

Help Find a Cure for Diamond Blackfan Anemia

# Collector's Corner

june 2012

FEATURE

## FUNDRAISING TIME

THANK YOU ESPOSITO08!!!

WITH A WORD WITH  
SCOTT KOZLOWSKI & ESPOSITO08



SCF



[www.dbafoundation.org](http://www.dbafoundation.org)



ENTER HERE:

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**HELP A GOOD CAUSE AND WIN YOURSELF A WONDERFUL CARD!**





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## **Making a Difference** **By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888**

We've all heard the expression trading cards community, it's thrown around left, right and centre in the hobby and it was even used by card manufacturer who ran a contest to find out who the best online trading community was. Unfortunately, Sports Card Forum did not win but I still believe that it is the best community out there. If you need evidence you do not have to look any further than this month's feature story.

It all started when one of our members (Esposito08 – Thank you once again!) sent a private message to a hockey team moderator generously offering to donate a couple of cards to the site if we were willing to use them to raise funds for a good cause. That was on May 9th, fast forward to May 27th and we had the cards donated in hands and we were launching the fundraiser. Which cards were they? Well, have a gander at the beauties below!



What happened in between those dates? Well, a thread was created in the hockey team forum to discuss the idea and its feasibility. In that thread, the means to raise funds were discussed, the way to run the contest and of course, which charity to donate the proceeds too. Many ideas were thrown around but the one that stood out was to donate to the Diamond Blackfan Anemia foundation. Why? Well quite simply, we felt it was right to give the proceeds to a charity we knew would have an impact on one of our members. We didn't have to look too far for such an idea since one of our former hockey staffers, Scott Kozlowski, has a little girl who suffers from Diamond Blackfan Anemia. There is a saying amongst the SCF staff; you never truly leave the hockey team. Whether you step down or move on to another role on the site, you remain part of the team. That certainly applied to Scott who still takes part in the staff fantasy hockey league every season.



So when we were given the opportunity to raise funds by one of our members, I suppose it's only normal that we thought about Scott's little girl.

Personally, what I prefer in the hobby is not the cards themselves, not the act of collecting but rather the people I've met and the friends I've made. Back in 2009, I was lucky enough to meet some of those friends at the National Sports Collector Convention in Cleveland. Scott Kozlowski was amongst those friends along with his daughter Olivia so I'm insanely pleased that the hockey team decided to donate the funds to the Diamond Blackfan Anemia.

Even though I do not collect cards anymore, I cannot bring myself to walk away from the site, its members and its friendly atmosphere. If I was to leave, it would leave a great big hole in my free time but I just know I would miss it too much. To those who have already taken part in the fundraiser and to those who will, I would like to say thank you and for those of you who've not heard about the fundraiser yet well, keep reading, the next few pages will tell you all about it.







**A Word with Esposito08**  
**By Karine Hains aka Pheeb888**

Once in a while, a special member comes around and leaves the whole staff in awe at their generosity, willingness to help others and just their pure devotion to the site. We've quite a few examples of this over the years, be it members sending freebies to others, taking part in secret Santa events and giving amazing gifts or even answering everyone's questions about everything on the site. However, I will admit that I have never been as impressed as I am now by Esposito08's gesture. In case you've not seen the thread about this, I will just refer you to the editorial on page 4 or to the contest thread here: <http://www.sportscardforum.com/showthread.php?p=11589749#post11589749>. Without further delays, here is a quick interview with the man who made the first SCF Hockey fundraiser possible, Esposito08.

**Have you always been a hockey fan? Which team do you collect?**

Yes I've always been a fan. I do not collect by team, although I am an Ottawa senators fan.

**How long have you been collecting? What do you most enjoy about the hobby?**

I collected MVP when I was about 8, got back into collecting in high school. My favorite part of the hobby is looking through checklists before a product is released, then hunting down whatever it is I planned on going after...

**What do you mainly collect? Looking at your collection, I see a lot of high end items, do you only stick to high end stuff?**

Yes my personal collection is all high end. I do build many subsets but I tend to sell them to a private buyer once they're done. I'm more of a fan of the hunt. I collect cut autos, triple and quad hard signed Hall of famers autos, and select In the Game vintage memorabilia pieces that catch my eye.

**How long have you been a member on SCF and what brought you there?**

For about 2 years now. I was looking for a community of collectors who share the same passion for collecting as me. I was told about the site by a friend.

**What gave you the idea of making this donation to SCF to raise funds for a charity?**

I've been very fortunate with my collecting, with the general kindness of the members on the site, they have helped me finish sets and helped me locate cards that I wanted and needed. If it wasn't for these people, I wouldn't have the collection I have today. So I figured a charitable donation would be a nice way to thank the entire site for all they help they have provided me.

**Have you heard about the Diamond Blackfan Anemia Foundation?**

Yes, It's a great charity that does great work. I'm very happy to be able to help with the cause, even if it's only with a couple of cards.



**DIAMOND BLACKFAN ANEMIA  
FOUNDATION, INC.**

**I know you are one of Chris Bossy's customers, how did you meet him or hear about his store? (Chris Bossy is one of SCF's members, going by the username bossy'scards and also has a card shop in Montreal, Québec)**

I used to pass by it all the time, being in a local mall close by. We have been dealing together for close to 5 years now. He is a good guy to do business with.

**What is your favorite product and why?**

ITG's Ultimates. Every year I save up and buy a case or 2, it's my personal favorite to buy and collect. I love building the subsets in the product, always a challenge when they include cards numbered out of 9 and out of 4.

**What do you think could stand to be improved in the hobby?**

Less product production, they make a lot of "useless" products that saturate the market, lowering values on almost everything. Also, I'd like to see ITG get a license so they can start producing monster products that would include pictures of the players that they cannot use right now. Wouldn't it be great to see Orr or Gretzky on an Emblem attic numbered out of 4?





## A Word with Scott Kozlowski By Karine Hains aka Pheebes888

Now that we've introduced you to the man who made our fantastic raffle possible, we thought we'd introduce you to the member who has a particular interest in the cause for which we are raising funds. As I've mentioned on page 4, I've had the chance to meet Scott, his wife and his daughter at the National Sports Collector Convention in 2009 and I am honored to count them amongst my friends. Here is a chance for you all to know a little bit more about him and about Diamond Blackfan Anemia.

### **Let's start with a bit of background info, how long have you been collecting?**

I restarted collecting February, 2007 when my wife and I got a call about adopting a child. One of my first reactions was to go out and buy baseball cards. It was supposed to be a one time thing, go buy cards, build a set to represent the birth year and be done with it.  
Its 5 years later and I'm still around!

### **What do you mainly collect?**

I primarily collect Hockey at this point. I do dabble in Football and Baseball on occasion.

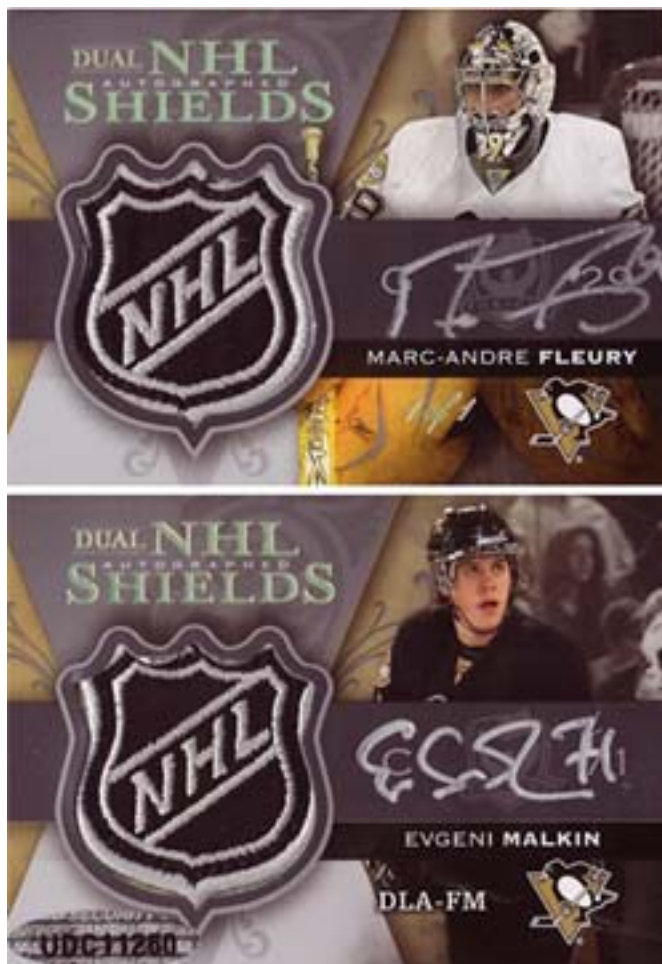
### **When did you first join SCF? How long were you a moderator for?**

I first joined SCF in April, 2007. I have had 2 stints as a mod, the first one was in 2009, stepping down early in 2010 and then from January to April of 2011.

### **What do you most enjoy about the hobby? What's your favorite hobby related memory?**

The thing that I enjoy the most about the hobby is not the cards, rather the relationships and the friends that I have made over the years.

I'm not sure if I have a favorite hobby related memory, but I do have a story that made my wife cringe. Becky needed some time to finish a project, so I decided to take Olivia (who was 7 months old at the time) over to Dave and Adam's Card World Flagship Store in Tonawanda, NY. I was going to buy something to pass the time, but I was debating on what to buy. One of the guys thought he was smart and kept pointing to







a specific tin of 2007-08 The Cup. Kept saying that he was going to buy it, blah, blah, blah... whatever. I had kept telling Becky that I was going to crack at least 1 tin, I just did not know when. Anyhow, to make a long story relatively short, I bought the tin. Opened it up and pulled a decent card. But now the question was going to be, how was I going to tell her?!?

So, I got home and told her that I bought a tin. She flipped out on me for spending nearly \$400 on a pack of cards, and said you better have gotten something good to help pay for that tin. Well, I did. That card is owned by tknullin (in a collection that this card belongs with).

Wife was eventually OK with this purchase!

**As some of our members know, your daughter Olivia has Diamond Blackfan Anemia. Can you tell us what DBA actually is?**

In a nutshell, her bone-marrow does not product any Red Blood cells. The only way she gets Red Blood cells is by chronic Blood Transfusions, generally every 3-4 weeks.

**When was Olivia diagnosed with this blood disorder?**

Olivia had her first transfusion at 3 weeks of age and this was the initial diagnosis she received from her Hematologist. We knew when we were adopting her that anemia ran in the family bloodlines, but did not understand how severe it was.

**What kind of treatment does Liv receive for it? Will she need a stem cell transplant?**

Olivia has been on Blood Transfusions since she was 3 weeks old. We did try steroid therapy for about 6 months, but it had no impact on her condition and the side-effects were much too risky to continue down this path.

We also need to make sure that Olivia is chelating on a daily basis. Any person that is on chronic blood transfusions will have excess Iron in the blood stream, thus causing Iron overload. The iron has to go somewhere in the body as the Iron cannot be removed naturally. Without chelating, that somewhere would be her vital organs (Liver, Kidneys and Heart). The medication she takes helps to trap the excess Iron in blood, binds it up and is able to get it out of her system.

The potential exists for a Bone Marrow Transplant in the future, but not at this time.

**What is the DBA foundation? What does it do?**

The DBA Foundation is an organization that is effectively run by families that have loved ones with DBA. The foundation mission is "to collectively and actively generate funds for the charitable and scientific purpose of furthering, by clinical study, laboratory research, publication and teaching, the knowledge of the disorder known as Diamond Blackfan Anemia (DBA). Our intentions are to share this knowledge, to inform, to lend support, and to communicate with all families of DBA patients."



The DBAF supports itself solely through donations and our families' fundraisers.

**You recently held an event called “Fun day for DBA” how did it go? Were you happy with the fundraising results?**

It was a great day for the Fun Day in Buffalo, NY. Sunny, 80+ degrees and awesome to see a bunch of kids (and Ravens\_creed) running around, jumping in bounce houses and just being kids! We ended up raising \$3295/USD with all the funds heading to continue much needed research for not only my daughter, but everyone that is affected by DBA.

**How do you feel about the SCF team electing to use Esposito08's most generous cards donation to raise funds for the DBA foundation? Were you surprised to hear about the initiative? Anything you'd like to say to Esposito08?**

In a word, unbelievable! Surprised is not even the right word for it!

From the bottom of my families' heart, and other DBA families, we all say thank you! Any help the foundation receives goes directly to research and the only way we can find a cure is by donations and selfless gestures such as this!





## June 2012

At the time of publishing, these dates were accurate but as you know, they do change a lot...

### Hockey

06/29/12 ITG Broad Street Boys Hockey  
06/27/12 Panini Rookie Anthology Hockey  
06/13/12 Panini Titanium Hockey

### Baseball

06/2012 Topps Tier One Baseball  
06/06/12 Topps Series 2 Baseball  
06/13/12 Topps Pro Debut Baseball

### Football

06/20/12 Panini Prestige Football  
06/19/12 Upper Deck SPX Football

### Basketball

06/13/12 Panini Limited Basketball







## Around the Rink by RGM81 aka Richard McAdam

All right, everybody who predicted at the start of the playoffs that the Stanley Cup Finals would be contested by the Los Angeles Kings and the New Jersey Devils, raise your hand! That's what I thought. These two teams have been on an incredible run, both of them getting red-hot at just the right time of the year. It should make for a very compelling Finals complete with several storylines and points of interest.

The Kings have only lost two games through the first three rounds – when you consider that they were playing the #1 seed Vancouver Canucks in the first round, many people had only predicted them to win two games in these playoffs. Truly remarkable play from the team's young core of Jonathan Quick, Drew Doughty,



Anze Kopitar, and captain Dustin Brown has propelled this squad all the way to the Finals, and made the Kings the hottest ticket in a very large sports town. The offensive supporting cast of Dustin Penner, Jeff Carter, and Mike Richards has been clutch in tight situations as well, and GM Dean Lombardi must be absolutely thrilled at how quickly his key acquisitions have generated results for his team. The Kings, who knocked off the top three seeds in the West as the #8 seed, may be the favourites going in to the final round.

