five year extension with the Wizards worth eighty million dollars.
 Gerald Henderson resigns with the Bobcats.
 Elton Brand signs with the Hawks.
 Carl Landry signed four year contract with the Kings.





Minor League Hockey By Mason Hermann aka Antropov14

Usually everyone who follows hockey has a favorite NHL team and worships it to some degree or another, whether it be watching the games, or naming your pets after your favorite players. Though NHL is seen as the face of hockey, it always intrigues me how loyally people follow minor leagues and hometown teams. I know that there is nothing better than stopping in somewhere for a hockey game and observing the sense of 'secluded' community that exists, and that one die-hard fan that sits in the nosebleeds and hollers at the top of his lungs like there's no tomorrow. To me it almost seems that because of the lack of media these teams receive, it just makes the experience greater. This is the story of my first hand encounter with AHL hockey and the great passion to the game it delivered.



Firstly there are a few main differences from AHL and NHL hockey. The play is definitely more intense in AHL, the teams care more about their fans, and you can purchase tickets at the box office a few minutes before the game (as I did when I saw my only AHL game so far in Chicago). Right off the bat I could tell the difference walking into the arena: it was cozy, basic, but packed with stuff for the fans. How about an adopt a dog program right when you walk in the main lobby. There was nothing like walking through a crowd of people... and animals trying to get to your seats. Further more,

they even took the dogs out on the ice during intermissions to showcase them, and someone adopted one right at the game! Talk about great fan interaction!

After heading up to the empty upper level, I realized who the super fan was going to be. A man in his sixties had a single seat row (yes they had a single seat for a row), right on the front of the upper level, which in total had about 300 people in it, and he was decked out in his Chicago Wolves colors and content watching the game by himself. That is what I thought of course. About part way through second period, the few people sitting around him all started talking like they were best buddies, and one woman even pulled out a Rubbermaid container of banana bread and started passing around the slices to the little group. I realized how awesome the





sense of commitment to the team was, and the great community this created for this man who appeared to be a stand alone guy.

So as we took our seats, upon opening remarks, I realized that it was an honorable mentions night. Sure enough, the prior GM of the Chicago Wolves walks out on to the ice for a ceremonial banner rising, with a long tribute video and great thank you speech to the fans. Even more so, to my surprise, this man turned out to be the current GM of the WINNIPEG JETS! That's right, the man who was in charge of my favorite player's (Antropov) contract was in the same building that I was! I had to talk to him...(which I will explain later).

After the ceremony wrapped up, the arena crew hauled out this cardboard cut-out arch of a Wolf face (literally) and fired up a solid 4 minute fireworks show that was too dangerous even if it was outside! The amount of effort they put in for the fans was unbelievable! I had also gone to a Chicago Blackhawks game while in town and honestly, I had way more fun at the AHL game. The play was intense with huge hits, the value for your money had to be a 1000% better and the overall experience was great. Even after the game, when the Wolves won, the PLAYERS threw t-shirts to the crowd from the ice! What a neat touch. If I ever live in an AHL hockey town, I will definitely buy some season tickets!

Finally, I must explain the GM encounter. While walking back to my seats for the third period, I took a walk by the makeshift broadcast booth (located on a platform built over some upper level seats, accessed by a quality aluminum ladder), I saw the GM having an interview with the broadcasters. I waited until he was done, and I was able to get a nice picture with him and I was able to persuade him to sign Antropov to a 5 year \$50 Million dollar deal to be announced soon... (JK, I wish). We had a brief chat, told him I was a fan of the Jets and then he proceeded to walk the same way we did back to our seats. Just like that. He had no entourage, no security, just community. The sense of community that arena, its fans and team made was outstanding. When you have the sense that everyone is together, feeling the same closeness, it makes whatever you are doing so much more enjoyable. Though I have only been to this one AHL game, I will definitely go again. The same goes for small town hockey. It is unbelievable what you will discover if you just give it a chance... you never know... your favorite player probably got his start from one of those hundreds of teams, and for a meaningful encounter, there is no better place to go and look for him or her.

