

Collector's

January 2011

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- More contest entries
- Product Reviews
- All about the Hobby

FEATURE:

The Future of the Hobby

by: Richard
McAdam



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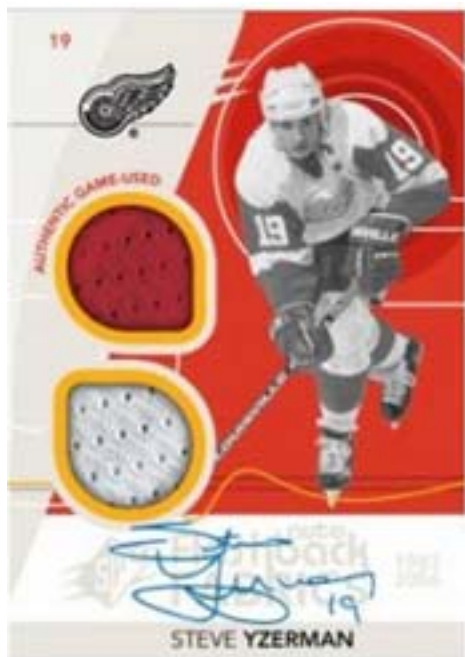
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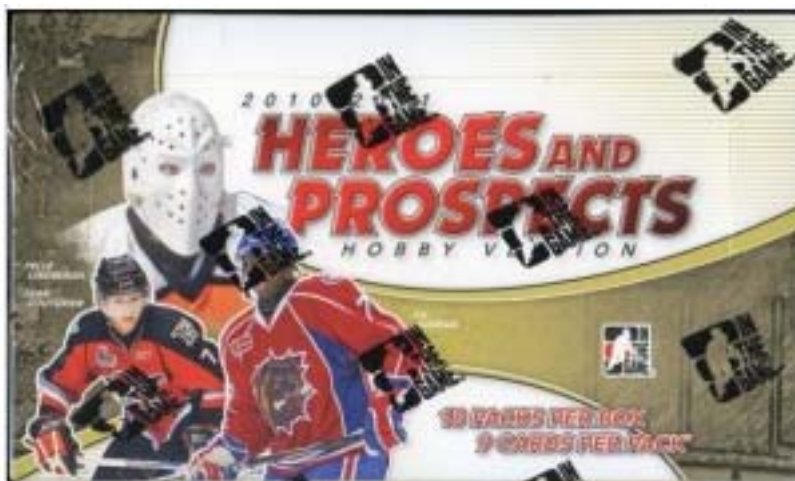
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New Beginnings
By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888

A new year, a new beginning for not only myself but also for Collector's Corner. I stepped away from making the magazine in 2010 for personal reasons, big decisions had to be made and I needed some time to think. Now that I am back on the right side of the ocean (and very much enjoying North America), it's time for Collector's Corner to be back where it belongs as well, on the net on a monthly basis. Much like when I was first running the magazine, it will be published once a month on the last day of the month. There may be times where there is a short delay, for instance in March when I am planning to attend a card show in Montreal on the 26th -27th but other than that, we will do our best to be as regular as clockwork.

In this issue, we treat you to the winning article of the last writing contest. It is an epic article which makes very interesting points, make sure not to miss it Richard worked hard on it! Also included are other articles submitted for the contest, a release calendar, 5 product reviews (one for each of our major sports) and of course, the team pages. Each month, a member of each team from the moderation teams (football, baseball, hockey, basketball, racing, through the mail and dispute teams) takes the time to write a little something which might be of interest to you. So, if you are a hockey collector, be sure to check the hockey team page and the same goes for any other type of collector!

In the next issue, we will discuss the NHL All-Star Game and whether the new format has been a success, we'll also be talking about the Superbowl and of course, we'll discuss the new releases in all sports. If there is something in particular which you would like to see in our pages, please feel free to either PM me on SCF (Pheeb888) or send me an email at karine@sportscardforum.com. I know that not everyone reads our magazine but I still think that it is an important communication tool and both myself and the magazine team members are happy to give our time and energy to get the material out every month. I am happy to be back as the editor in chief and I will do my very best to constantly improve the product we put out.

Enough said, feel free to browse the pages of this edition and enjoy the content. Also, make sure to stop by our friends at [Canadacardworld](http://Canadacardworld.com) and buy a little something, there is a \$5 off discount code on page 2, don't forget to use it!



The Future of the Hobby
By Richard McAdam aka RGM81

When I was a youngster collecting hockey cards, the idea of an insert was getting two pieces of that awful pink gum in my pack of O-Pee-Chee. Flash forward 20 years and now my collection is filled with autographed cards, memorabilia cards, short-printed inserts, and even a couple 1-of-1 cards. All of these ideas would have been pretty difficult to fathom as a 9-year old living in the year 1990, yet here we are today and we have reached a point where collectors are clamouring for even greater innovations in the hobby. The growth of the hobby in the past twenty years has been remarkable, and it can only lead us to imagine: what is yet to come?

In order to remain relevant and keep the hobby flourishing, card companies will have to find new and exciting innovations to hold collectors' interests and entice them to continue to spend hard-earned dollars on their products. Some current trends will likely disappear, only to be replaced by others, while some will probably continue and become even more prominent. That said, I do not expect there to be a revolution in sports card products so much as there will be an evolution, much of it based on the concept of survival of the fittest: the best ideas in use today will grow and flourish, while others that turn off collectors will be discontinued and relegated to the dustbin of history. The three key elements of the future in this hobby will be: a re-evaluation of how to use game-used memorabilia, a restriction of the number of products released each year, and the continued relevance of autographed content. Each of these elements will be discussed below, with an analysis of what is and is not working currently, and how that will translate into the future of the hobby.

Memorabilia

Game-used memorabilia cards have been a staple of the hobby since the late 1990s. They were an instant smash hit with collectors, who paid top dollars for the initial memorabilia pieces of Lindros, Roy, and other superstars of the day. Since then, memorabilia cards have grown to include skates, pads, gloves, sticks, and more. Yet those cards are reaching a crossroads. They are usually not the major hit in a product, and many fear that collectors are starting to get turned off by abundance of jersey cards in nearly every release. While there is certainly a future for memorabilia cards, the landscape will have to change to make them interesting and desirable to collectors again. I believe that there will be two key new features in the future, and the decline and discontinued practice of some memorabilia.

Recently, one of the licensed hockey card manufacturers, Panini, ran a contest on their blog soliciting ideas from collectors as to what they would like to see in future editions of their low-end Score product. Many of the suggestions were perhaps a little grandiose for what is currently a \$1 per pack product, but they could certainly hold water in other releases that are more on the higher end of the hobby spectrum. My own suggestion was to include pieces of a game-used puck as a memorabilia card hit. Puck cards have been included in past releases, and the now-defunct Sweet Shot Puck Signings were very nice aesthetically and had a strong following. By adding a game-used element to the puck cards, manufacturers can add value and interest to a box break.



When you look at an official game-used puck there are definitely opportunities to have some very interesting and highly collectible pieces.

Off the back side of the puck, there are a good 10-12 pieces that could be used which would be a nice visual piece of memorabilia: the NHL Shield, the “Game Puck,” and even NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman’s facsimile signature. The front side offers, of course, the home team logo and its own interesting pieces. Such premium puck slabs would draw a

large premium over a plain black piece in much the same fashion that a 4-colour patch draws more interest than a plain white patch today. I am not well-versed in the art of puck slicing but I would think that it is a relatively simple thing to do compared to chopping up a stick. The pucks themselves are certainly cheaper than a game-used jersey for the card companies to obtain, making them an inviting prospect. Imagine even getting an autographed piece with the signature over top of the team logo – now that is a card that collectors will want to add to their collections!

Currently, many hobbyists are finding that jersey cards are becoming passé. Once a highly-desirable item, the saturation of the market with tiny 1”x1” swatches of nearly every player imaginable has driven down the demand of these cards considerably. A major set checklist such as Upper Deck Game Jerseys will have upwards of 100 cards in each of the product’s two series. That makes for 200 different players featured, at a time when truly only a handful of the cards feature desirable players. I don’t mean to offend any of the players but when a person is spending upwards of \$100 on a box and they pull 3rd or 4th line players on both of their memorabilia cards in the box, it is very deflating and ensures that the opener will not be getting a good return on their investment. The downward trend in basic memorabilia cards is something that will likely come to a head in the next few years, and force a major re-evaluation of how and maybe even whether to include them in products.

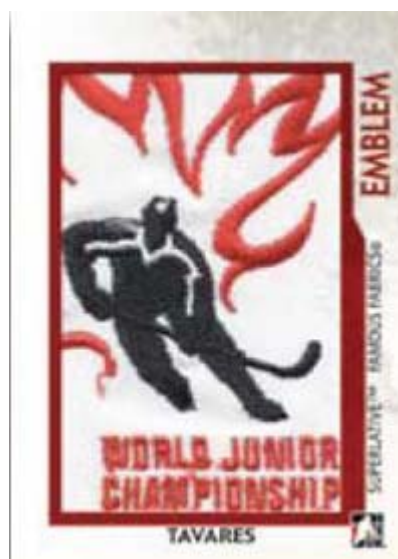
A possible solution to this negative trend may be found by looking at what In The Game is presently doing with its memorabilia pieces in such products as Superlative and Ultimate Memorabilia. The company uses, in limited numbers, jumbo pieces of memorabilia featuring entire emblems, numbers, and patch tags found on player jerseys.



If this concept were to be expanded it would surely be well-received by hobbyists. Larger swatches means more opportunity for there to be breaks, stitching, and multi-colour sections of the material, which makes for a more desirable card. By allowing for more jaw-dropping patches, collectors will have added incentive to pursue memorabilia cards with a greater intensity than they do at present.

Of course it is not feasible to expect that manufacturers will spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars on a jersey to use only the prime pieces. Not every product can include an Alberta flag patch from a game-used Jarome Iginla Calgary Flames jersey. Moreover, many collectors like the imagery on their usual hockey cards, and not all want to see a card that only has a piece of memorabilia on it at the expense of including that player's photo. Of course there is no way to please all of the people all of the time, which is why manufacturers employ a variety of sizes and swatches across product lines to appease most collectors. One thing is for certain, though: collectors do not like getting plain tiny swatches of average NHL players in their products. The status quo will have to change.

One change that I predict for the future is one that will make a lot of collectors happy: the end of manufactured patches. In an era where the manufacturers proclaim to be striving to bring collectors as close to the game as possible, manufactured patches are an anachronism. There is no connection between the player and the collector on a card that uses a piece of material picked out of a bin and glued to the card. Quite possibly the worst use of these cards is featured in Upper Deck Black, a rather high-end product that had some otherwise very nice subsets in the two years that it was produced in hockey. Many of the rookies in the set simply had a manufactured patch letter from their name on the card, while others had autographed versions. In a product that was in excess of \$100 per pack that had only two cards and one of them was guaranteed to be a rookie, to include such a card seemed to be a major affront. The only visible benefit was that collectors could make their own personalized name plates using various cards picked up at bargain bin prices.





The practice of manufactured patches was also used, highly ironically, in another high-end Upper Deck product: SP Game Used. This rather highly contradictory move allows for players to sign numbers and letters for numerous sets, and the concept has expanded greatly in recent years to include Nicknames and Nations. The small amount of space to sign these letters makes for a lot of illegible autographs, and the fabric and ink tend to not work well together. The themed cards tailored to individual players in OPC Premier is another high-end manufactured patch set, and many of them are among the least visually-appealing cards in the hobby (see above). Upper Deck is not the only company to use manufactured patches on their cards; they are, however, the only company to use them as a featured hit. ITG's Ultimate Memorabilia and Superlative Bleu, Blanc, Rouge used manufactured patches...on their base cards. The hits in these products were all game-used and/or autographed content. The use by ITG of manufactured patches is made more tolerable by this fact, but the truth remains that most collectors have a particular disdain for this type of card. I believe that in the short term, these cards will be continue to be used and possibly even proliferate; that Panini has them included in one of their forthcoming products indicates that growth in the use of manufactured patches will occur before any potential contraction.



There is a way that a manufactured patch can be acceptable to the majority of collectors. If it is used as an accent to a card, rather than as its main selling point, it may win over an audience. To refer back to Upper Deck Black, the Pride of a Nation autographs were immensely attractive cards because of the sleek design and the incorporation of a country's flag on the card to go along with a nice hard-signed autograph. The key to a successful manufactured patch card, so it seems, is to either have it as a non-hit (ie. a base card) or in conjunction with another aspect of the hobby that collectors like (ie. an autograph or a game-used piece). A card with a small Montreal Canadiens logo and a Carey Price autograph is something that would work for me personally. That said, I still believe that the future does not look good for manufactured patch cards in the hobby.

Change is crucial to keeping products fresh and relevant among collectors. If sets become too predictable or reliant on past successes, they will drop in interest. In order for memorabilia cards to regain their popularity, it is clear that change must be in the offing.



Contraction

Contraction is a word that often hovers around the hockey market. The inability of some markets to sufficiently support an NHL franchise and keep it viable has led to a lot of discussion about whether the League has become too bloated. With 30 teams, the talent pool is somewhat diluted, and there are franchises that will seemingly never have a legitimate opportunity to compete for the Stanley Cup. Relocation is a preferred option, though one to be strenuously avoided if at all possible, as surely there is a place out there somewhere that these franchises can survive.

The same concept applies to the hockey card market. With a combined 22 releases among the licensed manufacturers and a further seven in the offing this year from ITG, hockey collectors are constantly under siege from new releases. The first five weeks of the 2010-11 season saw five releases: Certified, Artifacts, Score, Upper Deck Series One, and Ultimate Memorabilia. This is simply too much for most collectors to handle. The deluge of products has caused some major player collectors to throw up their hands and drastically claw back on the scope and scale of their collecting intentions. These are collectors that have been maintaining collections for several years now, and even they cannot keep up the pace. While it is of course true that a collector does not have to have everything, a collector has to have everything!

While the hobby was very wise to recalibrate itself after the massive overproduction era that was the 1990s, it has done so in a way that makes the saturation of the market wider rather than deeper. Rather than having a small number of sets with innumerable parallels and sky-high print runs, today we are at a point where there are a large number of sets with medium-high print runs. The high number of sets means that manufacturers have to produce a slate of hits for every product, which leads to the problem of saturation of memorabilia cards that I have already discussed. A Wayne Gretzky autograph used to be a rare sighting and a difficult pull. The Great One is now included in nearly every Upper Deck release that features autographs. The problem in the past was that there were too many of each card; today's problem is that there are too many different cards.

Nowhere is this issue more readily apparent than when look at rookie cards. While there may have been several thousand Martin Brodeur Score RCs back in 1991, today's freshman will have up to 22 different rookie cards, each with a print run ranging from 99 up to (speculative) 5000. Add in the numerous parallels and other rookie-year cards, and the totals probably come pretty close to matching the numbers from the days of yore. While there are certainly staple rookie cards like the Young Guns, SP Authentic Future Watch, and more recently The Cup from Upper Deck, would anybody be truly heartbroken if they could no longer add a Be A Player or Artifacts RC to their collection? It is still too early in Panini's hockey card career to say which cards will stand up as being must-haves and which will be afterthoughts; regardless, it is certain that at some point in the future the NHL and NHLPA will have to enforce some form of hard cap on the manufacturers to restrict the market to some degree.