Meanwhile, their opponents have been no less remarkable. The Devils were able to knock off the top-seeded Rangers—in the process squashing an over-the-top media story hellbent on re-creating the circumstances of the Messier guarantee from 1994—in six games and secure their birth in the Finals. Martin Brodeur, at age 40, looks as good as he ever has. Ilya Kovalchuk has been the top offensive threat in the playoffs, entering  
JUNE 2012



the Finals as the top point-getter and showing why the Devils gave him that monster contract. This is not the same Devils of the mid-1990s – they are aggressive and forecheck their opponents into the ground, pressing the advantage and looking to dominate the play. But the Brodeur story will lead for New Jersey – if this is to be his final season, could there be a fourth championship looming for him to ride out in a blaze of glory?

While the Stanley Cup playoffs have dominated discussions everywhere, the past month has also been very busy for the hobby. The Spring Expo was a huge success, as collectors from all over the world descended upon Toronto to trade, buy, and sell, as well as interact with their fellow hobbyists. All reports from the boards suggest that it was a great time had by all, and many SCF members came away from the big show with fantastic new additions to their collections. With the card companies now releasing new products at a regular clip, there is no shortage of activity in the Pack/Box Break forum, and June promises to be an exciting time in the hobby as Panini will be reviving Titanium, featuring rookies cards #’d to the player’s jersey number! They will also be releasing Rookie Anthology, an update set that will heavily emphasize new rookie cards for late-debating freshmen. And to cap the month, In The Game will be releasing Broad Street Boys, a comprehensive cardboard history of the Philadelphia Flyers. Look for all the usual memorabilia and autograph hits from ITG! Unfortunately, there will be no Upper Deck releases in June, as SP Authentic and Ultimate Collection have been pushed back to July.

That’s all for this month! Enjoy the Stanley Cup Finals and we will see you around the boards!





## The New, Caution-Free Nascar? By Stephen Taylor aka race\_crazy



We are twelve races into the Sprint Cup season and for most diehard fans the overriding question is what has indeed happened to our crashes and controversy? Things deemed taboo by racing “purists” are often shown to fans in order to draw them in. Nascar fans have come to expect and love their fighting and carnage. It is no different than a big hit in football or fighting in hockey or a bench-clearing brawl in baseball or basketball. Controversy, mayhem, and violence will lead Sportscenter always. Our society eats this stuff up even though

it might be considered distasteful. It is as simple as this-when there is a car accident everyone on the freeway slows down to have a look. The curiosity of humans always wins. Part of Nascar’s and all of auto racing’s draw has been and always will be the thrill of seeing drivers walk away from big crashes. Spectacular safety innovations in recent years have limited serious injury or death but that aspect is still there (Dan Wheldon last year being the prime example). In Nascar’s case fans have moved on from Dale Earnhardt’s passing (the last death in Nascar) and have been accustomed to being treated to wrecks as part of the show. Along with the fighting which sometimes takes place after these events, this material provides great footage and even better water cooler talk among fans and media. This year however outside of Daytona and Talladega, carnage and mayhem has been limited. Bristol Motor Speedway, a track famed for the bump and run and notorious carnage was barely half full this spring, prompting owner Bruton Smith to re-vamp the track for the fall race. The “boys have at it” moniker has seemed to have worn off. Drivers are driving and racing just as hard as ever, but a few variables this year have changed how these races work and how aggressive the drivers are. These are the 5 main reasons:

### **1. The talent level of the drivers**

Like it or not racecar drivers are supposed to be good enough not to crash. In today’s Sprint Cup Series the talent pool is as deep as it has ever been. Almost every driver in the field has won or come close to winning a top tier event and everyone is remarkably talented. There is no better example of the talent level of the drivers than this spring at Darlington, where almost 200 laps were run without a caution flag. At a track as tough as that it is simply a remarkable achievement.





## 2.The car

The teams have perfected the car of tomorrow to a T. Engineers have conquered the aerodynamic package to get the most speed out of the cars. The problem with this (as evidenced by Formula 1) is that the cars cannot run close together. Passing is extremely difficult and track position is at a premium. At most tracks, particularly those over 1 mile in length, this leads to a lot of single file racing.

## 3. The Points Format

Drivers will no doubt push hard for a win or to stay in the top 35, but if they are not in contention for the win they often will play it safe. Three quarters of the event is a test of patience and the drivers and teams have adapted to this form.

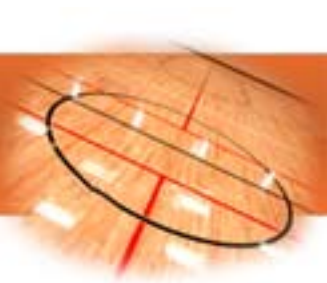
## 4.The length of the races

Perhaps the races in today's world are too long. Nascar is taking steps to fix some of these (Pocono thank goodness) but often drivers are just riding around running laps and diagnosing their car for when the race really matters, which kind of stinks for the race fan.

## 5. The Tires

Goodyear, Nascar's sole tire manufacturer, have perfected the tire needed to withstand the brake heat and pressure put on them by the Sprint Cup cars and the higher speeds in which they are running. However the tire compound has to be ridiculously hard to withstand these elements. A softer tire provides more grip and would lead to better racing, but it would also lead to countless tire blow-outs and more danger for the drivers. It is a double-edged sword of sorts.

For these reasons the 2012 Nascar season has been labeled by some as "boring." I suppose if one turns on the Nascar race and expects countless crashes and mad drivers as the promos often show to get them to watch, they would indeed be disappointed. However the competition level in the sport is still very high and every race indeed has a story. If Nascar fans can agree on anything it is that we are excellent at complaining. No matter what happens we will complain about something, then continue to watch. I say if you want countless wrecks go to a demo derby and if you want to see fighting go see fighting! Nascar is ultimately auto racing, yet it often is viewed as a soap opera on wheels. Those elements will come. Be patient. 2013 is going to give us a whole new car from all 4 manufacturers which will throw all of this knowledge and racing that we know with the current car out the window. Also Nascar and their R&D center are hard at work to improve the quality of the racing, and perhaps secretly trying to create more drama. The sanctioning body likes attention too. So for the race fans complaining, just keep your pants on, cheer for your driver, and watch for the spectacle. The drama you are looking for will come. Patience...



## Courtside

**By Jay Weager aka Jay 520 and John Broman aka XxViSiOnxX**

### **Contest Winners**

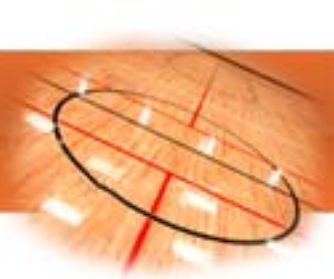
In May Theme Weeks returned with members showing of their cards to earn cc. Theme Week #1 was Random Auto in which realeodeal won with a 07-08 Chronology Bill Sharman auto/99. Theme Weeks #2 saw realeodeal win 2 in a row with a 08-09 UD Premier Rookies Rose/Beasley dual patch/25 for Dual patches. Theme Weeks #3 was All-Star base or inserts and a new winner in SiuMai with a 95-96 SP All-Star insert of Michael Jordan. A letterman auto was the theme for week #4 and MrAnonymous would win with a 08-09 UD Black HOF Letters Larry Bird auto ¼. Top 4 NBA GTS leaders for the month are andrewhoya in 1st with 14 wins, 2nd is pwaldo with 10 wins, 3rd is TurdFerGUson with 9 wins and lastly is bouncer and udeckcoll in fourth tied with 7 wins through 5/27. On the VIP side gladdyontherise is in first place with 23 wins, 2nd is andrewhoya with 20 wins, 3rd is bouncer with 16 wins and 4th is pwaldo and NY Sports Teams tied with 13 wins. The playoff have started for the NBA Top Performers contest with 2 eliminations so far with mrjobe85 in round 1 and toddsr in round 2. The top 6 remaining is anththeman with 52 points, Thrillseeker with 48 points, tk10775 with 47 points, AiThor with 36 points, vixsportscards with 31 points, and rocketfan86 with 25 points. The final 3 participants for the 2012 Predict the NBA Playoffs are Thrillseeker, tk10775 and leiber88.

### **Hobby News**

Could it be SCF? Rumor has it that there is going to be a 2011-12 release of Upper Deck Exquisite Basketball!!! As it's only still a pre-release type of rumor no official date has been released or been confirmed but stay tuned as we are in hot pursuit in trying to find out more about this. In other release news, Past and Present seems to be a hit with the hobby world with its collectability of autos and 2011 draft pick auto redemptions. Collectors look for 11-12 Panini Limited to hit the shelves on June 13th at \$100 a box for 6 cards. You will find 2 autos, 1 memorabilia per box and 3 base or inserts. Coming in July will be 11-12 Gold Standard with a suggested retail price of \$200 a box containing 10 cards (2 autos, 2 GU and either a 2011 or 2012 draft pick auto redemption). Also Stay tuned to the Basketball Box Breaks section as SCF Staff are running group breaks!! So it's rocking and rolling and everyone is invited.

### **Pack and Box Breaks**

In May the major box to break was 2011-12 Past & Present. To start off was Blue33gold opening just 1 pack got an 2011 draft pick auto redemption. bookyyyyyy bought 6 packs pulling a gamers GU of Luke Walton, Elusive Ink of Hubert Davis and Modern Marks auto redemption for Kevin Durant. 41 fan got a box to pull a 2012 draft pick #21, Elusive Ink – John Paxon, Reggie Theus, Kevin Willis, Gamers GU – Quincy Pondexter with several inserts that included Kobe, LeBron, Durant and Chris Paul. Jadastyles opened a box and 5 packs pulling 2 2011 draft pick auto redemptions, Elusive Ink – Tim Hardaway



, Willie Burton, Bob Elliot, Gamers GU Ray Allen. Hrad\_23 got a 2011 draft pick auto redemption, Elusive Ink Steve Kerr, Brad Davis, B.J. Armstrong base auto, Gamers GU – Zach Randolph, LeBron James from 4 packs and a box. Jprk31 got a box pulling Elusive Ink – Tom Gugliotta, Bob Sura, Gamers GU – Ron Harper and a 2011 draft pick auto redemption. jb1981 got Elusive Ink – Rex Chapman redemption., Mario Ellie, Gamers GU – Lazar Hayward and a Kevin Love base auto out of a box. bdooddy42 got 2 boxes pulling Elusive Ink – Major Jones, Bo Outlaw, Al Horford base auto, Breakout auto of Jrue Holiday, Gamers GU of Jrue Holiday, Darren collision and 2011 draft pick auto redemption with 2012 draft pick #18. Blake23Griffin got 2 as well pulling these Elusive Ink – John Paxon, John Salley, Anthony Avent, Ron Brewer, Breakout auto – DeJuan Blair, Gamers GU of Kevin Love and 2011 draft pick auto redemption. dauber01 got 2 and pulled Elusive Ink – Kerry Kittles, Sleepy Floyd, Tom Gugliotta, Vin Baker, Bob Sura, Brian Grant, Gamers GU of Eric Bledsoe and 3 2011 draft pick auto redemptions. rockchalk went for 2 pulling Elusive Ink – Scott Pollard, B.J. Armstrong, Hersey Hawkins, Bo Outlaw, Gamers GU of Kevin Garnett, Damon James and 2 2011 draft pick auto redemptions. theguru bought 4 boxes pulling Elusive Ink – Brent Barry, John Salley, John Paxon, Bob Love, Stacey Augmon, Gheorhge Muresan, Luc Longley, Ron Brewer, Brad Davis, Charles Oakley, Gamers GU – Jrue Holiday, Danny Granger, Rodriques Beabois, Mo Williams, 2 2011 draft pick auto redemptions and a complete 2012 draft pick set!! cavaliersfan30 tried 2 boxes and then got 2 more to pull Elusive Ink – Steve Kerr, Kevin Willis, Mugsy BoGues, Bill Wennington, Sleepy Floyd, Bo Outlaw, Marv Roberts, Vinny Del Negro, Scott Pollard, Gamers GU – Paul George, Raja Bell, Ben Wallace, Russell Westbrook, 3 2011 draft pick auto redemptions and a 2012 draft pick #18.

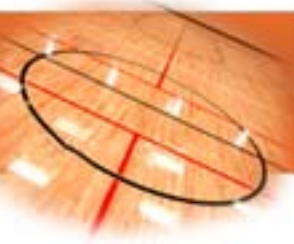
## NBA News



### West First Round

In the western first round series between the Spurs and the Jazz, San Antonio made short work of the Jazz. The Spurs won game 1 106-91 on Tony Parker's 28 points and a 31 point 3rd quarter. The game 1 win snapped a 6 consecutive game 1 losing streak for the Spurs. Game 2 was no different as the Spurs blew out the Jazz 114-83. All 5 starters would score in double figures for the Spurs led by Parkers 18. Jazz could only muster 34% shooting for the game compared to 53% for the Spurs. Game 3 saw Parker score 16 of his 27 points in the 4th while Danny Green and Stephen Jackson hit 3's down the stretch to help the spurs pull away for the win to go up 3-0 on the Jazz. Utah would cut a 21 point lead down to 4 with 49.9 seconds to go in the 4th in game 4. That would be as close as they got only to lose 87-81. Ginobli had his best game with 17 points as the Spurs win the series 4-0.

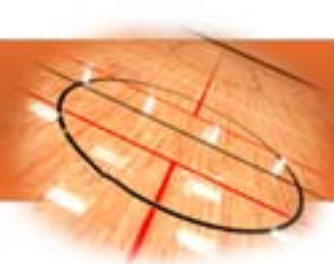




The Thunder took on the defending champs Dallas Mavericks for their first round matchup. Dallas up 94-87 with 2:20 to go in the 4th quarter of game 1 the Thunder would score the next 7 points to get even at 1:10 to play. In the final seconds Durant would hit a jumper to give OKC a 99-98 lead to steal a win from the Mavs. Game 2 would come down to the final minutes as well with James Harden making 4 clutch free throws to see OKC go up 2-0 on Dallas. Game 3 in Dallas saw a 16-5 surge by OKC in the 3rd. And with a 16 point lead the Mavs could not cut into it for the win 95-79. The Thunder would go up 3-0 on 31 points from Durant forcing an elimination game 4. Harden would score 15 of his 29 points in the 4th as the Thunder overcame a 13 point deficit to win 103-97 to take the series 4-0 and move on to face the Lakers.