HERE IS MY PERSONAL VIDEO OF THE FIREWORKS SHOW AT THE GAME!

<http://s1278.photobucket.com/user/an...f9cfd.mp4.html>





Miro the Hero By Jonah Levitan aka Satan81

A lot of people on this forum tell me that it's nice to collect someone who isn't a superstar like Sidney Crosby or Steven Stamkos. It's refreshing to see someone collect an average player. Well let me tell you, to me, he's a superstar. Perhaps more.

I am talking about my favorite hockey player, Miroslav Satan. Miro started as a very late draft pick by the Oilers, then traveled a few times from Buffalo, to Long Island, to Pittsburgh to Boston. That's where his NHL days ended. He would then go on to win a championship with Slovan Bratislava, leading the playoffs in scoring on the team. Those days would (seemingly) end too, however, due to a bad injury from Zdeno Chara.

However, to me, they're still very alive, through the cards I collect of him. And something bolstered my admiration for this hockey player.

Meeting him.

My cousins play ice hockey in a rink a fair ways away from where I live, and it just so happened Miroslav Jr. was in the camp there, and none other than Miro himself was assisting in drills. Knowing he was my favorite player, he notified my dad of such, and offered my dad and I to visit one day, perhaps meet him.

As any kid of fifteen years of age would, I immediately accepted, knowing I would probably become extremely timid at the time of meeting him. I was partially correct.



The day came and we went into the rink. I couldn't pick out where his kid was, but it was no challenge picking out Miro. I was wearing my away Pittsburgh Penguins Satan jersey at the time. Before I knew what was happening my dad called out: "Hey Miro!". Apparently, he had heard and skated over, smile on his face. My dad explained to him my admiration, and he immediately proposed a picture. So we did. Afterwards, I asked if he could sign the jersey and he said yes, I still have it hanging in my room to this day.

Afterwards, this was something none of the hockey players I've met (Bob Nystrom, James Neal, Joe Vitale) had done. We, my dad, him and I, actually had a 10 minute conversation, rather than him going back to the rink straight away. And what a conversationalist he was.

One of my dad's questions was "I gotta ask you, what was it like being a line mate with Sidney Crosby?" The response was amazing.

"Eh, it was alright." We shared a laugh. Then, my dad asked him how it was being an Islander. He said it was a great place to play, and the crowd was the loudest he'd ever played for, spanning his 5 teams. Afterwards, I asked him what it was like to skate with the



cup, and he told us it felt like he was skating with a feather over his head. Goes to show the adrenaline a Stanley Cup winner gets after all is said and done. So then, my dad told him I collected his hockey cards, to which he showed interest. He asked how many cards there were of him, and being honest I said somewhat over one thousand. He was shocked, then asked me how many I had, and at the time I had a little over one hundred, to which he was also shocked. He laughed and said thanks, in an appreciative way. After our conversation, he thanked us for coming out to see him, and said he hoped to see us again. Was truly an amazing moment.

I will never forget it. True superstar, and perhaps one of the nicest people I have ever met. And from then on, my collection has only grown. Notched my first two 1/1 of him, which is always a nice thing for a player collector to achieve. Plus, I would call him above average. He's the 8th top scorer in Sabres' history, and 6th top scorer of Slovakian NHL hockey players. Although he did win a cup in Pittsburgh, his most well known goal was with Boston during the 2010 playoffs. Double overtime, against Ryan Miller. Always nice to get a game winning goal, right?

He's had a great career in his 1050 games played. I would not say he belongs in the Hockey Hall of Fame, but he's definitely a player worth remembering. I would most certainly say that. Average player? Maybe. But superstar of a guy.





