

Set Collecting 1933 to 1941

What can be collected and for how much?

By George Vrechek



Whether you have a huge collection or no collection of pre-WWII cards you probably went through a process of trying to figure out what made sense to collect. Since most of us weren't around to collect these cards as kids, we don't have the normal sentimental attachment that helps determine what cards to collect. You might have sought the advice of others or perused the price guides as to what made sense to collect. You may have even decided to forget the whole thing in that cards from the 1930s aren't a dime a dozen anymore.

The decision of what to collect is very personal and subjective. Collectors choose to collect graded T206 sets or bent up 1974 Topps. However, collectors have a propensity to try to organize, prioritize, file and research. Jefferson Burdick organized tobacco insert cards of actresses even though they didn't have names or statistics. A collection is put in order numerically, by team or by player. There is usually some logic to our interests and collections. Let's try using some logic to look at set collecting from 1933 to 1941 with the goal that we might be influenced to start another set or re-think the decision to avoid this era entirely.

181 Sets Issued

Between 1990 and 1999, according to the *SCD* Catalog, approximately 4,128 baseball card sets were issued. From 1933 to 1941 there were 181 sets issued. Not all of the 181 issues are cards in that *SCD* includes pins, matchbooks, pennants, wrappers, stamps, coasters, ice cream lids and cereal boxes in their listings, which are nice but just don't fit very well into our shoe or cigar boxes.

Of the actual card sets, some of them were issues of just one or two players (Jimmie Foxx, Babe Ruth, Ducky Medwick, the Deans). While it is great to have a 1939 African Tobacco card of Babe Ruth, if you still need one, it is a bit hard to find these advertised in *SCD*, at a card show or on eBay.

Then there were the team-issued picture packs (Cubs, Tigers, A's, Reds, White Sox). Again these are great to have but were only distributed locally and don't really look like baseball cards. At the risk of insulting advocates of Dixie Lids and Mrs. Sherlock's Bread Pins, I'll suggest that there really are not that many card sets to collect. So the good news is that we are looking at collecting a few thousand cards from this pre-war era versus jillions from the modern era. The bad news is that it costs you a little more.

After eliminating issues that aren't cards or were only issued locally or only of a player or two, we can take a harder look at the major sets from the era. Without looking in a book you know that Goudeys, Diamond Stars and Play Balls have to be in this group. There are other sets like Batter-Up, Fine and Wide Pens, S&S, Tattoo Orbit and DeLong that you may know something about but appear to be difficult to collect. After this bunch you may have to consult the catalogs to know much about Butterfinger, Butter Cream, Al DeMaree, Eclipse Import, Rittenhouse or Schutter & Johnson. Again the good news is that you are about done thinking about sets from this era.

Collectible criteria

I'm going to start with the proposition that to generate much interest in collecting, a set has to be attractive, available, not too easy to complete and it needs some historical hobby popularity. Let's also look at what, if anything, it will cost you to collect a set. If you look at the price guides for sets in mint condition, you may quickly conclude that collecting sets from 1933 to 1941 is an

academic discussion particularly given the big jump in prices lately as reflected in the 2006 *SCD* Catalog. When the kids (or you) need shoes or a college education, it is hard to justify popping for a near mint 1933 Goudey set at maybe \$90,000. As an investment a near-mint Goudey set would have done better than the S&P index over the past five years, but then you'd have to peel off a Ruth or two to send the kids to college - for a few months. Plus it wouldn't be much of a collecting quest if you just went out and bought a set. But what would it cost you to chip away at/collect the sets from 1933 to 1941?

Condition

To answer that question we need to consider condition. When I came across 1933 Goudey cards in the mid-1950s, I thought the cards were made with rounded corners. The ones I picked up from a kid in the neighborhood had been his father's collection and the corners were pretty round. The kids in my neighborhood had not been flippers like the kids from the 1930s; we just put the cards carefully in shoeboxes, protected them with rubber bands, and played dice games with them. We may have also trimmed 1952 Topps to the size of the Bowmans and changed the names of the players or their teams on a card. 1953 Bowmans were ideal for such alterations.

