

# You can't collect everything, but why not try?

A look through the sports card catalogs at what's next for the collector



*A fabulous 30,000-vintage baseball card collection might include Topps, Bowman, Goudey, Diamond Stars, Play Ball, M&P and other popular sets and then you might start looking for what to collect next.*





by

George Vrechek



An adage attributed to veteran collectors is that you can't collect everything. Conversely Jefferson Burdick (1900-1963), the Father of Card Collecting, strongly encouraged collectors not to limit themselves and to remain open to expanding their interests. As a card collector it was easier for Burdick to take that position since he gave that advice around 1950 when there weren't eight ba-jillion cards that could be collected.

### **The signs of addiction**

Collecting is a progressive addiction. It may start innocently with a friend introducing us to collecting and even giving us a few freebies. We dabble into buying cards of favorite players from our youth. We progress to collecting sets from those childhood years. That feels pretty good, and soon we are tempted into expanding into earlier and later years. We get hooked on the high that comes from completing sets, and we move from baseball to football, basketball, hockey, boxing and non-sports cards. We buy from dealers in poorly lit hotel meeting rooms. Eventually we are completely addicted and start bidding furiously on inserts, test issues, regionals, tobacco cards, exhibit cards, early gum cards, variations, printing differences and upgrades to all of them. The collectors' eyes start to glaze over as they move into progressive rounds of the addiction. Bobble heads and Slurpee cups appear on den and basement shelves. Second and third sets accumulate. Family members enable the addicts by covering up for them when they miss family events to visit dealers instead. Soon the addicts are looking for autographs of 19<sup>th</sup>-century ball players, uniforms of 300-game winners, Old Judge variations and Ty Cobb's false teeth.

## **BASEBALL**

### **So you think you have collected everything**

It is not surprising that some collectors come to their senses before they get Cobb's teeth on their want lists and follow the advice that you can't collect everything. I've heard collectors say that they have "about everything," or that there is really nothing left that is available or affordable. We will look more closely at how far collectors get into the universe of collectibles. Jerseys, balls, autographs and photos are almost limitless. We will start with just baseball cards and consider other sports next. How many baseball cards do you have, not counting duplicates? How many cards are there that you could collect? What might be reasonable to collect next?

### **How many cards do you have and what is a card anyway?**

Many of us can probably figure out how many baseball cards we have, but even that answer has to be based on more specific criteria. Do we distinguish between vintage and modern sets? What years would be considered vintage? Do we include minor league sets? Does it make a difference if the minor league card is a Babe Ruth 1914 Baltimore Oriole or a Rubby De La Rosa 2013 Pawtucket Red Sox? What about foreign issues? Are Japanese cards different from Topps Venezuelan cards? Are postcards included? What about photos with players' names? Do we count variations? What about the first series 1954 Topps "Canadian" graybacks versus the third series 1952 Topps graybacks? What about tobacco cards with different backs or different factory numbers? Or do you just worry about scarce backs? How far do test issues need to roam outside the Topps offices? What about team issues, collector issues and reprints? Do we include comic cards of women in baseball outfits? How about ticket stubs with pictures of players? What if they are generic players? How about cards cut from newspapers? Are they cards or paper? Are coins, pins, silks, discs, Chemtoy Superballs, wrappers and movie posters included?

### **All-inclusive catalog approach**

Former *Standard Catalog of Vintage Baseball Cards* (catalog) editor Bob Lemke wrestled with all these questions and developed criteria for what got included in the catalog – which generally included the kitchen sink, rather than trying to separate items into another non-card catalog. Most of the items mentioned above are in the catalog, despite some of the stuff not looking like a card. In the catalog introduction Lemke described the criteria for listing. The complete catalog got so chubby that they decided to split the listings into vintage and modern with 1980 and prior issues going into the vintage book. The current F+W Media *Standard Catalog of Vintage Baseball Cards, Third Edition* was edited by SCD Editor Tom Bartsch.



*Former Vintage Catalog Editor Bob Lemke*

### **Burdick's take on continuing the pursuit**

Jefferson Burdick would urge us not to turn up our noses at recent issues like those after 1980. Burdick continued to collect until a few years before his death in 1963. He stopped trying to pick up complete sets, but he did manage to acquire then-recent card issues like Johnston Cookies as he turned his collection over to the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art. He was also organizing the heck out of postcards in his later years which may have distracted him from finishing off his Topps sets.



*Jefferson Burdick (1900-1963) started the first card catalog in 1939. (1950 photo)*

I thumbed through most of Burdick's baseball card collection at the Met. According to the Met, Burdick gave them about 30,000 baseball cards. His card collection was as complete as possible until the early 1950s when he started shipping cards to the museum. Thereafter his cards were usually just examples of the newer sets. He was trying to collect everything, while still acknowledging that it was impossible to succeed. I even found Burdick's equivalent of a brief want list showing how many cards he was missing in each of the sets.

From the catalog you can also figure out what sets were unknown to Burdick. If it is an old set and doesn't have an ACC (Burdick's *American Card Catalog*) designation, either Burdick didn't find it or the set was lumped in with another issue. I'm guessing Burdick had 30,000 of maybe 35,000 baseball cards that he knew about, but there may have been another 10,000 cards issued before the mid-1950s that he didn't know about.

### **A 15,000 to 30,000 card vintage collection**

I estimate that long-time baseball card collectors today will have 15,000 to 30,000 vintage cards issued before 1981. I took an unscientific poll of 31 vintage card set collectors. Their collections averaged 17,000 pre-1981 singles. Someone owning just a lousy complete set of T206s would be welcomed into my circle of serious collectors as well, although collectors aren't all that "serious."

Let's look at 1) what popular sets would comprise the 15,000 to 30,000 card collections, 2) how many cards have been issued and 3) what is available that we may not have considered collecting.

### **How many cards in popular sets?**

We'll start with the easy math questions. How many cards are there in the popular (subjective opinion) sets from 1933 to 1980?

- I counted 16,787 Topps cards issued in their regular sets from 1951 to 1980.
- There were 1,884 Bowmans (excluding the 1949 PCL issue).
- Other cards issued after WWII through 1980 included widely distributed Topps inserts, 1975 minis, traded sets, Post Cereal, Fleer, Leaf, Kellogg, Nu-Card, Golden Press and Hostess. I counted 4,902 cards in this arbitrary grouping.
- While there were classic issues in the 1930s and early 1940s, they only comprised about 1,813 cards for popular sets like Goudeys, Play Balls, Diamond Stars, Batter-Up, M&P and exhibit cards.
- The 2,000+ variations in these popular sets will be ignored, although I certainly don't.

If somehow you managed to collect all of the cards mentioned so far, you would have 25,386 baseball cards and quite a nice collection. If you won the lottery and decided to pick up a few popular sets from the 1880 to 1940 period, you would only need a box big enough for about 3,000 more cards. In this grouping I included Old Judges, T201, T202, T206, T207, E120, E121, Tattoo Orbit, Goudey and National Chicle Premiums, S and S and Double Play. Throw into the shoebox another 1,600 cards for a type card collection: one card from other sets.

You would have about 136 sets and 30,000 baseball cards. Like Alexander the Great, at that point would you weep because there were no more collecting worlds to conquer? Burdick had 30,000 cards. Is that about it for vintage baseball cards?

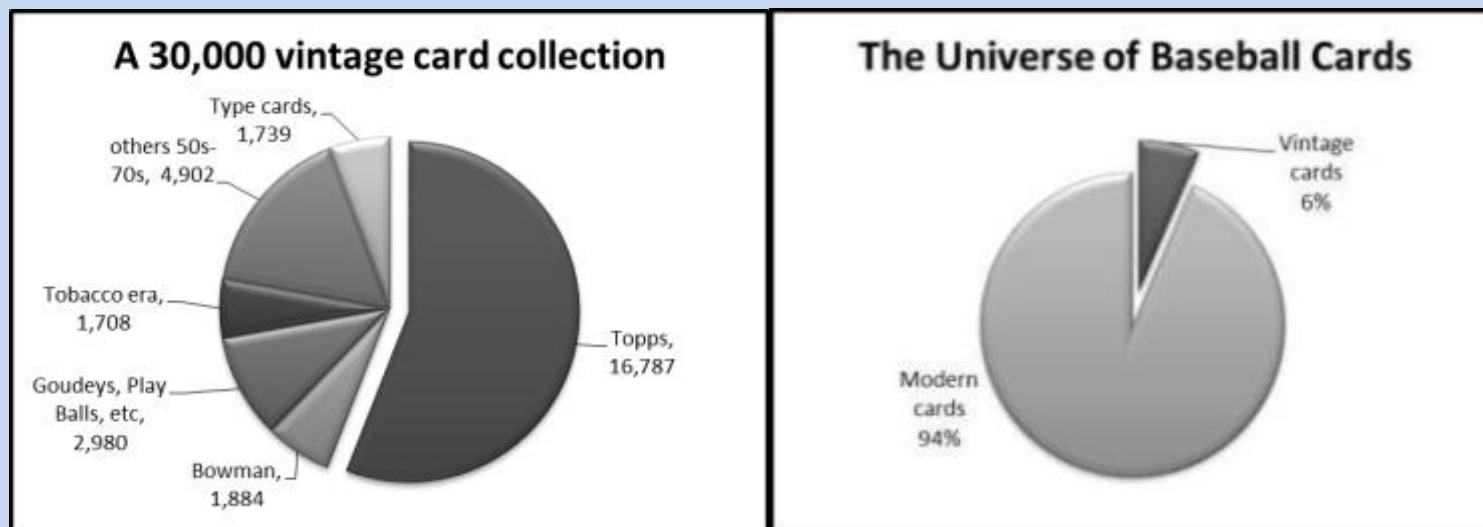


*If you won the lottery, you could knock off a few tobacco sets like Old Judge, T201 T202, T205, T206 and T207.*