Uncle Billy and Me

By Josh Ammons aka bigdog2003



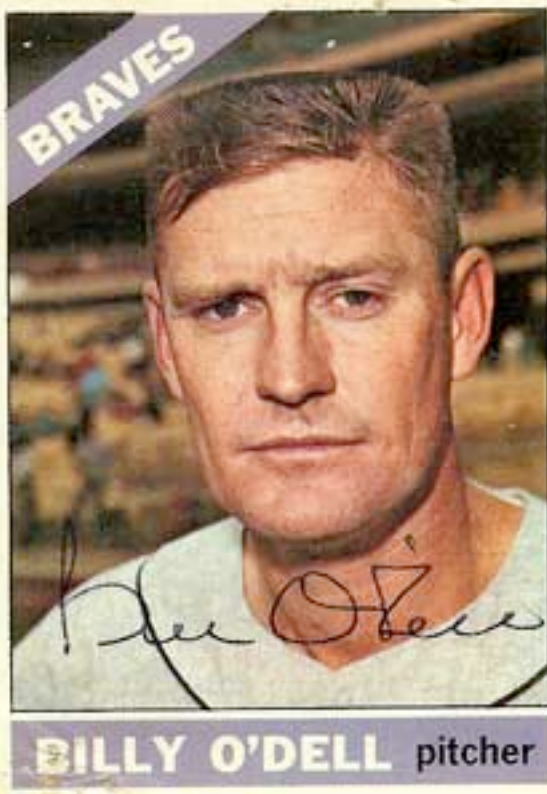
Growing up, I was in love with the sport of baseball. I loved everything about the sport, but fell in love with pitching. I started pitching the first year I played 9-10 year old baseball, and was quickly the ace of the staff. I was always trying to learn how to better pitch, and how to be more effective on the mound. I had a leg up in this due to a former Major League Baseball pitcher attending my church. Billy O'Dell, or Uncle Billy to me, began working with me at about 9 years old to teach me the art of pitching. The lessons he taught me went further than the mound, and stay with me to this day.

I always knew Uncle Billy had played in the big leagues, but did not know how good he really was until he started helping me. Uncle Billy pitched for five teams from 1954-1967, and was a two time All-Star. He was a star at Clemson University before then, pitching a no-hitter against South Carolina in 1953. In the 1958 All-Star game, he was named the Most Valuable Player, after retiring all nine batters he faced. Among the batters he retired that day was Stan Musial, who at the time had the highest batting average in the majors, Frank Thomas, Ernie Banks, Lee Walls, Willie Mays, and Hank Aaron.

Uncle Billy would always tell me that he would work with me as long as I was having fun playing the game. We would work on skills on Saturday afternoons in his backyard. Dad would always be my catcher, and I would throw all afternoon. Dad made a portable mound that we would take with us, so that I would be able to work on a mound. We would work on arm angle, driving off my back foot, following through, and getting into fielding position. We would also work on hitting. Uncle Billy was also a good hitter, and I learned a lot from him about hitting.

After working on skills, we would go inside and just sit around. He had all of his memorabilia hanging up and in cases. I would sit for hours just listening to his stories of his playing days. I loved hearing about Ted Williams, Ernie Banks, Willie Mays, and Hank Aaron. He would tell us about how he would sit around with Ted Williams talking about hunting before games. He always had nothing but good things to say about the guys he had played with and against during his career. My favorite story of his was the one about striking out Mickey Mantle twice in game one of the 1962 World Series. Every time he would start telling stories about his playing days, I





would beg him to tell that one.

As time moved on, my pitching skills continued to get better with Uncle Billy's help. My fastball got faster, my change up was better, but he would never teach me the curveball. He said he was protecting my arm. At the time, I didn't understand, but now I do. He was looking out for the next generation and their chances to further the game.