The point is that I don't think the manufacturers of Goudey Gum cards intended that the cards be kept in mint condition. Rather than paying good money for great cards, why not pay less money for "good" cards that were actually out there in circulation in the 1930s, banging around in pockets, school bags and cigar boxes? The VG or worse cards are easier to find than the mint ones anyway and we don't have forever to put these sets together. Hail to the VG or worse card.



Some cards may only be somewhat affordable in well-used condition. DiMaggio and Williams – 1939 Play Balls, Williams 1941 Play Ball

Ruth and the Boys

The next thing that drives the price of a set up are those darned superstars like Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio, and Williams. They used to be priced the same as any other card in the set. (We must continue reading without kicking ourselves for any past failures to take advantage of the prices of yesteryear.) But what if you held off on Ruth, Gehrig, Williams, DiMaggio and maybe just a few others? Now, if you look at the Goudey set and forget about Ruth and Gehrig for a while and target collecting the other 233 cards in VG condition, you are looking at a lousy \$11,500 (plus future inflation) to collect the near set, or a \$49 per card average. If you lowered your sights a bit more to somewhat bent and bruised cards, it would be proportionately less. If the royal 1933 Goudeys, the premier cards from the 1930s, can be (mostly) collected for \$11,500, what would it cost to collect the other near sets in such a way? Even if you conclude that my version of

collecting logic is warped, you can adjust my information to draw your own conclusions about the economics of collecting sets in better (or worse) condition and with or without superstars.

However, we must keep in mind that you can't actually buy from the catalogs or price guides. You have to deal with real, live people, some of whom are interested in selling VG cards at near mint prices. These sellers are more like museum curators who really don't want to part with their cards. You'll get satisfaction overcoming this obstacle as well. Of the major issues (as arbitrarily defined by Vrechek) in the 1933 to 1941 era there are only about 2,000 cards. If you hold off until a rich uncle dies to buy just 31 cards of Ruth, Gehrig and the boys, you can conceivably collect many of the sets.

Set Size

Let's look at the number of cards in each of the major sets.

- Group 1 The Long Sets:
1940 Play Ball (240 cards), 1933 Goudey (239 cards without Lajoie)
- Group 2 Big Sets:
1934-36 Batter-Up R318 (192 cards), 1936 Goudey R314 Wide Pen Premiums (178 cards), Al DeMaree R304 (173 cards, maybe), 1939 Play Ball (162 cards)
- Group 3 Average sets:
1936 National Chicle Fine Pen Premiums R313 (120 cards), Diamond Stars (108 cards), 1934 Goudey (96 cards), 1941 Double Play R330 (150 players on 75 cards), 1941 Play Ball (72 cards)
- Group 4 Modest sets:
1934 Butterfinger R310 (65 cards), 1933 Tattoo Orbit R305 (60 cards), 1936 S&S Game (52 cards), 1933 Rittenhouse Candy E285 (52 cards), 1935 Schutter & Johnson R332 (50 cards), 1938 Goudey R323 (48 cards)
- Group 5 Small sets:
1935 Goudey Puzzles (36 cards not counting variations), 1941 Goudey R324 (33 cards), 1933 Butter Cream R306 (30 cards), 1936 Goudey Game R322 (25 cards), 1933 DeLong R333 (24 cards), 1933 George C. Miller R300 (24 cards), 1933 Eclipse Import R337 (24 cards)

There are pros and cons to working on large and small sets. As the cards in a set decline, completing the set may be less time consuming and may not produce quite the same sense of accomplishment. The larger (or long sets as they used to call them) also included more stars and represented more teams. While veteran collectors like Lionel Carter played baseball dice games as a kid with the 24-card DeLong set, it would seem to be more fun to have all 239 of the 1933 Goudeys available to make up your fantasy teams. In fact, four different people could have a Babe Ruth on their team in that Ruth appears four times in the set. The excess cards of Ruth were actually an annoyance to Carter as a collector in 1933 - the card numbers could have been used to produce more complete team rosters. One factor in analyzing what to collect should involve the number of cards in the set. Too few cards reduces the challenge; too many cards may create too much of a challenge and expense.

Historic Popularity

What did collectors in the 1930s think of sets from the era? There aren't too many collectors to poll who collected cards as kids in the 1930s. I asked two of them: Lionel Carter and Bob Solon. Both men, now in their 80s, collected cards in sets and were very interested in card numbers (e.g. #106 in 1933 Goudey) and the appearance of new or obscure players on cards.