What, then, is the ideal number of product releases, and how do the companies get to that point without having to make drastic cuts to their product lines that result in losing some signature subsets? How can the companies both contract and relocate without creating bloated sets out of what survives? This is certainly a matter up for some debate. In order to attract youths to the hobby—critically important if the hobby is to perpetuate itself—there must be variety among the low-end sets. In order to retain the established high-end collectors there must be a variety of super-premium products containing super-premium cards. The cuts, then, will have to come in the middle-range products. Fortunately there is a lot of fertile ground in this area. This season there are 11 releases per licensed manufacturer, plus the other seven by ITG. For each of the licensees, their 11 products have 2 entry-level products and 2 high-end products, leaving 7 sets in the middle price range. Ideally, and this is solely my own opinion, this number could be reduced to 4. Pick the four best-sellers, drop the other three, and where possible seek to incorporate what made the other three releases moderately successful.

By streamlining the product release schedule, the manufacturers will be able to space out the products and give collectors a chance to catch their respective breath. They will have more opportunity to dedicate themselves to creating superior products, including having fewer redemptions when the releases go live, and reduce some of the clutter that rests for months at a time in collectors' traders boxes. With fewer releases, there will be fewer rookie cards, fewer autographs, fewer memorabilia pieces, and fewer inserts and parallels. Demand will be sustained by having only the best of the best sets, and the hits will hold a greater meaning. If a collector is an Upper Deck-only collector, they will have 8 great rookie cards to pursue instead of having to concern themselves with chasing a glut of cards like they did during the 2008-09 season. If they chose to focus on Panini's products, their 8 releases will leave them satisfied without worrying about missing a set or two. And if a collector doesn't discriminate, 16 rookies is much more manageable than 22. There are of course drawbacks to cutting back on releases: cuts can be painful, there will be less revenue, and some collectors will be displeased if their favourite product gets cut. The 07-08 lineup was the last year to feature the Hot Prospects series, and even today some collectors still lament its loss. However, the good will outweigh the bad, and there is always the possibility of annual product rotation, in which certain sets may be run every second year. This approach would allow some niche sets to still surface while giving a sense of freshness instead of simply churning out the same products each and every season. For that reason alone, contraction is an idea that should be explored in the hobby's future.

Autographed Content

Many years ago, one of the great joys of my childhood was getting my cards autographed in person by the players. Every year in Penticton, B.C. (best known as the home of Norris Trophy winner and Stanley Cup Champion Duncan Keith), Boston Bruins goalie Andy Moog had a golf tournament in the summer that would have several NHL players in attendance. For a youngster, getting to not only meet my hockey heroes but also get their signatures on my cards was a really cool experience. Moog himself actually had a condo that was right around the corner from my childhood home. It was a regular thing for him, I'm sure, to have kids show up at his door with handfuls of cards to sign – and he always did



sign them all. Years later when Moog had a brief stint with the Canadiens, I treasured those IP autos all the greater.

It did not take long for the card manufacturers to realize that including autographs in their products was a great incentive. The early super-rare Patrick Roy, Bobby Orr, and Wayne Gretzky autos in products like Score and Upper Deck hinted at the future. By the end of the 1990s autographed cards had become a staple of the hobby. Nearly all major releases would have autographed content in them, and the early cards fetched a major premium. To this date, a Maurice Richard signature commands at least \$50 (for the relatively easy to obtain Beehive 5×7) and the harder-to-find cards can go for much more than that. While The Rocket lives on in current sets thanks to cut signatures, those handful of cards signed during his life are certainly special items in anybody's collection.

What is it about an autographed card that makes it so valuable to collectors? They have certainly surpassed nearly any memorabilia card in terms of popularity. In talking to a lot of collectors about the autographs v. memorabilia issue, it is really very simple as to explain why: the players have either held the card in their hands and personally signed it, or done so with the sticker sheet. The problems involving memorabilia cards and the certainty of their legitimacy as to being "game worn" are well known – error cards have been a part of the hobby since jersey cards were introduced. With few-and-far-between exceptions (mostly on sticker auto cards), that problem does not apply to autograph cards. We know with certainty that a hard-signed John Tavares hockey card was held by John Tavares. Much like the days of our youth and chasing down in-person autographs, knowing this brings us closer to the players and therefore to the game. That is a powerful sentiment for collectors and cannot be understated.

There are, of course, some concerns involving autographed cards in the hobby today: redemptions, oversaturation, sticker autos, and signature quality are the main drawbacks to their inclusion in product releases. They are all issues that can be resolved, fortunately.

Redemptions are quite possibly the most reviled feature of the hobby today. There are fewer things more frustrating than breaking open a box and seeing in one of your packs that dreaded white card. Even if it is a name that you recognize and have good reason to believe will be produced, having to wait that much longer is not something that many collectors want to do. Rather than redeem it themselves they will sell it and allow the redemption process to become someone else's problem. The redemption backlash reached a climax with last season's "Mystery Redemptions" featured in SP Authentic. Collectors expected these dual autographs to spotlight superstar pairings; the redemption cards reached a peak of \$100 on eBay to reflect this interest. When Upper Deck later announced that the player selection would mostly be mid-range players similar to those featured in the single Sign of the Times set, collectors were furious. Some ended up with good pairings, but most got the likes of Jason Arnott or Mark Fistric on their cards. That's not intended as a slag against Arnott or Fistric, but there is no chance that either of these players would attract even half of the value as what people were paying for the mystery cards. Collectors have disliked redemptions for a long time with good reason, be it a long wait



or even worse, the all-too-regular occurrence of a card not ever being made at all. The replacement process is often fair, but not something that should have to be undertaken in the first place.

Part of the problem when it comes to redemptions is the oversaturation of the market with autographed content. Players have only so much time during their season to sign cards, and the numerous other demands on their time leave for a limited window of opportunity. Even if the unsigned cards are sent to the players weeks or months in advance, there still may not be the time or desire on their part to sign them all and return them in time for the product's release. Rookies have an especially large pile of cards to sign, particularly the more popular freshmen that are featured in every set. When you consider the following: 999 cards for SP Authentic, up to 799 for SPx, up to 1299 for Certified, and many more for subsets and other products, rookies have a tremendous burden to bear. Given how RC-

driven the hockey card market is, a lot is dependent upon them getting the cards signed and returned in a timely fashion. If a major rookie becomes a problem child getting card back on time, that will have a severe negative impact on the product. Even the veterans have arguably too many cards on the market. Sidney Crosby is now in his fifth NHL season and has over 300 autographed cards. While many may be short-printed and while demand for the NHL's poster boy remains sky-high, imagine how much more valuable those cards would be if he were not included in every release. By that same token, of course, imagine how less popular those releases would be if they deliberately omitted Crosby from the checklist. As suggested in the previous section about contraction, perhaps the opportunity for a middle ground exists if there were fewer product releases. With fewer sets on the market, there would be fewer autographed cards on the market thereby allowing demand to increase, and bring values up with it.

Connected with the contraction concept is the reduction and possibly even elimination of sticker autographs. Sticker autographs are something that is tolerated within the hobby as they do help minimize redemptions. If a player only does two or three autograph signing sessions per season, the stickers allow the companies to feature that player in a multitude of releases without having to worry about them getting cards from different sets back on time. That said, sticker autographs are still nowhere near as desirable as hard-signed autographs, in part because there is a level of separation between the player and the collector. The player never held that card, so it does not have the same "as close to the players as possible" sentiment. The other part of the equation is the propensity for errors, most notably the stickers being applied upside-down on the cards. It is something that has happened to cards of the most common player all the way up to Wayne Gretzky. This is something that cannot happen with a hard-signed signature, and the lack of attention to detail when it comes to quality controlling sticker auto



products is one driving reason that I hope and believe that they will someday be far less prominent in the hobby.

Often times, the player is as much to blame for such things as an upside-down sticker autograph as the person quality controlling the product. This is due to the lack of care and effort that some players put into their signature. The days of Jean Beliveau-quality signatures are definitely a thing of the past; I cannot think of a single current player that has a signature as crisp, clean, and full as that of Le Gros Bill. Again, I refer back to the saturation of the market with the volume of content. If a player has to sign several hundred cards at a time, eventually the quality of their signature will deteriorate. Compare and contrast these two Carey Price autographs.

Carey Price, Then and Now

The first is one of his earliest releases. The second is the result of three years of being included in every single autographed set imaginable. The quality of Price's signatures has since bounced back (much like his on-ice play) since that mid 2009-10 season release, but it goes to show just how quickly a player's signature can decline in quality. There are many well-known poor signers in the NHL. It would be beneficial to collectors, the companies, and the players if some-



body were to take these players aside and instill in them a sense of pride in their name. This is not a call for every player to sign every letter of their name on every signature; rather, it is an expression of a belief that two lines and a squiggle is not something that collectors want to have included in their collections.

Unlike the sweeping changes I predict for the other two concepts discussed in this article, the changes needed in autographed content are mostly cosmetic. The cards are, and will be, central to the hobby and its continued success. Nothing brings a player closer to a fan than an autograph, and nothing is more desirable to a fan than to have their hockey hero's signature. By reducing sticker content, improving quality control, and encouraging the players to put more pride into their autographs, hockey cards will remain at the forefront of this hobby for years to come.

Conclusion

Recently I wrote about the dawn of a new era in hockey card collecting, due to the end of the Upper Deck Exclusive and arrival of Panini on the scene. The hobby is already adjusting to its new reality,



and there is much more to come. The early-season inclusion of autographed memorabilia cards of the hottest rookies was a stellar first impression, and it will up the ante for the manufacturers to make cards that collectors want in order to increase their market share. Staid products and complacency are not options for either company if they want to remain at the forefront of collectors' buying choices.

In the coming years, we will be treated a number of innovations and evolutions in current content. I expect to see new and interesting uses of memorabilia cards, fewer products resulting in fewer redemptions and increased emphasis on the product lines that work, and the continued central role of autographed cards. These are not the only items on the agenda for discussion. Everything from parallels to print runs to rookies to inserts are under constant scrutiny, and surely there will be ongoing evaluations of all of these items and their relevance to collectors. However, to bring real bang to a collector's buck, the three major agenda items discussed here are front-burner issues, and deserve to have a spotlight shined upon them to stimulate discussion and put the onus on card manufacturers to deliver change that people want in the hobby.

This article won Richard \$100 to spend on www.cardsbythebox.com. Be sure to keep an eye on the announcement forum to know when writing contests are held. If one of the suggested topics gets your creative juices flowing, be sure to enter and you could win too!

**CardsByTheBox.com**



The Quest for the Winter Classic 2011 **By Kevin O'Connor aka rainman67ko**



What started as a statement of fact in “I’m so there...” back when the 2011 Winter Classic was announced for Pittsburgh last May, sounded all but lost when New Year’s day came. I had entered in the NHL draft lottery to win a chance to buy some tickets but to no avail. Ticket prices on the internet where all over the place. They were listed anywhere from \$350 up to \$1350 depending on the seat. I knew a few Pens season ticket holders had some but they where all going to attend. It had been a good year for me, but not great, and after getting through some expensive home improvement

projects, my budget for the Winter Classic was fixed at just below what tickets were generally listed for.

My son Blair is 18. He is the third son of five. He was out visiting for the Christmas holiday. He has been an intense Penguins fan ever since I took him to a game a few years before. We’ve always been close, both by proximity and by relationship, but when boys get older, and Dad moves to the other side of the state, quality time is harder to come by. His older brothers had returned to NJ for New Year’s to celebrate with girlfriends, etc. Blair and I saw this opportunity to grab the once in a life time experience and find 2 Winter Classic Tickets.

It started as a joke... then slowly, we began to plot. It was New Year's Eve and we had nothing else in the world going on except to find tickets on eBay or Stubhub, or whatever outlet had them. The intensity grew with each mouse click, every page scroll, all the while our brains justifying, tricking, and trying to understand how much we would need to spend. We set a limit. Adjusted it and searched again. We rang in the New Year no closer to having tickets in hand. But this was in fact a New Year and we where resolute in our quest for the Classic. We retired to fight another day.

The morning began with a scan of the ticketing sites for price shifts, mostly up, then a fresh search on eBay. Again nothing firm within reach. Then I began to dive into the mess that is Craigslist. To my surprise it was a hive of ticketing activity. Prices were reasonable. At first all inquiries were ignored or replied with “sorry bud... sold” or some variation. A lot of jockeying could be seen taking place. The tickets that were listing for \$500 OBO each were disappearing rapidly. Too rich for me I thought. Then I saw a posting “Free Ticket – Come to the Westin and wait outside between 9 and 9:15 and I’ll hand them to the first 4 people I see.” We thought it was too good but we thought this as we raced downtown. When we got outside the Westin there were 2 other people who saw the same add. Apparently a staffer or sponsor had the tickets but was not permitted to sell them and could only gift them. A few moments later we learned from another that he had actually done so inside just before 9.

FEBRUARY 2011



It was too good to be true and now we were desperately intent on finding tickets. We went to the stadium area and spoke with some of the regular scalpers, to get a feel for the market, and gauge their confidence. You see, the weather report was ominous, and the fact that the game had been pushed to prime time was cause for concern for some. Apparently some folks couldn't adjust plans and that is why the tickets were starting to pop up at close to reasonable prices. We missed out on no less than 3 other Craigslist deals on the way back home. These tickets were going as soon as they were listed.



We had moved our budget up one notch but I was done. The tickets in our price range were mostly gone by the time they were posted. I had exhaled, accepted that I would be watching from home, and grabbed a bite to eat. Time to regroup. After I ate and looked on Craigslist one last time. There it was, like a neon sign, a new post just after hitting refresh - "Two tickets \$400 OBO" and a phone number!!!

I called the out of market number as quickly as I could. The man on the other end started to tell me he had another offer and I shot him mine that was well over what he had been getting, but still under my newly adjusted, modified, broken, and modified again, final budget. That was my strategy all along, you see, I had to convince myself I was fine with not going and then it would happen. The hockey gods were good to us at that moment. He said he would hold them and to meet him on the North Shore by PNC park in

25 minutes. We drove, giddy like kids at Christmas, but still apprehensive as they were not in hand. When we pulled into his Hotel parking lot the seller said "Oh your Penguins fans..." to which I replied "yes we are" and very quickly "are you having fun here today boy this is a great event eh?" Apparently the Caps season ticket holders got the opportunity to purchase quite many of the Winter Classic tickets. The Capitals were well represented at the event I later observed. We exchanged the money and the tickets and wished each other well. Driving away to fist pounds and high fives with Blair, we had reached our goal, our New Years Resolution, our Winter Classic was going to be a reality in Prime Time!

The game has been chronicled by many professional sports writers, telecasters, and even HBO 24/7. This epic journey from the mustard seed idea to the realization of the goal, the journey, the experience, this was ours. Blair commented on my Facebook photo again just the other night "We were crazy!" and "Thanks Dad". That is one in the win column for me.



Intent - One Word the NHL Needs to Remove from its Dictionary

By Sean McCafferty aka 30ranfordfan



Here we go again. Another major star in the NHL goes down, due to a hit to the head, and the people at the NHL's head office deem the hit okay, because there was no 'intent'. Nope. You're not reading that wrong. It's okay that David Steckel's shoulder runs into Sidney Crosby's jaw, because Colin Campbell doesn't think Steckel meant to do it.