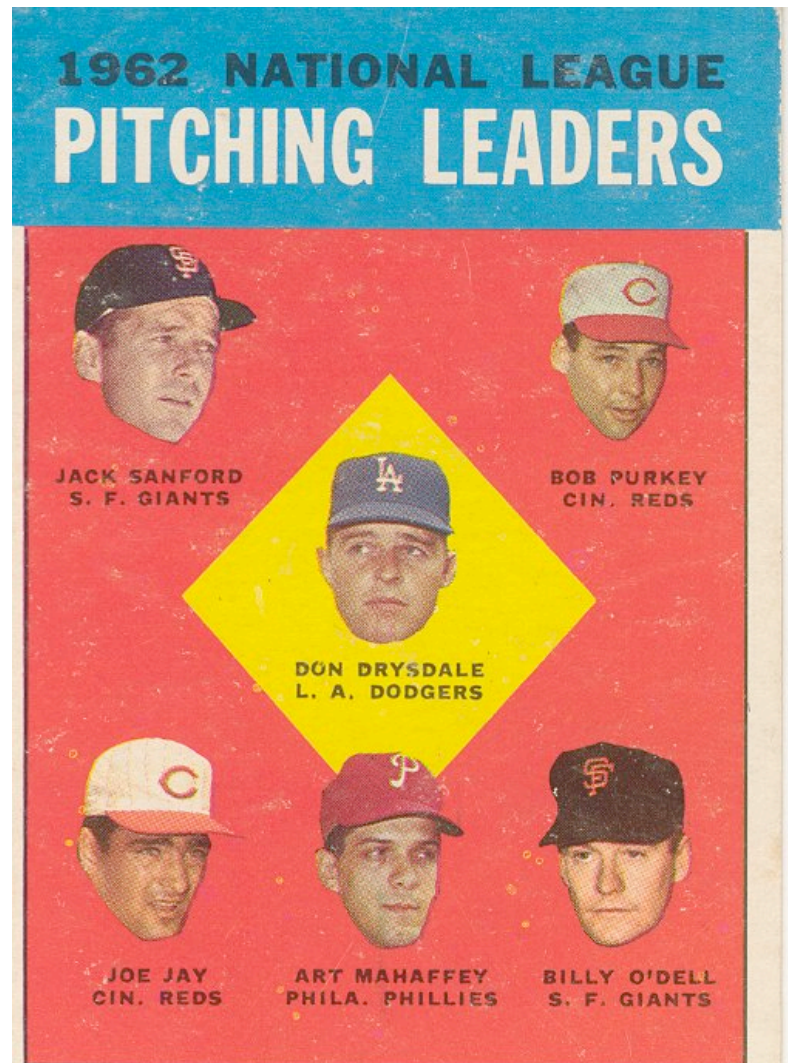
Uncle Billy would come to my games when I was starting on the mound. I would look for him before I warmed up on the mound every game. He would be sitting there, with his snow cone in hand, yelling encouragement from the stands. Any time I would get down on myself, he was yelling at me to keep my head up, take my time, just play catch with the catcher. Having him there really helped me stay calm on the mound.

He was there the night I struck out 16 batters in a six inning

game, but still lost 2-1. I gave up two homeruns that night, and we couldn't score. After the game, I was as upset as I ever was after a game. He looked at me and said; "Kid, you shouldn't be upset, you should be happy. You just pitched a great game. You win some, you lose some, but never forget, you are playing the greatest game in the world." That has stuck with me all these years, no matter what, you are playing the greatest game in the world.

As I got older, I grew out of baseball. I went from a pitcher, to a 6'4 275lb offensive lineman. He was still there, not in the stands, but in my head. The lessons he had taught me were there when I felt like I couldn't go on. It was like he was right there saying; "Stay with it, focus, have fun." I always heard those words when I felt like quitting. When I was injured and my football dream died, he was there to say baseball was still an option.

I decided to play one more year of baseball when I was 19. Partly because of the chance to play with my brother, but also because of Uncle Billy. He told me to give it a





shot, at first I thought he was crazy. I hadn't played organized baseball in 6 years, could I still throw as hard? Could I still hit? Could I still play at the level I was use to playing at?

That season, I was the old man on the team. Everybody else was 15-17, and I was 19. I felt more like a coach than a teammate. I had more fun that year than any other year I ever played baseball. I even had a college coach offer me a chance to play for him, which I turned down. I told him I just didn't enjoy the game enough to do it every day in college.

I run into Uncle Billy every now and then around town. When he heard I was a coach now at the high school level, he said he wasn't surprised. He said he could see that I would be good at that if playing didn't work out. I made sure he knew that the lessons he taught me were being passed on to my wrestlers today.

Uncle Billy is one of the greatest men I have known. His willingness to work with a short, skinny kid, has helped dozens of kids learn the lessons of the great era of sports. I pass little pieces of Uncle Billy's lessons onto the next generation in the hope that they will continue to do the same.