*E120, E121, Tattoo Orbit, S and S, Double Play and more Goudey and National Chicle issues should fit in your box as well.*





*A hypothetical collection of 30,000 popular vintage cards would include Topps, Bowman, Goudeys, Play Balls, some tobacco sets and others.*

*With the explosion of sets produced in recent years, the (110,000) vintage cards (pre-1981) are estimated to make up only 6% of all the baseball cards issued to date.*

### **How many cards are in the universe of baseball cards?**

Because of all the questions I had about what was a baseball card, I was quite cautious in accepting any information as to how many separate baseball cards have been issued. I found a study from 1999 that estimated around 600,000 cards were issued between 1863 and 1999. I think the study was light on counting 19<sup>th</sup>-century cards, but those sets turn out to be relatively minor compared to trying to figure out how many cards were issued in recent years. For example, more individual cards were issued in 1998 than during the entire first century of baseball cards.

I estimated that the 1 million individual baseball card threshold was reached a few years ago and the numbers have continued to climb. The 2013 *Beckett Almanac of Baseball Cards and Collectibles* advertises more than 1.8 million "items," although their data base currently identifies an even more robust 2.6 million items. I didn't have the energy to try to figure out how many of the items were cards.

Whatever the number is, it is enormous. While there have been expensive cards issued in recent years, you might well say that having a set of 528 1990 Leaf cards is not better than having 524 T206s, and that counting cards issued after 1980 is like counting so many grains of sand on the beach. Why bother? In my own collection, over 60% of the cards were issued after 1980 but they represent maybe 2% of the total



value. Dealer Al Rosen once told me that while he will buy everything in a collection, he will leave the modern cards behind rather than lugging them home.

### Cards before 1981

I'll pass on trying to calculate all baseball cards ever issued, but I will take a stab at looking at how many cards were issued before 1981. To make things easy, I assumed that whatever Bob Lemke thought should be included in a book called "Vintage Baseball Cards" is what I would include in my calculations even though the catalog includes many things that don't look like cards to me. Lemke gave me his guess that there might be another 15% of the vintage card universe that is still uncatalogued since there are regional and foreign issues being discovered each year.

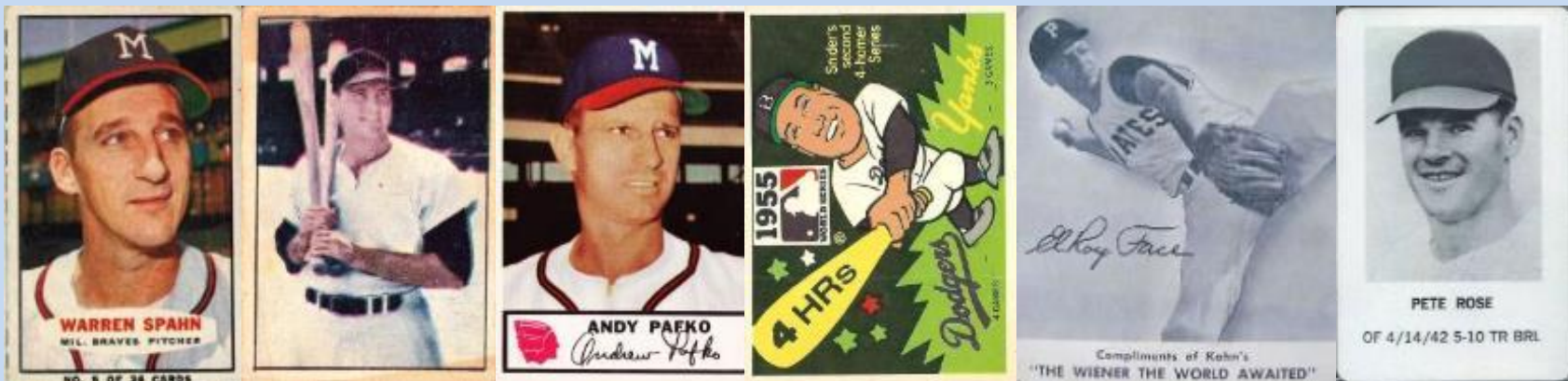
I went through the *Standard Catalog of Vintage Baseball Cards, Third Edition* and counted 2,249 sets. Only 136 of those 2,249 sets make up my phenomenal 30,000 card virtual collection described above. I then calculated the line items in the catalog. I found about 110,000 such line items that I thought represented individual cards in those 2,249 sets.

Therefore my virtual collection of 30,000 wonderful vintage cards from 136 sets, that would cause me to conclude that I had spent enough time and money, would represent only 27% of the vintage cards ever issued and cover only 6% of all the vintage sets.

What is out there that we may not have considered collecting? Are they primarily cheapo collector issues and minor league sets from the 1970s that take up space? Are they Canadian and Latin American issues, or is it just a lot of Chemtoy balls, pins and discs? It looks to me that it is a little of everything, a sea of sets difficult to easily describe.

### What is left to collect in recent cards?

We will start with the post-war sets that didn't quite pass my subjective test of popularity. I included the warped Kellogg's cards, the Post Cereal cards cut from boxes by 7 year-olds and the chopped-up, stained Hostess panels and singles in my 30,000-virtual-card collection, but I didn't mention several other issues. I would put these other issues in the category of recent cards that are available, if you can develop sufficient enthusiasm for them.





*The next tier of sets from recent years - Bazooka, Berk Ross, Johnston Cookies, Laughlin, Kahns, Milton Bradley and a variety of more obscure Topps small sets.*

I identified 76 issues that have around 3,900 cards for consideration. The principal issuers are Milton Bradley (695 cards), Kahn's (508), Laughlin (479), Bazooka (425), Jello (397) and Topps Burger King (223). This category also includes more obscure Topps inserts, Johnston Cookies (95 cards), Berk Ross (112) and 1948-9 Leaf (98) to take care of any extra money you might have. This group is probably the most fertile ground for those looking for sets that are available and challenging, but not completely impossible.

### **Non-cards**

I understood Bob Lemke's rationale in including items that weren't really cards in the catalog, but they don't fit in my shoeboxes very well, and you may want to treat them as outside a vintage card collection. The oddballs include pins, discs, caps, cups, lids, coins, silks, records, albums, statues, cartridges, matchbook covers, ticket stubs, stamps and bottle caps. If we ignore all this stuff, we can chisel away 10,417 items in 209 issues. Conversely, you can delve into any or all of these categories, but I wouldn't call them cards.

### **Collector issues**

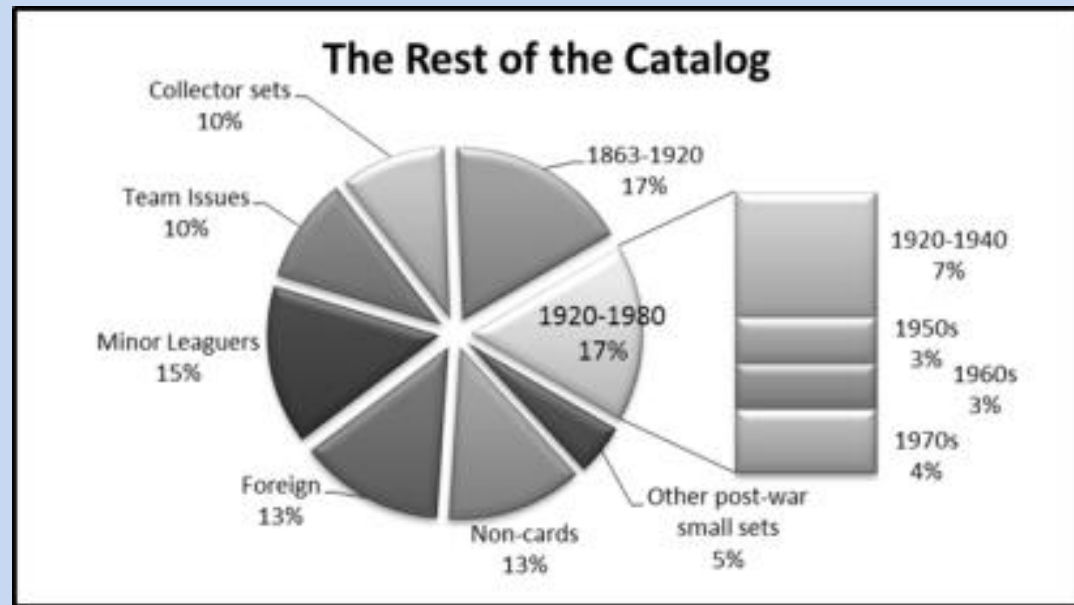
I can be less apologetic about collector issues regardless of how old they are. I'm going to cart them over to the side as well. My numbers include 9,998 cards from 276 issues. They include issues produced for minor league teams by TCMA and others. The granddaddies of these sets turn out to be those created by the late Bob Solon of Oak Park, Illinois. Solon and friends produced five sets in 1969 and 1970 including what are now called the 1969 Solon Royals, the mysterious 1971 Expos LaPizza Royale (for a non-existent pizza place) and Fud's Photography for another phantom company. Solon was ahead of his time in the non-licensed collector card business.