You know what NHL? If you'd like to see an end to your star players ending up in the hospital then you need to do something. You need to make black and white rules. You need to put in meaningful suspensions. You need to hold players accountable. You need to stop pretending like you can read minds, and remove 'Intent' from your dictionary.

When a player is careless enough with his stick that he cuts open another player - he receives a 5 minute penalty for it. The referees don't stop to see if the player meant to do it. Flick the puck over the glass in your own end, and you get a 2 minute penalty. I don't think I've seen this call made once where it looked like the player did it on purpose. Did Steckel mean to do it? I don't know, and I don't care. What does what he intended to do have to do with anything? Maybe he meant to hit Crosby, maybe he's just careless and happened to have his arm in the same space Crosby's face was occupying. The result is the same.

While I have no confidence at all in Colin Campbell's ability to hand out a proper suspension, I have less faith in the league's resolve to actually eliminate hits like this and prevent injuries.

Why is it that every time someone suggests hits to the head be removed, the answer is always the same. We'll hear tales about what a great player Scott Stevens was, that he's in the Hall of Fame largely because of his ability to intimidate, which was due to his uncanny ability to knock out other players who insisted on skating with their heads down. He was never considered dirty, just a fearless warrior.

Neither I, nor anyone, can disagree with any of that (regarding Stevens). So what? Just because that type of hit was allowed while he played, it doesn't mean they need to allow it now. It doesn't mean the NHL can't finally open its eyes and ban it. It doesn't mean the NHLPA can't agree that the best thing to do to protect its membership is to stop vicious attacks on it.

To effectively do this though, the NHL needs to use a black and white rule, and they need to punish it every single time. On purpose? Accidental? Doesn't matter. The victim is out of action for 2 months, or

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gets up from the play and doesn't miss a shift? Ignore it. Really simple: If you hit your opponent, and make contact with his head, you will be suspended. It works for everything. Slew Foot? Suspended. Baseball-Swing style slash? Suspended. Hit from behind? Suspended. Leave the bench to start a fight? Suspended. The list can go on all night. Just make sure a "If you come up with something so stupid, we never thought about it, you're still suspended" clause goes in there.

How do we determine the appropriate length of a suspension? I'd like to think that someone could be put in charge of picking an appropriate length each time. Review each offense on a case by case basis. Colin Campbell's ineffectiveness has shown us though, that's not going to work. Spend an entire off-season listing out all the hypothetical offenses that the league wants removed from the game. The ones they consider dirty. The ones that injure other players. Then assign an appropriate value for each one. Maybe a slew foot is worth 2 games? Maybe a hit to the head is worth 5? Maybe boarding should be 10? If you attack the ref its worth 164? I don't know. But make a list, check it twice, and take the guess work out of suspensions.

After a value has been assigned to each offence, multiply it by the number of times the player has been suspended. Repeat offenders will quickly be forced to change their ways, or forget about playing on a regular basis. Remove one from that total, if a player can go 246 games without getting suspended (the equivalent of 3 seasons).

I know it will be tough. This means that if a star player insists on also being dirty, they might miss a few games. It means that a player like Chris Pronger (who, in 15 years, has never gone 246 games without being suspended) would be up to a factor of 9 the next time he crossed the line. One head shot and he'd miss somewhere between a quarter and half of the season.

The current system doesn't work. The man games lost to injury are piling up. It's all due to plays that should have no place in today's NHL. Is it because players have no respect for each other? Maybe it's the bigger equipment? Is it because they're just careless? Is it because they're too afraid of being labelled soft? I don't know. I'm not going to pretend to be a mind reader. I hope at the very least the NHL's head office will stop acting like they have psychic abilities, and remove 'intent' from its dictionary.



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2010-2011 ITG Heroes and Prospect Product Review

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

Configuration

18 packs per box

9 cards per pack

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



PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

Each box of 2010-11 Heroes and Prospects contains 18 packs with 9 cards per pack*! This year's Heroes and Prospects features a 150 Base card set, Game-Used Memorabilia cards & Authentic Autograph cards inserted 1:8 packs. There are also 5 different Non-Memorabilia Insert sets inserted 1:6 packs. The He Shoots-He Scores Redemption program is back! Collectors can redeem 200 points for limited Game-Used Memorabilia cards only available for this program.

*Each pack contains 8 cards plus one He Shoots - He Scores Redemption Card or one Game-Used Memorabilia Card.

WHAT WE PULLED

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei8KmnT7XjY>

Base - 139/150 (92.7%)

Dupes - 0

100 Years Of Card Collecting (1) - Milt Schmidt

75th Anniversary (1) - Lou Trudel

Memorial Cup Champions (1) - Marc Cantin

Brett Sonne Auto



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Michael Latta Auto



Tyler Seguin Silver Jersey (Print Run of 30)



National Pride Jacob Markstrom Black Jersey (Print Run of 80)



Net Prospects Jake Allen Silver Jumbo Jersey (Print Run of 20)



FINAL RATINGS

Base - 4.75/5

Design - 4.5/5

Fun - 3.5/5

Value - 4/5

Rebuy - 4.5/5

Total - 21.25/25 (85%)

In The Game starts out 2011 with a bang with Heroes And Prospects. The 150-card base set intermingles some NHL veterans/retired players with NHL youngsters and future prospects. While the AHL and CHL are well represented, Heroes And Prospects showcases future stars from all over the world. In what appears to be a first, the term "Rookie" is seen on some of the cards.

There are five insert sets to compile in Heroes And Prospects. The 100 Years of Card Collecting series features replicas of cards from yesteryear. 75th Anniversary highlights 35 players who honed



their skills in the AHL. Calder Cup and Memorial Cup Champions sets their respective focus on the players from the championship teams. Finally, Class of 2011 has a unique setup. There are 10 cards that contain a letter from A-J. The back of the card will have a number from 1-30. Two weeks before the CHL/NHL Prospects Game is played, ITG will announce the ten players that each of the letters represent. Then during the 2011 NHL Entry Draft, collectors use these cards to match up the player and their draft position. If both the name and number match, you can use this card as a redemption to receive a special memorabilia card of that player. There are only 10 memorabilia cards per player.

There are numerous memorabilia and autograph sets found in Heroes And Prospects. There is a huge list of players in the base autograph set and just a handful for the 7th AHL Anniversary set. A total of thirteen different type of memorabilia sets dominate this release, with some having up to nine versions. The ever-popular Complete Jersey and Made To Order cards are back. Two lettermen series can be found in honor of Team Cherry and Team Orr. Last but not least, Complete Logo cards will be a highly sought after chase set.

Heroes And Prospects delivers exactly what its name implies. While heavy on the prospect side, collectors will find many reasons to pick up boxes. The base cards shine with the player photos appearing to jump out of a frame with a nice mix of color splash and white background. And you have to enjoy the possibility of almost completing a base set in one box. While the cards are great to look at, it can become somewhat tedious because of the low number of inserts. But that's not necessarily a bad thing when you consider that on average, you will have 3 inserts and 4 memorabilia or autographs in every box. That's almost a bonus card in every other pack. Not to mention, the He Shoots, He Scores redemption cards are back for another year. That in itself is a good reason to buy multiple boxes, if you really needed one. Heroes And Prospects is a solid product and it encompasses all collectors.

Once again, I'd like to thank our wonderful sponsors at In The Game for giving us the opportunity to open and review this release. For more information on all their products, they can be checked out at www.itgtradingcards.com.





2010 Topps Prime Football Product Review

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

CONFIGURATION

10 packs per box

6 cards per pack

Current Retail Price: \$74.99 - \$84.99

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS

- 4 Numbered Hits in Every 10-Count Hobby Box!
- Every Card Features Super Thick Slick 36-Pt. Card Stock
- Hobby Exclusive Numbered Rookie Base Cards
- Hobby Exclusive Numbered Base Card Parallel Sets
- Four Levels of Insert Cards
- 150 Base Cards

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

AUTOGRAPH RELIC CARDS - 4 OR MORE RELIC PIECES PER CARD! 1 PER BOX!

Prime Relics - Five levels of exciting multiple relic cards featuring 4,5 or 6 different uniform/equipment relics in combinations such as: wristband, glove, football, home/away jersey on each numbered card! Prime Levels 1-4 spotlight thirty 2010 NFL Rookies each on a single card, while Prime Level 5 highlights Rookies and Veterans.

WHAT WE PULLED

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1NuSgrgAz9s>

Base: 42/150 (28%)

Rookies /999 (3): Eric Berry, Joe Webb, Ryan Matthews

Gold Rookie /699 (2): David Reed, Sean Canfield

Gold Veteran /199 (1): Jon Beason

Red Rookie /75 (1): Riley Cooper





1st Quarter (3)
2nd Quarter (2)
3rd Quarter (2)
4th Quarter (3)

1st Quarter Toby Gerhart Jersey /420
4th Quarter Carson Palmer/Tom Brady/
Jordan Shipley/Taylor Price Quad Jersey /124
Jerry Hughes Auto /599
Sam Bradford Level 5 Quad Jersey/Auto /150



FINAL RATINGS

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

Total - 21/25 (84%)

Topps rolls out its football line with Prime. The base set is 150-card strong and intersperses rookies (numbered to 999) along the way. Each card encapsulates the player with a full-body color photo with simplistic overtones to show the team logo and player's name while keeping it eye-catching. On top of that, the card stock is just a bit thicker which helps to bring the photos to life.

There are four levels of inserts named after the four regular periods in football. 1st Quarter contains

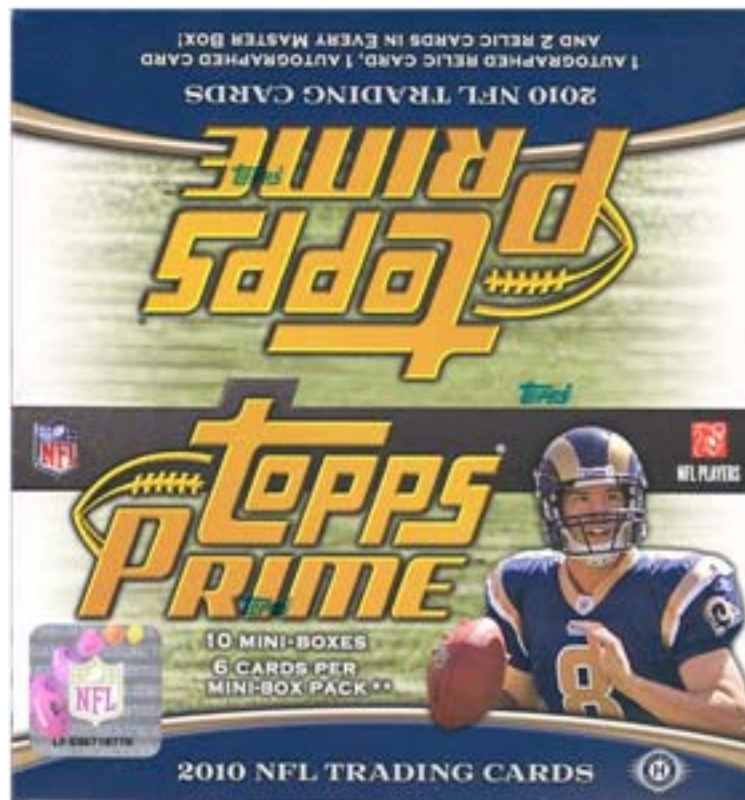


one player, 2nd Quarter contains two players, and so forth. The picture quality also the focus to be on the players, not on the card itself. Most, if not all, in each subset are devoted to the rookies of 2010.

Each box yields four autographs or memorabilia pieces with one being guaranteed to be an auto/relic of some sort. The auto/relics come in five levels and can be determined by looking at the card number on the back (PL1, PL2, etc.).

Topps Prime is solid as a first-year release. The base cards shine and is easy to put together since it is 150 cards including rookies. By making the player the focal point of the card, each one breathes its own life. Outside of the aforementioned four "hits" per box, there's a lot of additional value within the inserts. Since rookies dominate them, they are easily collectible, tradable and sellable which is a hobbyist and mini entrepreneur's dream. This is easily a product people will want to keep picking up until interest moves to future releases. The biggest knock is the enjoyment factor. Having to go through the hassle of the cellophane and the box to get to each pack is a bit over the top for a product in this price range. Save the special packaging for the high-end products.

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 their products, you can check them out at www.topps.com.



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2010 Bowman Platinum Baseball Product Review

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

CONFIGURATION

24 packs per box

5 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): \$79.99-\$89.99

PRODUCT HIGHLIGHTS:

3 Hits Per Box!

- 2 On-Card Autograph Refractor Cards

- 1 Autograph Patch Card

All Chrome Autographs Signed Directly on Each Card!



WHAT WE PULLED

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9qUa-gOBgB8>

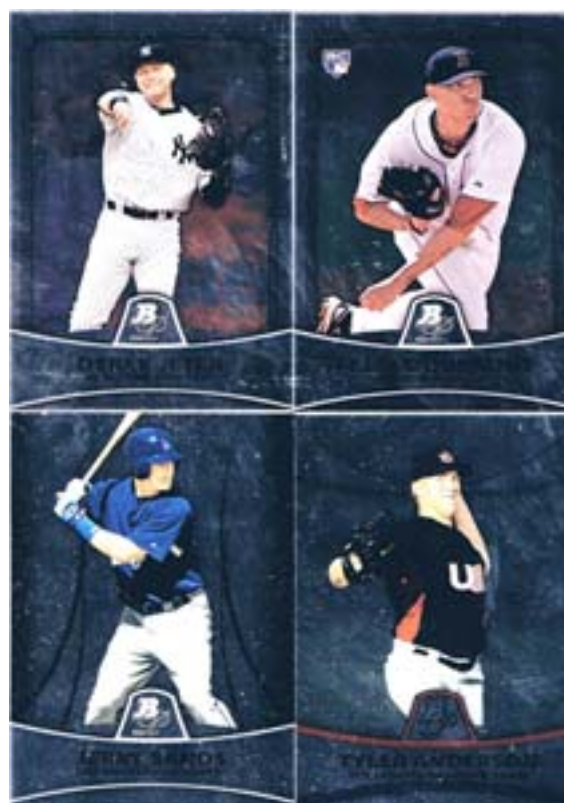
Base: 66/100 (66%)

Dupes: 0

Prospects: 44/50 (88%)

Dupes: 0

(Pardon the poor scan...chrome cards do not show up well on my scanner)





Thick Refractor /999 (4): Kevin Youkilis, Nick Markakis, Miguel Sano, Gerrit Cole
 Thick Refractor Gold /539 (1): Prince Fielder
 Refractor /999 (1): Grant Green
 Refractor Green /499 (1): Sonny Gray

Box Topper Redemption Auto



Jordan Henry Auto



Alex Dickerson Jersey/Auto /740



Tyler Anderson/Brian Johnson/Brett Mooneyham Triple Auto /89





FINAL RATINGS

Base - 4/5
Design - 4.5/5
Fun - 3.5/5
Value - 5/5
Rebuy - 4.5/5

Total - 21.5/25 (86%)

Bowman Platinum is continuing a trend of popularity with the word Platinum in the release's title. Platinum is a 150-card set with 100 veterans and rookies and 50 prospects and members of USA Baseball. Each card is done in chrome and placed on a piece of foil board card stock. The player's photo grabs your attention while the set's logo and player's name can be found at the bottom.

Much like some of the Bowman releases this year, there are no separate inserts sets. Instead, there are refractor and parallels versions of each base card. The first 100 card have a Gold Refractor version numbered to 499. The last 50 have parallels ranging in number from 999 to 1.