Thank you to everyone for reading this, and more importantly, THANK YOU UNCLE BILLY! Thank you for teaching a young kid the RIGHT way to play the game. Your legacy will live on through every kid I coach.





My First Ballgame **By Jacob Vance aka GoldenCards**

I remember it like it was yesterday. Seven years old, cut-sleeve muscle shirt, Old-Navy blue jeans, and some rocking white Nikes on my feet.

Waiting in line in Summer Texas heat was all worth the wait because “I couldn’t wait to get an autograph from every guy on the team!.”

My dad chuckled.

As my Dad and I slowly inched to Minute Maid Parks entry doors, my heart began beating faster and faster, “Dad, we’re almost there!.”

My Dad chuckled again.

As I gave the lady my ticket to get scanned, and walked through what I called the “clicky-spinny thing”, I finally witnessed what all my friends had been raving about.

The smell of the fresh popcorn, the sound of the ball cracking off the opposing teams bats during pre-game batting practice.

I was astonished. I was officially in heaven.

My Dad and I took a stroll around the first level, looking at several different sites and attractions.

As soon as we got to the Jeff Bagwell commemorative home run wall, I said “Dad, do you think I have a chance to be in the big leagues?.”

My Dad smiled and said, “only if you practice every single day.”

Then my Dad suddenly asked if I wanted to go into the right field seats and try to catch a home run ball.

I didn’t even reply as I was already on my way to right field.

The second we got in position, I look up and see the one and only, Barry Bonds walking to home plate.





Instantly my Dad told me to go up to the wall railing while he stayed back to give us a better chance at getting a ball.

As I was heading down, “CRACK”.

The first ball he hit went far into the second deck.

Next pitch, “CRACK”. Way over my head.

The third pitch changed my life. Bonds hit a ground ball into right field, gobbled up by Jeff Kent who was shagging.

He quickly heard the screams of everybody who wanted that ball. I stayed quiet knowing my high-pitched voice would not be heard.

He slowly began walking to the rail, obviously looking for the right person to give it to.

A second later, we made eye contact and he instantly made his way towards me.

He arrived, and asked me, “What’s your name son?”

“Jacob” I replied.

“Jacob huh?” “I like that name.”

He then pulled out a blue sharpie and autographed the ball.

After that, he wrote on it, “To Jacob, my new pal.”

My tongue was in a knot.

He shook my hand and said “It was very nice to meet you Jacob, see you around!”

All I could get out was, “Thank you sir.”

I quickly ran to my Dad, showing him my new treasure, and telling him all about my new favorite player.





Then my dad said sarcastically, “You’re not supposed to like anyone from the Giants!”

About ten minutes later, the PA announcer told everybody to go to their seats.

Our seats were great, on the first row behind the Astros dugout.

I watched the whole game in awe, eating my pizza, sipping on coca cola, and yelling “go Jeff!” when he would walk to the plate.

The Astros ended up clobbering the Giants on the night that beat all nights.

The whole way home all I talked about was the Astros, how badly I wanted to go back, and Jeff Kent of course.

Right when we got home I ran to my mom to tell her about my night.

Ending the conversation, I asked if we could have Jeff Kent over for dinner.

My mom said, “if you can get him to say yes we will gladly have him over” she said with a smile.

As I was getting ready for bed, I took a minute to stare at my first ever autograph.

Suddenly, as my parents came in to say goodnight, I said “Thank you so much for taking me tonight, I had so much fun.”

My parents looked at each other.

My Dad smiled and said, well, do you want to have fun tomorrow night?

I quickly asked what he meant.

He replied, “I got us two tickets behind the net!”

That night, I got two new things for the first time.

My first autograph, and my first heart attack.

I guess you could say I had a pretty good first ballgame.