Bob Solon (left) and Lionel Carter (right), both in their basements attired in card-collectors' plaid, photos by G. Vrechek

Solon collected most of these sets in the 1930s and has always had an ability to look at the business-side of the hobby. Solon points out that manufacturers weren't chasing around a lot of excess disposable income during the Great Depression. Heads of families were out of work and baseball cards weren't of great importance in the big picture. Competition among card distributors seemed to heat up in 1933 when there was a certain optimism that the economy was going to get better. However, the economy continued to lag and the card competitors seemed to peter out and set sizes dwindled to about nothing by 1937. Finally the economy started to recover in 1939 as the popular Play Balls arrived. Solon thought the Goudeys got less inspiring each year. He thought the 4-player 1935 puzzle cards "bombed." The best thing you could do with such cards at the time was to cut them into four. The 1941 Double Plays frequently suffered a similar fate. I recall the same personal reaction to the 1955 Topps Doubleheaders, although at least we couldn't rationalize cutting them in two. Subsequent Goudey sets were not as widely distributed or sought as the 1933 and 1934 sets according to both Solon's and Carter's recollections.

Carter liked the DeLongs, Batter-Ups, Diamond Stars and Play Balls. He viewed the Wide Pens, Fine Pens, puzzles, exhibits and game cards as not quite baseball cards in that they weren't cards of one player with stats on the back. Solon felt the Wide and Fine pens were geared to an adult market interested in nice photos rather than cards. He appreciated the variety of players between the two sets and the inclusion of obscure players. Many of the other sets just weren't around much to collect. Carter had the DeLongs as a kid but not many others did. Solon felt the DeLongs were more available in St. Louis and rural areas which was quite unusual at the time since cards tended to come from the East where the big cities and major league teams could be found and then stop at the Mississippi. If you were in California, you got Zeenuts.

Jefferson Burdick's collection at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York has many rare cards including the Al DeMarees and Eclipse Imports, but even Burdick only had a few George C. Miller cards. Looking at sets from the perspective of collectors from the era I have grouped the cards into the following categories:

Popular

1933 Goudey, 1934 Goudey, Batter-Up, Diamond Stars, 1938 Goudey, 1939 Play Ball, 1940 Play Ball, 1941 Play Ball

Not as Popular

DeLong, Fine Pen, Wide Pen, Tattoo Orbit, 1935 Goudey, 1936 Goudey, S&S, 1941 Goudey, 1941 Double Play

Obscure

Al DeMaree, Butterfinger, Rittenhouse, Butter Cream, Schutter & Johnson, George C. Miller, Eclipse Import

Card sets I've left out

Exhibits (a separate topic itself), Zeenuts (minor league), Canadian cards, U.S. Caramel (a 1932 issue), R303, R308, R311, R312, Worch Cigar, M&P (not issued until WWII, at least they are cheap and ugly), Sport Kings (only a few baseball) and undoubtedly some others.

Cost of the Cards

In general the cost of sets are 10% to 30% less than the total of the individual cards in the set per the *SCD* Catalog. But buying the entire set isn't much of a collecting activity. It is a one-shot event. I'll assume you want to buy a decent number of cards to get a set going and to continue to chip away at the set over time.

Table 1 reflects the approximate cost of collecting individual cards to make up a set in an average grade of VG with roughly a 10% premium over the set price. Then assume that for some reason you want to follow my suggestion of buying VG cards and forgetting Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio, Williams and just one card of Shoeless Joe in the 1940 Play Ball set.

I have shown the cost of completing near sets of these cards and the average cost per card with and without the superstars. By leaving out the 31 superstar cards you save about 20% of the total cost. For the 1933 Goudeys you cut the cost of the near set by 35%. For 1939 Play Balls, 2 of the 162 cards (DiMaggio and Williams) make up 33% of the set price.

Here is how the cost of collecting cards in a set stacks up on the affordability scale. This listing may imply that you can just go out and find these cards to make up a set, which we will see is not the case.