Originally, Bowman Platinum was slated to have two regular auto cards and an auto/relic in each box. Topps announced shortly before release that a bonus auto would be added in the form of a box topper redemption card. This auto would come from a small list of players, 10 in total. There are many auto versions in Platinum from individual autos and as many as six autograph subject in a booklet card.

Bowman Platinum is as eye-popping as the name implies. The silver foil board accentuates the overall card and brings the player photos to life. The design is well thought out as the player in the primary aspect of the card, instead of grandiose images and colors. Pack opening does have its bouts of becoming static as there are no true insert sets. But that is a minor setback to what you get overall. The addition of a fourth autograph increased the value of the boxes immediately and they are well worth the time and investment over and over again.

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 their products, you can visit them at www.topps.com.





2010-2011 Panini Timeless Treasures Basketball Product Review

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

CONFIGURATION

1 pack per box

5 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): \$74.99-\$89.99

BOX BREAK (On Average)

3 Autograph or Memorabilia Cards (at least one autograph) per tin

2 Commons/ Parallels #d to 399 or less

CASE BREAK (On Average)

Find one or more of the following: Kobe Bryant Autograph, Shaquille O'Neal Autograph, John Wall Autograph and Cut Signature, Logoman, Logoman Signature, Laundry Tag Logoman, Laundry Tag Logoman Signature, Laundry Tag Team Logo, Laundry Tag Team Logo Signatures or Signatures of Magic Johnson, Bill Russell, Bill Walton, John Stockton or Larry Bird



WHAT WE PULLED

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsxNKMh1AcI>

Base /399 (2): Manu Ginobili, Andrea Bargnani





Rookie Recruits Paul George Auto /10



Material Ink Alvan Adams Jersey/Auto /99

NBA Apprentice Evan Turner/Luke Harangody/Ed Davis/Damion James Quad Patch /10



FINAL RATINGS

Base - 3/5
 Design - 4/5
 Fun - 4/5
 Value - 4/5
 Rebuy - 2/5

Total - 17/25 (68%)



Timeless Treasures is short, sweet and to the point. Instead of a box, each pack comes in its own separate tin. Each one yields two base cards numbered to 399 or parallels numbered to less. There are 100 veterans and 50 rookies.

Outside of the base cards, there are three autographs or relics in each tin. The pool of players covers the gamut of a who's who in the annals of basketball. From guys like George Mikan to John Wall, Timeless Treasures covers the history of basketball.

In general, I'm not a huge fan of products with 1 pack. Usually, it is because the price point takes it out of the hands of a lot of collectors. As for Timeless Treasures, the price is somewhat a redeeming quality. While the cards are amazing in quality of design and excitement, only getting 2 out of 150 base cards is not desirable to most (a discouraging fact of a lot of high-end products). Add to the fact that in the same price range, there are many other products that will contain the same amount of "hits" on top of a base set and inserts, it is very easy to steer clear of this one. Yes, I realize that "hit" potential is probably greater with Timeless Treasures, but for a lot of collectors, it is about a lot more than that when opening a product.

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





2011 Press Pass Racing Product Review

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

CONFIGURATION

30 packs per box

6 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): 64.99 - 74.99

PRODUCT DESCRIPTION

Press Pass 2011 captures all of the action from an exhilarating season of racing!

Product Info:

- One Memorabilia card per box!
- Expanded 200 card base set
- Press pass autos - Authentic autographs from the sport's hottest drivers
- Burning Rubber Signature Edition - Autographed victory tire card from 2010 race winners
- Winning Ticket - Set-within-a-set featuring vintage short-printed versions
- Burning Rubber - Race-used victory tires from the season's most memorable races
- Four Wide - Four piece race-used memorabilia card Collect all 4 versions!
- Geared Up - Authentic memorabilia cards featuring a wide range of race-used memorabilia

WHAT WE PULLED

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-A-Pmy1_B6M

Base: 155/200 (77.5%)

Dupes: 2



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Gold /50 (2): Jeff Burton, #18 M&Ms Car (Kyle Busch)
 Cup Chase (1): Ryan Newman
 Flashback (3): Greg Biffle, Matt Kenseth, Jeff Gordon
 NASCAR HOF (1): Bobby Allison
 Tradin' Paint (2): Jeff Gordon, Mark Martin
 Winning Ticket (10)
 Winning Ticket SP (1): Dale Earnhardt (1998 Daytona 500)



Burning Rubber Gold Ryan Newman Tire - Phoenix 4/10/
 10 (11/50)



FINAL RATINGS

Base - 4/5

Design - 3.5/5

Fun - 4/5

Value - 3.5/5

Rebuy - 4/5

Overall - 19/25 (76%)



Press Pass kicks off their 2011 campaign in a big way. Instead of a 100-card base set and a few SPs tacked on at the end, Press Pass' initial yearly release is 200-cards strong. As in previous years, drivers from Sprint Cup, Nationwide and Craftsman Truck are featured. In addition, there are cards devoted to other aspects of the racing circuit such as the vehicles, the haulers as well as the hidden stars of racing, the various tracks/speedways. All are brought out in stunning photos with vibrant colors.

The inserts this year are somewhat unique. Flashback is a series that goes back in time to 1993, the first year Press Pass produced cards for NASCAR. It features today's drivers with information on what they were doing in 1993. The second class of the HOF is immortalized in its own series of cards like last year's inaugural class. Tradin' Paint is back and showcases the faces of the drivers along with their rides. For a fun set to accumulate, Press Pass has a 62-card insert set called Winning Ticket. The card is designed like a small ticket with a picture devoted to a winner of a particular race in 2010 from among the three circuits. Additionally, there are short prints that center around important races of yesteryear. The last time I recall the idea of tickets as inserts was from 2003 Wheels American Thunder with the release of Rookie Thunder. Hopefully, this set will stick around for years to come as it is a nice idea.

All in all, 2011 Press Pass is geared towards those who build the foundation of racing cards, the racing collectors. True enthusiasts will enjoy this product. With an expanded base set and a nice selection of chase cards, race fans will find a lot of enjoyment opening a box. Problems I can see for others though is that 30 packs is a lot to open to only find 2 numbered cards and 1 autograph or relic. Price point wise, it is not a good deal in that regard. Also, the design seems to be basically the same year in and year out with the base cards. While the name headers are different, the pictures seem the same. Also, if you have a box of cards that is not going to yield the entire base set, then do not make some of them duplicates.



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





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At the time of publishing, the release dates were accurate but as you know, releases get pushed back rather often!

	1  - Upper Deck SPx Hockey	2  - Topps UFC Knockout	3	4
7	8	9  - Panini Playoff Contenders Football  - Topps Tribute Football	10	11
14	15  - Upper Deck Series 2 Hockey - Upper Deck SP Authentic Football	16  - Panini Crown Royale Hockey  - Topps Serie 1 Baseball	17	18
21	22	23  - Press Pass Eclipse Racing	24  - Topps Five Star Football	25
28				



The Magic Mistake

By Lauren Fong aka Fyretiger



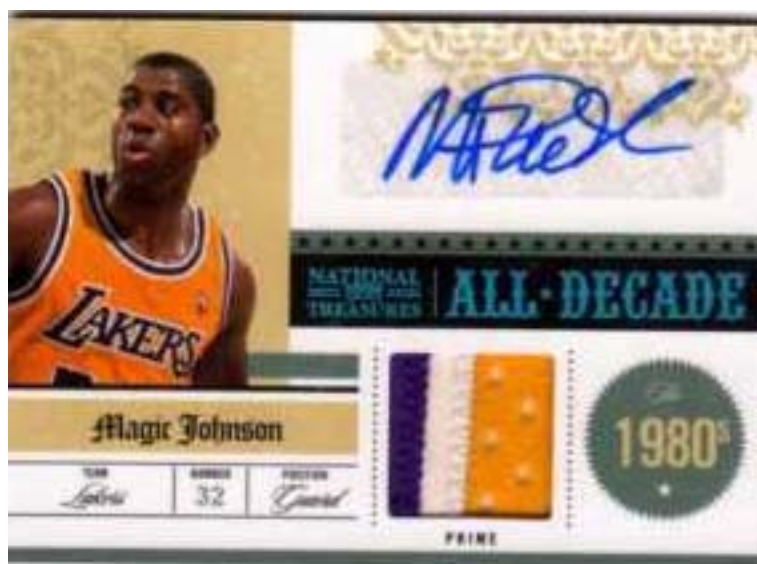
We've all been in this situation before; bored at home with an itch to bust open some packs. So we run over to the local card shop hoping to strike gold in the form of cardboard. We scan the packs available and pick a few here and there. We find an autographed card every few packs and the vast majority of the time, the reaction goes something like: "Who's that??" Then we go home and try to find out who this guy is whose signature we now own. After which we check out the completed listings on eBay hoping that we might be able to sell the card for at least the price of the pack only to find out that our new card is selling for the dreaded \$0.99 plus shipping.

I was in such a situation not too long ago. I headed over to the card shop and this time decided to try my luck with some of the newly released 2010 Donruss Elite Extra Edition Baseball. The first couple packs yielded just a few base cards, but on the third pack, I pulled my first autograph of the day. It was an Aspirations version numbered out of 100 of a young prospect by the name of Jordan Swagerty. I had the usual response; "Jordan Swagerty? Who's Jordan Swagerty?" All I could tell was that Swagerty was a pitching prospect for the St. Louis Cardinals. Several packs later and into the next box, I pulled another Jordan Swagerty autograph, this time the Collegiate Patches Autograph card numbered out of 125. By then, I could only hope that Jordan Swagerty would become a star someday. This time though, I noticed something strange about the signature. With a name that starts with "J", most people would begin their autograph with some sort of cursive "J," but no matter how I looked at it, Jordan Swagerty's autograph appeared to begin with an "M." As a matter of fact, none of the scribble on the cards looked anything like "Jordan" or "Swagerty."

I rushed home, turned on the computer, and checked out eBay's completed listings and found my Swagerty autographs ending at around \$60. Had I finally got lucky and pulled a highly touted prospect?! I quickly found that there isn't anything particularly special about Jordan Swagerty as a baseball player. My cards are only valuable because it is not Jordan Swagerty's autographs on them. It was some guy named Magic Johnson. My "Who's that?" autographed cards had just turned into the cards of a Hall of Famer and one of the best basketball players ever. My \$4 cards (including shipping) had turned into \$40-\$75 cards. It wasn't quite striking gold, but compared to my recent cold streak, it came pretty close.

It turns out that Panini has made one of the strangest mistakes in the hobby's history. They have mistakenly applied Magic Johnson's sticker autographs to most, if not all, of the 905 Jordan Swagerty cards in this year's Elite Extra Edition product. Panini has publicly apologized for the mix up; "It's an extremely unfortunate - but honest - mistake and we can't apologize enough to collectors," says Panini's marketing manager, Scott Prusha. "What we can do, however, is what we always do: Atone for our mistake and make things right for collectors." Panini has already set up a system to correct the error through their website. Collectors who return the Magic Johnson version of the card will receive the correct version of the Jordan Swagerty card, plus an exclusive 2010 Elite Extra Edition card of top prospect Manny Machado.

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There are a few interesting points to consider: As generous as Panini's offer is, I don't know of anyone who would prefer the autograph of a 21-year old pitcher selected in the second round of the 2010 amateur baseball draft over the autograph of Hall of Famer Magic Johnson. However, there are several collectors who put together the entire autographed set every year. Will they trade in their Magic Johnson autographs?

If Magic Johnson went to Michigan State, why is he signing the Arizona State Collegiate Patches cards? This brings up the question of how the Collegiate Patches cards are manufactured. It must be that the ASU logo was sewn into the

fabric after Magic Johnson signed the card. The Collegiate Patches cards are generally quite popular among collectors. Would this information affect their popularity?

Before the release of 2010 Elite Extra Edition, there were 989 different Magic Johnson certified autographed cards in circulation, most of which are serial numbered lower than 25. With the sudden flood of 905 autographs into the market, will value of Magic Johnson autographs decrease? At the moment, the Swagerty error autographs are selling for nearly as much as Magic Johnson's correctly autographed cards.

This is not the first time that an autograph has been affixed to the wrong card and Panini is not the only company to have made the same mistake. However, the "Swager Magic" error, as many collectors are calling it, is obviously a much more costly error, as Magic Johnson clearly demands more to sign than Jordan Swagerty. It is yet another strike against the widely hated sticker autograph. Collectors hate stickers primarily because the signer never physically possesses the card, but there have been errors in placing the stickers upside down as well. Despite protest from collectors, card companies have continued to use stickers to attach autographs to their cards. Since this particular error sticker autograph has cost Panini thousands of dollars rather than the collectors, maybe the card companies will finally begin phasing these stickers out and switch to the much more popular on-card autographs. It is an unlikely consequence, but it is still nice to see the card companies have to pay the price for sticker autographs rather than collectors.

Right now, most collectors will be inclined to keep their Magic Johnson autographs, but what if Jordan Swagerty and/or Manny Machado become big stars? Will Panini impose a deadline for collectors to trade in their cards? How will this affect the market value on the Swagerty and Machado replacements? "Regardless of how these questions get answered, I'll always remember that day as living proof that you can turn junk into gold. All you need is a little Magic!!

NFL Madness in London By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888



Once a year, at the end of October, London goes crazy...NFL crazy and this year is no exception. In fact, this year there is even more madness. For the first time ever this morning on the eve of the International Series match-up between the San Francisco 49ers and the Denver Broncos, the NFL held a questions and answers session with the commissioner Roger Goodell and 100 lucky fans. Thankfully, I was one of those lucky fan and I got to attend the session prior to heading to the NFL Fan Rally in Trafalgar Square in the afternoon.

The first NFL fan forum of the sort was held a year ago prior to the draft, since then 2 more have been held in Green Bay and in New Orleans but this morning was the first international fan forum and it was definitely a success. Staged at the 5 stars London Landmark Hotel, the session allowed fans to ask any questions they wanted to the commissioner. The crowd was rather colorful as fans came dressed in their favorite team's colors, the only unrepresented team being the Jacksonville Jaguars.

The session kicked off with a question about the planned 18 games scheduled and the likelihood that a longer season would mean more injuries. Goodell stated that the decision had not yet been made to extend the regular season calendar and that if the NFL was to do it, they would only do it properly. The main reasons behind the proposed change were that fans want more games that actually mean something, regular season games, important games. The league is considering staging more games overseas and does not want to deprive the fans of yet more home games. He also added that a longer season meant that injured players would have longer to recuperate and potentially be able to return in time for the start of the playoffs.

Picking up on the burning topic that is injuries to player, the next fan asked the commissioner what the NFL is doing to provide for players once their short career is over due to injuries such as concussions? The man of the moment was quick to answer that the NFL is leading the charge in that field and that it starts with prevention. Initiatives include developing better equipment such as improved helmets, ensuring that players are wearing the protective gear they should be wearing and if an injury does happen, provide the best medical care in the world to the player affected. The league is also looking at providing pension and help not only to the victims of injuries themselves but also to their family. He also added that health was one of the major concerns of the league which explained the recent rule change.

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I took that as my cue to ask a question: “The NFL currently offers a great product, spectacular offensive plays and hard hitting defensive plays, do you not think that the new rules are somewhat restrictive on the defence and may prevent the defensive players to do their job as well as they could because they have the possibility of a suspension or fine in the back of their mind?”