The Lakers faced the Nuggets in the first round that went 7 games. Game 1 saw LA hold a 10 point lead late in the second half that Denver could not overcome winning 103-88. Bynum had a triple double with 10 points, 13 rebounds and 10 blocks (1st since Magic Johnson for the Lakers). Kobe Bryant had 38 points in game 2 as the Lakers took a 4 point lead with 3:19 to play and go on to win 104-100. Bynum added 27 tying his playoff career high to go 2 up. Game 3 would go the Nuggets way as Ty Lawson was hot all game scoring 25 points as Denver wins 99-84. Rookie Kenneth Faried and JaVale McGee helped take care of the glass each pulling down 16 rebounds for Denver. Ramon Sessions and Steve Blake hit late 3's to put the Lakers up 3-1 over the Nuggets in game 4. The Nuggets jumped out to an early lead on LA and were able to hold on in a 102-99 win. Kobe had 43 but came up short down the final stretch. Up by 9 at half time Denver scored the first 9 in the 3rd to go up 18 as LA would get no closer. Kobe with a stomach bug scored 31 points but didn't get any help from his teammates as Denver would tie the series at 3-3 in a 113-96 win. Tied at 78 all LA would go on a run to put away the Nuggets for good. Bynum and Gasol had an advantage on the glass pulling down 17 and 18 rebounds while Steve Blake hit 5-6 3's for 19 points. Metta World Peace had 15 points in his return from suspension as the Lakers win the series 4-3 moving on to face the Thunder.

The 4-5 match-up in the west was Memphis vs. L. A. Clippers that went 7 games as well. Game 1 saw a monumental comeback by the Clippers. Down 95-71 with 9:13 to go in the 4th the Clippers went on a 28-3 run to pull off the comeback win. Nick Young hit 3 straight 3's in a minutes stretch to help LA tie the biggest NBA playoff 4th quarter comeback and set their team franchise record. Game 2 with the Grizzlies up 83-79 and 8:06 to play 4th did not let the Clippers get any closer to win 105-98. O.J. Mayo scored 10 of his 20 in the 4th while Clippers committed 21 to's leading to 25 points for Memphis. In game 3 Rudy Gay hit 2 3's late but missed the third at the buzzer as the Clippers won 87-86 to go up 2-1 over Memphis. Blake Griffin put up 30 points as LA and Memphis go into OT. Chris Paul would go 4-5 for 8 of the teams 14 points in overtime to give the Clippers a win and 3-1 lead. Memphis up by 24 early would need a 7-1 run in the last 1:44 to finish the game and win 92-80. Marc Gasol finally had a break out game with 23 points to push a game 6. In game 6 with 5 minutes remaining the Grizzlies get a 3 by Mike Conley and a tip in by Randolph to secure a lead that gave them a win of 90-88 to force a game 7 at home. Down 75-69 with 2:26 in the 4th Memphis failed to score on its final 3 possessions



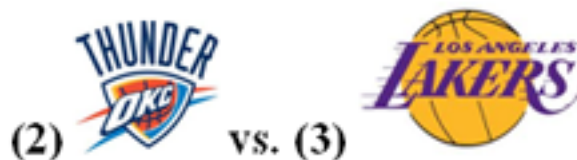
allowing the Clippers to take game 82-72 and the series 4-3. The Clippers move on to face the Spurs.

### Round 2



The second round got underway with the Spurs and Clippers going head to head. Going into game 1 Chris Paul and Blake Griffin were not 100% because of minor injuries suffered in the previous series. The Spurs put together a 13-4 run in the 3rd to build a 19 point advantage that LA just could not rebound from to win 108-92. Game 2 finished like game 1 as San Antonio took out the Clippers in the third with a 13-2 surge and a 16 point lead to win 105-88. The point guard play by Paul and Bledsoe was at fault committing 13 turnovers combined. At home in game 3 the Clippers jump out to a 24 point lead in the second quarter but the Spurs cut it to 10 at halftime. After trading baskets San Antonio burn LA with a 24-0 run and take a 69-57 lead that they would not relinquish to win 96-86. The only bright spot for LA was Blake Griffin who had 28 and 16. Down 0-3 to the Spurs, Chris Paul and the Clippers were up 100-99 late in the 4th but failed to get the win making mistakes. First a turnover by Paul and a missed shot by him sealed their fate as the Spurs won the game and the series 4-0.

### Round 2



The other matchup in the second round would be the Thunder taking on the Lakers. Game 1 was a blowout from the beginning as the Thunder had a 15 point lead at halftime. Then in the 3rd OKC went on a 24-6 run that LA had no answer for. Durant had 25 and Westbrook with 27 both sat in the 4th as the Thunder rolled to a 29 point win 119-90. Lakers seemed to have game 2 in hand up 7 with 2 minutes to play but the Thunder had other plans. OKC would go on a 9-0 run punctuated by a Durant basket with 5 seconds left. LA had 1 last chance but a play called for Kobe went to Steve Blake in the corner that missed the 3. The Thunder win 77-75 and go up 2-0. In game 3 LA made 41-42 free throws to get a win 99-96. They were 12-12 in the final 3 minutes and Kobe hit 18-18 from the line for a new Lakers record to finish with 36 points. Game 4 with the Lakers up 11 and 7:45 remaining squandered the game. OKC would outscore them by 14 to win 103-100 after a big 3 by Durant with 13.7 seconds giving them a 5 point lead. Kobe had 38 for the Lakers but could not prevent the Thunder from going up 3-1. Game 5 in OKC tied at 70 in the 3rd would see the Thunder pull away on a 23-7 run and win 106-90. Thunder takes the series 4-1 and will face the Spurs in the West Finals.



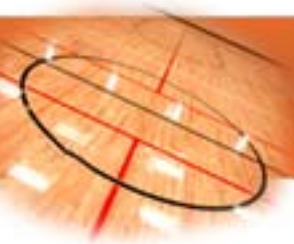
## East First Round

The first round series between the Bulls and Sixers did not start well for Chicago. The Bulls led by 14 in the 3rd and would go on to win 103-91. But the awful news came with 1:10 in the 4th up 11 when Derrick Rose injured his left knee causing him to miss the rest of the playoffs for Chicago. Game 2 saw Philly trailing at halftime by 8 when they would go on a 21-6 run and never look back. Shooting 59% Philly would roll 109-92 handing the Bulls their worst loss of the season. Down 67-53 to the Bulls in game 3 with 10:13 to go in the 4th the Sixers put together a 26-7 run to rally to win 79-74. Joakim Noah would sprain his left ankle in the 3rd but manage to return in the 4th but not be effective. Philadelphia up 2-1 going into game 4 needed a couple of 3's by Jrue Holiday to give them a 7 point lead in the 4th to hold on to win 89-82. With the win the Sixers took a 3-1 lead over the Bulls with out Rose and Noah. Game 5 was a sloppy defensive game that the Bulls would hold a 35-26 halftime edge that Philly couldn't overcome to win 77-69. Taj Gibson injured his right foot in the 3rd but would return in the fourth. In game 6 with Philadelphia down 78-75 with 25.8 seconds, Thaddeus Young made a tough shot to make it 78-77. Omar Asik would be fouled but miss both free-throw attempts which led to a Igoudala rebound and a missed layup on the other end but was fouled. He would hit both from the line giving Philly a 79-78 lead and go on to win by that score. Sixers win the series 4-2 over the Bulls. Phillies next opponent would be the Boston Celtics.

The Heat would face the Knicks in a first round series that would go just 5 games. Miami sent an early message with a 32-4 run over the 2nd and 3rd quarters to blow out the Knicks 100-67. The heat would hold NY to 35% shooting and force them into 27 turnovers. LeBron and Wade didn't even play in the fourth quarter. A 10 point lead at halftime would be enough to give Miami a win 104-94 in which Wade had 25, Bosh 21 and James 19 in game 2. In game 3 down 40-29 in the 2nd to the Knicks, Miami would start a 22-6 run in the 3rd to go up 56-46. A 29-14 advantage in the fourth would too much as they put away the Knicks 87-70 and go up 3-0. Trailing by 11 in the second half at one point New York would make a turn around. Carmelo Anthony would hit a 3 to give the Knicks an 87-84 lead with 54 seconds left. NY would prevail 89-87 to end a 13 game post season losing streak and stave off elimination. Holding a 11 point lead at the half Miami would win 106-94, wrap up the series over the Knicks 4-1 and move on to face the Pacers.

The 3-6 matchup in the east was between Indiana and Orlando. No Howard no problem right? Wrong! The Magic would finish with an 11-0 run in the 4th to beat Indiana 81-77 in game 1. Jameer Nelson and Jason Richardson would combine for 34 points and get 16 points and 13 boards from Glenn Davis. Indiana would score 14 in a row to take a 70-55 lead into the 3rd and not look back winning 93-78. Danny Granger, George Hill and David West each would score 18 points as the Pacers tie the series at 1-1. Game 3 Indiana would dominate the paint as Hibbert would score the first 6 points in the 3rd quarter and go up 12. The Pacers would roll 97-74 and take a 2-1 lead. Down 19 in the 4th Orlando would fight back to send the game to OT. In the OT George Hill would make 2 clutch free throws with 2.2 seconds to give the Pacers a win 101-99 to force an elimination game 5. Hoping to extend the series and up 73-71 in the 4th Orlando would see Collison end it. He would score 5 straight buckets en route





to a 20-7 run for the Pacers. A 3 by Anderson cut it to 8 when Indiana put them away with a 14-2 run to finish the game winning 105-87. Pacers win the series 4-1 and move on to play the Heat.

The last series of the first round was between Boston and Atlanta which went 6 games. The Hawks would hold a 31-18 first quarter lead and go on to win 83-74. With 41 seconds to go Rondo would get back to back techs one for talking back to the ref and the second for accidentally bumping the ref. That would lead to a suspension for game 2. Boston down 11 would go on a 12-1 run to get to a tie at 66 in the 4th. From that point on Paul Pierce would out score the Hawks almost by himself and lead Boston to an 87-80 win with 36 points. The Celtics would go scoreless in the final 4 minutes of regulation as Atlanta would send it to overtime. In the OT period Boston would score the first 6 points and go on to win 90-84 on Rondo's 20th career triple double. Celtics are now up 2-1 on the Hawks. Celtics took control of game 4 early and led by 37 at one point and eventually on by 22 101-79. Pierce had 24 and Rondo had 20 and 16 assists to lead Boston to a 3-1 edge. Atlanta starters all scored in double figures to force a game 6. It was close though as Pierce hit a 3 to cut the lead to 87-86 but Boston on their next possession were unable to get a shot off to secure the win. Boston took the lead 81-80 on a tough bucket by Garnett (28 and 14) in the final seconds. Al Horford managed to get fouled for a chance to take the lead missed both from the line as Pierce would secure the rebound and get fouled immediately. 2 free throws later Boston would win 83-80 and the series 4-2. Philadelphia will be their next opponent.

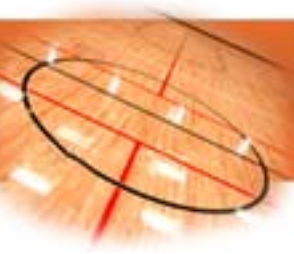
## Round 2



The Heat and Pacers met in the second round with things getting interesting quickly. Chris Bosh would crumble to the court after a dunk over Hibbert in the 2nd with an abdominal strain that would force him to miss the rest of the series. LeBron and Wade would team up and score 22 of the Heat's last 25 points in a 95-86 win. Game 2 Miami was held scoreless in the final 2:44 as James missed 2 free throws and Wade missed a 3 for the Pacers to win 78-75. James and Wade didn't get any help as they were the only 2 to score in double figures without Bosh. Indiana would go up 64-50 on a 19-3 run in the 3rd and



another run minutes later to make it 73-55 to blow out the Heat 94-75. Chalmers and James led the heat with 25 and 22 while Wade had just 5 points on 2-13 shooting. Up 2-1 over the Heat, Indiana had a 10 point lead in the 3rd in game 4. That lead wouldn't last long as James and Wade got hot. In a span of more than 13 minutes they would combine for 38 points to get the Heat a win 101-93 and tie the series at 2-2. In total James dropped 40 points, 18 grabbed rebounds and dished out 9 assists to have one of the best postseason performances in 40 years.



Game 5 turned into a rout by the Heat after Danny Granger went down for the Pacers in the first half. The Heat outscored Indiana 66-43 in the second half after a 9 point halftime lead. Battier had 13 points on 4-5 from 3 to help Miami blow out the Pacers 115-83 and put them back on top 3-2. Game 6 without Haslem and Pittman due to suspensions, Miami would take control in the 3rd on a 13-3 run. This would grow to a lead of 79-63 but Indiana cut into it at 83-78. With chances to make it a 1 possession game the Pacers could not do it and would lose 105-93. Wade would put up 41 and 10 to secure a berth in the East Finals against Boston.

## Round 2



Boston vs. Sixers was the other round 2 series in the east. Boston down 8 in the 4th with 9:17 to play would go on a 20-5 run. 9 points from Garnett in that stretch would lead to a Celtics win 92-91 in a close one. Rondo had his 8th career postseason triple double in 13 points, 12 rebounds and 17 assists. In a back and forth game 2 Boston grabbed the lead with 2 minutes left. With 40 seconds to play an Evan Turner layup by the Sixers would retake the lead. 2 failed possessions by Boston would seal the victory for Philly 82-81. Game 3 saw the Celtics lead by 11 at halftime and then 25 in the 3rd to blow out Philly 107-91. The win over the Sixers helped Boston retake home court advantage in the series. Garnett had 27 and 13 for the Celtics as they go up 2-1. Tied at 83 all late in the 4th after a Rondo bucket the Sixers would score the next 9 to win 92-83. In the 9-0 run Igoudala scored 8 of those points. 2-2 going into game 5 the Celtics put together a 10-0 surge in the third quarter to build a lead Philadelphia couldn't overcome. Boston won 101-85 as Brandon Bass had 15 of his 27 in the 3rd quarter to lead the Celtics. Facing elimination Philadelphia found themselves up 4 starting the final quarter. Philly would extend the lead to 11 on a runner by Louis Williams with 7:15 to go. The lead would hold as the Sixers win 82-75 making a game 7 be the deciding factor in who goes home. Game 7 went back and forth up until the final 4:16 when Paul Pierce fouled out with Boston up 3. Where would the points come from for Boston? The answer was Rondo who scored 11 of his 18. Outscoring Philly 11-7 by himself as the buzzer sounded Boston wins 85-75. 18 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for Rondo would be his 2nd triple double of the series and lead Boston to meet Miami in the East Finals.

So we've got in the West the Spurs vs. Thunder which should be a great contest. Will the young defeat the old or will the older and wiser Spurs crush the younger inexperienced Thunder? Either way this should be a great series to watch and a learning experience for both teams.