TABLE 1

	cost to aquire set in VG	cards in set	average cost/card	set cost wo stars	cards in (near) set	average cost/card	Set wo stars as % of total
S&S	\$ 385	52	\$ 7.40	\$ 385	52	\$ 7.40	100%
FINE PEN NATIONAL CHICLE	1,650	120	13.75	1,425	119	11.97	86%
1939 PLAYBALL	3,000	162	18.52	2,000	160	12.50	67%
WIDE PEN - GOUDEY R314	2,600	178	14.61	2,200	176	12.50	85%
1940 PLAYBALL	6,000	240	25.00	3,900	237	16.46	65%
1941 DOUBLE PLAY	1,650	75	22.00	1,400	73	19.18	85%
BUTTERFINGER	2,200	65	33.85	1,800	63	28.57	82%
RITTENHOUSE	2,000	52	38.46	1,600	50	32.00	80%
1941 GOUDEY	1,100	33	33.33	1,100	33	33.33	100%
1936 GOUDEY GAME	880	25	35.20	880	25	35.20	100%
BATTER-UP	7,200	192	37.50	7,200	192	37.50	100%
1941 PLAYBALL	4,100	72	56.94	2,700	70	38.57	66%
1934 GOUDEY	5,500	96	57.29	4,250	94	45.21	77%
1933 GOUDEY	17,600	239	73.64	11,500	233	49.36	65%
1935 GOUDEY	2,200	36	61.11	1,800	35	51.43	82%
ECLIPSE IMPORT	1,500	24	62.50	1,200	23	52.17	80%
DIAMOND STARS	5,800	108	53.70	5,800	108	53.70	100%
SCHUTTER & JOHNSON	3,900	50	78.00	3,000	48	62.50	77%
1938 GOUDEY	4,400	48	91.67	3,700	47	78.72	84%
TATTOO ORBIT	5,100	60	85.00	5,100	60	85.00	100%
DELONG	3,600	24	150.00	2,800	23	121.74	78%
BUTTERCREAM	6,000	30	200.00	4,900	29	168.97	82%
	\$ 88,365	1,981		\$ 70,640	1,950		80%

Cards excluded

31
1.6%

Table shows the cost of accumulating individual cards to make up a VG set per 2006 SCD Catalog prices, as well as the cost of a "near set" excluding certain superstar cards. The average cost of cards in a set is shown.

Affordable

- S&S (\$7 per card - Oops, I haven't even started collecting this set, so why am I highlighting it?)
- Fine Pens (\$12 per card, forgetting Joe DiMaggio)
- 1939 Play Ball (\$13 per card, if you exclude DiMaggio and Ted Williams)
- Wide Pen (\$13 per card, forget two DiMaggio cards)
- 1940 Play Ball (\$16 per card, if you exclude DiMaggio, Williams and Joe Jackson)
- 1941 Double Play (\$19 per card without DiMaggio and Williams)

Not horrendous

- Butterfinger (\$29 per card, if you exclude Ruth and Gehrig)
- Rittenhouse (\$32 per card, without two Ruths)
- 1936 Goudey Game (\$35 per card)
- 1941 Goudey (\$36 per card)
- BatterUp (\$38 per card and you don't have to leave anyone out although you may have a problem finding the standup backs to your cards)
- 1941 Play Ball (\$39 per card, if you exclude DiMaggio and Williams)
- 1934 Goudey (\$45 per card, forgetting the two Gehrigs, however you get a picture of Lou on most of the other cards anyway)
- 1933 Goudey (\$49 per card, if you exclude 4 Ruths and 2 Gehrigs)

Pricey

- 1935 Goudey Puzzle (\$51 per card, if you exclude Ruth who takes up 1/4th of one card)

Eclipse Import (\$52 per card, excluding Ruth)
Diamond Stars (\$54 per card, darn those high numbers)
Schutter & Johnson (\$63 per card, if you exclude Ruth and Gehrig)

High End

1938 Goudey (\$79 per card without DiMaggio)
Tattoo Orbit (\$85 per card)
DeLong (\$121 per card without Gehrig)
Butter Cream (\$169 per card without Ruth)

Impossible

I am going to go way out on a limb here and state that no one is likely to start a collection of Al DeMaree Die-Cuts (\$200 per card in VG) or George C. Miller cards (over \$500 per card in VG). Burdick had a nice collection of the Al DeMaree Die-Cuts that I viewed, but no one even knows how many cards are in the set, and collecting the die-cut cards in mangled shape wouldn't be much fun anyway. You are really looking at \$500 to \$800 per card and the cards can't be found anyway.