Complètement inacceptable Par Karine Hains aka Pheeb888



Les Devils ont aujourd'hui largué une bombe sur la scène de la LNH, après avoir "complété" (entre guillemets puisqu'on peut à peine compté la dernière saison comme complété) 3 saisons d'un contrat devant en couvrir 15, l'agent libre le plus convoité de la saison morte en 2010, Ilya Kovalchuk, a confirmé qu'il prenait sa retraite du hockey de la LNH à l'âge respectable de 30 ans. Ce faisant, il laisse un joli magot de 77 millions de dollars sur la table...ne soyez pas trop rapide à le louer et à dire qu'il n'a pas hésité à faire le bon choix et à tourner le dos à une petite fortune pour aller rejoindre sa famille en Russie. En effet, c'est la raison principale de la décision apparemment. Toutefois, Kovalchuk a bien précisé qu'il se retirait de la LNH et non pas du hockey. Donc, si on lit entre les lignes, il semble évident qu'il ne tardera pas à signer un nouveau contrat faramineux mais cette fois avec une équipe de la KHL.

Pourquoi est-ce que je considère que c'est inacceptable? Et bien au delà de la simple considération éthique qui présuppose que quand on prend un engagement on devrait le respecter, pour moi le problème c'est le "timing" de la décision. Je m'explique, nous sommes maintenant le 11 juillet, 6 jours après l'ouverture du marché des agents libres dans la LNH. Bien que quelques joueurs de qualité soit toujours sans contrat, les joueurs les plus attrayant ont trouvé preneur dès l'ouverture du marché, si ce n'était pas avant avec les rachats de contrat. Il y a fort à parier que si Lou Lamoriello avait su qu'il disposait d'un autre 6.66 M sur la masse salariale l'an prochain, il aurait sûrement eu une toute autre stratégie. On peut supposer qu'il n'aurait pas laissé Clarkson lever les voiles parce qu'il n'avait pas les moyens de le garder tout en gardant Elias, il y avait aussi des rumeurs à l'effet que les Devils avaient courtisé Daniel Brière, plus d'espace sur la masse salariale veut également dire meilleure offre. On pourrait spéculer longtemps sur les répercussions possibles de cette annonce si elle avait été faite plus tôt mais une chose est certaine, un homme d'honneur et un vrai joueur d'équipe aurait pris et annoncé sa décision beaucoup plus tôt afin de ne pas mettre non seulement l'organisation, mais également ses anciens coéquipiers dans un incroyable pétrin. Je vous l'accorde, changer de pays n'est pas une décision qui se prend à la légère mais c'est justement pour cette raison qu'à mon avis, il aurait pu confirmer ses plans aux Devils beaucoup plus tôt. Quand on réalise l'ampleur des conséquences que ce type de décision peut avoir sur tellement de gens, on les mets au parfum le plus tôt possible.





Finalement, si vous vous souvenez bien, le premier contrat que les Devils avaient tentés de consentir à Kovalchuk avait été refusé par la ligue puisque visant à contourner les restrictions relatives au plafond salarial. Conséquemment, les Devils s'étaient vu imposer des sanctions, notamment de devoir renoncer à leur premier choix soit en 2012, 2013 ou 2014 ce qu'ils n'ont pas fait à ce jour et qu'ils devront donc faire en 2014. Si on examine les choses de manière réaliste, il ne serait pas surprenant que ce premier choix s'avèrent être un très haut choix. Les Devils sans Kovalchuk sont une bien pire équipe et il ne serait pas surprenant de les retrouver dans les bas-fonds du classement. Mince consolation, le fait qu'ils aient conservé leur premier choix au dernier repêchage leur a permis de préparer l'après Brodeur en allant chercher Corey Schneider à Vancouver.

Au final, Kovalchuk aura accumulé 816 points en 816 matchs de saison régulière dans la ligue nationale un ratio qui est excellent, mais pour moi, il a perdu toute crédibilité en exigeant un contrat exorbitant de la part des Devils avant de les désertir 3 ans plus tard sans aucun souci pour le tort qu'il a pu causer à l'organisation. Dans les prochains jours, on apprendra les termes de son nouveau contrat avec le SKA St. Petersburg dans la KHL et on peut être certains qu'il recevra presque autant d'argent que ce qu'il a laissé sur la table au New Jersey...