In the East we've got the Miami Heat vs. Boston Celtics. Will LeBron and Dwyane Wade be able to carry this team or lose another shot at a potential ring? Will the Boston Celtics be able to continue their run with some lingering injuries to Ray Allen, Kevin Garnett or will they be able to overcome this and move on to the Finals and potentially win it all? Lets stay tuned and find out.



## Around the Base Paths by RGM81 aka Richard McAdam

It's been a very interesting time on the Baseball boards here at SCF in recent weeks. We've had some personnel changes on the staff and had to say farewell to the previous team that was led by BBonds25. The team, which also included spuds1961 and stewart20rulz, gave many years of loyal and dedicated service to SCF and helped the Baseball section of the site become the second most popular sports area on the boards. The SCF Staff wishes them well with their future endeavours and reminds them that the door is always open to return somewhere down the line.

The personnel changes mean that I've had to take a crash course in the hobby aspect of the game in order to get current with where the market is at these days. As you all know, I'm primarily a hockey card collector and I've got maybe a dozen baseball cards in my collection. I've been a casual fan of the Toronto Blue Jays for many years, and I still lament the loss of the Montreal Expos, and I have enjoyed venturing more into the hobby in the past couple years. My first big PC item was snagging a Jose Bautista autograph for the low price of \$8 a few months back, which struck me as being an incredible deal for the reigning home run king. Since then I've added a few nice J.P. Arencibia cards to my small Blue Jays PC. I would like to get a Brett Lawrie autograph at some point but I am amazed at how expensive his early release cards are. I know that he's a very popular player with the Jays, but seeing his autos exceed Sidney Crosby cards was truly astonishing to me. And don't get me started on some of those incredibly low numbered Bowman Chrome autographs. It has been a very interesting educational period for me, and I look forward to learning more about the hobby side of America's pastime during the transition period for the Baseball Team.

As the 2012 MLB season moves into June, I hope that everybody is enjoying the contests that are taking place for this season. We've got an awesome Sandy Koufax autograph to give away, and the MLB Survivor and Guess The Score segments are now in full swing. Monitoring the daily contests has been interesting and it brings me a lot of enjoyment to see everybody participating in the games and having a lot of fun with it. One thing is for sure – these games reveal the old idiom to be true: predictions are hard, especially those made about the future! You just never know who is going to win on a night-to-night basis.

June is going to be a very busy month for baseball collectors, as Topps will be releasing (barring any product delays) a new product every week for the first three weeks of the month. Topps Series 2 hits on the 6th, Topps Pro Debut arrives on the 13th, and the most exciting hit-laden release of June will be Topps Tier One on the 20th. Boasting two autographs per three-card pack and some amazing 1/1 bat knob hits from a checklist that includes Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, and superstars from all eras of the game, Tier One looks to be a fantastic product that will deliver a lot of satisfaction. I look forward to seeing a number of breaks around the boards, and if all goes well, the SCF Team will attempt to orchestrate a case break for our members.

That's all for this month – see you around the boards!





## **Battle of the Super Prospects**

**By J.R. Lebert aka rrlebert**

For the past few years, boxing fans have clamored for the Fight of the Century, Floyd Mayweather vs. Manny Pacquiao. Despite what we are told to have been both parties' best efforts, we have yet to see it. Move over to the baseball diamond, however, and it seems we have our own battle royale. This one is the Battle of the Super Prospects, and it seems like we may get 15 years of it, rather than 15 rounds.



In one corner, the challenger, wearing a red jersey with grey trunks. He hails from The Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim by way of Vineland, New Jersey. Standing 6'1", and weighing in at 210 pounds. Miiiiiiiiiiiiike... Trout!



In the other corner, also wearing a red jersey with grey trunks. Representing the Washington Nationals by way of Las Vegas, Nevada. He comes in standing 6'3" tall, weighing 220 lbs. The former #1 overall draft pick, and the reigning hottest "can't miss" prospect in baseball, Bryyyyyyce... Harrrrrrper.

You can see it now, right? One player, Trout, much like Rocky Balboa, the underdog, coming out very business-like, and focused on the task at hand. Plays good defense, sets the table at the top of the order for guys like Pujols,

Morales, Trumbo, and Hunter, and does the little things to help the team win. The other, Harper, much like Apollo Creed, appropriately dressed in the colors of the American flag, representing D.C. itself. The flash to go with the substance. His job is a little different: puts butts in the seats. Make fans forget about Jayson Werth's albatross of a contract and ailing wrist. Be a star. Now.

These two fledgling superstars look to be the cornerstones of their respective franchises, separated by a few months at birth and about 3000 miles on the map. Both players made their MLB debuts as 19-year-olds, play corner outfield spots, and have been compared to two of the game's all-time greats (more on that later). Both will be forever linked, and the 2012 season is set to be the first round of what promises to be a great fight.

Baseball has been lucky enough to have this happen on a few occasions: Two young prospects coming



up at around the same time, playing the same, or close to the same, position, and going on to star, side by side, for a decade or more.

The careers of outfielders Willie Mays and Mickey Mantle began in the summer of 1951, with Mickey still 19 and Willie just two weeks past his 20th birthday. Of course, both are considered top 20 players all-time, with almost 1,200 home runs, over 3,400 RBI's, 5 MVP's and 37 All-Star selections between the two. Mickey got the call to the Hall in 1974, his career cut short and numbers hampered by injuries and questionable personal decisions. Willie joined him in Cooperstown 5 years later, in 1979, after a forgettable two-season career ending stint with the Mets.

Though he debuted in 1973, the career of Royals' great third baseman George Brett began in earnest in 1974, as a 21 year old. Not to be outdone, making his debut at the ripe old age of 18 (!) that year for the Brewers was a wiry shortstop, Robin Yount. Truly paralleling each other, they each retired in 1993 as the unquestioned greatest player in their respective franchise's history. Though Brett is widely regarded as the better player, you wouldn't know it by career hits. Yount retired just 12 hits shy of Brett, 3,154 to 3,142, and both are two of only 28 men to reach 3,000 hits. Appropriately, both were elected to the Hall in 1999, on their first try.

1979 may have signaled the end of the decade, but it was just the beginning of the careers of two of the most exciting players in the history of baseball. Turning 20 on Christmas Day the year prior, Rickey Henderson went on not only to cement himself at the top of the lineup no matter where he went (and he definitely went, playing for 9 different teams) but earning, and perhaps giving, himself the title of the greatest leadoff hitter ever to play the game. Still a teenager in '79, Tim "Rock" Lincecum was just that, the rock at the top of the order for 6 different teams. Both players were All-Stars every season from 1982-1987. Remarkably, these two played in the majors a combined 48 years, scored over 3,800 runs, and stole over 2,200 bases.

In 1996, a highly touted shortstop wearing pinstripes walked away with the American League Rookie of the Year Award as a 22-year-old phenom. One year later, playing the same position just across the thruway in Boston, a 23-year-old did the very same thing. Less than a year apart in age, Derek Jeter and Nomar Garciaparra began an 8-year stranglehold on box scores and the shortstop position New England. From 1996-2003, Garciaparra actually out hit Jeter in many ways, posting more doubles, triples, home runs, and RBI, despite having 500 LESS plate appearances, with a higher batting average. Jeter, however, had the last laugh, winning 4 titles in that span, and is, of course, still going strong for the Yankees, while Garciaparra was forced to call it quits in 2009, after injuries derailed what looked to be a sure fire HOF career.



Can the impending careers, and parallel paths, of our two budding phenoms really compare to that of 5 current and 2 future Hall of Famers? If you listen to some major league scouts, they certainly can. Trout has been compared to Mantle on several occasions, and although it remains to be seen if he can develop the consistent power that The Mick possessed, he is on pace for a possible 20-20 season as the leadoff man for the Angels. Harper's style of play has many thinking he could become the next Charlie Hustle, the nickname bestowed on the all-time hits (and bets) leader, Pete Rose. He has already made more than a few outfielders pay for lazily jogging to a "should-be" single or lofting a ball in haphazardly.

At the time of this article, with both having played just 28 games, their stats are remarkably similar, too. Harper and Trout are neck and neck in all of the major categories: hits, runs, doubles, home runs, and RBI. While Trout takes the batting average crown, Harper has the better on-base percentage. Both have the EXACT same slugging percentage, .514.

Let's turn our attention off the field, and on to their cards. How and when to apply the "RC" designation on player's cards becomes no clearer at all when looking at the checklists of both Trout and Harper. Trout's first mainstream cards appeared in Bowman Chrome Draft Prospects, Bowman Sterling Draft Prospects, and Elite Extra Edition, all in 2009, and in a handful of other similar sets in 2010, yet his "RC" designation does not appear until 2011. Harper has cards in all three years as well, but no "RC" until this year, in 2012 products. Confused yet?

Where they seem to really separate, however, is the current selling value of their cards. It might not be a fair fight, as Trout has had a year on Harper to cool a bit (especially after his cup of coffee in 2011 resulted in a .220-5-16 line in 135 PA's) and for his cards to re-sell and stabilize. But one thing is clear, collectors, prospectors, and investors must bring their checkbook if they are to get in on these guys. Trout has consistently seen his higher end autographs from Bowman Chrome fetch into the four figure mark, but Harper takes the cake here. In what is essentially his fourth year of cards in 2012 (but also technically his "RC" year), Harper has pushed past the \$3,300 mark with his 2012 Bowman Superfractor 1/1, with NO autograph. Having another fellow super prospect on your team in ace Stephen Strasburg definitely helps to give you a bit more hobby exposure and love, and Trout may also be overshadowed by teammate and every day first baseman Albert Pujols, already a hobby icon.

Both players play in second rate markets, knocking on the doorsteps of both New York City and Los Angeles but not actually getting the invite in, and their franchises are certainly not two of the more popular ones with collectors (Red Sox, Yankees, Dodgers, Cubs, etc.). But if the great "Strasburg Phenomenon of 2010" was any indication, if you demand attention, the market will come to you. Here's to hoping that 2012 is just the first round in what I feel could be one fantastic fifteen round affair. Now remember: No hitting below Brandon Belt, touch gloves and come out swinging, preferably for the fences! DING!





**For Me, It's Fun Again**  
**By JR Lebert aka jrlebert**

I hate to admit it, but it almost happened. I almost lost it, after over 20 years in this hobby. You know... IT, that little spark inside you that makes this fun. Why grown men and women spend part of their hard-earned paycheck on what amounts to nothing more than a cardboard lottery.

The hard part was that I saw it coming, and I didn't think there was anything that I could do about it. One awfully designed Panini product, or one terribly collated Topps product, or one uninspired Upper Deck product, after another, after another. On a teacher's budget, how many boxes of Threads can you open just to get that Jordan Todman autographed manufactured letter, or boxes of Inception busted just to get that Austin Pettis "event-worn" jersey patch, one of probably two dozen or more he wore for 30 seconds each while signing a thousand cards at the Rookie Photo Shoot, even if I am a Boise State fan?

I looked at the receipts, I looked at the cards I had in front of me, and I realized that something needed to go. Was I becoming what I had wanted to avoid more than anything? Am I now going to resort to just cherry-picking EBay for the cards I want out of particular products? Am I done busting boxes, or buying packs? Or do I just leave the hobby altogether? This certainly wasn't any fun, and neither would be scouring EBay. I thought all was lost, until two old friends walked back in the door, with a new one in tow. I couldn't believe it, but my love for my hobby was rekindled by three products that I hadn't cracked in quite a while, one of which I actually had never opened before. Who were these masked men?

Introducing my big three: Topps, Score, and Adrenalyn XL. That's right, the lowest of the low end SAVED my hobby for me, and it may save the industry, one kid with his allowance at a time.

You see, my story starts out just like most of you reading this, at least those over the age of 18. Busting packs wasn't as much of a privilege as it was a right. If you were a card collector, you did three things: You opened packs, you traded cards, and you built sets. It was all a wonderful cycle. There wasn't 15 sets from Topps, another dozen from Panini (there really wasn't even Panini, unless you counted stickers), and a handful from Upper Deck. There was Topps, and Upper Deck, and Score, and sometimes a handful of other brands, but everyone collected the same sets, went after their favorite players or teams first, and then tried to complete the rest. It was perfect. My buddy the Raiders fan wanted all my Bo Jackson's, or Jerry Porter's, or Napoleon Kaufman's. I, in turn, wanted his Bobby Hoying RC's, Randall Cunningham's, or Fred Barnett's for my Eagles binder. (Quick note: Cards used to be stored in binders. It was easier for all your friends to see what you had, and just plain fun to look through.)

Of course, the problem started much, much earlier than this year, and for a whole handful of reasons. The industry, the "hobby" changed. It became less about the kid trying to finish his team set, and more about the big investor landing ultra-limited, super-premium copies of the hottest rookie draft pick. It was less about the 10-year veteran quarterback, and more about the unproven junior running back who just finished his first mini-camp. And it became less about the cool looking refractor parallel or neat



base set design, and more about how to fit as many sticker autos, almost-never-worn jersey swatches, or even actual precious metals on to the cards. This was no longer a child's hobby, and it was no longer a hobby for the masses. And as for opening packs? That's becoming a thing of the past. Boxes went from 36 packs, to 24, to 18, to 6, and now to one or two in each box. And that box, that used to run \$20-\$50? Ha. Add a zero to the end of each of those, and now you're getting somewhere. Forget the kid who gets \$20 a month, or even a week (nice family!) in allowance, what about the teacher, or factory worker, or salesperson who makes \$10/hr, who also has to eat, buy gas, and pay bills, but just wants a bit of fun in their weekend? The hobby had passed them all by, me included.

Part of my rekindling effort needs to be attributed to one other reason, Cam Newton. Not since Peyton Manning had I been so eager to pull a new RC's cards. I just wanted the thrill of being able to look at one of the cards in my top loaders and knowing that this wasn't item 3765009821 on EBay, but that it was the fifth pack of the second box I had opened of that product. Without Cam, I may not have opened the amount of product I did this last year, which led to both the frustration I felt and the epiphany I came to. A little good with the bad!