But you can see that as long as you are not a big fan of Ruth, Gehrig, DiMaggio or Williams, you have a chance to collect near sets of many of the issues. A few sets like S&S can be collected in their entirety since they had the good sense not to include any of the biggest names.

Availability

Now that you may have an interest in collecting any of the sets described, a good question would be: What is actually available in the market? A card may well be affordable, desirable, attractive and nostalgic but if it isn't available in the market, there isn't much collecting activity.

One way to judge availability is to look at what is on eBay. While eBay may have several unusual listings at any point in time, I thought it would give me a general indication of how easy it would be to find some of these cards. I looked at listings on eBay four different times and averaged the results. My research resulted in a big surprise to me. Even though I hadn't been looking for some of the less popular sets from the era, I thought I would find cards from most sets available on eBay for a price. Of the sets I have described, 7,429 cards were either currently listed or had sales closed in the past two weeks. The 7,429 represented less than 0.5% of the 1.7 million baseball cards listed on eBay during my survey. Incredibly 1933 Goudeys accounted for 50% of the 7,430 listings with 3,676 cards. 1934 Goudeys had 1,158 listings or 16%, Diamond Stars 798 listings or 11%, and the other sets I've discussed had much less activity in total making up 23% of the cards listed.

However we really need to look at how many listings there were compared to the number of cards in a set to get a better handle on availability. See Table 2 for listings per card. Even then, this is still a rough guide in that you certainly won't run across high numbers as frequently. Also many of the listings, DeLongs for example, include a significant number of eBay store items that are listed for buying now versus for bidding. However using this rough approach Table 2 ranks cards listed on eBay compared to the number of cards in the set.

TABLE 2

	average number of cards on ebay		cards in set	listings per card
1933 GOUDEY	3,676	49.5%	239	15.38
1934 GOUDEY	1,158	15.6%	96	12.06
DIAMOND STARS	798	10.7%	108	7.39
DELONG	104	1.4%	24	4.33
1935 GOUDEY	144	1.9%	36	4.00
1936 GOUDEY GAME	84	1.1%	25	3.36
1938 GOUDEY	116	1.6%	48	2.42
1941 DOUBLE PLAY	167	2.2%	75	2.23
S&S	98	1.3%	52	1.88
1941 PLAYBALL	101	1.4%	72	1.40
BATTER-UP	264	3.6%	192	1.38
FINE PEN NATIONAL CHICLE	163	2.2%	120	1.36
1941 GOUDEY	40	0.5%	33	1.21
WIDE PEN - GOUDEY R314	182	2.4%	178	1.02
1939 PLAYBALL	129	1.7%	162	0.80
BUTTERFINGER	36	0.5%	65	0.55
1940 PLAYBALL	123	1.7%	240	0.51
BUTTER CREAM	14	0.2%	30	0.47
TATTOO ORBIT	17	0.2%	60	0.28
RITTENHOUSE	7	0.1%	52	0.13
ECLIPSE IMPORT	2	0.0%	24	0.08
GEORGE MILLER	2	0.0%	24	0.08
SCHUTTER & JOHNSON	2	0.0%	50	0.04
AL DEMAREE DIE CUTS	2	0.0%	167	0.01
	<u>7,429</u>	<u>100.0%</u>	<u>2,172</u>	

Table shows the number of cards from each set found to be either listed on ebay or recently closed. The totals for cards available on 4 different dates were averaged. The number of cards listed on ebay were divided by the number of cards in the set to derive a factor of relative availability: "listings per card."

If the survey numbers are valid, it would mean that Batter-Ups are 10 times harder to find than 1934 Goudeys, Rittenhouse cards are 10 times harder to find than Batter-Ups, and Al DeMaree Die-Cuts are 10 times harder to find than Rittenhouse. In other words, Al DeMaree Die-Cuts come around at about the same pace as eclipses. DeLong appears to be more available per the table than I think they really are due to the many buy now listings at high prices. According to the *SCD* Catalog, Rittenhouse was a relatively affordable set, but their infrequent availability would make them difficult. Several sets were not only unavailable but very expensive which should not be a complete surprise.