*Bob Solon (1923-2009) was ahead of his time in producing collector sets. (2003 photo)*

We started with a phenomenal virtual collection of 30,000 cards out of maybe 110,000 items in the catalog. After looking at recent available sets and after setting aside non-cards and collector issues, there are about 55,000 cards to consider.

After collecting 30,000 popular vintage cards, you can still find another 80,000 baseball cards in the catalog comprised of many different categories.



#### Minor league issues

Minor league sets range from very valuable early tobacco cards to recent issues trying to capitalize on rookie card collecting. Babe Ruth's Baltimore Oriole rookie card sold for \$450,000. The massive and expensive T210, T211 and T212 sets were all minor leaguers, and there were some great PCL issues like Zeenuts (3,622 cards), Mother's Cookies and Seattle Popcorn (348 cards). The catalog includes these cards, but they are relegated to the back of the book. I'm going to treat them as a separate group. However, I'll leave the minor leaguers in the T206 set and the pre-1900 minor leaguers out of this grouping since that's how Lemke handled them. This convenient exercise has created a group of about 8,000 cards, including some rather pricey items. The catalog doesn't bother to list the plethora of minor league sets from the 1970s which would be at least a few thousand more cards.

*There are some great minor league long sets thanks to the West Coast teams – T212, T210 Old Mill, Zeenuts, Mother's Cookies and Seattle Popcorn*



### Foreign cards

Canada doesn't seem very foreign, but I am going to categorize the 6,950 O-Pee-Chees produced before 1981 along with 2,041 Topps Venezuelan cards and other Latin American issues into another category comprised of 46 large sets with 10,721 cards. Many collectors have worked away on the O-Pee-Chee sets. The Latin American issues are harder to find; many are stickers that have already been "stuck." A few of these issues go back to the 1920s and 1930s. I have settled for collecting type cards of these issues. I am concerned that if I have more than a few dozen O-Pee-Chees that I will be looking for 6,900 more and crossing the border to find dealers in dimly lit Canadian hotels.

*Foreign issues include cards from Japan, Puerto Rico, Venezuela and Canada.*



### Team sets

Team issues are usually relatively affordable, but their availability outside the city of issue is a challenge. Some teams were issuing cards in the early 1930s and have kept at it. There are gray areas as to what should be considered a team issue, but I counted 503 vintage issues and 10,292 cards. Generally the issues included all members of the team and utilized picture packs or postcards. Putting together sets for team-issued Cubs, Dodgers, Red Sox, or Indians will keep you busy. Jay Publishing alone cranked out 1,571 cards for teams during the 1950s and 1960s.



### Test issues

Topps produced several issues that were tested in limited areas or may have not even made it out of the office. In some cases there are only a few samples around, sort of like looking for Cobb's teeth. It is great that they are listed in the catalog and they provide interesting reading, but they aren't often available. There may be 45 issues with 834 cards in this category plus quite a few more items that I included in the non-card group above. There are several gray areas between test issues and what was distributed to the public. In this category I included advertising panels, certain stickers, plak, 3-D cards, puzzles, 1951 All-Stars and other oddballs.

We are down to looking at about 25,000 vintage cards not covered by the above categories. We will look at the more recent sets first that might be affordable and available.

### What's left to find from the 1970s?

The leftovers from the 1970s, not among the sets previously mentioned, include an assortment of 127 small sets with 3,098 cards that didn't seem to be collector issues or team issues, but may have been pretty close. The largest sets were 1975-7 Shakey's Pizza (205 cards), 1973 Linnett Portraits (179 cards), 1970 Dayton Daily News (161) and 1977 Sportscaster (142). They aren't expensive, but they aren't necessarily easy to find since they aren't viewed as exciting inventory.

*1970s: Shakey's Pizza, Linnett Portraits, Dayton Daily News and Sportscaster*

*1960s: Ashland Oil, Dexter Press, Bell Brand, KDKA Pirates, Rawlings and Sugardale*



## 1960s

For some reason the oddball sets from the 1960s seem to generate more enthusiasm. Topps collectors from that era were hungry for something else and several small issues with regional distribution fit the bill. I found 91 sets with 2,203 cards from issuers like Ashland Oil, Dexter Press, Bell Brand, KDKA Pirates, Rawlings and Sugardale. I see these sets on collectors' want lists as they expand their horizons.

*1950s: Esskay, Volpe, Hunter's, Num Num, Glendale, Stahl Mayer, Red Man and Hires*

## 1950s

Many of these remaining sets from the 1950s (2,200 cards) were issues like Esskay, Volpe, Hunter's, Num Num, Glendale and Stahl Mayer featuring local teams. National issues included Red Man and Hires. Challenges in several sets from the '50s and '60s involve fretting over tabs attached to the cards, product staining and scarce players. There are interesting sets here that can also be very expensive - how about \$206,000 in near mint for the 60 Esskay Hot Dogs Orioles, \$60,000 for 86 Hunter's Weiners Cardinals, or \$55,000 for 28 Glendale Hot Dogs Tigers. Who knew that hot dog packaging could be so expensive?

The 1952-5 Red Man Tobacco cards (205 cards, depending on how you count) can be fun to collect with their larger size, drawings, tabs (or not) and bright colors. Watch out for unmarked reprints. You can also collect them twice, if you want each of the backs with the two different offer expiration dates. I sent a Red Man of Washington Senator Gil Coan to him recently since he didn't have one. Hires are also available, but the "with tab" specimens are pricey.



*1940s: Tip Top Bread, Sports Exchange, Bond Bread, Babe Ruth Story and Sport Thrills.*

### **The late 1940s**

There were not many sets to choose from in the late 1940s. In 1947 Tip Top Bread issued 163 cards in various regions. A near mint set runs \$20,000. The 1947 Sports Exchange 108-card set was actually one of the first collector sets but rated a ACC classification of W601 from Burdick. There were two small sets from Swell in 1948: Babe Ruth Story and Sport Thrills. Bond Bread issued five sets in 1947. The 13-card Jackie Robinson set is listed at \$85,000 in near mint. The other sets are much more affordable, but watch for reprints. Also in 1948 there is a 48-card R346 Blue Tint set with plenty of New York players.

### **1930s and early 1940s**

Most of these sets have been included in my ideal 30,000 super card collection of popular sets like Goudey, Diamond Stars, Play Ball, Sport Kings, Tattoo Orbit, Goudey and National Chicle Premiums, S and S and Double Play. There are another 90 sets making up 2,400 cards in the catalog. I wrote SCD articles a few years ago about delving into this decade's sets as well as a story on the discovery of uncatalogued Al Demaree Die-Cuts found under a bed in Wisconsin.

My observations were that there were some interesting sets like Butterfinger and Rittenhouse in this era that were not ridiculously priced unless you had to have names like Ruth, Gehrig and DiMaggio. I checked eBay listings and reported that the hardest to find cards were Al Demaree, Schutter and Johnson, George C. Miller, Eclipse Import and Rittenhouse. I checked Burdick's collection at the Met and found he only had a few of the 32 George C. Miller cards, and this set was issued in 1933 when Burdick was looking for everything. The set today is listed at \$125,000. The 1933 U.S. Carmel set has 32 cards including Ruth and is listed at \$75,000. Pioneer collector G. Lionel Carter's favorite cards were the 1933 DeLongs. This colorful 24-card issue has Gehrig and the other big stars of the day, looking even bigger as they loomed over stadiums. Carter's set cost him 24 cents in mint. He traded away his duplicates. A near mint set today is \$30,000 per the catalog.



*G. Lionel Carter (1918-2008) was collecting sets like DeLongs and looking for other collectors like Burdick. (1935 photo)*

There were at least 208 Wheaties boxes with players on the backs issued during the 1930s. Their prices today aren't too bad, since youngsters didn't use laser cutting technology in freeing these players from the rest of the cereal boxes.

There were 128 Four-on-One Exhibit cards issued in the 1930s at about a rate of one sheet of 16 cards each year. The common cards aren't too expensive, but you have to like having four guys on one card. They can also be found already cut into four cards for you.