I looked on the shelf at my local card shop, and nothing seemed appealing. I ad busted a box of just about everything I could afford, and nothing, with the exception of Topps Chrome, which he was out of, really appealed to me. I looked down a bit, and there was a box of a product that just sounded bad. I mean, come on, at least spell adrenaline right! Wasn't adding Y's and X's very late-1990's? Adrenalyn XL? I asked the shop owner about it. He said it was a cross between those customizable card games like Magic the Gathering (yuck) and sets like Topps Total and Upper Deck XL. Well, little did he know, but he had me with that last part. I loved Upper Deck XL. It had cards of a TON of different players and the design was pretty neat. These were full bleed cards, plenty of space if I wanted to get any of them signed, and the cards just looked different from anything else out. And by the looks of it, there were about 50 packs or so in this box! With plenty of fun to be had, and a rather low price point (I think he was trying to get rid of them, so he changed me \$20 for the whole box), I took them. Next to it on the shelf was Score. I remembered Score from when I collected baseball, back in 1991, with the over 900 card set. It was daunting to say the least, but especially at \$5 a week. I bought a few packs of this year's football version, and immediately, the product struck another nerve with me, parallels, and lots of them. Glossy versions, pose variations, Red Zone, Gold Zone, End Zone, Artist's Proofs. The best part of all, at least for me, is that each pack had about 2 or 3 rookies in it, some of them in these parallels, and the base design wasn't bad either. Oh man, I was hooked. The box was cheap-ish too, less than \$50 for the whole box of 36 packs! I took two!

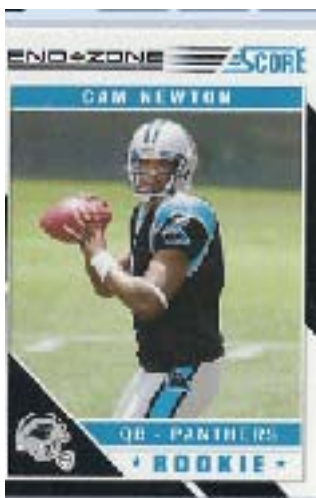
All in all, I spent about \$105, and walked out of there with over 110 packs. I could not have been more excited. Ah, but the card collecting gods must have seen my joy, and felt the need to temper it a bit. I busted each and every pack, and although I had enough parallels, and rookies, and stars, and even an autograph... NO CAM. Not a single base RC, parallel, nothing. I double-checked the online check-lists, and sure enough, he was there, and not numbered to 99, or 25, or 10, just a regular old base rookie in each.

I stormed (read: happily drove) myself to the LCS the very next weekend, and was prepared to just rinse



and repeat last weekend, until we got to talking about Topps. Sure, there were a ton of insert sets that would just get in the way, my LCS's guy said, but hey, just more chances for another Cam, right? I corrected him: Not "another" Cam, my first Cam. I bought what he had left of Score, two boxes, and did the same with Topps. I got home, sat down, and opened, and right there in the first pack of Topps, from the first box, was Cam. Glorious Cam, with that glow from the heavens, and angelic choirs singing in the distance, was now in my hand. Sure, it was a \$5 base RC, but it was mine. I pulled it, not EBay. I set him aside, and kept opening. About 20 packs in to my next box, I pulled another. When I put him next to his sibling, something was vastly different. He was in a different pose, a variation! I said a quick thank you to the card collecting gods for smiling on me, finished opening my Topps and Score (still no regular Cam RC from Score, but two inserts of his), and went on about my weekend.

I collated everything, and the spark grew once more. I began trading my dupes here on Sportscardforum. Other people were doing the same thing, set building. There were team collectors looking for every Titan, Packer, and 49er in every color they could get them in. It was even a great way to get a few hot rookies without emptying your wallet. This was it, I was right back there at the kitchen table with all my friends, swapping cards, filling holes in my sets, and just plain having fun. I wasn't getting rich, but I wasn't breaking the bank to get these cards either. The money I saved in boxes went to cherry picking a few cards off eBay, of course, but at least they went with the theme...



One last side note to the story... I had mentioned I was a teacher above, and one of my favorite parts of my job is discussing sports with my kids, 3rd-4th graders, out on the yard between classes. I asked them if they collected cards, and sadly, most said no. I bought each of them (boys and girls) a pack or two, and sure enough, they loved the parallels. Most were just as excited to pull a Rob Gronkowski, Clay Matthews, or Matt Ryan as they were to get a Tom Brady or Aaron Rodgers, and very few knew of Andy Dalton, Julio Jones, or Aldon Smith. Hopefully, the spark that was rekindled in me thanks to three low-end products and one high-end quarterback has now been passed on to them.





## Product Review: 2011/12 Panini Elite Hockey

By Tony Joyce aka Enigma

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

### Product Details

20 packs per box

5 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): \$120.00 - \$129.99

### Product Highlights

- Elite features a whopping 80 Rookie Cards, including 20 short prints that will challenge the most dedicated pack busters!

- Watch for the return of popular die-cut parallels, including Aspirations and Gold Status!

- Social media hits the hobby with Social Signatures, an ON-CARD autograph set featuring special inscriptions highlighting the player's online

- And keep your eyes peeled for 50 Hard-Signed autographed rookie variations

- The legendary Prime Numbers insert is back and better than ever, with each collectible augmented by a piece of memorabilia or an ON-CARD autograph! Chase all three versions of top stars Joe Sakic, Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby and many more!



### Box Break

- 3 Aspirations Die-Cuts
- 2 Elite Rookies
- 1 Elite Rookies Auto Variation
- 1 New Breed Materials
- 1 Elite Materials
- 1 Elite Stars
- 1 Elite Rookie Stars

### Case Break

- 12 Elite Rookies Auto Variations



- 2 Elite Rookies Aspirations Die-Cuts
- 3 from each of the Elite Series: Joe Sakic, Alex Ovechkin, Sidney Crosby, Steven Stamkos, Steve Yzerman, Mark Messier
- 3 Elite Series Duals Taylor Hall/Ryan Nugent-Hopkins
- 12 New Breed Materials
- 1 Social Signatures
- 6 Elite Signings
- 12 Elite Materials
- 1 Prime Numbers Jerseys
- 12 Elite Stars
- 12 Elite Rookie Stars

## What we Pulled

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwwFn8XpdsI>

Base - 82/200 (41%)

Dupes - 2

Rookies /999 (3) - Anton Lander, Erik Gustafsson, Mattias Ekholm

Aspirations (5)

Aspirations Rookies /99 (1) - Adam Henrique

Status /99 (1) - Stephen Weiss

Elite Series (2)

Elite Stars (1)

Rookie Stars (1)





Justin Faulk Rookie Autograph (on card)



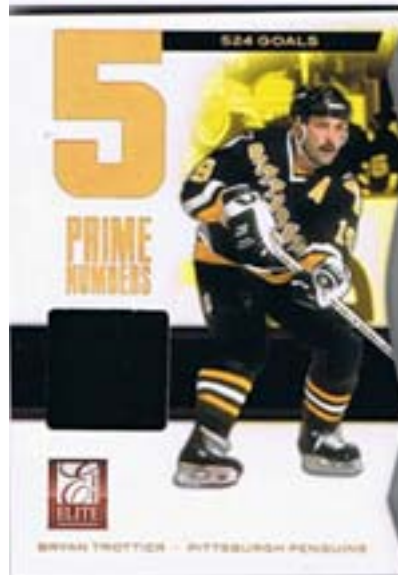
Elite Signings John McCarthy Autograph



New Breed Harri Sateri Jersey



Prime Numbers Brvan Trotter Jersey /524



## Final Thoughts

Base - 3.75/5  
 Design - 4.5/5  
 Fun - 4/5  
 Value - 3.5/5  
 Rebuy - 3.5/5  
 Overall - 19.25/25 (77%)





Pros:

On card Rookie Autographs

Nice portrait designs on the base cards

Always a fan of the die cut Aspirations and Status series

Cons:

Sticker Autographs

Change in the Aspirations/Status numbering

Rookie Autographs are not numbered, yet the regular rookie card is

Another overpriced product

Duplicate base should never happen unless the base set is complete in in the box

NPN Information:

Panini America, Inc.

NPN, 2011-12 Donruss Elite Hockey

5325 FAA Blvd Suite 100A

Irving, TX 75061-3601

Limit to 2 entries per household, mailed separately

Postmarked: 5/16/12

Received: 5/23/12

Canada Skills Question:  $935 + 616 / 154 \times 795 - 451 = ?$

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





## **Product Review: 2011 Panini Prime Signatures Football**

**By Tony Joyce aka Enigma**

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

### **Product Details**

1 pack per box

4 cards per pack

Current Retail Price (online): \$60.00 - \$69.99

### **Product Highlights**

- All Cards 72pt. Thickness!
- Rookie Signatures & Prime Signatures in Silver, Gold, Platinum and Black!
- Only 1 each of the Printing Plate Signatures for these sets.
- New! Signing Bonus Signatures With a sensational 2 autographs per card and Max seq numbered to 49!
- Some of Football's greatest hero's are highlighted in Call to the Hall Signatures & Call to the Hall Combo Signatures, including: Hall of Fame Autographs (Seq numbered to 49) and Dual HOF Autographs (Seq numbered to 25)
- Prime Signatures is a packed 261 Card Set! Including 175 Commons of combined Veterans and Retired players, also built-in are 86 Autographed Rookie Signatures (36 of which are Rookie Premiere Player ON-CARD Autographs)!
- Look for autographed sets of Prime Signatures Silver (Seq numbered/75), Prime Signatures Gold (seq numbered/25), Prime Signatures Platinum (max seq numbered/5), Prime Signatures Black and Printing Plate Signatures (numbered to 1)! Including players such as Troy Polamalu, Matthew Stafford, John Elway, Barry Sanders, Dan Marino, Joe Montana
- Find Signing Bonus Signatures featuring 2 autos per card of veteran players including Aaron Rodgers, Peyton Manning, Adrian Peterson, Tom Brady and more! (max seq numbered/49)
- Look for Rookie Signatures Silver (seq numbered/199), Rookie Signatures Gold (seq numbered/49), Rookie Signatures Platinum (seq numbered/25), Rookie Signatures Black and Printing Plate Signatures (numbered/1). Including players like Doug Baldwin, Dane Sazzenbacher, Terrelle Pryor, Mason Foster, Casey Matthews, Aldon Smith, Denarius Moore
- Plus Rookies Premiere player ON-CARD Autographs including 36 players who attended the 2011 Rookie Premiere such as: Andy Dalton, Blaine Gabbert, Cam Newton, Christian Ponder, Daniel Thomas, Demarco Murray, Julio Jones, Mark Ingram, Randall Cobb, Torrey Smith, Delone Carter or A.J. Green
- Call to the Hall Signatures include Hall of Fame Autographs (max seq numbered to only 49) and
- Call to the Hall Combo Signatures combine two Hall Of Fame Autographs (max Seq numbered to 25)





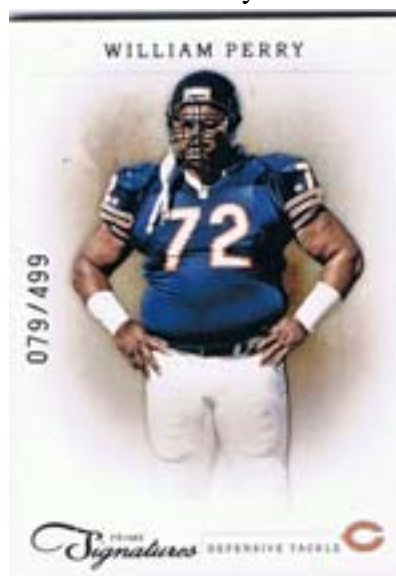
## What we Pulled

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGd-kGxPX5s>

Terrell Davis /499



William Perry /499



Prime Proof Laurent Robinson /99



Armond Smith Rookie Autograph /199







### Final Thoughts

Base - 2.5/5

Design - 4/5

Fun - 4/5

Value - 2.5/5

Rebuy - 2.5/5

Overall - 15.5/25 (62%)

#### Pros:

Nice card design

Mix of veterans and retired in base set

All cards are numbered

#### Cons:

Rookie Sticker Autos

1 main hit per box

175 card base set

Only selling point is on card rookie autographs of top picks

Football season has been over for months, yet still product is focused on 2011

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



# PANINI



## **SCF Official Review: 2011 Panini Limited Baseball**

**By Tony Joyce aka Enigma**

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

### **Product Details**

1 pack per box

7 cards per pack (some will yield 8)

Current Retail Price (online): \$100.00 - \$114.99

### **Product Description**

Limited greats signatures

- Among the signers in Limited are future Hall of Famer Mariano Rivera, Pete Rose, Miguel Cabrera, Matt Kemp, Hanley Ramirez, Josh Hamilton, Cal Ripken Jr., Carl Yastrzemski, Ryan Braun, Adrian Gonzalez, C.C. Sabathia, Al Kaline, Chipper Jones, Dustin Pedroia, Edgar Martinez, Craig Biggio, Andre Ethier, Buster Posey, David Wright, Don Mattingly and David Ortiz among others

Commons Signatures

Limited Draft Hits Signatures (On-Card Max #d/299)

Limited Gamers gloves

Rawlings Gold gloves signatures

- Find Rawlings Gold Glove Signatures featuring a 14k piece of gold along with a signature - each #d to 20 or less

Historical Cuts (Max #d/5)

- 30 Historical Cuts Include Cut Autograph Cards From legends of baseball as well as other sports, entertainment and the political Arena.

- Each cut #d/5 or less!

- Among the cut signatures: Jack Johnson, the turn-of-the-century boxer recognized in his time as the first African-American Heavyweight Champion (1908-15). This is believed to be the first-ever Jack Johnson cut autograph. Other cut signatures include autographs from Bill Clinton, Gerald Ford, George Steinbrenner, Hank Greenberg, Roger Maris, Jack Dempsey, Ben Hogan, Lucille Ball and Pee Wee Reese.

Limited Hall of Fame Gear

Also included:



- Memorabilia pieces include game-used swatches of "Shoeless" Joe Jackson's bat, Ty Cobb jersey, Lou Gehrig jersey and Jimmie Foxx fielding glove, among many other players
- Also find Silver Sluggers Signatures that carry an autograph with a real piece of silver - each #d to 49 or less
- Hard Hats (#d/99) are the first helmet cards in nearly 10 years
- Button cards (#d/3 or less) return!