The reply came quite hastily: “That is the point, the rule is not to hinder the defence, this is a protection for both offensive and defensive players.

Both can be injured in hits that we are sanctioning here. I want the players to have that at the back of their minds, I want those hits using bad technique to stop.”. He then swiftly moved along to the next question, clearly the debate over the new rule is somewhat of a sore spot for the commissioner. As demonstrated in the afternoon as well when the 49ers coach Mike Singletary said on stage: “Football is a tough game and the intensity is great, the intensity of the game should not be diminished...but I should let that go”. At which point the presenter said: “It’s okay, he’s gone now (Goodell)”.

The European fans were also very keen on questioning the commissioner on the future of the NFL in Europe. Questions such as the possibility of a team based in London and of venturing in other European cities were raised and handled masterfully by Goodell. He told the fans what they were dying to hear by confirming that a team in London is a real possibility which is being looked into. The league is thinking about staging more games in London next year to see if the market could handle more than 1 game a year. As for trying other cities, Goodell stated that they prefer building a very strong



successful foundation in London and then take that model elsewhere once it is ready. The main reason for the choice of London being that historically the NFL has been in the UK a lot and that the media offers a lot of sports coverage. Therefore, for the immediate future it's not looking good for other European fans, they will just have to carry on making a yearly trip to London.

Other topics covered included the use of technology in the game, the worrying situation of the Collective Bargaining Argument (according to the commissioner there WILL be football



next year), the increase in counterfeited merchandise online and the opposition of the American fans to the possible expansion of the League in Europe. Overall, it was a great experience to be part of and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The commissioner came across very well, poking fun at some fans, interacting with kids and in a nutshell, really working the crowd. Once the session was over, we were driven by coach to Trafalgar Square for the fan rally.

Upon arriving, I was pleasantly surprised by how busy it looked. However, I was a little bit disappointed because not that many fans were sporting their team's jersey. Perhaps this means a lot of people just happened to stumble on the rally and decided to go in. On offer during the afternoon were (numerous) performances by the 49ers' cheerleaders, the British dance group Flawless and a band called "The Cuban Boys" which I will admit I had never heard of before. In between performances, there were also interviews with Roger Goodell, Mike Singletary, some of the 49ers defensive players and most importantly Jerry Rice. The crowd was particularly receptive to the San Francisco defensive players as two of them demonstrated their dancing skills and to Jerry Rice (who wouldn't be, he is after all football royalty!).

Fans present at the rally could also show off their Madden skills in the EA sports tent at their own risks though, I must admit it was funny to see a 10 year old boy positively destroy a 40 year old defensive line lookalike. Merchandise was sold there as well although the selection was disappointing compared to what is normally on offer at the pre-Wembley tailgate party so I elected to wait until the next day to purchase my usual commemorative ball. Overall, the fan rally was a good idea but it could have been organized and advertised in a better way. I'll put this down to the fact that it was decided to hold that event quite late in the day (in early October) so there was not that much time to get the word out.



What to Do?

By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888

Us collectors have all been there, you scour the market to find THAT card, you know the one with the best patch you've ever seen adorning a card of your personal collection player? And then, you find it! Or you think you did anyhow...the price seems too good to be true...There it is sitting on eBay and hardly anyone has bid on it. The patch is spectacular! Plenty of breaks, plenty of colors and ever so pleasing on the eye. The problem is, the other cards from that set are nowhere near as nice...so is it a one off? Or are you looking at the work of art of a con artist? You can't really tell so you go ahead, bid and even win.

A few days later, you browse in someone's Photobucket and what do you see? A card of your player from the same set, the same year and upon closer inspection, it's the same serial number! Is the patch the same you ask me? Well no, of course not...You're looking at your card with one of those dreaded plain white patch. Bottom line is you bought yourself a tempered card and as you've paid for it already there's nothing you can do...Every collector will one day in their collecting experience suffer such a disappointment be it buying an altered card, a fake rookie card or a fake in person autograph, it always hurts...

What can you do to protect yourself though? Well, you can always do thorough research online to see if a card suddenly got itself a different patch and hope for the best but chances are, you won't be able to protect yourself adequately. No, the solution rests with the card manufacturers they are the only ones who are in possession of the cards originally and know what they look like. So what can they do you say? They could do what was suggested to Upper Deck by Jeremy Lee an established sports card collector who approached them and offered to take pictures of all the patches from their The Cup product in 2009. Jeremy took time off from his job, flew to the Upper Deck facilities and took pictures of all the cards. Now, those pictures are held by a sports cards collectors forum and they are in the process of being put into a browsable database. It shouldn't have taken this long though, Upper Deck clearly acknowledging that what Jeremy was planing to do was a worthy endeavour should have stepped up and hosted the images on their own site. As well as doing the same process for every release, this would truly help to protect the collector. Unfortunately they didn't and the exercise was not repeated for the release of The Cup this year.

What about elsewhere though is the grass greener in other companies pastures? Since 2007, Panini America has partnered with KODAK TRACELESS for anti counterfeiting. Each card released by Panini and showing the "Prime" stamp can be sent in by collectors to be authenticated. In short, you can find out if the card you have is authentic but this is not prevention. By the time you get it authenticated you have already acquired it and there is still nothing you can do but curse your luck and wish your card was real but unfortunately, it has been returned to you with the "Not Original Production" stamp and will forever be stuck in your collection with the mention. A cruel reminder that you were fooled. Each authentication will command a \$10 fee for the first card and a further \$5 for any supplementary card. In short, you will be out of money for buying a fake card and for getting confirmation of that fact.

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To date, there is therefore no program in place from card companies to help the collectors before it is too late. As the hobby grows and becomes even more value orientated, chances are the fakes will run rife and the problem will carry on growing. Unfortunately, it is human nature to be greedy and the con artists out there are currently seeing the hobby as a way to make a quick and easy buck while the manufacturers are not interested in defraying the extra costs necessary to come up with an appropriate way to protect their customers. Can you blame them though? They are after all in this market to make a profit. Chances are if they were to increase the price of their product to put in place preventive measures, most collectors would complain instead of seeing the positive side of things. For all our will to get the best cards and get our hands on the real goods, we're still not willing to pay extra money which makes us human too.

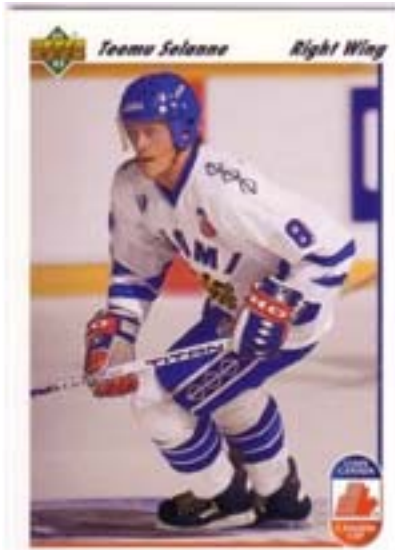
How many times will we need to get burnt though before we've had enough? How much would you need to spend on a card which you think will be the cornerstone of your collection only to realize you got yourself an expensive fake before you decide to call it a day? Before you realize that our hobby has been tainted and that the thrill of the chase is minimized by the risk of investing in a counterfeit piece? Personally, I don't think I can answer this question yet...I've not been hugely burnt so far. Only once did I make a trade for a Patrick Roy O-Pee-Chee rookie which turned out to be a fake thankfully though, I made this right a few months back by adding the true version to my collection. It definitely helped to ease the pain but it did remind me that us collectors, traders and buyers need to exercise extreme caution to avoid being faced with utter disappointment. Our playground is becoming more and more hazardous by the day and it is definitely not suitable for those impulse buys which used to make your day not so long ago...Should you have any idea how this impossible conundrum can be solved, I beg you to make contact with a card manufacturer and pitch your idea to them.



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Wherefore Art Thou, Teemu? By James Bisson aka edthesandwich



Life reality No. 1: Everybody, at one time or another, makes mistakes.

Life reality No. 2: Fact No. 1 doesn't make our mistakes any easier to accept.

Card collectors love sharing stories. It's one of the things that makes the hobby so intoxicating. Ask any die-hard collector about his favorite hobby-related story, and he'll likely spin a yarn about the whale he captured after months of chasing, the pulse-quickening decision to purchase the last pack in a box and finding a monster hit inside, or the heart-wrenching tale of a damaged gem, a pack full of base or an autograph of a no-name has-been or never-will-be.

And then, there are the stories of a deal gone wrong, the biggest cautionary tales out there. "I can't believe I traded away that card!"

the storyteller will say, usually more than once, often more than twice. You can see the pain in his eyes as he describes the transaction, almost as if he is secretly hoping his words will somehow wind back the clock of time and bring back the beloved card or cards he sent away. Alas, it doesn't work that way.

My story doesn't involve a card of great value. You will not hear names like "Rocket", "Great One" or "Mr. Hockey" tossed around my tale. The card in question can be acquired for a few bucks from just about any card store on the planet. And yet, not having it has caused me more than a fair share of grief, because it was the first hockey card that actually meant something to me. I battled greed, and greed won. Here are the gory details:

Spring, 1993. A fresh-faced Finn named Teemu Selanne shatters the NHL record for goals by a rookie with 76. It instantly becomes one of "those" records, the kind you know likely won't be broken until the NHL suddenly starts awarding two points for every goal. I was a 16-year-old who had only dabbled in hockey cards to that point, enamoured with Upper Deck but only really able to afford Pro Set. But man, did I love what that Selanne guy could do.

I knew his only rookie card was an Upper Deck model from his time with the Finnish Canada Cup team. I saved my quarters and dollars until I had enough to pick up seven or eight packs from the LCS, and took my shot at Selanne. In the second-last pack, as crisp as a newly minted 20-dollar bill, sat Selanne's Canada Cup card, and I was elated.

Most kids would have placed their ultimate PC item in the most airtight container possible, where it would sit as a prized possession for the next 70 years. Not me. I wanted some ink on that bad boy. I had heard that Selanne was a generous signer, so I looked up the Winnipeg Jets' mailing details, tossed in a

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self-addressed stamped envelope and hoped for the best. Was I crazy for not waiting at least until I had a double? Perhaps. But this is what kids do sometimes. I took a shot.

And I scored.

A month or so later, I had in my possession a signed Teemu Selanne rookie card. The signature was bright blue, as crisp and clear as any hockey autograph I had ever seen. Not even a hint of a smudge. I did a little happy dance as I slid the card into a soft sleeve and top-loader, then spent the next several hours staring at it with an unprecedented mix of astonishment and elation.

That card remained in my possession for a good year or so, and was the pinnacle of what, at the time, had become a rather robust collection. Nothing could prompt me to part with that card. Not 10 dollars. Not 20 dollars. Dare I say, not even 50 dollars. And then...greed took over.

I had followed the popularity of Topps Stadium Club baseball with a great deal of interest. People were shelling out huge money for packs of this product, which featured the highest-quality photos that had ever appeared in the hobby. When I found out that Topps would be releasing a Stadium Club hockey product, I simply had to be a part of it.

I didn't have nearly enough money to buy a box myself, and my younger brother was in no mood to part with his own hard-earned money. I brought along some traders, but the gentleman at the LCS was truly unforgiving when it came to assessing equal value; there was only one card in my collection that would have sealed the deal.

I would have to part with Teemu.

I had to make a decision then and there, and it wasn't easy. I'm sure the man could see the anguish on my face as I decided whether I would take my prized Selanne card and return home, or whether I would relent to the sparkly new cards and part with my first favourite card.

I decided to take the box, and let the Selanne go. It took me less than 15 minutes to open every pack of Stadium Club; after about the fifth pack, the novelty quickly wore off. The cards weren't that exciting, and it seemed like every other pack had a Brett Hull in it. He's a great player, sure, but one or two Hulls would have suited me just fine.

The moment the final wrapper was tossed into the trash, I felt a terrible feeling in the pit of my stomach, realizing I had made a colossal mistake. When I returned to the shop a few days later, the LCS owner had already turned around the Selanne. It was gone for good. I was crushed.

Only recently did I return to the hobby after a lengthy absence, and with hundreds of Selanne cards on the market, I look forward to reestablishing myself as an elite Teemu collector. But no matter how big my stash of Selanne cards becomes, I will always wonder what happened to the first signed card I ever owned.

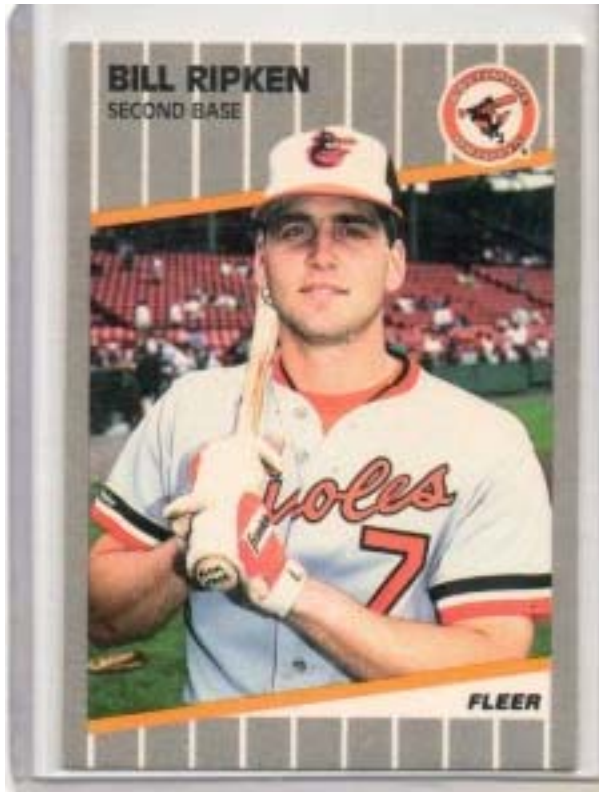
I can't believe I traded away that card.

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This Wonderful Hobby

By Michael Barton aka MonticelloCards



I have been a collector since 1988. That year, the card we all wanted was the Matt Nokes Topps RC. Nokes had an incredible season, and his cards were highly sought after in the hobby. My! How times have changed over the years... Nokes faded after that season, and the other sought after rookie card, the elusive 1988 Donruss Gregg Jeffries, can now be found with the Nokes in common bins across the country. So many things have changed between then and now. But I have never lost my passion for these wonderful pieces of cardboard, even as the hobby has become somewhat crazy in terms of prices these days.

I also remember 1989, the year Upper Deck debuted. The rookie craze was all about Ken Griffey Jr., a man whose card was reaching astronomical prices at the time. But there was another card that had people buying pack after pack in search of it – I am talking about the Dale Murphy reverse negative error. I pulled one, and the treasure was worth a box of 1989 Upper Deck to my dealer, so I made the trade. 1989 was also the year of THAT famous Billy Ripken variation card.

An insulting phrase was written on his bat, and some-

how it made it through to production. In a scramble, Fleer did everything to the card until they finally covered it with a black box. It was another frenzy that had collectors busting wax like mad. I remember those two times vividly, as I hung out at my card shop so often people thought I worked there! It was the beginning of my collecting days, and I will take those memories with me for the rest of my life.