I think the prices for the obscure sets are a lot thinner for both buyers and sellers. There don't seem to be many of these cards available and when they do become available the seller will luck out if there are 2 or 3 people who have been anxious to acquire the cards. Modest book value prices might wind up doubling in such a sale. It may also be the case that the seller has a few of these obscure cards that no one is anxious to buy and it may take a long time before the ideal buyer appears. If you have a 1933 Goudey Ruth, you can probably buy or sell pretty quickly around book value. If you have an expensive Schutter & Johnson card, it might be awhile before a person who needs the card is willing to pay a high price. In statistical terminology I am guessing that the standard deviation from book value is much greater for obscure cards.

Collectors Comments

Finally I asked a number of current collectors to share their observations about these sets. Without resorting to my fancy analyses they seemed to me to be right on target with their comments.

Joshua Levine

Wide Pen - fairly easy to finish but there are variations, Fine Pen- tougher than the Goudeys but not impossible, Batter-Up - rarely if ever seen complete, S&S have seen complete sets fairly cheap, 1941 Goudey very tough, Tattoo Orbit reprinted a lot, Rittenhouse tough with back variations, some cards short printed, Butterfinger also a Canadian version, top stars can get really expensive, Butter Cream tough because of contest/promotion

Andy Cook

1941 Goudey is extremely difficult. I've been working on it for years and still need 2 to complete. Both the DeLong and Tattoo Orbit sets are completable if you've got a little money

John Harrell

1936 Goudey is easy and relatively cheap, 1935 is a bit tougher, Wide Pens are somewhat more plentiful than Fine Pens, 1938 Goudey is doable in low grade but will cost you a fortune for the Greenberg and DiMaggio, 1941 Goudey is getting harder by the year, especially the short prints, the DeLongs except for Gehrig can be found in low grade for not too much but you'll have to be patient, Tattoo Orbits are extremely tough as several cards exist as (unlisted) short prints. Been working on my set for close to 10 years and am down to 3, George C. Miller is the impossible dream set.

John Scott Gray

1941 Double Play is a set that I have been very successful at working on. I am over half-way there and I have not been really trying that hard.

Bob Donaldson

I think a realistic collecting goal would be to start with the 1933 Goudeys, the granddaddy of them all. I'd then pick a Play Ball set and one miscellaneous set (Fine Pen, Double Play.) Finally I'd work on a type set of all the others. I definitely think the 30s were the golden age of BB cards.

Observations

Now that I am inundated with information and before I forget why I collected it, and before you figure out whether there is indeed any logic to my approach, I will put all the factors together using completely secret mathematical equations (even to me) and present my observations as to the sets to collect from the 1933 to 1941 era.

Category 1, Sets that would make sense to collect:

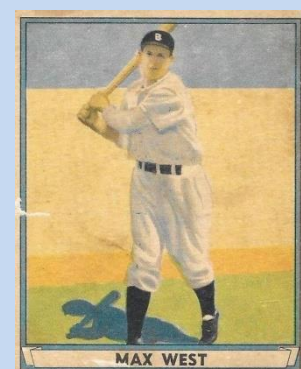
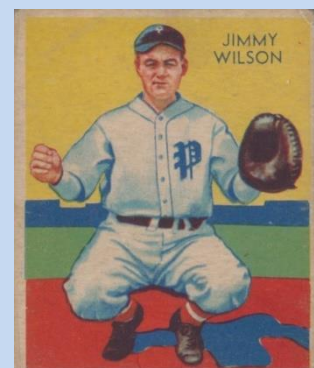
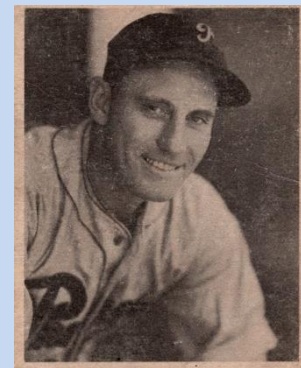
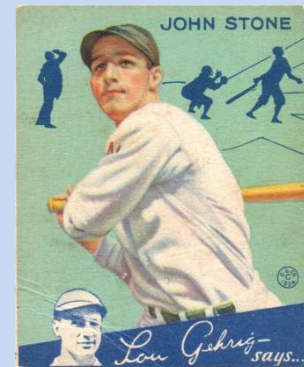
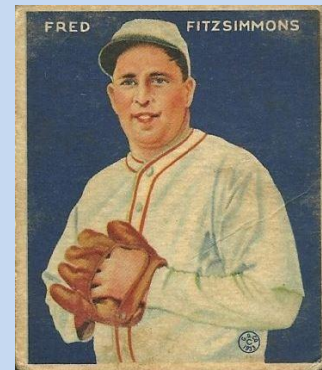
1933 Goudey The 239-card set is a classic in appearance and is available with the most listings of any 1933 to 1941 set on eBay. There are many stars and HOFers. High numbers (# 190 to 240 without Big League Chewing Gum in a block on the bottom) aren't priced at a premium. Solon remembers the high numbers coming out "in a flood" after the World Series. If you can live without the six Ruth and Gehrig cards, a near set in VG would (theoretically) run only \$11,500 versus \$17,600 with Ruth and Gehrig. It would probably be cheaper to buy a set but less fun. We won't talk about the 1934 issue of #106 Lajoie, but if you have an extra, please send it to me for safekeeping. On the other hand this is all a lot of money for baseball cards and I can fully understand if this set slips in a collector's priorities.