### What we Pulled

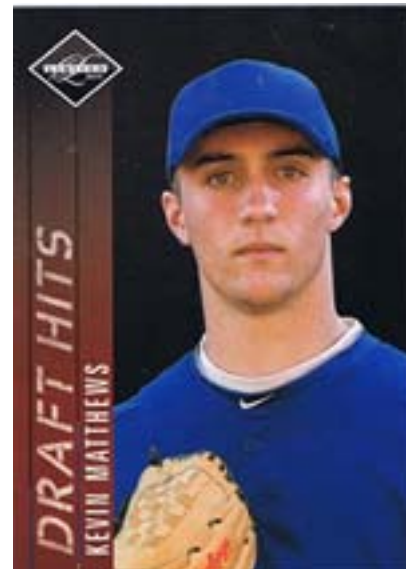
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3iKxB8k46g>  
Prospects Mike Walker /249



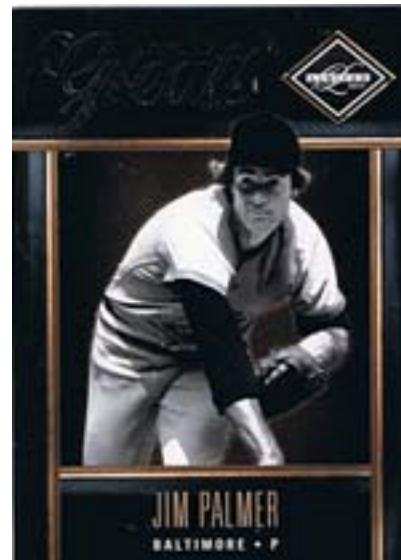
Match-Ups Brooks Robinson/  
Frank Robinson /199



Draft Hits Kevin Matthews /249



Limited Greats Jim Palmer /299







Limited Gamers Mark Teixeira  
Glove with Stitch Holes /299



Prospects Shawon Dunston Jr. Autograph /339



Draft Hits Jake Hager Autograph /295 (on card)



Limited Match-Ups Signatures Al Kaline/  
Denny McLain REDEMPTION





### Final Thoughts

Base - N/A

Design - 4.25/5

Fun - 4/5

Value - 3/5

Rebuy - 2.5/5

Overall - 13.75/20 (68.75%)

#### Pros:

Some use of on card Autographs

Extra hit in some boxes

Use of gloves as a relic

#### Cons:

No team names and logos kills the look even though the design is nice

No true base set, though various subsets

Regardless of look, no MLB properties permission equates to overpriced

Sticker Autographs in one subset while another prospect subset is on card

Autograph version of card is higher numbered than regular version

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



# PANINI



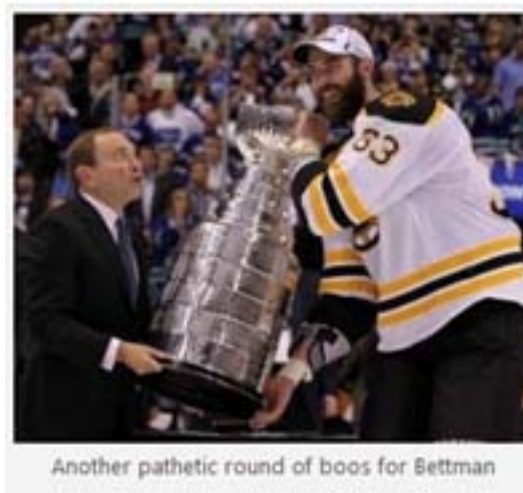
## Give Bettman a Break By Sean McCafferty aka 30ranfordfan

With the Eastern Conference Final now in the books, I know that we hockey fans have a great Stanley Cup final to look forward to, with the New Jersey Devils taking on the Los Angeles Kings. Both teams have performed admirably throughout the first three rounds of the playoffs, so a series with great goaltending and clutch goal scoring should very much be in the cards.

In less than a couple of weeks, we'll all know which team has won the Stanley Cup. Those of us tuning in will get to see what should only be described as the greatest team celebration in sports: when the winning team hoists Lord Stanley's Mug, and one by one take their turn doing laps of the ice.

That night will not be without a black mark though. Sure, fans of the losing team will go home disappointed, but that won't be the only sour note. Only moments before the players get to live out their boyhood dream of celebrating a Cup win with their teammates, what's become an annual tradition amongst hockey fans will continue to be a shameful embarrassment to the sport.

I'm talking about the inane booing of NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman.



Another pathetic round of boos for Bettman

I don't mean to suggest that everyone should be happy with Bettman, certainly not all the time. While he has done a lot of good for the NHL, he's also made mistakes. Everyone is entitled to their opinion, especially when you're paying hundreds of dollars to be in the building – but when fans turn booing the NHL's top boss into a Stanley Cup sideshow, they're ruining a celebration. Make no mistake about it, this will happen again this year, regardless if the winner is on home ice or not.

What makes the chorus of boos even more pathetic, most of the gripes fans have with Bettman are born of nothing but ignorance.

We incessantly hear that Bettman is not a "hockey guy" and, in fact, is a "basketball guy". I wonder if people realize how ridiculous that sounds.

If the conversation is talking about Bettman as a kid growing up, or a young man finding his way in the world, the truth is he was neither. This is not a guy who was an athlete in his youth, be that basketball, hockey, or anything else. Professionally, he's a lawyer. A graduate of Cornell University (a school that's done pretty well producing other "hockey guys", like Ken Dryden & Joe Nieuwendyk) and having a law degree from New York University, Mr. Bettman was primed for a career as a lawyer. A career he started by working for a law firm for four years, before joining the legal department of the NBA in 1981.





Of course this is what likely fans point to when they call him a “Basketball guy”. His second job after graduation was with the National Basketball Association. One he excelled at, and rose to be general counsel to the league, as well as Senior Vice President. After nearly 12 years on the job,

Bettman received a new offer: to become the first commissioner of the National Hockey League.



If I were to be writing this story in 1994, with Bettman barely past the one year mark of his tenure, calling him as “basketball guy” may have been justified. Certainly insisting that he wasn’t a “hockey guy” would have been. With only a year of hockey experience under his belt, and over a decade of working for the NBA, anyone would have been (at least sort of) correct in making that point.

The problem now is that this is not 1994. This is 2012. Gary Bettman has been at his post for a little better than 19 years. Surly anyone capable of even a little bit of critical

thinking can acknowledge that with nearly two decades of running the NHL – Gary Bettman became a “hockey guy” a long time ago. I would challenge anyone to cite what exactly it is that Gary doesn’t know about hockey. How the game is played? Please. After 19 years on the job, this man understands the most subtle nuances of the game. Hockey’s rich history? He’s done nothing but continue to honor it, while doing his part to write new chapters.

NHL fans under the age of 35 can’t even honestly lay claim to really remembering a time when he wasn’t in charge.

Of course there will be those that will tell you that you have to have played the game to understand it, and that’s one thing that Gary will never be able to lay claim to. The whole notion is a bunch of malarkey. You understand things by observing, by studying, and yes – by doing. He can’t lay claim to the last one, but I suspect that there are few people on earth that have done the other two more than he has. An understanding of the game? He understands it a lot better than all the beer league players that claim he doesn’t.

Next we have the idea that Gary is responsible for expansion, the supposed watering down of the NHL’s talent pool, and any perceived problems that have come along with it.

The fact is owners like Mike Ilitch (Red Wings) or Jeremy Jacobs (Bruins), influential members of the board of governors, have much more to do with it. Heck, disposed Oilers owner Peter Pocklington, and his trade of Wayne Gretzky to the Kings, may be the man whose hands had the most to do with the expansion of the 1990s.

The NHL was a 21 team league in 1990, and with the use of about 30 seconds of one’s time on Google



it's easy to see that the majority of the 1990s expansion was already done before Bettman even took the job. The San Jose Sharks, Ottawa Senators, and Tampa Bay Lightning were already in the league when Bettman was hired. The decision for the next two teams (Florida Panthers, Anaheim Mighty Ducks) was already made before he took office. Of the 9 new teams that hockey fans saw via expansion in the 90s, Mr. Bettman was only involved in awarding four of them.

His involvement, of course, was by design. The reason that his name was chosen as NHL Commissioner should be obvious. The league wanted to hire someone that knew how to market sports in America. To grow the game. Something he knew very well. The most crucial task of the early years of his tenure was to find four more markets to expand to.



Gretzky's Trade was far more influential in Southern Expansion

For all the criticism he's taken for having a southern bias, Bettman certainly never showed it with his expansion choices. While he did oversee the new teams in Nashville & Atlanta, he also saw fit to award teams to Minnesota & Columbus. The latter two can hardly be described as southern.



Hockey is doing just fine in Nashville

If you're unhappy that there was expansion, nobody is going to be able to do much to convince you that it was a good thing. It certainly wasn't without its issues, and many teams (like most expansion clubs in most sports) went through growing pains. One (Atlanta) has since been uprooted, and another (Columbus) has never really had any kind of success. Some still argue that the league has only gone downhill since those 9 new teams came along. Regardless of what you thought of expansion, Bettman

was responsible for only 44% of the new teams he seems to get all the credit for, and he was specifically hired to do that. His bosses (the NHL Board of Governors) wanted it.

In Canada, Bettman is met with even more hate than he is in the USA. Why? Because a large portion of Canadian Hockey fans think he has it in for Canada. He doesn't like Canada, doesn't want so many Canadian teams. He'd prefer to see Canadian Clubs relocate to the United States.

This, of course, is born from the fact that both the Quebec Nordiques & Winnipeg Jets relocated to southern American cities while Bettman was also executing the final phase of the NHL's 1990s expan-



sion.

What hockey fans never seem to be able to offer though, is a suggestion as to what Bettman should have done differently. Both teams had owners that could no longer afford to lose money on their teams. They were playing in archaic rinks, and dealing with a 65 cent dollar. After years of bleeding money (despite good crowds at the games) they could no longer lose money, and threw the proverbial keys on the table.

“NHL hockey was meant for cities like Winnipeg & Quebec” argue Canadians hockey fans everywhere, but the fact is that the increased costs of doing business, and a low valued dollar, meant that there wasn’t a single buyer willing to step up and pay to keep either of those teams in town. Gary & the league didn’t have any choice. Allowing the franchises to be bought by deep pocketed American owners was the only move they had, save for folding the franchises.

Winnipeg left for Phoenix, and Quebec for Colorado. Bettman was to blame, but not the team’s owners. Certainly not perspective owners that knew team ownership in either of these team’s would have cost them millions per year to keep afloat. Of course the notion that Bettman wanted to move Canadian teams south overlooks what happened to both of the WHA cousins of those two relocated franchises.

Hartford Connecticut was also the victim of an aging arena, and an owner who couldn’t keep up with the economic boon that the NHL was in. Like the Nordiques & the Jets, the Whalers were sold and moved to Raleigh North Carolina, where they become the Hurricanes.

Hartford proves that it wasn’t just a Canadian problem the NHL had. It was low revenue teams that couldn’t keep up. The idea that Bettman has some anti-Canadian bias should be completely dispelled when the conversation moves to that of the Edmonton Oilers, the fourth team from the 1979 WHA merger.

The Oilers had much more success than the other ex-WHA teams. With 5 Stanley Cup in their first 10 NHL seasons, they were one of the most dominant teams ever assembled. After reaching the pinnacle of success, they became an example of what poor ownership can do to a team.

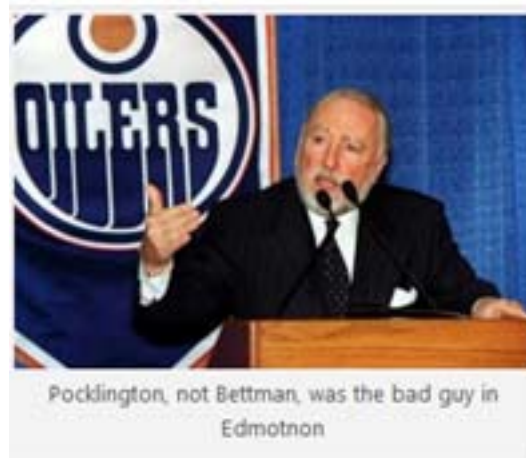
Oilers owner Peter Pocklington sold off Wayne Gretzky, drove away stars like Mark Messier & Jari Kurri, and the combination of a hated owner, a losing team, and low dollar meant the team was in trouble. Since virtually all of Pocklington’s other businesses were also doing poorly (the ones that hadn’t already been seized by creditors) he was forced to sell the team, and was looking for the highest bidder. Where they wanted the team to play was of little concern to him.

Pocklington’s alleged choice of a sale partner was to Les Alexander. A billionaire located in Texas, Alexander already owned the NBA’s Houston Rockets, and wanted to add the Oilers to his growing list of assets.





What did Gary and the NHL do? They blocked the sale, they delayed the sale, they did everything they could to slow the move down. Then he worked with a group of nearly 40 investors local to Edmonton, and facilitated the sale of the team to them. The Edmonton Investors Group (commonly referred to as EIG) bought the team from Pocklington, and ran it for over a decade until a sale to current owner Daryl Katz.



Bettman never had a bias against Canada. Winnipeg and Quebec didn't leave because he wanted them to, they left because there was no other option. The only difference between them and Edmonton is that Edmonton was able to find another option.

Furthering the point that Commissioner Bettman has no bias against Canada, look at what transpired between the 2010-11 and 2011-12 seasons. A similar situation occurred in one of the expansion cities he presided over: ownership in Atlanta could no longer afford to keep losing money. They wanted out, and were unwilling to continue to run the team.

The result? The Atlanta Thrashers became the Winnipeg Jets. Bettman worked with a new ownership group to move the struggling team north of the border. Somehow this move never once stirred up accusations of a Canadian bias, or anti-Southern bias.

The relocation, or folding, of a franchise has got to be the low point of the tenure of any league commissioner or president. It does mean the league failed the fans in that city. They couldn't create a business model that worked for all teams that played. If what happened in Winnipeg, Quebec, Hartford, and Atlanta is to be held against Bettman's administration, that can certainly be constructed as a valid point.

It should be noted, however, that virtually all of his predecessors has similar issues to deal with. The only two NHL Presidents who didn't see a franchise move (or fold) during their tenure were Gill Stein (Bettman's immediate predecessors, who was President of the league for only a year) and Red Dutton: NHL President from 1943-46. Hardly men who had any kind of legacy, other than that of a caretaker. Even his peers in other have suffered through the same uprooting, with MLB, NFL, and NBA teams leaving their locals during the same time period.

The reality of this business is that the NHL has cyclically gone through hard times, and they've lost teams because of it. Atlanta won't be the last team to suffer this fate, nor will Bettman be the last commissioner to preside over a team leaving town.

Bettman is also heavily criticized for "changing the game". Fans complain about too many rule changes, breaking away from long standing traditions like the red line, deciding a game via shootout, the fight-



discouraging instigator penalty, or even the rebranding of divisions & conferences.

I will not pretend to be a fan of all those moves. I think the shootout, while very entertaining, is a horrible way to decide a game. I think it's silly that the Campbell & Wales trophies go to the Western & Eastern conference winners. I also believe that most of the changes have been good for the overall growth of the league, even when I may not like them.