In between then and now, I have done shows, I have worked for an amazing man in a hobby shop for a year, I have gotten caught up in selling cards for profit, even going so far as to buying cards that were listed improperly on eBay and reselling them for a major profit. But this year I finally got back into the essence of collecting. My favorite recent purchase was a lot of different rookie cards from 1988-89, including Sammy Sosa, Randy Johnson, Gary Sheffield, and other major stars and future Hall of Famers. I paid \$1.00 for 17 different rookie cards (it came to \$3 total when you include shipping), and once I got them I began to smile. I bought these because of the fond memories of my youth, not because of any possible future value. Spotting a 1989 Donruss Curt Schilling RC, I remember those living in my common boxes – who knew he would become a part of baseball history!



I look at people's personal collections, and there are so many cards that are made today that absolutely amaze me. Before Strasburg got hurt, the frenzy for his cards in 2010 made me remember all of those wonderful memories of the late 80's, and thanks to that frenzy, it made me remember why I got into collecting cards in the first place. For fun and enjoyment. For sharing times with friends making trades. That is why I recently came back to my favorite trading site – Sports Card Forum.

<http://www.sportscardforum.com>

Today, I am no longer looking for the hot card of the moment trying to make a deal in my favor. I am looking for cards that will be in my personal collection forever. The rookie lot that I mentioned above is the beginning of my personal collection. I am on the hunt for a copy of THAT Billy Ripken variation card. My personal collection may not be viewed by many as much value wise, but the cards I am collecting now have a sentimental value that cannot have a price put on it. Do you remember the 1989 Topps Gary Sheffield card?



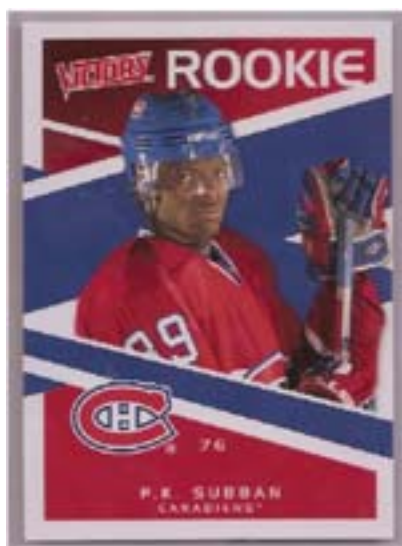
I certainly do, he had those braces on and they were front and centre on his rookie card. He looked about 15 to me, but he went on to have a very nice career. I am going to start an Albert Belle collection, because he was my favorite player in the 90s. I was a Belle guy, not a Griffey guy. And I am one who will stand up and say he deserves a spot in the Hall of Fame, controversies aside. If you look at his statistics over the ten year period before his hip began to fail, he is one of the top five guys in baseball in the 1990s. I am also planning on working on a Chicago White Sox collection, my favorite team.

In closing, I have seen it all. I have been a collector, I have been a retail seller, I have been an investor. In 2010, I have gone back to my roots, and when you see my eventual personal collection, I hope that, like me, you will see it for the memories that I associate with these special cards, and worry less about what something is worth. And please, keep the Kirk Gibson cards away! Over 20 years later, I still have a desire to destroy his cards after his dramatic home run against the Oakland Athletics. It was the first time a baseball game made me cry, and I will never forget it. And that, in closing, is what collecting should be all about.



The End of “Parallel Hell”? A New Perspective on Parallel Cards

By Richard McAdam aka RGM81



The beginning of the 2010-11 card season seems to have brought about a shift in thinking about parallels. It began with Upper Deck Victory and the inclusion of the rack pack exclusive Red parallels. Not since the 05-06 numbered to 5 Black parallels has there been so much interest in Victory; people were breaking the packs in bunches in the hopes of landing a superstar or top rookie, or even to do the entire parallel set. It has continued with Panini Certified. Even though some player checklists are of epic proportions there are still large numbers of collectors jumping for joy when they hit a Platinum Hot Box, and the variations in the Fabric of the Game memorabilia cards are very nice to look at, especially those featuring the Prime designation on a team with a lengthy name. It looks set to continue with Upper Deck Series One and its 20th Anniversary parallels. All of this begs the question: why now?

Hockey collectors have traditionally not been big fans of parallel cards. There are some exceptions, as one would expect, but for the most part parallels end up in dollar bins at card shows or stuck in the untradeable pile in collections. Sets such as Artifacts and SP Game Used are considered the worst offenders, featuring up to—and sometimes exceeding—50 cards for one of the more popular players in each release. For that reason these sets have been labelled “parallel hell” for player collectors, severely damaging their chances of achieving a complete set for their player and diminishing their chances of applying successfully to be recognized for their collection in the SCF Super Collector Hall of Fame. Indeed, “parallel hell” has caused many player collectors to simply throw up their hands and take their collections in new directions. At some point, it becomes a question of quality over quantity: a person can buy one really nice auto/patch card from The Cup for \$50, or they can buy 10 parallels at \$5 each. Many have chosen to go the route of focusing on high-end pieces to have a better visual collection at the expense of completeness, and who can blame them?

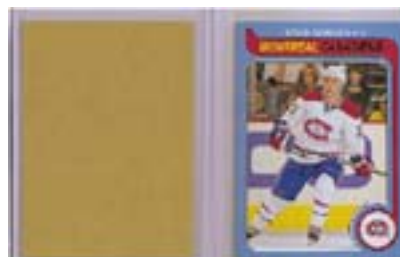
Even though parallels are popular in other sports (as anybody who followed Steven Strasburg-Mania earlier in 2010 can attest), I believe that they are less so in hockey and it comes down to two factors: one, the sheer volume of parallels in some sets; and two, the lack of ingenuity put into the parallels. When you consider a set such as Artifacts, a base card will have 5 variations: /5, /50, /10, /75, and /25. Most star players will also have a Stars subset /999 card that has 4 additional parallels: /50, /10, /75, and /25. Already you have 11 cards for that player and I have not even mentioned memorabilia and autograph subsets. What makes this so particularly frustrating is that not only are there so many, the only thing that differentiates one card from another is the foil stamping. The shiny stuff looks nice, but that’s really where the added value ends with this type of parallel. Moreover, with so many parallel sets being so similar in appearance, there is often confusion over exactly which card is which. On SCF’s Hockey Card Talk Forum, there is a reference guide for one set (2008-09 O-Pee-Chee) that has nearly

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2000 views from collectors trying to discern the difference between the parallels. Because of all these factors, it is not at all uncommon to see a parallel #'d /25 go for an opening 99 cent bid on eBay.

There are parallel sets that do strike the right balance between numbers and feature enough differentiation to make pursuing the “rainbow” desirable. For a rookie collector, there is no higher objective than completing a rainbow from The Cup. O-Pee-Chee is one other that immediately springs to mind. For the last two seasons the set has featured a retro parallel that harkens back to the old days of OPC, complete with hard-to-find blank back versions, and also features a different photo than the regular base card. The Metal parallels featured in the 2008-09 Update Set were also of interest (and a source of some confusion – see above), and in all made for a nice group of seven cards to chase down from a relatively inexpensive set.



There is, then, a happy medium for collectors. So long as the numbers are kept low and the variations in the cards are interesting, parallels can be desirable and collectible. Different images, memorabilia, and autographs can give parallels that extra “oomph” and make them something hotly desired by collectors. To use one recent set as an example, Panini Certified’s tiers for the Masked Marvels goalie subset have made certain variations incredibly popular. Looking at Carey Price, the auto/jersey version /25 has sold as high as \$50 while a non-auto, non-memorabilia Emerald /5 sold for only slightly less than that. Price’s other auto-memorabilia cards in Certified have eclipsed \$70 in sales as well. As somebody that obviously watches the Price market very closely, I have been very surprised to see these sales – clearly the combination of Price’s on-ice play early in the 2010-11 season has a role in this, but even taking that into consideration clearly there is a high level of interest in these parallel cards that Panini created in their hockey debut that doesn’t exist in other product releases.

Does the early season interest in parallel cards bode well for the card manufacturers? After years of complaining about getting parallel on top of parallel in their breaks, are collectors coming around and embracing parallels? This seems to be the case. At the beginning of this article, I asked the question, “Why now?” I believe I have the answer. With three manufacturers producing hockey cards now, each has to go an extra mile to create cards that people want in their collections. Whereas in the past parallels have simply been something to put in the set in the hopes that they’ll catch on and entice people to chase the rainbow, they are now being used as a focal selling point. When you look at an UD 20th Anniversary parallel, it takes you back to that first UD release. When you compare your Certified Mirror Blue Materials and Mirror Red Materials you see something different beyond the foil colour. I am not predicting a universal love of parallels across all sets, as there will still be some head scratchers, but I do believe that the days of viewing releases as “parallel hell” may be more limited in scope and stature in this season and beyond.



A Look Back at 2010

By Brad Wingate aka BBonds25

2010 was a year like no other, both on the diamond, and in the hobby. There were a record number of no-hitters tossed, a first time appearance in the Fall Classic, and an exclusive manufacturing license. Let's take a look back at the year that was.

On the Diamond

The 2010 season brought us 6 no hitters. Six! And 2 of those were perfect games, pitched 20 days apart. It would've been 3 perfect games, however an untimely mistake by an umpire cost Armando Galarraga his own gem in early June. Roy Halladay pitched the season's first perfect game on May 9, but he wasn't done there. He also tossed only the second no-hitter in postseason history, and the first since Don Larsen's perfect game in 1956.

2010 was also a huge year for rookies. The Braves Jason Heyward (.277/18HR/72RBI) took the league by storm by hitting a homerun in hit first at bat. Giants' catcher Buster Posey (.305/18/67) took control of arguably the best pitching staff in the Majors on his way to winning NL Rookie of the Year honors, as well as a World Series Championship. 2010 was also the second straight year that a closer won AL ROY honors when the Rangers' Neftali Feliz (40 saves, 2.73 ERA) took top freshman honors. Also making large contributions to their respective teams were Austin Jackson, Ike Davis, Starlin Castro, Mike Leake, Tyler Colvin, and Drew Stubbs, just to name a few. But no rookie was bigger in terms of hype then that of Stephen Strasburg. But we'll come back to him in a minute.

At the end of the season, fans were treated to a little history when the Texas Rangers made their first appearance in the World Series. In fact, the team's win against Tampa Bay in the AL Division Series was the franchise's first post season series win. Unfortunately for the Rangers, they ran into a young San Francisco Giants team led by a clutch hitting rookie catcher and a tough, bearded closer in the Fall Classic, and their dream season was put to an end in 5 World Series games. The Rangers off season loss of starting pitcher Cliff Lee makes a repeat performance look improbable...but, crazier things have happened.

In the Hobby

2010 marked the first time since 1980 that the hobby had only 1 MLB licensed manufacturer in the game. Topps was granted an exclusive license in August of 2009, which took effect on January 1, 2010. Upper Deck did release a base set in the early part of the year, but that was all they would put out. Plans for a 2010 SPX set were scrapped when MLB filed an infringement lawsuit against the California based company. Donruss Elite Extra Edition also made its 4th consecutive (unlicensed) appearance, bringing collectors a large checklist of young prospects to invest in.



So that brings us to Topps. Most of the same sets from past years were made available to collectors this year, including fan favorites Heritage, Allen & Ginter, and the high end Topps Sterling. And of course we still had the Bowman line, which included the first release of Bowman Platinum. Furthermore, in an attempt to wet the appetite of prospectors, Topps decided to include cards depicting players from the USA National Team, and the USA under-18 National team into its Bowman releases. This decision caused a frenzy as collector's scrambled to pick up any and all packs, boxes, or cases of 2010 Bowman Baseball. The reason for this mad dash? The Washington Nationals. Or, more specifically, the Nationals 2009 and 2010 #1 draft picks, Stephen Strasburg and Bryce Harper.

Let's start with Strasburg. No rookie has had his cards this sought after since Albert Pujols in the summer of 2001. Every collector cracking was in search of anything Strasburg related. Bowman included a Chrome first year card, as well as an autographed base version, which drove box and case prices of 2010 Bowman through the roof. However, by the time Topps included Strasburg into one of its brands, the rookie pitcher was put on the shelf after electing to have Tommy John surgery, thus ending his 2010 season, and most, if not all of his 2011 season. Now the waiting game begins. Will he be as dominating as he was in his MLB debut (14 K's, 0 walks), or will he become the next Brian Taylor or Todd Van Popple? Only time will tell.

As for Bryce Harper; he was also included in the aforementioned Bowman release, as part of the Team USA Under-18 Chrome insert set. If Strasburg's cards were on fire, Harper's were molten. Pulling a Bryce Harper from a pack of 2010 Bowman was like buying a winning lottery ticket. But, Topps did not stop there. Earlier this year, the company announced that collectors will not have to wait until the release of 2011 Topps for a chance to pull a Harper autograph. As part of its 60th Anniversary autograph set, the company announced that the first card, Bryce Harper, will be inserted into packs of 2010 Bowman Sterling.

So, what will this year hold for collectors? Well, if 2010 was any indicator, I think 2011 will be another landmark season for the hobby.



2010 Football Card Awards By Craig Hill aka ChillyDoggy

2010 has seen many great football sets product through January of 2011, some new & some old... some are missing from previous years or have changed for the worse. I will offer some of my most & least favorites in this article. That said, let's jump right in...



BEST OVERALL 2010 FOOTBALL PRODUCT:

2010 Certified Football

Certified is always a great product, but this year, its design, value per box & player selection make it the best overall product in my mind. The Fabric of the Game GU set player selection is the best I've seen and has something for all ranges of collectors from normal jersey versions through to jersey number patch auto versions.

Honorable Mentions: 2010 Absolute Memorabilia & 2010 Topps Finest

WORST OVERALL 2010 FOOTBALL PRODUCT:

2010 Topps Magic

Topps Magic is back for a 2nd year and while I do enjoy the art style cards, the player selection for their autograph set is very watered down and the value isn't there for me, for a product that is similarly priced as most football products this year. The player selection on the autographs just scream... sticker dump!

Honorable Mentions: 2010 Prestige & 2010 Topps Prime



BEST OVERALL 2010 FOOTBALL CARD DESIGN:

2010 Crown Royale Rookie Die Cuts

Crown Royale is back this year after a few years off and has a beautiful design, but especially this insert autograph set with a large piece of jersey behind a die cut of the player depicted on the card.

Honorable Mentions: 2010 Topps Finest Rookie Patch Autos & 2010 Certified Fabric of the Game



WORST OVERALL 2010 FOOTBALL CARD DESIGN:

2010 Topps Prime

My least favorite football card design of the year is a new release from Topps. Prime couldn't be a



worst name for a product that just screams that it was produced on the cheap. Simple, boring design produced on thin card stock. The boxes features mini box type packs, much like Absolute Memorabilia, but they don't hold a candle to Absolute Memorabilia.

dishonorable Mention: 2010 Prestige

MOST IMPROVED FOOTBALL CARD PRODUCT:

2010 Bowman Sterling

Bowman Sterling's quality this year is much better. The 2009 release had awful die-cuts that were often off center & the edges were in rough shape. They seem to have cleaned up that problem this year and the design is much cleaner.

Honorable Mention: 2010 Gridiron Gear



LEAST IMPROVED FOOTBALL CARD PRODUCT:

2010 Prestige

Prestige came out early this year to compete with the college draft products. Panini's license had not yet started though so they created a bland set featuring photography that was either of a player without a helmet on or where you couldn't see the college logo, or even worse yet, they airbrushed the college logo out, much like sets from the past. The base set & rookie auto set's design & photography were so bad, they get the award for least improved or greatest decline.