1934 Goudey If you are working on 1933, you might as well hit the next classic, a 96-card set. I don't know how you can collect a "Lou Gehrig says" set without Lou, but a VG near set without the two Lous would be \$4,250 versus \$5,500. Based on what I found on eBay, the set is only slightly less available than the 1933s although the "Chuck Klein says" high numbers will slow you down. Babe Ruth took a pass on appearing in Lou's or Chuck's set. Without Ruth and Gehrig the 1933 and 1934 Goudeys average about \$47 each in VG.

1939 Play Ball Commons are affordable and available. Design is similar to 1953 Bowman B&Ws. Williams and DiMaggio are the pricey cards. Many back type font variations if you want to keep collecting. Only 2 of the 46 high numbers go for an additional premium, thank goodness. A VG set without the 2 keys would only be \$2,000 versus \$3,000.

1933-35 Diamond Stars Another classic, although only 108 cards get issued over three years. High numbers are hard to find and many variations can keep you going. Because there are no Ruth or Gehrig cards, you might as well go for the whole set although the high numbers are expensive - plus many are identical to the low numbers. In 25 years I've reduced my own high number wants from 12 to 4. A VG set would be about \$5,800. My rough survey showed that Diamond Stars were more available than other sets except for the 1933 and 1934 Goudeys.

1941 Play Ball. This set looked better than any produced in the next 10 years. DiMaggio, Williams and Foxx price the set in VG at \$4,100. Without Joe and Ted it would run \$2,700 for the rest. The eBay listings would have this set in the middle of the pack as to availability. 1940 Play Ball I love the nicknames. Everyone gets one even if their nickname is "Bob." This is the longest set of the era and the high numbers drive the price of the set in VG up to \$6,000. But if you can live without Ted, Joe and Shoeless Joe for a while, you can



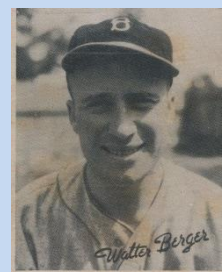
(theoretically) spend \$4,000 for the other 237 cards which include some retired HOFers, sort of like a 1960 Fleer set thrown in. Availability isn't great so this will take a while.

Category 2, The Next Sets to Consider (or maybe the first, if Category 1 is financially impossible):

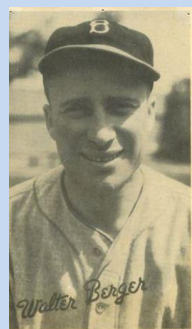
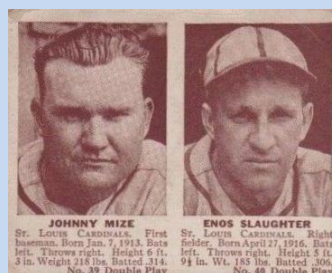
1935 Goudey Puzzle Only 36 cards if you forget the variations. A VG set is \$2,200 with Ruth as a Brave, who only gets 1/4th of the card anyway. Without Babe it is \$1,800 and about as findable as the Diamond Stars per my survey.