We hockey fans should count ourselves fortunate that "hockey purists" have never really been able to have their way for too long. Otherwise, we might still be playing the game with a rover on the ice, and the forward pass might still be illegal.

Ridiculous comparisons? Not really. Think about how different hockey would be if each team iced six skaters instead of 5. Think about how illegal forward passing would impact the game. Those were seismic shifts in how the game was played in their time. Compare that to a shootout, and the Bettman-led changes look relatively minor.

Truthfully, I think more changes are needed. An outright ban on contact to the head needs to become something that is enforced with suspensions. Fighting should result in an immediate match penalty. The rinks the game is played on should be expanded to meet the international game's dimensions. Revert the ending of power plays on a goal. Facial protection needs to become mandatory. Major changes like this need to be considered by the NHL, to improve player safety and the overall entertainment value of the product.

I will not claim to think that Gary Bettman has done a perfect job as league commissioner. He hasn't. Nobody could hold that job down and be perfect. His overall performance? It's been pretty darn good. Fortunately for him, it's not the fans he needs to keep happy. It's the owners, and since they keep renewing his multi-million dollar contract, I have to believe that most of them would agree with me.



I'm not saying that everyone should like Bettman, I'm just suggesting that he should be given much more acknowledgement should be given for the positives he's brought, instead of only focusing on the negatives. When he makes public appearances, like the one he's gearing up for at the end of the finals, I just wish fans would show a little more respect for the Bettman, the league, and this game, and either cheer on their team as the Cup is presented, sit in silence if their team was just defeated, or just get up and leave the building. Stop embarrassing hockey fans everywhere.



## **Enter the Sandman... Again**

**By JR Lebert aka jrlebert**

Alex Rodriguez said it all, as he watched 42-year-old Mariano Rivera crumple on the warning track after shagging a fly ball off the bat of freshly minted Yankee Jayson Nix: "Oh my God. Oh my God." This was probably the same sentiment heard aloud in every bar, barbershop, and deli in New York as the replay made its way through the airwaves and the web. Would the last image of the great Mariano be that of him hoisted onto the back of a John Deere by former battery mate and current manager Joe Girardi?



According to Rivera, the answer is an emphatic NO. "I'm not going out like that," said Rivera, just a day after the injury. The injury has helped shift Mariano from otherworldly deity, untouchable not only by major league hitters, but seemingly also by Father Time, to an athlete that wants to prove to everyone, including himself, that he can come back from this, at the age of 43, and dominate as if nothing happened.

Mariano has always prided himself on staying in fantastic physical shape. Part of his regimen is what led to his injury, shagging fly balls before games. He's done it every day since he joined the Yankees in 1995. He is still as wiry and trim as he was almost two decades ago. He may have the birth date of a forty-two-and-a-half year old, but he doesn't have the body or the will of someone ready to call it quits.

The career of Kerry Wood, which came to an end this week, tells us just as much about Rivera and his legacy as it does Wood's. Kerry missed parts of more than a few seasons because of arm trouble, and although he throws much harder than Rivera, he demonstrates how hard it is to for a quality major league pitcher, which Kerry certainly was, to toe the rubber night in and night out at that level. Mariano has done it consistently, at the highest level the game has known, for 18 seasons. According to #42, there will indeed be a 19th, but how can we know for sure that he will come back and be his normal, dominating, intimidating self? Let's look no further at his limited body of work this season, before the injury. He had his occasional hiccup right off the bat (no pun intended), blowing a save and giving up 2 runs on 3 hits and 2 IBB's on Opening Day.

Those would turn out to be the only runs and walks registered against him this season, and equal to the amount of hits that Mariano would give up in his other 8 appearances, combined. Over the course of his other 8 appearances, Mariano recorded 24 outs, 7 by strikeout, while giving up 3 hits and absolutely nothing else. His ERA was a not-so-surprising 0.00 in those appearances, and his WHIP, H/9, and K/9 were all better than his career averages at the time of his injury. Simply put, Rivera was just being Rivera.





Of course, the X factor that nobody can predict is how a knee can recover from ACL surgery. But we are not talking about your knee, or my knee. We are talking about the knee of the Great One, the Untouchable One, Super Mariano Rivera. Granted, Mariano doesn't throw innings like a Roy Halladay, or throw gas like teammate David Robertson (also injured at this time), or throw every other game like a Fernando Rodney. Ask any pitching coach, however, and they will tell you that the key to pitching is your core and legs. Most arm trouble stems from something wrong mechanically, whether it's opening your front shoulder, bending your knee too soon, or some other core/

leg related issue. This is where Mo's recovery and rehabilitation is key. Undoubtedly, Mariano's knee will stiffen a bit more, get sore a bit faster, and be fatigued more often than before the surgery. All that may have been true without the injury, as he turns 43 at the end of the year. The knee injury will just accelerate the process.

After turning 40, one would also expect a pitcher's numbers to take a hit. After 40, Greg Maddux was one game below .500 (37-38), with an ERA more than one full run higher (4.19) than his career average (3.16). His ERA+, a stat measuring a pitcher's performance versus the league average, was exactly at league average, 100. John Smoltz had just 20 wins after his 40th, and although he did achieve his 3,000th strikeout, none of his 53 CG's, 16 shutouts, or 153 saves came after 39. Fellow all-time great closer Trevor Hoffman did notch 77 saves after 40, though he had just a 67% save percentage in his final season, and had been replaced mid-way through the year.

My momma, however, didn't raise no dummy. You will not count me as one of the doubters of Mo's ability to bounce back. Just looking at Mariano's body of work as a member of the 40-and-over club tells me all I need to know. Since turning 40, Rivera's ERA is 0.34 LOWER than his career total (1.87 to 2.21). His ERA+, the best all-time at 206, is better since his 40th, 233. His WHIP, H/9, and K/BB are all better than his career numbers. Simply put, Mariano Rivera has actually been BETTER since turning 40! Despite the injury, I expect Big Mo to come back just as dominant as before the injury, and look forward to hearing "Enter Sandman" fill Yankee Stadium again in 2013.



## **Detroit Red Wings Offseason Buzz- Who Stays, Who Goes, and What's Next**

**By Paul Bartosz aka wogman56**

Being from northern Michigan, some of my fondest memories growing up were listening to hockey games announced by the legendary Mickey Redmond. Mickey has a way of painting a picture, if you will, while broadcasting games. Since Mickey called the Stanley Cup winning goal by Darren McCarty in 1997, winning has become expected, not accepted amongst Wings fans. After McCarty and the Wings ended a 42 year drought in Motown by hoisting Lord Stanley's chalice, the Wings followed it up by winning the cup in 1998, 2002, and 2008 as well.

Now, in the offseason of 2012, it has been four seasons since the Wings won the Cup and fans are growing more and more impatient, demanding a winning product on the ice. The Red Wings have the longest playoff appearance streak in NHL history at 21 straight seasons, but simply making the playoffs isn't enough to satisfy their expectant fans. The 2011-12 season included a series of peaks and valleys. Amongst the highs were an NHL record 23 game home winning streak which saw them surge to the top of the NHL's standings near the trade deadline. The low points in the season included losing several top players due to lingering injuries and poor defensive play which ultimately led to a quick first round exit in five games at the hands of the Nashville Predators.

Since management is also not satisfied with just making the playoffs and getting knocked out in five games, the Red Wings' brass have recently gotten together for three days over the long holiday weekend to decide where the team needs to go in the future to try to bring the Cup back to the Motor City. General manager Ken Holland, assistant GM Jim Nill, head coach Mike Babcock, and several others have sat in their war room to discuss free agent possibilities, possible departures, and which direction they would like to head in the upcoming draft in June.

The big question surrounding the Red Wings this offseason is: will captain Nicklas Lidstrom come back for a 21st season next year? If he does not, who will fill the void left by one of the best defensemen of all-time? While he seemingly lost a step this past season, Lidstrom is still in peak condition and can still outplay 95% of NHL defensemen, even at 40 years of age. The Wings are scheduled to host the 2013 Winter Classic on New Year's Day at Michigan Stadium against the Toronto Maple Leafs and Lidstrom has expressed his interest in playing in the game, but is that one game enough of a selling point to keep him around for another season? Or do the Wings need to add some other pieces to the puzzle to try and persuade their captain to stick around for one more shot at Lord Stanley's Cup?

Along with Lidstrom, the other two questions the Red Wings have before seeing how much salary cap space they have this season are: What will happen to Tomas Holmstrom and Brad Stuart? Holmstrom, along with Lidstrom, are the only two players remaining from the 1997 Stanley Cup season and have each hoisted hockey's ultimate trophy four times wearing the winged wheel. Holmstrom is a warrior, making his office in front of the opposing goalie, trying to create screens and tip in teammates' shots. He has sacrificed his body numerous times over the past 15 seasons to



self, being demoted to the fourth line and failing to produce at the level Wings fans are accustomed to seeing. Head coach Mike Babcock has expressed his interest in keeping “Homer” around for another season, but will the rest of the Wings front office agree with him?

Stuart is a different story, however. The unrestricted free-agent defenseman, who has family in California, has told the media and Wings management that he would love to go back out to the West Coast, where he began his career. Due to a court agree-

ment with his first wife where his daughter cannot leave the state of California, Stuart would love to get back closer to home to be able to see his daughter more in the waning stages of his career. He is not expected to be back, although the Wings could use his physical presence and penalty-killing prowess.

Another free agent that is not expected to return is forward Jiri Hudler. Hudler would love to return to the Red Wings for his eighth season with the team, but being an unrestricted free agent, he will command some larger offers from other teams than Detroit is willing to pony up for his talents. That leaves two roster spots left to fill, with possibly one or two more if Holmstrom or Lidstrom decide to ride off into the sunset. The Red Wings also have quite a bit of salary cap space remaining as they failed to make any large moves at the trade deadline. Rumor around town has it that they are using it to try to lure free agent defenseman Ryan Suter away from the Nashville Predators. Suter has stated that he would love to play in Detroit, whether with Lidstrom, or trying to fill his shoes (or skates in this instance) should he choose to retire. Another free agent the Wings will be actively pursuing on July 1st will be forward Zach Parise of the New Jersey Devils, the cream of this summer’s free agent crop. Parise’s Devils have recently won the Eastern Conference and will be playing for the Stanley Cup. Does that mean he will take a hometown discount to remain in New Jersey? Or will he test the free agent waters and try a new change of scenery?

The Wings have a strong nucleus built for long playoff runs, with stars Pavel Datsyuk, Henrik Zetterberg, and Jimmy Howard all coming back. While the blueline will need to be retooled over the next season or two, will the Wings management decide to do it this year, or wait one more season before making significant moves? Only time will tell. For the meantime, as Terrell Owens said, “get your popcorn ready” as this off-season could be one of the most exciting in recent memory for both the Red Wings and their fans as they chase their 12th Stanley Cup next season.





## The Four Saddest Words By Pedro Maicazo aka metsmagic18

What could have been. John Greenleaf Whittier coined this phrase back in 1856. Little did he know, these words would end up meaning a lot in the world of sports. The poem is about a maid who meets a judge. They fall in love but end up marrying other people, while wondering their whole lives; "what might have been?" . Similarly, in every day sports you find these guys. Not all of them are so well known. Everyone knows Drazen Petrovic, Len Bias, Armando Galragga's perfect game. But there are so many of these players, these teams, these moments. So many things happen in sports that will always be left to be wondered, but that's what makes sports great. Let's look at some of these.

### **What if J.R. Richard hadn't had a stroke?**

He won 18 games 3 out of 4 years from 1976 to 1979. He struck out 313 batters in a season. He won 107 games by his thirtieth birthday. After 1979, Nolan Ryan joined him in the rotation, bringing on the possibility of an Astros pitching powerhouse. A rotation that featured Richard and Ryan! It could have been one of the best 1-2 punches ever. On July 14, 1980, after striking out the side in the fourth inning, he felt his arm "go dead". 9 days later, he checked into the hospital to attempt and fix his arm problems, they said he was good as new. On July 30th, while warming up, he suffered a stroke on the field. He would never pitch again. After only 9 seasons, he already held the Astros all-time career strikeout record, and had 1400 strikeouts in his career. He is 62 and lives in solitude.

### **What if MJ hadn't retired the first time?**

After dominating the NBA for a decade and collecting three championships, Jordan decided to hang it up. He said it was a lack of passion, but many thought that the murder of his father was the real cause of it all. Jordan decided to play baseball and spent a horrendous season with the White Sox' Double-A affiliate in Birmingham. Meanwhile, the Houston Rockets were building a dynasty of their own, built around Hakeem Olajuwon. Once Mike was back for good, his Bulls three-peated again. Could Chicago have collected a very Celtic-like eight, nine or 10 consecutive championships? Don't bet against Jordan.

### **What if Roy Campanella hadn't left work early?**

On a cold winter day in January of 1958, Campanella started to drive home to Long Island from the liquor store he operated in Harlem, on his way, he hit a patch of ice, and skidded off the road and into a telephone pole. It ended his career after 10 years, and put him in a wheelchair for the rest of his life.



## What if Joe Namath hadn't won Super Bowl III?

What would have happened is that he would've amounted to nothing. His record was below .500 and he threw more interceptions than touchdowns over his career. Yet he is in the Hall of Fame, only because of his victory over Unitas' Colts in 1969. His win secured his legacy, and showed that the AFL was a competitive league. Without his win? Who knows where Joe Namath would be. And maybe the AFL and NFL wouldn't even have merged.

## What if the baseball strike of 1994 hadn't happened?

Matt Williams had 43 and 96 RBI when the season was abruptly cancelled. He lost a third of his season, and he had a chance to break Ruth's record before Sosa and McGwire came along. Inexplicably, he actually lost the MVP award that year to Jeff Bagwell. Tony Gwynn was batting .394 on August 11, 1994. On August 12, he needed to go 4 for 4 to get his average above the .400 mark, the latest that would have been accomplished since the days of Ted Williams. There was one problem though. There was no August 12 game. There would be no games for the rest of 1994. To this day, he says he would've guaranteed that he would have done it.

## What if Mickey Mantle hadn't stepped on that drain in 1951?

What drain you say? Let me set the stage. It's the 1951 World Series, Joe DiMaggio's last. As a courtesy, manager Casey Stengel puts DiMaggio in center field, and moves rookie Mickey Mantle to right. A pop fly is hit in between them, DiMaggio hovers over it easily, but Mantle cautiously runs over to back up the play. DiMaggio yells, "I got it!" and Mantle stops short, at just the wrong time. His spike gets caught on a drain pipe on the Yankee Stadium outfield, and he cries out in pain, falling onto the ground like he had been shot. He watched the rest of the series in the hospital, and never ran the same way. Stengel said he had more speed than any slugger he ever saw, and Mantle ran the fastest clocked time around the bases than anyone in 1951. What could have been.