Dishonorable Mentions: 2010 SPx & 2010 SP Authentic

BEST VALUE FOR YOUR BUCK:

2010 Certified

On average, around \$100/box gets you 5 hits normally including a Freshman Fabric Jersey RC Auto or a Fabric of the Game Jersey Auto and a couple of legend or rookie Jersey cards. Some super nice legend and quad relic rookie autos to be had too.

Honorable Mention: 2010 Topps Chrome

WORST VALUE FOR YOUR BUCK:

2010 Bowman Sterling

At anywhere from \$230 to \$275 a box, you do get 19 hits but most of them are single color jersey cards and the player selection reaches pretty far. It's a nice looking set this year, but at this price, I'd save my money and put it towards one of the nicer high end products soon to be released.

MOST ANTICIPATED NOT YET RELEASED PRODUCT:

2010 National Treasures

National Treasures is always one of the most anticipated products along with Exquisite but with Exquisite being a big question mark this year... there is no other product as anxiously awaited as National Treasures.

Honorable Mention: 2010 Contenders, 2010 Topps Five Star
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Hockey Happenings

By Richard McAdams aka RGM81

Happy New Year from everybody on the Hockey Team!

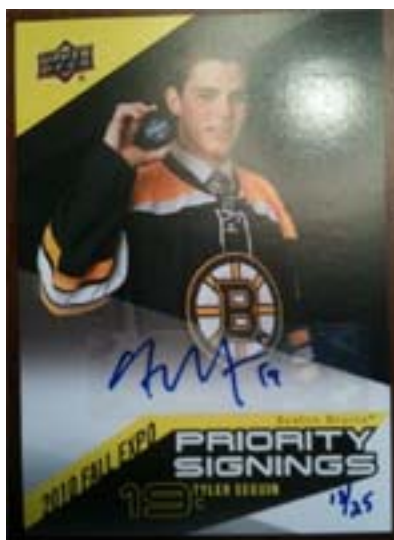
It has been a very exciting time for hockey in the past few weeks: the NHL held its annual Winter Classic on New Year's Day, the World Junior Championships took place in Buffalo, the All-Star Game returned after an absence in 2010 for the Olympics, and many teams are preparing to gear up for the stretch drive to the Stanley Cup Playoffs. There is a lot to be excited about as a hockey fan, and a lot of that excitement has been translating into the hockey card hobby as well.

SCF's Hockey Forums have been incredibly active this season, and with good reason. With a new licensee in Panini, there has been a heightened sense of interest for many collectors, as both Upper Deck and Panini have stepped it up to deliver the goods to collectors. Our Box Breaks Forum has seen literally hundreds of breaks this season, leading to an even greater number of trades. The activity has been fantastic, and really helped to develop the sense of community in the Hockey section of the website.

SCF has also had a number of fantastic hockey contests running this season:

The Race For The Trio has been a season-long contest in which the grand prize is a The Cup Triple Enshrinements featuring Bobby Orr, Phil Esposito, and Johnny Bucyk numbered to 10 copies!

The March To The Playoffs, sponsored by Panini, is another season-long contest in which the grand prize is a puck signed by 2010 first overall draft choice and Edmonton Oilers rookie sensation Taylor Hall! There have also been monthly contests completed for prizes including boxes of Certified and Limited. Both Upper Deck and Panini have sponsored contests featuring prizes for redemption cards from the Toronto Fall Expo. The winner of a Tyler Seguin Upper Deck Priority Signings was very fittingly Bruinsfan08!



In The Game sponsored a contest where the winner—HammerHawks—will receive an Uncut Sheet from ITG Ultimate Memorabilia 10!

For information on all of SCF's hockey contests, please visit the Contests Forum here: <http://www.sportscardforum.com/forumdisplay.php?f=356> – look for a new monthly contest starting February 1st and many more throughout the year!

Do you have a spectacular collection of your favourite player or your favourite team? Do you think you have the best collection of that



player? Have you built that collection through trades and buying here at SCF? Do you want to have your collection immortalized and recognized? If you answered “YES!” to those questions, we want you to apply for the SCF Super Collector Hall of Fame! The Super Collector badge is awarded to collectors that have incredible collections and who have been active members of the SCF Community. For more information, visit the SCF Super Collector Forum here:

<http://www.sportscardforum.com/forumdisplay.php?f=437>



The hockey card schedule has been packed with fantastic releases to this point. Through January, collectors have been introduced to Panini through products such as Certified and Limited, while getting to revisit old favourites such as Score. In the coming weeks we will see Crown Royale and Pinnacle re-born as well as get to view the first hockey release of Rookies & Stars! Upper Deck has delivered traditional favourites like the signature Series One starring the always-popular Young Guns, and injected new value into Black Diamond and SPx with the inclusion of the Ice Bonus Packs. Soon we will be looking forward to Series 2, SP Authentic, and more. In The Game delivered a fantastic tenth edition of Ultimate Memorabilia, featuring some of the most amazing memorabilia cards the hobby has ever seen. They also had a successful and timely release of Heroes and Prospects, and it won't be long until Between The Pipes brings goalie collectors another exciting instalment. As noted earlier, collectors have been breaking boxes, packs, and cases galore of all of these products – to get in on the action, please visit the Box/Pack Breaks Forum here: <http://www.sportscardforum.com/forumdisplay.php?f=168> and share your opinions on all the manufacturers and their products in the Hockey Card Talk Forum here: <http://www.sportscardforum.com/forumdisplay.php?f=59> There have been some recent changes to the SCF Hockey Team – two great new staff members have recently been added to the Team: ravens_creed and flemingc04! Welcome aboard Paul and Andrew! On a less happy note, Smashy77 has recently left the team, and Team Manager Captngeech has also had to step away from his role. We miss you very much Jeff and Annie! Also of note, Pheeb888 has stepped down from her hockey team role to concentrate on her editor-in-chief role and yours truly has been promoted to Senior Sports Manager. Both myself and Karine will still be around the hockey boards though, you never really leave the hockey team!

From everybody on the Hockey Team, have a great month, and we'll see you on the boards!



Five Stars Brings a New Aspect to the Racing Hobby

By Stephen Taylor aka race crazy

With the introduction of Press Pass Five Star this past December, racing has officially joined the other major sports in the realm of high end card collecting. Press Pass had previously graced us with Press Pass Showcase in 2009 and again in 2010, which at that point in time had been racing's priciest release ever. Five Star tips the money scale at about 600 dollars a box for five cards-to many a steep price to pay in the world of racing cards. The cards are no doubt of the highest quality. The wooden box in which they come in is perhaps more spectacular then the cards themselves. I caved and bought a box along with a few other racing collectors while a lot of our friends in the hobby watched. I love the cards. It is no doubt the best work Press Pass as a company has ever done and they are the best racing cards ever produced by far, but their impact on the hobby is yet to be seen and it is up for debate as to whether this release is a good or bad thing for our sport. Five Star is a product for those who love beautiful racing cards and are looking for a fun high end box to bust, but it is definitely not for those who are looking to break even. Without a 1/1 pull or a Danica Patrick pull most are looking at selling for half of what they paid for the box, which is what happened in my case, and that is fine. I did not buy the box for money, I bought the box for fun, and it was fun. For the people looking to make a buck, this is not the release for you. The Nascar market for cards is solid and consistent, and it also differs from the other sports. The cards do not determine our market, the collectors do. This is perhaps why high end racing will not work. It will be interesting to see what Press Pass does in the future with this release.



2011 Is Upon Us

Things are not all peachy in the Nascar world at the moment. Having been faced with declining TV ratings and lower attendance Nascar has been searching for new methods and ways to entertain and to lower cost. They are also more than likely looking for a different champion. Despite some of the best racing I have ever seen as an 18-year fan of the sport, 2010's final result remained the same as Jimmie Johnson remained cool under pressure and won his 5th straight Championship, an unprecedented achievement. There is no doubt Jimmie and his team are the best in the sport, but there is



also no doubt that many fans have been turned off by Johnson's constant dominance of a system designed to ensure different champions and closer championship battles. The team truly is the evil empire of the sport to some fans. The same thing happened with Jeff Gordon in the 1990's. The difference is that the sport is not booming right now and there is no Dale Earnhardt-esque rival that Johnson is taking the crown from as Gordon did. It is Jimmie Johnson vs. himself-and as of yet no one has proven they can step up. Nascar and the Nascar fans need this to happen in 2011. In some ways it must happen. If the NFL and NBA lock out next year (distinct possibilities) come late November during the Chase perhaps more eyeballs will be watching Nascar, and they must make a good impression. The future of the sport in regards to it being mainstream

depends on it.

Reflecting on Dale Earnhardt's Death 10 Years Later

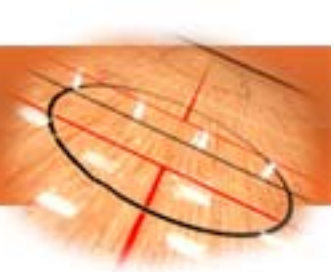


I'm sure most Nascar fans knew exactly where they were when they got the news that Dale Earnhardt had died after his last lap crash in the 2001 Daytona 500. I was a young 12 year-old who despised Earnhardt. I had loved the race-Tony Stewart's big crash, the exciting pack racing, and a surprise new winner in Michael Waltrip had me wound up at the end of the event. I knew something was wrong with Earnhardt but I was naïve. I anxiously watched ESPNNews for any updates (there was no such thing as Twitter back then) and when the news came down I was pretty shocked. I cried-and I could not stand the guy. That is what he meant to the sport. He was the good guy to

many and the bad guy to many. Without him we were lost. Many new fans gathered around our own Nascar community as the story made national news. Dale Earnhardt Jr gained many fans and carried on his father's legacy after his passing, with a remarkable win in the July race at Daytona that left many fans crying for the right reasons (including me again, a non-Earnhardt fan).

As the years have gone on since Earnhardt's passing many things have changed in Nascar. Dale Earnhardt Jr. drives for Rick Hendrick, not DEI. DEI exists as a merged team with Chip Ganassi. The many fans that flocked to Nascar after Earnhardt's passing have gone away. In some ways Nascar is back to its mid-80's ways. The diehards are still here but the common interest is gone. Dale Earnhardt was a large part of the common interest, a larger than life character that transcended the boundaries of the sport. It is hard to imagine it being 10 years in February since his passing. Tremendous safety improvements have been made to the sport since his death and due to what was learned from his wreck people like Michael McDowell and Elliott Sadler are still alive today in what would have been fatal wrecks in 2001. It is just another way The Intimidator carries on his legacy, even after death. When February 18th, 2011 rolls around everyone, Nascar fan or not, should just take 3 seconds out of their day to think and thank ole #3. For the good, the bad, and the ugly. Haters, Non-haters, Fanatics, we all still miss Earnhardt. #3 forever.

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And Over on the Basketball Forums...

By Jay Weger aka Jay520

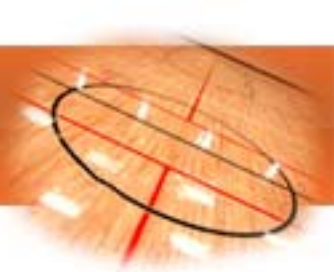
First off the basketball team would like to announce XxViSiOnxX as the new Team Manager and Jay520 as the New Assistant Manager. And also the team would like to welcome back garnett 21 to the staff.

The contests in the basketball forums are awesome. The NBA Top Performers contest monthly winners for Oct/Nov. were jdlee123 in first place winning 100 cc and JesRey in second place winning 50 cc. December saw jdlee123 in first again and Thrillseeker come in second. January is almost done with JesRey in 1st with 21 points through 1/22 and jdlee123 and rocketfan86 tied for second with 19 points. Next is the NBA Guess the Score contest that is all season long. The leaders for regular members are: JesRey with 11 wins, 2FarGone with 7 wins, scooby10672 and dwighthoward tied with 5 wins. VIP leaders are andrewhoya with 11 wins, TheHeel 10, JesRey 9 wins through 1/22. A NCAA Basketball Guess the Score was started on 1/23 for those who like college basketball. Steal of the Month contest will be returning in February. The winner will receive 100 cc for the biggest steal of the month off of eBay. 2010 Theme Weeks wrapped up this last month. 1st place winner was tristan20 and he won a 09-10 Panini Certified Fabric of the Game Triple jersey of Dikembe Mutombo /10. 2nd went to Force Majeur getting a 09-10 Bowman '48 Ben Gordon auto. 3rd went to nissandriver77 winning a 07-08 Topps Generation Now Josh Smith gu. Congratulations to the winners! You have to check out our new Ultimate All-Star Weekend contest starting 1/27. Why ultimate you ask because a hobby box of 2010 Ultimate Collection will be the prize to the lucky winner. Check out our contest forums for more contests coming this season.

There were some Super Collector additions added over the past few months. Force Majeur earned player Super Collector status with an impressive Xavier McDaniel collection. Geoffyb made the player Super Collector status with a nice Dennis Rodman collection. Schwood was given team Super Collector status by amassing a great collection of Boston Celtics. Nina joined the team Super Collector status with a huge collection of Minnesota Timberwolves. And finally whalechaser accomplished team Super Collector status with an incredible Chicago Bulls collection.

The only news out of the hobby is that Panini has signed Kevin Durant as a spokesperson and will be signing for future products!

There were some great pulls this month posted in the Pack/Box Break forum. 2010 Ultimate saw some awesome pulls from members. Flashie007 pulled a Triple signature auto of Derrick Rose/Lebron James/Brandon Roy 6/25 from 3 boxes. Cheken opened 2 boxes and got a Bobby Hurley auto and a Triple Signature auto of Julius Erving/Lebron James/Magic Johnson /15. b23 pulled a Larry bird auto and Detsports72 hit a Derrick Rose auto. 10-11 Panini Timeless Treasures was very popular this month for hits. Merl pulled a Evan Turner rc patch auto/10 from 2 tins. Baseball Digest hit a Bill Russell hall of Fame auto /10. Velvet Hoop pulled a Brook Lopez auto /10 and a Scottie Pippen gu /299. KB"24" got lucky and hit a sweet Stephen Curry patch auto 1/1! legend33 broke a case of Timeless Treasures and pulled some impressive cards: Hakeem Olajuwon dual patch /10, Stephen Curry auto 14/20, auto patch



redemptions of Allen Iverson and John Stockton /10, Hall of Fame autos of Bob Lanier and Dolph Schayes /25, Tag auto of rc Dominique Jones /5, and a Tyreke Evans 1/1 parallel. Other great pulls came from XxViSiOnxX who pulled a Kareem Abdul-Jabbar auto /25 from 10-11 Panini Threads. Spursgirl85 got a John Wall rc auto /299 from 10-11 Elite. 10ballboy opened 2 packs of Elite and hit an Allen Iverson patch auto 5/5. And the best old school box break came from skeen who pulled a Michael Jordan Titanium insert out of 97-98 Metal Universe valued at \$100. There were too many pulls from 10-11 Donruss blasters and rack-packs to list.