1930s: Butterfinger, Rittenhouse, Schutter and Johnson, DeLongs, Eclipse Import, Al Demaree, U.S. Caramel and George C. Miller

### 1920s

I only included the E120 and E121 sets in my fabulous virtual 30,000-card collection. There are at least 65 sets with 3,300 cards to choose from among other issues from the 1920s. The Exhibit Supply Company issued over 600 cards in this decade and most of them are the more attractive one-player-per-card versions since the Four-on-Ones didn't start until 1929.

Inexpensive strip cards (10 for a penny) were issued in the 1920s with limited identification. Burdick categorized them as "W" cards starting with W500. The "W"

*Exhibits, a long story themselves- the 1920s, 4 in 1s, Salutation, HOF, Regular, 1977 HOF + stat backs*



designation was the result of these "recent album cards" being in the general category of souvenir cards which were covered later in Burdick's catalog than advertising or insert cards. The letter "W" was left over for these second-class citizens. Burdick even mentions that these blank-backed strip cards were not inspiring compared to the tobacco inserts or later gum cards. I think of "W" as meaning: "What are they?" There are at least 1,000 such cards in sets known as W501 through W590.

What Burdick considered as larger pictures rather than cards went into a designation starting at W600. Many of the flimsy paper W cards are expensive today if in great condition, but since they are usually found in lousy condition, they may provide fertile ground for expanding that little 30,000-card collection.

Other sets from the 1920s that might attract attention are 1921-3 National Caramel (E220), R315 and R316 Kashin Publications. The 1928 and 1929 Star Player Candy issues of 76 cards have star prices that seem incredible given their ordinary appearance. A graded Ruth card complete with pinholes, tears and wrinkles was offered on eBay for \$7,000.



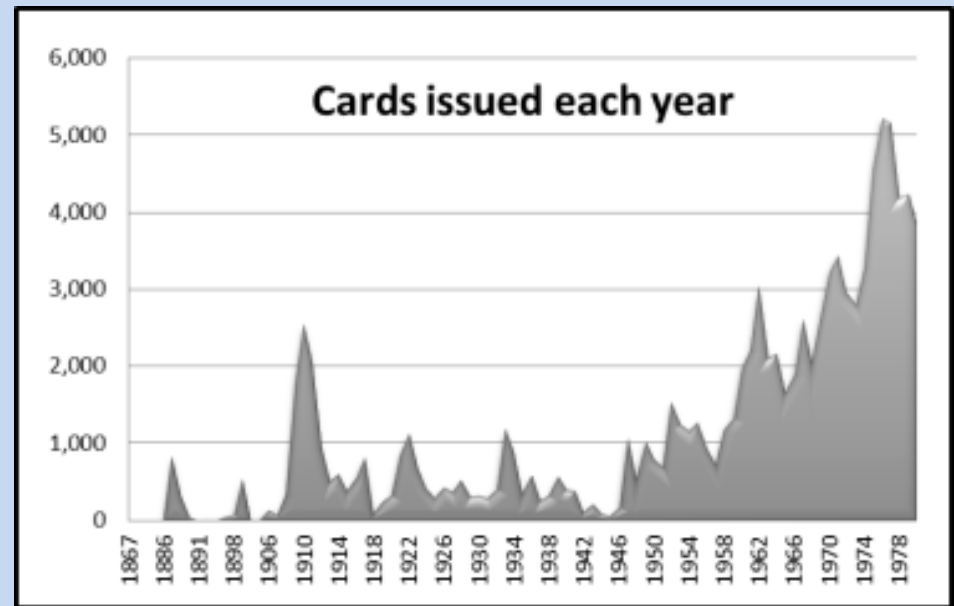
*E220, M101, R315, R315  
Kaskin and Batter-Up – in  
exciting black and white*

### **Prior to 1920**

In addition to the Old Judges, T201, T202, T206 and T207s I included in the popular pursuits, there are at least 380 sets with 15,000 more cards issued before 1920. Such sets include T204 Ramly, Cracker Jack, Weil Baking, E91, M101, Fan Craze and Famous and Barr. Cards like Kalamazoo Bats, Old Judge Cabinets and Just So Tobacco will run several thousand dollars – per card. The 1910-2 second tobacco era produced a plethora of new cards not matched until the late 1950s.

I was unable to calculate the values for everything in the catalog and have not covered the question of what all of this costs. My best guess though is that the cards from the pre-1920 era would account for the bulk of the dollar value of all the cards in the catalog. With patience and an unlimited amount of money, you should be able to finish the rare and expensive sets in this general category within this century.

*The number of new individual baseball cards produced each year is reflected in peaks and valleys. Note the high points starting in 1910, 1922, 1933 and 1948. If this chart were continued to the present, the vintage cards would be small bumps preceding a mountain of annual issues that erupted after 1980.*



*Some pre-1920 sets: T204 Ramly, Cracker Jack, Weil Baking, E91, Fan Craze and Famous and Barr*

### Thinking outside the box

Some readers may well decide it is impractical to keep collecting ever more expensive vintage cards. I have assumed that you won the lottery in order to keep working on some of these old sets. Even if you do win the lottery, you may not want to spend it all on baseball cards. Obviously you will need to save some of the lottery money for football, basketball and all the other cards. It might also occur to you that vintage cards include no one who is still on the field. Rickey Henderson was the last “vintage” player and he retired 10 years ago.

You might conclude that the 1980s and beyond will produce the vintage cards of the future as mothers (and Al Rosen) throw out the old cardboard like mothers of old. Rather than going after \$125,000 sets of George C. Miller cards that even Burdick couldn’t find, why not pick up some sets issued after 1980 that are available, inexpensive and may even include players who are still playing. What a concept!



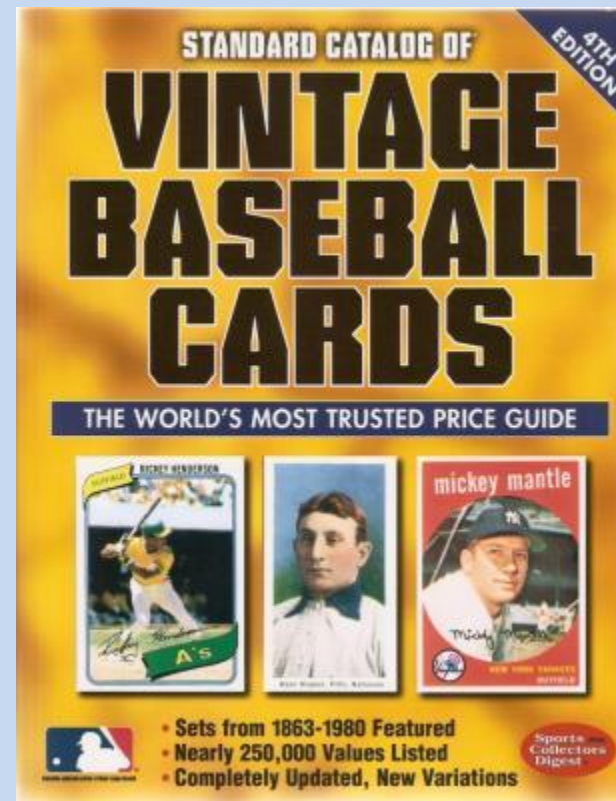
Whatever direction you decide to go, Burdick would be happy if you continue to expand your interests. What anyone chooses to collect or not collect is entirely up to them. It is a hobby.

