

'53 minis, instant rookie cards, and the dice games

By George Vrechek

Do you remember the 1953 Topps minis? I didn't think so. They were "manufactured" on the 2500 block of Hessing St. in River Grove, Ill., in the summer of 1953 by Keith Toomey. Keith was one year older than me and lived across the street. He was definitely not a "mint only" freak. Keith tried unsuccessfully to get me to cut down my Topps cards to the size of the prior year's Bowmans since it was obvious to Keith that the larger size was only a flash in the pan.

I decided not to follow Keith's lead that summer. Keith apparently got out of the card business shortly thereafter because I find in my collection many of those '53 minis that must have come from Keith. Shown here are three Hall of Famers who went the mini route: Satchel Paige, George Kell and Monte Irvin. A '53 Bowman of Jackie Jensen

apparently joined the others on the guillotine.

Size was a problem from 1950 to at least 1958. The card collectors of Hessing St. - Keith, Pat, Guy and I — always wanted to have the latest card of a player showing him in the uniform of his current team. We also wanted to have a card of every regular player on the 16 teams so that we could play baseball dice games among the teams. It was convenient to put the cards together by team in a box if they were all the same size. Once we had a 1953 Topps Mantle we could put away that old '51 Bowman that didn't fit with the new cards. In fact, the only old Bowman I kept in my "singles" was Stan Musial. I didn't have the '53 Bowman and there were no other Musials until '58. Musial was the only "rare" card I remember.

Once those '57s came out we wanted to get rid of the larger '53s thru '56s. In some cases they got trimmed down to the '57 size. The '55 Johnston Cookie of Charlie Gorin was great because he

didn't appear anywhere else, but he had to be trimmed to fit in the box. Football cards didn't escape the scissors either. The cards of Gifford, Starr and Hirsch from 1957 appeared to be designed to be shared with a friend.

Sometimes we would manufacture our own "instant rookie" cards by some creative retouching. I had plenty of '55 Bowmans of Milt or Frank or whoever it was Bolling, but I sure didn't have one of rookie "Coot" Veal of the Tigers. No problem: with an eraser, eraser shield and blue pen, "Bolling" became "Veal." Art Ditmar became "Craddock." I also had a '55 Bowman Willie Mays who became "Bill White." Despite my sentimental attachment to that card I sold it to dealer Pat Quinn several years ago and cannot show it to you readers. Perhaps the current owner of this card will surface with this specimen.

The '53 Bowmans were almost too easy to modify. Gus Zernial was scratched out and became "Lopez, Infield" — never mind the lack of fam-

ily resemblance. There are other poor cards of mine like the '52 Topps high number minis (via scissors) and the scrapbook backed '53 Bowman Stengel — but you get the picture. The picture is that it was a lot of fun.

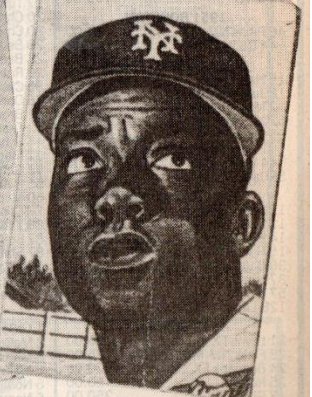
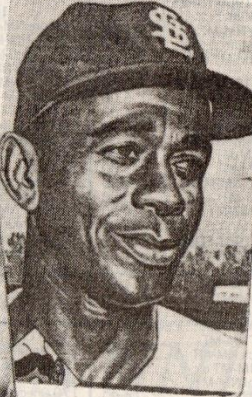
What drove a lot of this card-cutting madness were the dice games. We didn't know about APBA in the '50s so we had our own games with dice. 2 was a homer, 3 sacrifice, 4 single, 5, 6, and 7 out, 8 a strikeout, 9 a single, 10 a walk, 11 a double, and 12 a triple. We played an entire 154-game season with all 16 teams one summer. Miraculously the Cubs and Sox met in the World Series with my Sox beating Pat's Cubs. Nellie Fox hit several homers in the series. Pitchers were also pretty good hitters on our teams in that an 11 was a double regardless of who was batting or who was pitching.

I haven't seen the guys on Hessing St. in 33 years. I hope their mothers didn't throw out their cards.

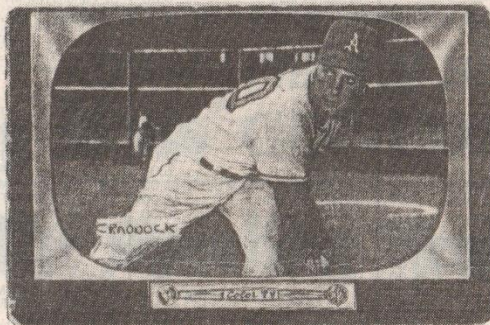


CHARLIE GORIN
Charlie Gorin

Charlie Gorin was a Johnston Cookie exclusive.



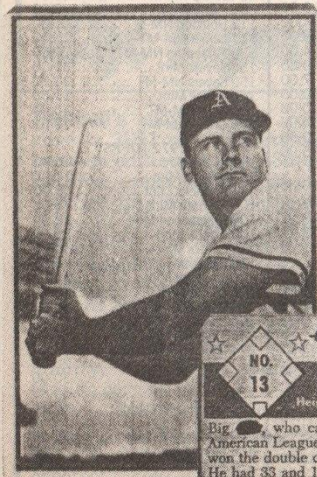
Three Hall of Famers and Jackie Jensen as '53 minis.



Art Ditmar was relieved by Walt Craddock.



Frank/Milt Bolling in yet another variation: Coot Veal.



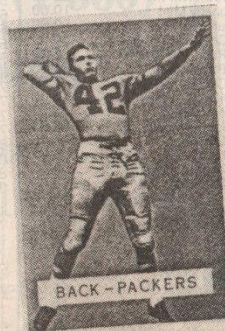
NO. 13
Philadelphia Athletics
Born: Beaumont, Texas, June 27, 1923
Height: 62", Weight: 205, bats: Right, Throws: Right

Big **LOPEZ**, who can hit the ball a country mile, was one of four American Leaguers to bat in 100 or more runs in 1952. In 1951 Gus won the double crown as home run king and runs batted in leader. He had 33 and 129 respectively. Came to the majors in 1949 with the White Sox, went to Philadelphia in April 1951. Holds a number of records for home run hitting.

	MAJOR LEAGUE BATTING RECORD							FIELDING RECORD		
	Games Played	Times at Bat	Runs Scored	No. of Hits	Runs	Bat. In.	Bat. Ave.	Put Outs	No. of Assists	No. of Field. Errors
1952	145	549	76	144	29	100	.262	302	6	9
Life time	504	1861	272	512	96	360	.282	1015	37	29

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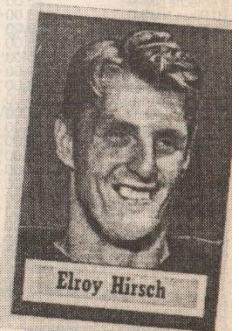
Gus Zernial became Hector Lopez, infielder.



BACK-PACKERS



BACK-GIANTS



Elroy Hirsch

Hirsch, Gifford, and Starr could be cut in two and shared with a friend.

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