Now for what's happening in the NBA. The Boston Celtics have the best record in the Eastern Conference at 33-10. Next is the Miami Heat at 31-13, Chicago Bulls at 30-14, Orlando Magic at 29-15, and Atlanta Hawks at 29-16. In the Western Conference the San Antonio Spurs own the best record of 37-7. Second are the L. A. Lakers at 32-13, Oklahoma Thunder at 28-15, Dallas Mavericks at 28-15, and New Orleans Hornets at 29-16. The top 3 NBA MVP candidates for the first half of the season are Derrick Rose, Dwight Howard and Amare Stoudemire. Rose is playing at a high level this season averaging 24 pts, 4.7 rbs and 8 assists a game for Chicago. Dwight Howard has been the best center so far averaging 22.1 pts, 13.3 rbs and 2.13 blks a game for the Magic. Amare Stoudemire is proving to be a great pf away from Steve Nash in New York averaging 26 pts, 9 rbs and 2.6 assists a game. The NBA Rookie of the Year seems to be a runaway for Blake Griffin of the L. A. Clippers. Last years no.1 pick is having a great first half averaging 20+ pts, 10+ rebs a game with a double-double streak of 27 straight games ending on 1/20. His dunks this year have been impressive to say the least which has earned him a spot in the Slam Dunk contest at All-Star weekend. Carmelo Anthony almost got traded to the Nets but the trade deal got too expensive for the Nets owner and called it off. But there were 2 big trades made on 12/18. The first trade was between the Magic and Wizards which was Rashard Lewis for Gilbert Arenas. Second trade saw Vince Carter, Mickael Pietrus and Marcin Gortat plus a future draft pick and cash going to Phoenix for Jason Richardson, Hedo Turkoglu and Earl Clark to the Magic.



FEBRUARY 2011



New SCF/TTM Custom Card Program

By Mike Greene aka indyreds



Sports Card Forum is proud to announce the creation of the 2011 Sports Card Forum custom template.

Bigga, has designed a custom card that we can all use to create, share and send off for TTM requests in 2011. The 2011 SCF custom card program is outlined in this article along with links to the threads he has created. The card is simple in design and should be easy to recreate with his template. The ability to share the created cards will allow us to use each others designs. The special success area for those designs should fill with some great successes in 2011. Should you all embrace this program we will bring in a new design next season as well. SCF is always looking for ways to help improve the experiences of the autograph community and we hope that you all enjoy this new program!

TTM is a big part of the SCF community, and custom cards are a big part of TTM.

The custom template was created so we could all have one template that is easy for everyone to use.

Here is an example of a card that was created with the template.

We have set up three threads.

The first is the Template / Tutorial thread, this is where you can go to get the template and find a tutorial for the template.

<http://www.sportscardforum.com/showt...=1#post9090608>

The second is a Creations thread, where we hope everyone will post their cards made with the tutorial for every in the community to use.

<http://www.sportscardforum.com/showt...27#post9090627>

The third is a success thread where we can post our successes .

<http://www.sportscardforum.com/showt...47#post9090647>

Have fun with the new design and may all your mailboxes be filled with wonderful successes!

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An Introduction to the SCF Disputes Process

By Kevin O'Connor



My name is Kevin and I am an advisor or moderator on the SCF Disputes Team. I will be writing articles related to the Disputes process, best practices, and online trading execution which is the follow through after the trade is completed. Please contact me with any questions regarding the SCF Disputes process or trading execution and I will try to answer immediately, and incorporate ideas into future articles published here on Sports Card Forum magazine.

The Dispute resolution process on SCF is in place to help traders resolve trade issues through impartial mediation with the assistance of an SCF Moderator. Dispute issues range from not receiving the trade, not receiving the trade as described, condition issues, or general dissatisfaction with the item received. Members also use this service to remove trades that trading partners mutually agree to cancel. Entering into dispute is not to be taken lightly, nor is being taken into dispute to be considered unfavorable, as it is an interactive process

of resolution. If you are not sure about filing a dispute, read the SCF rules and decide for yourself, or ask a moderator. If you are entered into a dispute, you should proactively participate and comply with the request of the moderator. Honest and timely communication is a key to a fair resolution.

I have been handling disputes for 6 months. During this time I have observed that clear communication during the trade negotiation, and specific language in the trade manager, could have prevented most trade issues related to shipping time, methods, or card condition. Expecting everyone to use delivery confirmation and a soft sleeve, top loader, team bag, and bubble mailer (DC with SS/TL/TB/BM), just because I do, does not warrant me being upset with things other than TL/BM if shipping methods were not disclosed during negotiations or included in the trade manager. Delivery confirmation or some other form of tracking is recommended and proves helpful in resolving issues related to shipment. Even the postal receipt can be used as proof of shipping. I retain my receipts and DC information until my trade is completed. If a low end trade is going to be sent with a plain white envelope (PWE) it must be discussed and posted in the trade manager. Late sending traders should also disclose this during trade negotiations. If it is unforeseen lateness that will cause the shipment not to be sent within the 3 day rule, as posted on SCF Rules Section VI, the sender has a responsibility to communicate this fact to their trading partner.

Payment issues are another topic I will address in detail in future articles. For now I'll just say PayPal is the safest followed by Money Order. "PayPal Gift" does not protect the buyer within PayPal if the

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item is not received so I do not use it. A few percent more to cover the fees is my insurance and a fair price for using the service. I do not use concealed cash but I understand why some others do. My experience tells me that if one is to send cash, they need to ensure it is well concealed. Additional insurance may be recommended for more valuable trades. How valuable? I had to determine my own tolerance for risk by asking myself what cash value I can handle losing or replacing if my shipment does not arrive at its destination.

An example of the life cycle of a typical trade dispute is as follows:

Trade negotiated and posted in the trade manager.

14 days go by and nothing arrives.

Trader sends a PM to trading partner but receives no response even though the person has been active on SCF.

After a couple of days of this activity, or a less than satisfactory response is received, the trader files a dispute within the SCF Trade Manager.

SCF Moderator picks up the dispute, gets the information from the filer, the trade manager, and then reviews the information available to him/her.

This is posted in the dispute log -

Hi <username>,

My name is Kevin and I will be working on your dispute ticket.

Can you please describe the issue and what resolution you are seeking?

Thanks,

-Kevin

SCF Disputes Advisor

SCF Moderator contacts the other trader via PM something like this –

Disputed Trade Issue –

Hi <member's first name>,

<dispute filer's username> has put this transaction into dispute:<transaction link>

Please contact me immediately so that we can get the issue resolved.

Thank you,

Kevin

SCF Disputes Advisor

The SCF Moderator then works to resolve the issue using information from both parties. Typically the communication goes directly between the traders and the resolution is achieved.

The Trader filing the dispute then contacts the Moderator indicating his/her satisfaction with the trade. They are instructed to leave feedback and the trade is then taken out of dispute and completed in the trade manager.

From time to time the issues can be more serious or the other trader is non responsive or non cooperative. The SCF Moderators do have some means to pressure the trader to resolve the issue such as issuing a Must Send First tag, a No Buying/ No Selling / No Trading tag, point infractions, suspension



sions, and even a ban of the users account. In rare cases the dispute filer may be directed to contact civil authorities and file criminal charges of internet and mail fraud against the other party.

In summary, open communication, follow through, and adherence to SCF Trading Rules, will avoid disputes from being necessary. If you are entered into a dispute, do not be discouraged, but you need to participate and communicate as requested by the moderator. Feedback on SCF is a leading indicator your credibility and reputation in this online trading community.

Trading on SCF should be a source of enjoyment for members. Online trading has rekindled the love of the hobby for many lifelong enthusiasts. Many new traders discover the hobby through online interaction. SCF has become a premier online resource for collectors throughout the world. The impartial moderation of trade conflict resolution is but one of many benefits to having membership on SCF.

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





A New Dawn for Hockey Collectors

By Richard McAdam aka RGM81



When Upper Deck released 2009-10 The Cup on October 1st, it not only brought closure to the 09-10 collecting season but also marked the end of an era. For the previous five years, Upper Deck held an exclusive license to manufacture and distribute NHL hockey cards. During this period, collectors were introduced to wildly successful products such as The Cup and the one-off Montreal Canadiens Centennial, bringing in a new wave of collectors, myself included after a 13-year hobby vacation. Every one of the rookie cards of superstars such as Sidney Crosby, Alexander Ovechkin, Jonathan Toews,

Evgeni Malkin, Steven Stamkos, and John Tavares feature the distinctive UD logo. It wasn't all sunshine and 1-of-1s, however. Collectors also had to endure years-long waiting periods for redemptions, frustrating customer service experiences, product redundancy and predictability, and numerous product delays. It was a period oddly reminiscent of the life of a government: initial enthusiasm, strong popularity, a plateau, a couple scandals, resting on laurels, lack of innovation, hostility, and calls for a massive change in scenery. By the end of the Exclusive Era, collectors were screaming for change.

Let me state plainly, as I have on many occasions in the past: I am a not pro- or anti- any manufacturer collector. I am a pro-hobby collector. If one company does something very right with a product or service, I will give them due praise. If said company also makes a painful gaffe, I will give them due criticism. My own personal experiences with Upper Deck during the Exclusive Era have been largely positive: only one redemption had to be replaced (unfortunately it was for my #2 priority player), any inquiries made on the phone or e-mail were answered fairly promptly and with a satisfactory answer, and the products that I liked, I liked a lot. The cards and products that did not interest me went largely ignored, or I may have left a small comment in the SCF Hockey Card Talk forum and moved on to the next project or set or discussion.

I have, however, seen the multitude of letdowns, disappointments, errors and grievances that my fellow hobbyists have had in their experiences. I have felt their anger when they had to request a replacement for a PC item they'd waited two years for and received a card or bunch of cards that simply did not measure. I have felt their frustrations when a product has been live for over a week and there is still no official checklist posted on the very poorly maintained Upper Deck website. It is very easy to find critiques and criticisms of Upper Deck's performance in the past two years, which seemed to really intensify in 2010. The sheer numbers of people who stopped collecting UD products speaks volumes about their sensibilities to being treated fairly as customers. When well-known supporters (financial, verbal, and otherwise) of UD products simply throw up their hands and state that they are taking their hobby dollars elsewhere, it becomes clear that a change is needed.

This past spring there was a lot of discussion about what would happen with hockey card licensing. Who would be granted permission? Would the exclusivity be extended? Would we see a return to the days of multiple manufacturers? How many products would each be allowed to release? Would In The



Game get a license? Would a new company arrive on the scene to shake things up? What direction was our beloved hobby going to take?



On March 24th, we got our answer.

“Having considered the input from all stakeholders, we have concluded that a semi-exclusive model would bring customer choice, revive legacy brands and add new and innovative products and marketing initiatives that appeal to all consumer segments,” said Dave McCarthy, Vice President of Integrated Marketing, NHL.[*]

With that announcement, Panini officially entered the hockey card market. The company had been in the hockey collectibles business for some time with its sticker sets, but this was a great leap forward for them. Panini has been involved with the other major sports for some time, producing cards in basketball, football, and baseball as well as entertainment-related releases. Some collectors were at first skeptical, noting Panini’s tendencies to create “parallel hell” for player collectors and that set designs lacked innovation. Others were enthusiastic about the announcement of Al Muir as the head of their hockey division; Muir himself has been a collector for nearly 40 years and has worked in the hobby for a long time.

In the weeks leading up to the 2010-11 season, there was a lot of buzz in the hobby community. The enthusiasm for change continued to build throughout the summer and into the change of seasons into autumn. As we got closer and closer to the first puck drop of the new campaign, Panini made a very bold decision to delay its initial release, Certified, from mid-September until mid-October. So doing would allow them to get the first rookie cards of players who debuted on opening night live into the product, scooping Upper Deck, which usually had the first releases in the staple Upper Deck Series One set with the hugely popular Young Guns. The freshman roster would include first overall draft choice Taylor Hall, his teammates Jordan Eberle and Magnus Paajarvi, and Tyler Seguin. Not only would Panini get these rookies live in the product, they would also provide autographed memorabilia cards featuring sticker autos and jerseys used at the annual Rookie Photo Shoot. All this was in addition to the stable of hard-signed rookie cards of players that made their debuts late in the 2009-10 season, a roster including P.K. Subban and Nazem Kadri.

The announcement was a huge hit with collectors that have become accustomed to waiting until after Christmas for autographed/memorabilia rookie cards. Panini’s move garnered tremendous positive feelings and people began to get on board with the new licensee. The question did linger of course until release day: how would the buzz translate into sales once the product was released?



The answer came on October 20th when the SCF Hockey Pack/Box Breaks forum began to light up like a Christmas tree. Members were breaking boxes upon boxes of Certified, and many were stating very positive reviews. The “hot boxes” provided extra value and happiness. The rookies went over huge. The autograph and memorabilia content garnered positive sentiments, particularly due to some unique materials being used. After looking at some of the breaks, I noticed that the Carey Price jersey cards had swatches in them that were not the traditional deep blue of a Montreal Canadiens jersey; they seemed more reminiscent of a Colorado Avalanche jersey but there was also something familiar about them. So I posted a thread in the Panini Discussion forum inquiring as to the memorabilia’s origin, wondering if this was an error or if perhaps they had used a non-traditional jersey for the memorabilia. Within a couple hours, Al Muir responded on the forum and confirmed that the Price swatches came from a 1909-10 Centennial throwback jersey, and he further added that

there would be future releases featuring other Centennial jerseys for other Canadiens players. It was also quickly noted that Panini had acquired a powder blue Pittsburgh Penguins Sidney Crosby jersey for inclusion into Certified. Secondary market sales have been very strong out of the gate and collectors are very quickly coming to decisions as to which parallel sets they want to pursue. It hasn’t been a flawless debut, as there have been a couple hiccups, but Panini has certainly gotten most of the big things right with its first hockey product release.

All of this has given Panini incredible momentum for their first foray into the hockey card market. The look and feel of the cards is notably different from Upper Deck products—that’s not a qualitative statement, and I’m not saying one is better than the other, just noting that they’re different—and the desire among collectors to go after the cards of the new guy on the scene is palpable. Will that momentum carry over into Score, Donruss, and the rest of the Panini release schedule? Time will tell.

No doubt Upper Deck is keenly aware of the buzz surrounding Panini at this time. They will certainly be jolted out of complacency and they will do all in their power to rise to the newcomer’s challenge. Upper Deck has already announced its full release schedule for the 2010-11 season, and while there are no new product lines they will be announcing new subsets and taking bold steps to pump up these products to new heights of interest and collectability. Chris Carlin has stated that there will be a number of interesting side releases throughout the year, among them a special Toronto Maple Leafs-themed set to coincide with the Toronto Fall Expo, and the third year of release for the popular National Hockey Card Day set. Upper Deck has long prided itself as being the leading manufacturer of sports cards, and they have shown their intentions to retain that title in the face of new competition.



For collectors, the new era in the hobby, which can really only best be defined for the time being as the “post-Exclusive era,” is a welcome injection of enthusiasm. Collectors have to learn all about Panini and their products and what they bring to the table, and they seem to be enjoying learning on the fly. They are intensely interested to see what Upper Deck will do to remain the best. They can still look to In The

Game to provide a viable and bang-for-your-buck alternative. For a long time now, collectors have wanted greater choice in their hockey card products. That has been delivered. Collectors now have three legitimate, credible, and interesting options to spend their hobby dollars, and it seems that no matter which way they turn they will be rewarded. A new day has arrived in the hobby, and it is one that promises to be filled with excitement for collectors.

[*] Press Release. “NHLPA & NHL GRANT TRADING CARD LICENSES TO UPPER DECK & PANINI” 24 March 2010.