These are just a few what if moments, there was many others and there will surely be more.



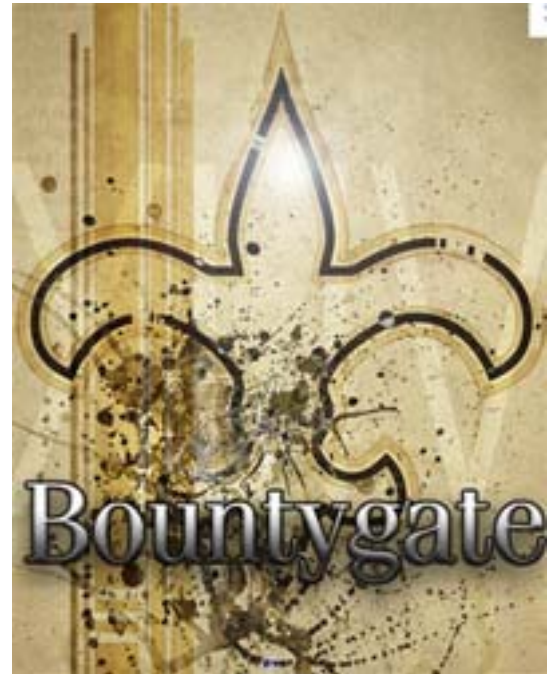
## Fixing the Saints By Guy Mitchell aka sweetg1

Much has been written about the New Orleans Saints and BountyGate. While nobody asked my opinion, I'm going to offer it. I'm here to help, free of charge!

I'm listing a checklist of items that will put the New Orleans Saints organization back together. Once they hire me to implement the changes, I'll be sure to report back to you on the progress made.

1.) They must admit their wrongdoing.

We, as a society, are forgiving people, especially in sports. When Andy Pettitte freely stated that he participated in taking steroids and said he was sorry, people forgave him. When Roger Clemens and Barry Bonds continuously stated that they did nothing wrong, people hated them. Sometimes all we need is an apology so that we can move on. We've heard from the coaches, but we really haven't heard much from the players, other than Anthony Hargrove. There isn't anything wrong with saying that "they got caught up in the moment" either (if that's what it was). Apologize and move on.



2.) Initiate a League-wide proposal that will fix the real problem.

Now that they have admitted to this being a problem and claim to want to move forward, let's do it. However, it cannot be lip service. I don't think anyone is naïve enough to think that New Orleans is the only team that does this. It's a league-wide problem. So I ask New Orleans to "get involved". They can:

- Get involved with the concussion studies, make donations, and really see the effects of trying to "hurt people". The players will become these people.
- Speak to fans and other teams about it. They need to own this, even if they weren't the first (and probably not the last) to do this. OWN IT!

3.) Do not allow the fall guys to come back.

As much as this may hurt and many will disagree, you cannot allow some of the key staff to come back. This may be seen as a contradiction to item #1. However, as an organization, you accept the apology, but you move forward with the staff members. In the back of your mind, you'll always wonder if the bounty is still in place. You cannot allow this to happen.





#### 4.) Sign Key free agents

They may think everything is right with the fans, but the events that have occurred play a big role in the long term success of the New Orleans Saints. They've lost their coach for 1 year. They've lost their Defensive Coordinator indefinitely. The GM will be out for a while and key players will miss time. The draft helped their cause, as they drafted some players to pick up the slack. But the truth of the matter is that the losses are key losses. Many free agents won't go to a place where they can't win. New Orleans, having won a Super Bowl already, is close to another. Having lost draft picks and key players, they aren't as close as they were. Why go there if they don't have the possibility to win today? With the losses, the Saints won't win in 2012. They need to not only sign talent, but quality talent. Quality talent, I'll define as talent where the players are upstanding citizens who understand all aspects of the game. In some cases, the Saints may have to overpay to get these players, otherwise, the hits that they're taking may eliminate the small window of opportunity that exists for the them.

#### 5.) Re-Sign Drew Brees!

This may be the most important one, as previously mentioned, the window for winning is small. Lose Drew Brees and the organization starts over. You cannot allow this to happen. Allow him to walk and what happens to the fan base? It will be the 'Aints all over again. Enough said.

#### 6.) Secondary Fixes include taking issue with the NFL

We talk about the players safety, but is the NFL truly about players safety? Anthony Hargrove did the right thing with the promise that he would remain anonymous. However, it was leaked that he provided testimony against his coaches. How could this have happened? Leaking his name puts the player in jeopardy and it doesn't fully allow him to earn his potential if teams view him as a malcontent or someone who isn't loyal. It hurts his earning potential. He's on a new team and now he'll miss games. That doesn't really help his team or how he is viewed with fans. If the league is truly about players, then they must be all in. This isn't the first time the league has leaked something to hurt a player, as the NFL most recently leaked the Wonderlic scores of Morris Clairborne.

There you go fans...the 6-step process to fixing the New Orleans Saints! Now where's my check?

Your comments are welcome!



## Who to Watch in the WWE By James Owens aka PvtDirt

2012 needs to be a better year financially for the WWE than 2011. The entertainment company only came in at \$25,000,000 revenue, which is 50% less than 2010. What's to blame for this? In many fan's opinion, this year was the best year entertainment wise since the days where The Rock was active full time. The answer is WWE Studios. WWE Studios is an expansion business off of the WWE that we know. Its drive is movies, starring their superstars, targeting WWE fans as its primary target. Unfortunately, these movies have been busts across the board, and have drained revenue from WWE from the start. But who are we to question Vince McMahon, it's hard to argue with his knowledge on building entertainment empires, but not even he can be mad at us for being skeptical about a 50% revenue loss.



So where should WWE turn? Well, I came up with a list of things I believe WWE should do in 2012 to generate more revenue. After all, the more we're entertained, the more Pay Per Views we buy, thus the more revenue WWE makes.



### 1. Push Your Future Stars

I've been saying for a year now, that Dolph Ziggler is the real deal. He's the perfect mix of charisma and talent that the WWE needs in its heel brand. The WWE apparently didn't learn when Dolph Ziggler and CM Punk put on a couple of the best matches of the year in 2011. Ziggler showcased his skills in ways we haven't seen before. Sure, CM Punk brought him up a bit, he does that with everyone, but Ziggler showed me a set of skills that champions have. Until WWE realizes this, and realizes that being a heel is all about charisma, than the heel brand will continue to suffer, and new rivalries will never be created.

The other star I want to see pushed this year is Kofi Kingston. Kingston had an incredible 2011, with some of the most impressive moves the WWE has seen in years.



He knows when to be electrifying, when to open up the can to something more, taking the match to the next level. He's got championship caliber skills, now all he needs is a little more character development. I think the WWE needs to get him out of the dry tag division, and in to a big rivalry that not only develops his character, but carries him to the top. I think Kingston can be a huge main event star, especially if we continue to see the electrifying move set he's been using as of late.

## 2. Make Another John Cena

The WWE Universe has finally gotten sick of John Cena, well at least the hardcore fans. Cena is something the WWE does need, he brings more emotion than anyone, and brings a ton of revenue to

the WWE each year from every kid in the stands buying his shirts. But even Vince McMahon has to know that it will eventually end, even if Cena has put on some big matches this past year. My match of the year, CM Punk vs. John Cena at Money in the Bank was simply amazing.



The billion dollar question for WWE is, who can match John Cena? My answer is simple, we're already seeing it. In my opinion, CM Punk has everything needed to be at the John Cena level. He has a fun to watch move set. Almost all of his matches would be a solid main event on any card. He has the best microphone skills since The Rock. Most importantly, he can apply to the mass of kids that power the WWE's global money chain. He doesn't drink, he doesn't smoke, and he doesn't do drugs, which is the perfect model to apply to kids. CM Punk is rough around the edges, but Vince can make any character he wants, we've seen it time and time again. If anyone can do it in today's WWE, it's Punk.

## 3. Save the Diva's Division

The days of the Diva's division being relevant are over. At its current state, I don't think anyone would even notice if it was scratched entirely, which is bad given the history of it. Today's Diva is a woman who is only beautiful, uses pointless moves, and can't wrestle herself out of a paper





bag. I'm talking about the likes of Kelly Kelly, and anything comparable to her. Her move set is honestly an insult to the fans of the Diva division. I sure hope Trish Stratus or Lita don't watch her matches, but it would make them shake their head in agony at the sight of what their profession has now become. This is all excluding Beth Phoenix of course, who is a very good wrestler, she just has no competition.

In my opinion, the only way to fix this is to either get Kharma back to face Beth Phoenix, or develop one of the few Divas that have talent, into a high caliber wrestler. Those choices are limited to Eve Torres, and Kaitlyn in my honest opinion. Something needs to be done though, or else we may see the days of the Diva's division permanently leave.

In closing, WWE may need more than what I've stated, probably to the extent of offering big money to past big talent. Their clone of Goldberg in Rybak could be just the kind of thing to get Goldberg back in the ring, which could be Wrestlemania worthy if Rybak develops a bit more, and Bill Goldberg is up to it. The WWE also needs to develop the tag team division into something special again. Us hardcore fans miss the times where a tag team match could easily main event. We'll see what WWE has to offer for 2012 though, after all, if there's anyone that can turn around a bad year, it's the man that started with nothing and built it to what it is.





## **Effect of NFL Player Movement on the Fan Base**

**By Thomas Adams aka Cardncasebreak**

Do you have a favorite sports team? Think about your favorite player on that team. Now imagine you just found out that they have been traded, retired early, or entered free-agency unexpectedly. How would you feel? Upset, relieved, happy, sad, angry, or just plain frustrated? You have that feeling? Now, also imagine you are an avid sports card and memorabilia collector. You have collected all the cards, autographs, jerseys, and memorabilia from your favorite star. But now he/she is moving to another team. Does this devalue the current memorabilia? Or the future team gear? Let's take a look at a few past and recent transactions that may or may not have an effect on specific player relics.



### **Peyton Manning**

Of course we would talk about Peyton Manning. He is arguably the largest free-agency release and pickup of any team ever in the NFL. Once the face of the Indianapolis Colts franchise he is now the soon-to-be starting Quarterback of the Denver Broncos. How are most fans going to react? What will collectors think about his old/new cards? Will Colts fans cherish the memorabilia they have from his tenure in Indianapolis? Will his cards/autographs in a Colt's uniform be more valuable? Will his Denver Broncos cards and memorabilia be worth more because his tenure there will be understandably shorter, thus making the amount of items available much smaller? Or will they embrace the new face of the franchise (many believe this will be Stanford's Andrew Luck)? On another note, what will Denver fans think? They just had an up and down year with new Quarterback Tim Tebow. He definitely played a different game and drew a huge fan base in Denver and throughout the country. Often touted as, "...the guy I would want my daughter to marry!" Do fans in Denver embrace their new quarterback in Peyton Manning, or still

hold on to the Tim Tebow days they relished only a few short months ago? Tim Tebow cards flew off the shelves and sold like hotcakes on eBay and other auction sites less than a year ago? Will this trend continue, or will fans and collectors alike lose interest?

One can say that both quarterbacks left a legacy and a mark on the teams they played for at the end of the 2011-12 season. Peyton Manning's legacy lasted 14+ years, while Tebow's lasted just under a full year with the recent NFL lockout. Will fans this year be more focused on Peyton Manning in Denver? Or will they feel they have been slighted and silently root for Tebow's success in New York with his new team, the Jets. This will be up to the fan and the collector. Some will reason that the players original team is where the legacy started and thus automatically makes the cards and memorabilia



worth more. Others will argue that that either team can be weighted the same and it will be up to the individual collector to decide. What are your thoughts? Has this already happened to your team in years past? What if it had nothing to do with free-agency or trade of a player?

## **Barry Sanders:**

Everyone who has watched football in their lifetime know this name. He is one of the greatest rushers in NFL history. Only two people have more career rushing yards than his 15,269. Those two players are Emmitt Smith and Walter Payton. Two NFL Legends. But, in 1999, Barry Sanders decided that he would unexpectedly retire from the NFL even though he was still healthy, running great, and within striking distance of Walter Payton's rushing record (16,726 yards). His retirement came as a surprise to most, except maybe those in the Lions organization. Apparently there had been some "bad blood" between Sanders and the leadership which caused him to lose his "love for the game". Thus his early retirement. Imagine being a Detroit Lions fan and hearing that just two years after signing a 6 year, \$35.4 million contract that your star running back retired. Although this situation is far different from that of Peyton Manning and Tim Tebow (they went to different teams),



the fan and collector situation remains the same. Some may argue that his cards and memorabilia are worth more because he is now retired. Imagine for a moment that he broke the all-time rushing record before his retirement. What does that do to the value of his items? But also imagine that he didn't break the record with the Lions and had been traded to a different team. Are his items worth more with the team where he broke the record, or for the team where he compounded 15,000+ yards?

Keep in mind this is merely two examples of what effect transactions in the sports world can have on fan base and collector interest. The views on what is better or worse for a team, card, jersey, or fan will only be decided by time. Some day we will know if a Tebow card in a Jets uniform is worth more than a Broncos. On the other hand, will a Tebow card in a Broncos uniform be worth more than a Peyton Manning card in the same blue and orange? These will and can be discussed endlessly. Opinions will be formed, but eBay, Beckett, and other ways to gauge memorabilia prices will tell the ultimate truth. What do you think?

The card value to me is created by two people. The first person is the one who has possession of the card. The second is the person who is searching for that card. The value to the card holder will be lower





at times than that of the person who wants possession of the card. Some people value cards if they are searching for more than others. The fact that a player moves from one team to another doesn't affect the card's value, merely whether that team's collector still values the card in the same way. Someone will still value the card, whether they are on their old team or new team.

Player movement is part of the game. It will never directly affect the value of a sports card or the value of that person to an NFL Team. Their value can only go down based on performance and not on what team they play for. In the case of early retirement, it may actually help the value of the cards and fan interest. If the player was declining or no longer in his prime it may serve him good to retire when he did so that his value didn't decline more in the following years.

In conclusion, player movement, trades, and early retirement will only have a major effect on the NFL team, the player's family, and possibly the NFL as a whole. The effect on fan base and card value or interest will only be short lived, as new and exciting players will be in and out of the NFL constantly.

# THE NATIONAL

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