1936 Goudey Game Like the 1948 Bowmans with 1968 Topps game card backs, but only about \$880 for all 25 cards in VG. Greenberg is the most expensive. Availability is fair.

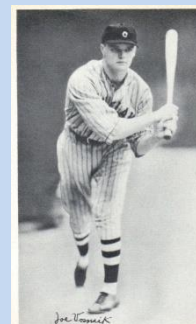


1941 Double Play Available and not too pricey if you leave out Ted and Joe. Two little guys on one card are twice as good as four tiny guys on a card?



1936 Goudey Wide Pen

178 to a set handed out by Mr. Retailer. Lionel Carter didn't consider them cards. Reasonably priced and available especially if you skip two DiMaggio cards and the variations.



1936 National Chicle Fine Pens Since you'll be digging though the Wide Pens you might as well go for their competitor from National Chicle with 120 cards and only one DiMaggio. Reasonably available but a lot of cards to keep you busy in these two good-looking sets.



S&S Started out as cheap dime store cards and they are still the cheapest of the lot. Half the card is the game information. Hard to get enthused about the appearance.



Category 3 - Maybe consider these when you have extra money and time:

1938 Goudey Not impossible to find but expensive with or without Joe DiMaggio

Batter-Up Distribution of the high numbers wasn't good in that cards were issued over two years. These fragile cards may be more mangled in lower grades than you can live with. 192 cards may take a while. Lionel Carter still needs a couple of highs and he's collected them for 70 years.



DeLong Great looking but expensive with or without Lou. Availability was pretty good per my eBay survey and there are only 24 to collect. Carter's favorite

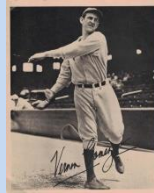


Category 4 Nice cards but impossible, Double Black Diamonds in ski terminology.

Forget 'em (don't even send me your extras, otherwise I'll try to collect the set.) Just not available much even though book prices may not be ridiculous. A type card would be nice though. In a wild guess descending order:

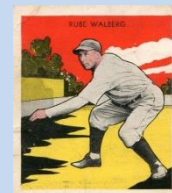
Conceivably Doable

Butterfinger - 65 cards may be worth pursuing

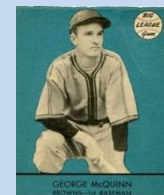


Rittenhouse - pretty flimsy game strip card, cheaper than others

Tattoo Orbit - \$85 plus for a little VG card that is hard to find and has short prints. Solon remembers comparing these cards to Goudey, Diamond Stars, and Batter-Up and thinking it was hard to get enthused about this little set.



1941 Goudey - hard to find but at least they are ugly with scarce color variations



Truly Forget 'em

Butter Cream - lots of money and hard to find

Schutter & Johnson - same as above plus they are drawings

Eclipse Import - strip card, slightly more glamorous than the M&Ps which isn't saying much

George C. Miller - a set for dreamers

Al DeMaree - save the money and visit Burdick's collection of these



Butter Cream, Schutter & Johnson, Eclipse, George C. Miller, Al DeMaree Die-Cuts

I hope you'll be persuaded to take a look at collecting another set or two from the 1933 to 1941 era. Have fun whatever you choose to collect.

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A big OBC thank you to *Sports Collectors Digest (SCD)* for allowing us to reprint George's article, on the OBC site. This article appeared in *SCD* June 30, 2006, see below.



HobbyHistory



A primer for collecting 1930s classics ... and on a budget

Like most collectors – and not just in the sports card and memorabilia hobby – you probably went through a process of trying to figure out what made sense to collect. Since most of us weren't around as kids to collect card produced before World War II, we don't have the normal sentimental attachment that often figures so prominently for Topps and Bowman issues.

The decision of what to collect is very personal and subjective. Collectors choose to collect graded T206 sets or bent-up 1974 Topps. However, collectors have a propensity to try to organize, prioritize, file, and research. Jefferson Burdick organized tobacco insert cards of actresses even though they didn't have names or statistics. A collection is put in order numerically, by team or by player. There is usually some logic to our interests and collections. Let's try using some logic to look at set collecting from 1933 to 1941 with the goal that we might be influenced to start another set or rethink the decision to avoid this era entirely.