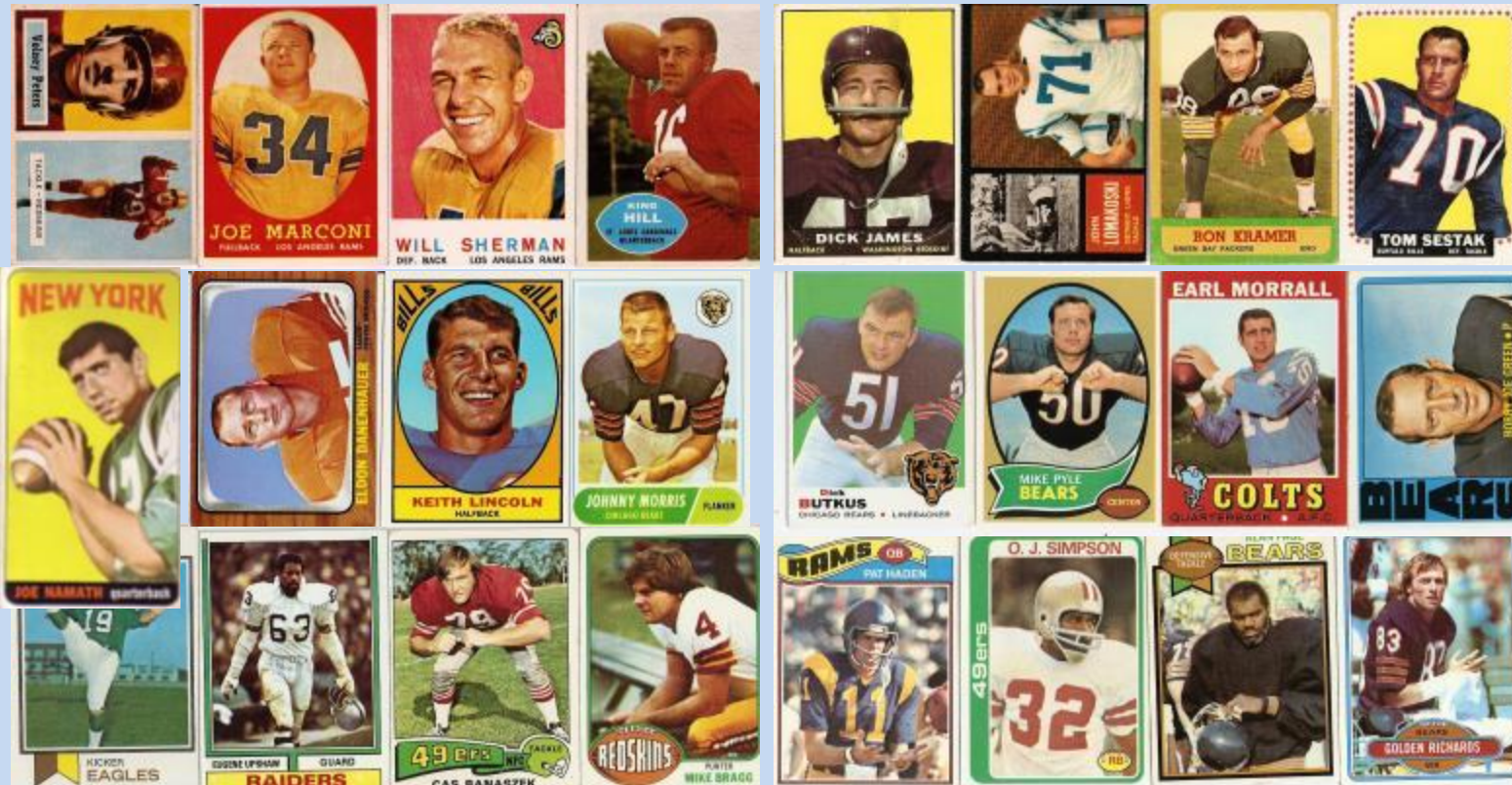
### **A plug for the catalog**

If you decide not to go after many additional cards or sets, you can still experience some of the action by reading about the many interesting issues in the *Standard Catalog of Vintage Baseball Cards* (available through SCD). The catalog is an incredible collection of information about the origins, difficulties and nuances of thousands of sets based on contributions from collectors and dealers over many years. The type font is even large enough that I can read it. A big plus, in my opinion, is that the catalog provides pricing in near mint, excellent and very good and avoids the focus on “book value” as being the value of near mint cards. I’ll wager that the most common condition for cards before 1960 is closer to good. I would actually prefer to see NR Mt, VG-EX and F-G for the three columns for vintage cards.

### **Collecting as a magic carpet ride**

Jefferson Burdick took collectors along on a ride that he described in his last 1960 *American Card Catalog*. Incidentally, Burdick had to encourage collectors to buy his 240-page catalog which sold for \$5 in 1960, which is the equivalent of \$40 today. Burdick wrote, “A card collection is a magic carpet that takes you away from work-a-day cares to havens of relaxing quietude where you can relive the pleasures and adventures of a past day - brought to life in vivid pictures and prose.” The *Standard Catalog of Vintage Baseball Cards* is today’s time machine to journeys to the past. Although you can’t collect everything, why not continue to expand your horizons?





*Topps cards 1957-1980*

## FOOTBALL

Let's look next at football cards before moving on to basketball, hockey and the other sports. Let's look first at the popular vintage football sets.

### Topps football 1956-1980

Once Topps gained a contract directly with the NFL in 1956, they produced annual sets. Cards from 1956 to 1980 are devoid of any particularly impossible series other than the 1972 high numbers, which Topps sold as surplus to dealer Larry Fritsch. However the printing sheet layouts resulted in a good portion of the cards being printed in slightly smaller quantities, and premiums for the short prints in these

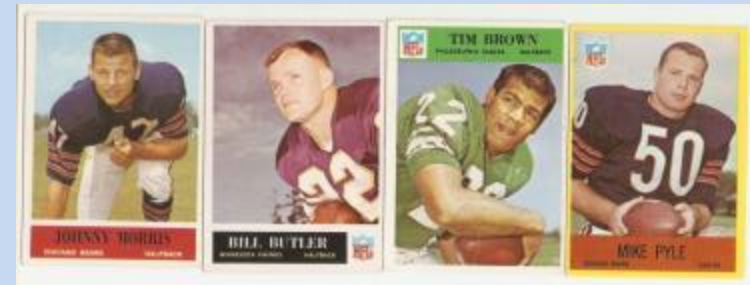
relatively small sets are a pain. After 1972, all cards were produced at the same time. Annual issues grew from 120 cards in 1956 to 528 in 1973 and remained at that level creating 7,457 regular cards between 1956 and 1980. There were also about 821 inserts, checklists and other cards produced by Topps prior to 1981.



*In addition to the regular issues, there are about 821 vintage Topps inserts and special sets.*

### Philadelphia and Fleer

Philadelphia and Fleer danced between each other and Topps featuring AFL or NFL players in the 1960s. The 792 Philadelphia cards (1964-7) are easier to find than the 528 Fleers (1960-3). The Fleers seem to get progressively more difficult by year. Without an NFL Players Association agreement, Fleer returned in the 1970s with 339 in-action cards, 134 Hall of Famers and 134 cards in other small sets not involving individual players.



*Philadelphia Gum issued 198 football cards each year between 1964 and 1967.*

*Fleers issues between 1960 and 1963 seemed to get more difficult to find each year.*

### Scarcity of football versus baseball

An analysis I made of the frequency of football cards versus baseball cards appearing on eBay showed that football cards were about one half as plentiful per card in the set as baseball cards for the entire period between 1956 and 1973, meaning that you were twice as likely to find a Topps baseball card you needed than a Topps football card. The analysis covered more than 800,000 eBay listings of Topps cards. The early 60s were the most lopsided for baseball over football. In the 10 years between 1958 and 1967, the number of cards in Topps baseball sets exceeded their football sets by a factor of 3.6 to 1.





### 1948 to 1955

Bowman's 108-card 1948 set is difficult. The 1950 through 1952 sets are 144 cards each and not too hard to acquire except for the 1952 Bowman large cards. The 1948 through 1955 sets resulted in 1,068 Bowman football cards. The tough 1948 and 1949 Leaf sets totaled 147 cards. The Exhibit Supply Company issued 60 football cards between 1948 and 1952. Some common players were only printed during one of the years resulting in some difficult and expensive commons as well as numerous variations. Without an agreement with the NFL, Topps issued cards of college or retired players with the 1950 Felt Backs, 1951 Topps Magic and 1955 All American sets (275 cards). I have included college players in my card counting.



*Bread for Health put players on the ends of their bread packages in 1952.*



*Bowman's 1950, 1951 and 1952*

*Bowman kept Topps out of NFL cards until 1956. Bowman, Topps, Leaf and the Exhibit Supply Co. issued cards between 1948 and 1951.*



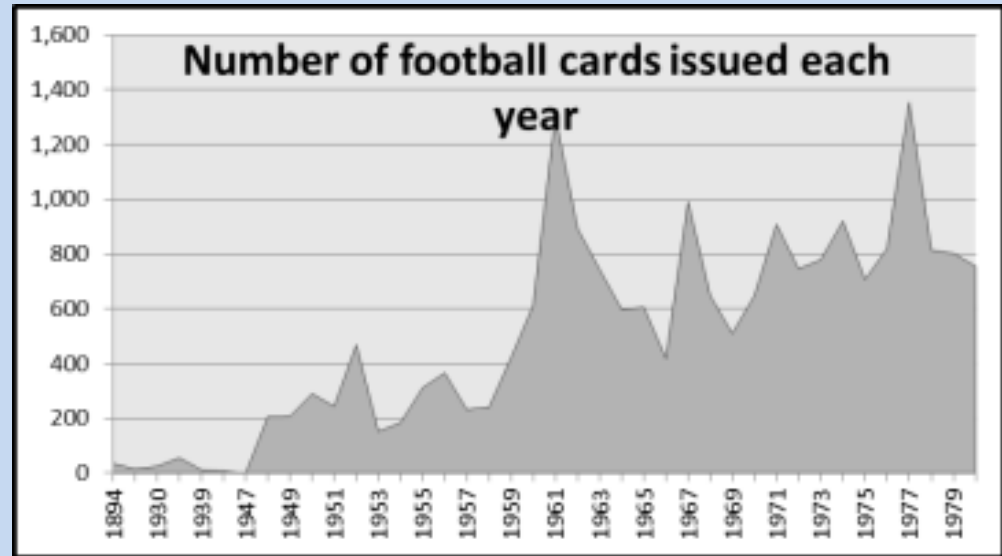
### An ideal collection

If you collected all of the above mentioned football sets, you would have a wonderful collection of 11,755 cards. If you took a pass on the difficult Leaf sets, 1948 Bowmans, 1950 Topps Felt Backs and the 1952 Bowman large cards you would still have 11,256 cards.

I surveyed 19 vintage football card collectors and found that their collections averaged 6,200 cards, whereas the average for the vintage baseball card collectors I surveyed was 17,000. As we will see, the football collectors actually corralled a greater percentage of the available cards than did the baseball collectors.

How much more is there to collect in vintage football cards after you have worked on the popular sets described? I took a look at the latest F+W Media, *Standard Catalog of Vintage Football Cards* (catalog) for sets prior to 1981.

*The number of football cards each year started with a trickle, jumped up in the 1960s with Fleer and Philly sets, and kept climbing as Topps increased the size of their sets. The blip in 1977 reflects the Topps Mexican set.*



### Pre-war cards

Unlike baseball, there is a surprising lack of pre-war football cards unless you consider the matchbooks from the 1930s as cards. I counted 143 cards from the following sets from the catalog - 1894 Mayo, 1935 National Chicle, 1935 R311-2 National Chicle Premium Photos, 1939 Gridiron Greats Blotters, 1908 Michigan Dietsche Postcards and 1930 Notre Dame Postcards. The catalog omits other postcards that were plentiful at the beginning of the 1900s. Football teams of all kinds pictured local players on regular postcards or “real” postcards. Grange, Rockne and Thorpe are in the 1933 Goudey Sport Kings set. The catalog lists the Mayo cards at \$87,500 in near mint and the National Chicle set at \$35,000. The other sets supposedly aren’t too expensive; however finding them may be a challenge. But that is it for pre-war cards, according to the catalog.



*Pre-war football is limited, but expensive – background 1935 National Chicle premium, 1935 National Chicle Nagurski and 1894 Mayo. Rockne, Grange and Thorpe were in the 1933 Goudey Sport Kings set.*



There are several cards of football players that didn't make it into the last catalog, especially those that were included in multi-sport sets.

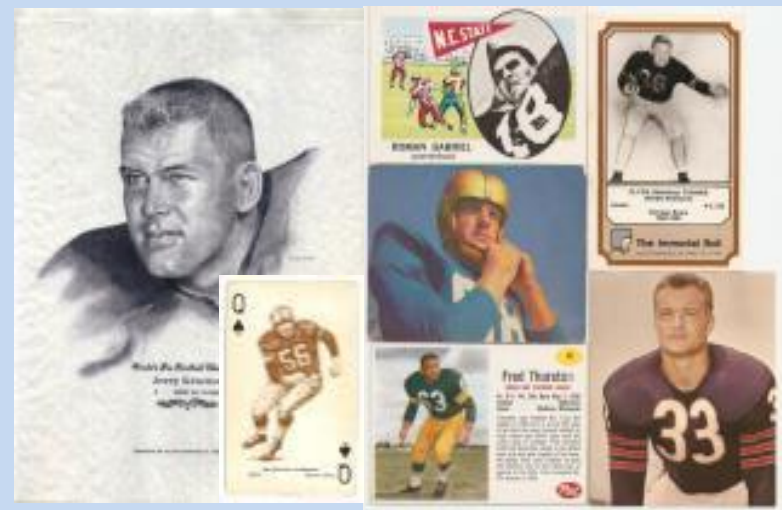
- Yale captain Harry Beecher is the sole footballer in the 1888 N162 Goodwin Champions set.
- B33 tobacco blankets had schools featuring generic football players as did the 1910 Murad Cigarette issues.
- In 1924 Lafayette College had 20 cards of their football players.
- 1926 Shotwell Candy had 26 cards of Red Grange.
- The 1926 Sports Company of America set included 14 football cards.
- People's Baking issued 24 cards of Stanford and Cal players in 1929.
- Wheaties boxes in the 1930s also had some football players.
- Sammy Baugh and Bronko Nagurski were on 1938 Dixie Lids.

*Williams portraits, 1963 Stancraft playing card, Nu-Card, American Tract Society, Post Cereal, Fleer HOF, 1964 Kahn's.*

**Other national post-war issues**

I found 41 issues with 2,305 cards that fit into a category I'll call post-war national or at least regional issues. This group ranges from expensive early 50s cards to cheap cards from the 70s.

- The largest issue is the 1967 Williams Portraits of 512 NFL players. These 8 by 10 inch drawings were a Kraft Cheese mail-in promotion and are nice-looking, findable and a little expensive. They are hard to put a rubber band around though.
- Between 1959 and 1964 Kahn's issued 288 cards of players in packages of wieners starting with just Browns and Steelers but then expanding to all NFL teams in 1963 and 1964.





- Post Cereal had a big, difficult 200-card issue of NFL players in 1962, which required consuming unpopular cereals and carefully cutting the cards from the boxes.
- Kellogg's had 60 3-D cards in both 1970 and 1971.
- Wonder Bread had 78 cards between 1974 and 1976. The cards are not hard to find. However Wonder Bread owned Town Talk Bread as well, and sets were created with a Town Talk Bread credit on the back for limited distribution in western Pennsylvania. The Town Talk variations are hard to find.
- Clark Volpe had a 66-card set of drawings in 1970 covering eight of the teams.
- Nu-Card issued cards of 80 college players plus 264 college pennants inserts, a few more than I will ever need.
- There were also Bazooka panels in 1959 and 1971. The 18-card 1959 set was listed at \$5,000 in near mint in the catalog.
- The 32-card 1952 Bread for Health bread end labels set was listed at \$4,300 in the catalog.
- Kellogg's Pep Cereal featured 5 players in 1948.
- 1951 Berk Ross includes 8 football players.
- The 1952 Wheaties card set includes 12 players.
- 1954 Quaker Sports Oddities includes 6 football players.



*Kellogg's and Stop 'N' Go went for the 3-D look.*



### Canadian and Mexican cards

Between 1958 and 1980 Topps produced 1,483 cards of Canadian Football League (CFL) players either under the name Topps or through a licensing agreement with O-Pee-Chee. Parkhurst, Post, Crown Brand, Wheaties, Jogo and a few others issued 771 CFL cards. In 1977 Topps issued 528 cards for Mexico which I'll add in with this grouping of neighbors to our North for 2,782 cards in this category. The Mexican set seems to have wound up with just a dealer or two according to collector Ken Morganti who has tried to hunt them down.

*Topps began their run of CFL cards starting in 1958.*



### Local or team issues

Jays Publishing and the teams themselves issued 54 small team sets made up of 967 cards. I also identified 86 sets with 2,061 cards which I would categorize as local issues. These sets include Rams Bell Brand, Cardinals Mayrose Franks, Packers Lake to Lake, Bills Jones Dairy and Colts Johnny Pro. Therefore there are around 3,000 cards which may not be terribly expensive but are scattered over 140 sets and are not easy to find, especially outside the local team areas.



*CFL cards: Wheaties, Topps stickers and Jogo.*



*Other football issues: Bazooka, Bell Brand, Lake to Lake, Mayrose Franks, Johnny Pro, and Clark Volpe.*

### Other items

I have not included in the card count other football collectibles such as matchbook covers, cups, discs, stickers, stamps, records, bucks, decals, police sets and the plethora of Coca-Cola caps. There are undoubtedly additional card issues that didn't make it into the last catalog. I would expect that they are local or team issues that would be expensive if they were pre-1960.

### Thoughts from a football card dealer

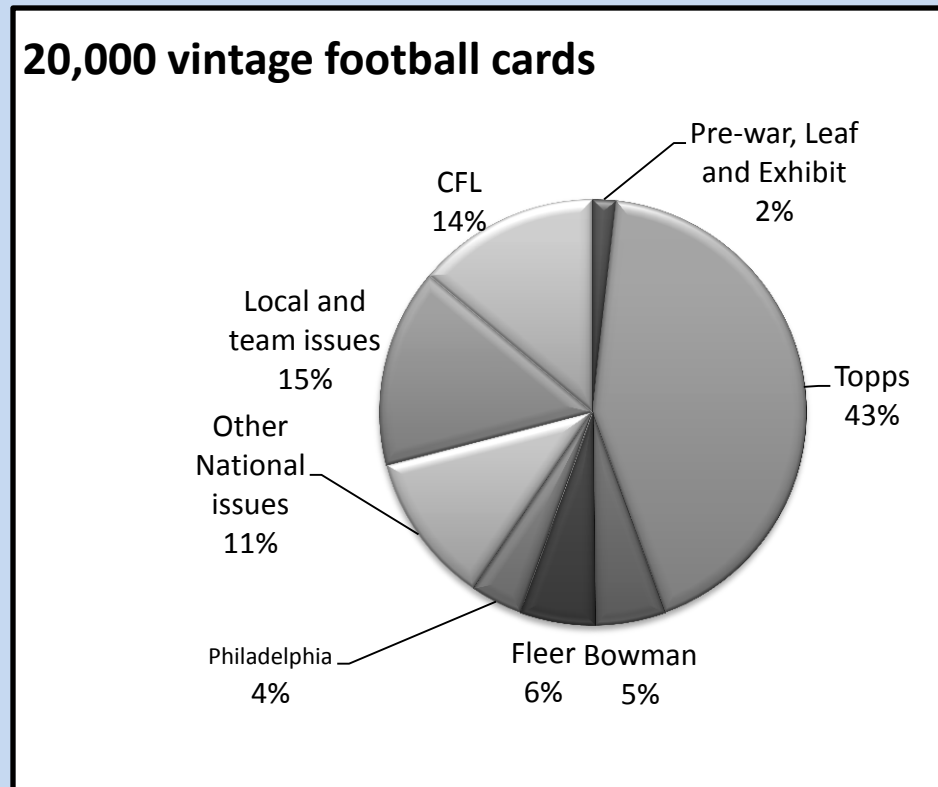
Joe Colabella has been a dealer for 43 years and has specialized in football cards for the past 23 years. As to the current trends in football collecting, Colabella observed: "The graded card phenomena has divided collecting into two forms. There is the investor collector who has to have 8s or 9s, which is impossible in many cases. The second area is the '70s-80s type collector that is evolving again who is merely assembling sets in varied conditions at a fair price. With the few dealers who still offer cards and eBay, this can be done at book or less prices depending on the grade. There are still folks who collect for collecting sake not for merely the investment potential."

As to the scarcity of football cards, Colabella's experience is that football cards are even less plentiful than my analysis indicated. He added: "Many of the obscure football sets have never been available. There was a find of Kahn's sets about 25 years ago with around 60 or so sets of '62,'63,'64 Kahn's football sets from a worker from Kahn's. I doubt that there are more than 100 complete sets of all 3 years assembled now. I have been known for Mayo football; there may be 12-15 sets known."

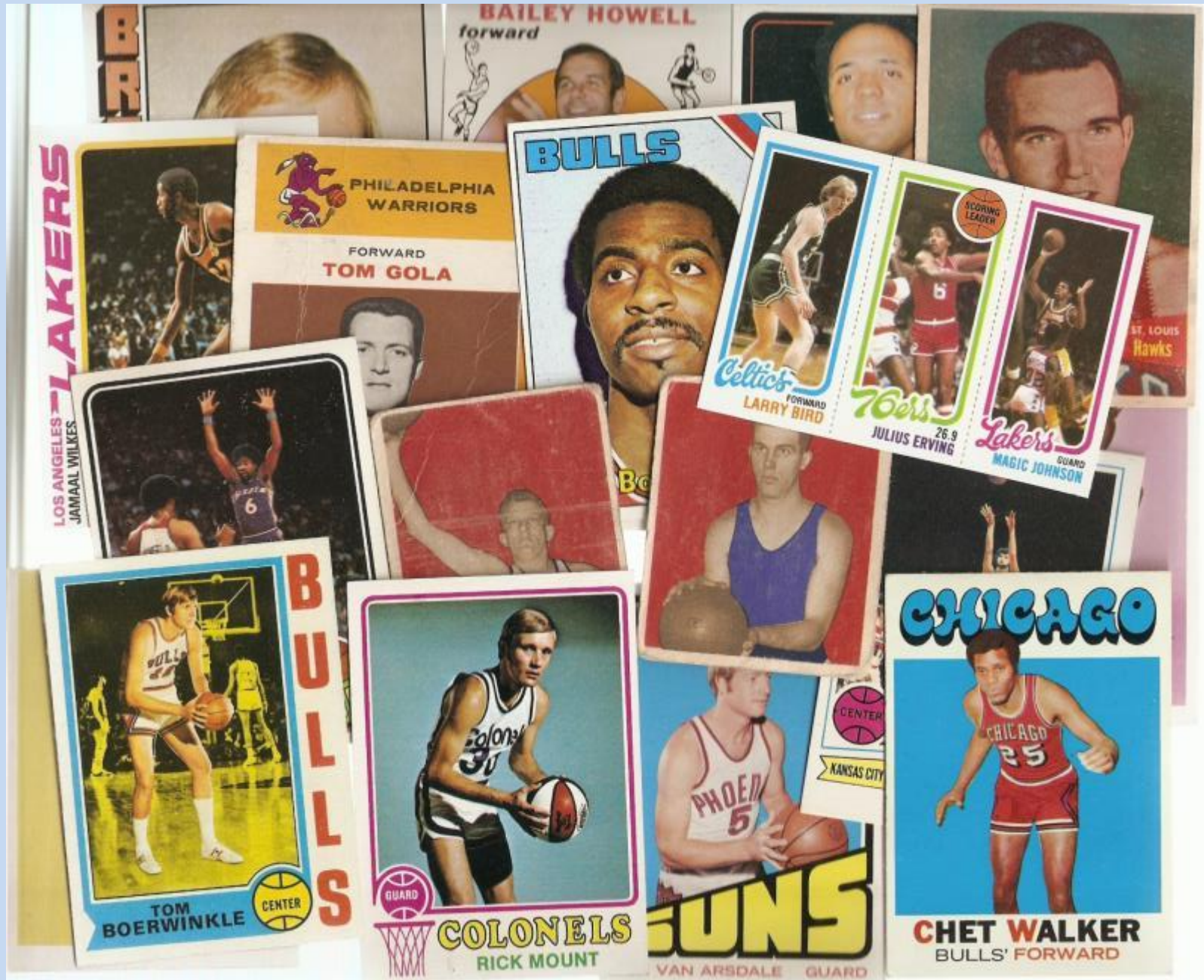
### Findings

The vintage football cards I have described total 20,137 cards from 313 sets. There are undoubtedly additional small, vintage football sets I didn't come across. Unlike baseball, with a host of expensive pre-war sets, there are few pre-war football sets. Annual card issues were always smaller than for those for baseball, both in the number of cards in a set and the number of cards printed. While someone would be lucky to collect 25% of the 110,000 vintage baseball cards, it is conceivable to collect 70% of the 20,000 vintage football cards, if you go after the popular sets plus CFL cards. If you wanted to collect 70% in value as opposed to the number of cards, you could probably get by with a very small shoebox and just put the pre-war cards in it.

*The percentage of the 20,000 vintage football cards is shown for each category.*







Basketball cards 1948-1981

# BASKETBALL

## **NBA early history**

Dr. James Naismith nailed the first peach basket to the balcony in 1891 and started bouncing the ball. Eighteen players were on the court for the first game which ended with an exciting 1-0 score. No tobacco manufacturers were apparently around to feature these pioneer cagers on their tobacco cards. Players were later called “cagers” because they played on courts surrounded by a checkerboard wall of ropes that kept the basketballs from going out of bounds.

It didn't take long to start a professional basketball league, but it lasted only from 1898 to 1904. The sport then seemed to slide back into slower development with semi-pro, barnstorming and industrial teams much like the early days of professional football. The American Basketball League and the “Original (New York) Celtics” came and went between 1925 and 1931. Leading scorers might scorch the net to average 7 or 8 points per game. Finally in 1935 GE, Firestone and Goodyear got behind the industrial Midwest Basketball Conference which was renamed the National Basketball League (NBL) in 1937. The Basketball Association of America started in 1946 to help fill arenas in the East and Midwest. In 1949 it merged with the NBL, and they renamed the combined league the National Basketball Association.

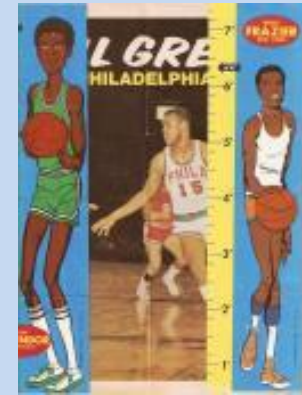
People remember early dominant, big man George Mikan and his cards remain very pricey. Other top players of the day, like Vern Mikkelsen, Max Zaslofsky, Jumpin' Joe Fulks, Bob Davies, Slater Martin and Jim Pollard, have not remained household names. I remember watching black and white TV broadcasts of players with skinny legs in very small shorts from Rochester, Syracuse, Ft. Wayne and Cincinnati throwing up one or two-handed set shots. Players seemed to waltz around each other to avoid contact. There were few players of color. No wonder there weren't many basketball trading cards to capitalize on the excitement. You might well say that pre-1981 years were not the vintage years for professional basketball. By the later 1980s Magic, Bird, Jordan and the well-known superstars made the game much more exciting, filled arenas and eventually sparked interest in basketball cards.

## **Early post-war cards**

Nonetheless, let's stick to the question of what vintage (pre-1981) basketball cards are available. Topps put out a set in 1957-8, which would have been at the height of my own collecting career as a kid. I don't recall ever seeing the cards in a store or in anyone's collection. Maybe Topps didn't bother with locations that didn't have NBA teams? Bowman's 1948 set was equally unknown to young collectors then. Fleer became the third company to take just a one year shot at a national set when they issued their cards in 1961. This lack of vintage cardboard has made collecting basketball cards a lot simpler than collecting baseball or football.

### Topps run 1969-1980

If you collected every regular Topps set starting in 1969 when Topps resumed issuing basketball cards, you would have 2,169 cards through 1980. You would have the bulk of vintage basketball cards at relatively affordable prices. You would not have had to chase high series cards or a plethora of “single” prints. You would have to shell out some bucks for rookie cards of Jabbar, Erving, Maravich and others, but their cards are available. You could add in the Topps inserts and small sets from those same years consisting of rulers, stickers, posters and checklists and add about 176 more cards. Let’s look at what else is out there after completing the 1969-1980 Topps.



*Topps inserts included rulers and posters.*

### The premier sets by Bowman, Topps and Fleer

The three premier sets (1948 Bowman, 1957 Topps and 1961 Fleer) are pricey and challenging. You could pay \$20,000 or more for the three sets in near mint and only add 218 more cards to your collection. You would also have cards of a lot of guys named Max, Walter, George and Herman. With all of these sets in your shoebox, you’d have 2,563 vintage basketball cards. Topps also produced a black and white test issue in 1968 of 22 stars of the day. The backs can be assembled to create a photo of Wilt Chamberlain. This set might cost an avid collector as much as the other three premier sets combined.

Kevin Savage (Kevin Savage Cards) has been a dealer for more than thirty years and reports: “I think the collecting of vintage basketball is very popular- especially 1957-8 Topps and 1961-62 Fleer. Both of these sets are highly collected-and have centering challenges throughout. Any time we get these cards, they sell very well, especially the big stars - Bill Russell, Cousy, West, Chamberlain, Oscar Robertson, etc. Well-centered cards are also highly coveted by set collectors. Both sets are loaded with rookies and Hall of Famers.”



### Globetrotters, HOF, Kahn’s and discs – 404 more cards

What else will we find in basketball price guide catalogs? The next largest basketball issue I found was the 84-card 1972 Harlem Globetrotters set produced by Fleer. The 84 cards were the result of multiple cards of each player. Meadowlark Lemon appears on 16 cards. All the Globetrotter sets from 1971-4 make up 126 cards. In 1968 the Basketball Hall of Fame produced a 53-card set of bookmarks available in their bookstore. This turns out to be the largest oddball set of NBA players you can probably find. Kahn’s issued 109 cards of Cincinnati players plus local legend Jerry West’s rookie card between 1957 and 1965. In 1975 and 1976 there were 76 discs of players issued by Crane’s, Buckman and Carvel. There were 6 Linnett sets in the 1970s with 40 cards in total.



*Fleers Globetrotters and Kahn's were the only significant issues outside Topps.*

*Hall of Fame bookmarks*



### Issues between 1891 and 1951

There were so few other issues between 1891 and 1951 that we can list practically all of them. Most of the older issues are found with quite astronomical prices, but at least there aren't many of them.

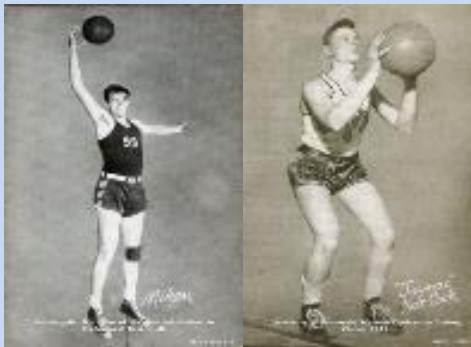
- The Net54 gang discussed the oldest basketball card candidates a few years back. The T51 and the larger T6 1910 Murad Cigarette issues of college pennants and seals featured generic basketball players for Williams, Northwestern, Luther and Xavier.
- Prior to 1910 some colleges produced postcards (or "real postcards") which pictured basketball players.
- A "Baines Netball" card from around 1902 apparently depicted basketball as did a Hamilton King Girl issue. There were probably other postcards in this era as well that teamed up balls with girls, children, or pets.
- B33 Tobacco felts included 20 basketball subjects in 1910.
- 1935 Sport Kings included 4 basketball players: Nat Holman, Ed Wachter, Joe Lapchick and Eddie Burke.
- The 1948 Topps Magic Photo issue included 11 basketball players.
- Kellogg's Pep Cereal included George Mikan on an expensive stamp in 1948. (It's a good thing we aren't counting stamps.)
- 1948-9 Exhibit cards – 6 basketball players (including Mikan) were issued along with other athletes.
- 1950 Royal Dessert – 8 cards cut from boxes
- 1950 Scott's Chips Lakers – 13 real expensive players including Mikan, the only issue just of basketball players
- 1950 Bread for Energy – 4 very expensive bread labels
- 1951 Wheaties box - George Mikan
- 1951 Bread for Health – 32 expensive bread labels
- 1951 Berk Ross – 4 basketball players in the set



*The 1910 Murad Cigarette issues of colleges included basketball players. The Hamilton King girls could handle the ball back then as well.*



*Four cagers appeared in the 1933 Goudey Sport Kings set.*



*George Mikan and "Tarmac" Bob Cook were two of the six players on Exhibit Supply Co. cards.*

### **Miscellaneous issues of interest 1952-1980**

Most of the miscellaneous basketball cards between 1952 and 1980 were small issues of players on the local teams. The following sets have been listed in catalogs and price guides and are on the expensive but not impossible side of the ledger.

- 1952 Wheaties cards - Mikan in action and a portrait as well as 5 other players
- 1954 Bullets Gunther Beer – 11 cards
- 1955 Ashland/Aetna Oil – 96 college players
- 1955 and 1958 Celtics team photo pack
- 1950s – 1970s J.D. McCarthy – 15 postcards
- 1958 Syracuse Nationals – 11 cards
- 1959 Hawks Busch Bavarian – 5 cards
- 1960 Rawlings – 7 players on their staff
- 1961 Union Oil – Hawaii Chiefs – 10 cards
- 1961 St. Louis Hawks Essex Meats – 13 cards
- 1961 Bell Brand Lakers – 10 expensive cards

- 1968-1973 Suns Carnation – 49 cards in 5 sets
- 1970 Suns A1 Premium Beer – 13 cards
- 1972 Comspec – 18 cards including Maravich
- 1972 Isee Bear – 20 cards
- 1973 NBA photo cards – 10 cards
- 1974-5 Nabisco Sugar Daddies – 19 cards

When you add in about 24 additional small, local basketball issues from this period, you have around 700 cards in this miscellaneous group. There are also many team issues in the 1970s which I have not included. Also in the late 1970s there began a flood of police sets which I have conveniently ignored. There are likely other team issues which have not surfaced yet in any type of catalog. These sets were not widely distributed; as few as 10,000 cards may have been printed. Think of how many survived the first year and how few are likely in the hobby 40 to 60 years later. It might take you some time to find these.



*Royal Dessert included basketball players in their 1950 cards which had to be cut from boxes. Bread for Health and Berk Ross also had cagers.*



*Early issues included 1954 Bullets Gunther Beer, 1955 Ashland or Aetna Oil, J.D. McCarthy postcards, 1959 Hawks Busch Bavarian and 1960 Rawlings.*





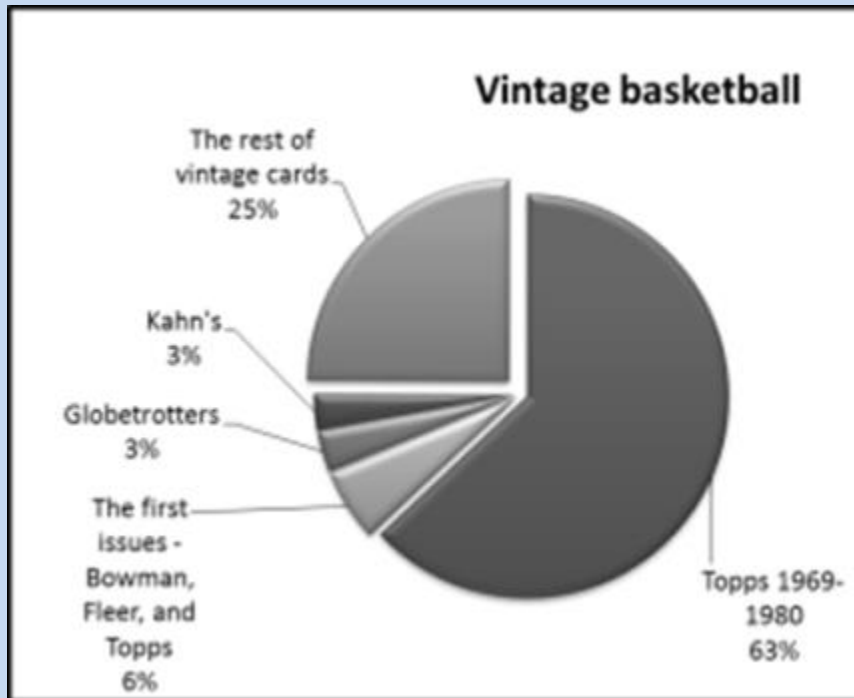
*Miscellaneous issues included 1961 Union Oil, 1961 Hawks Essex Meats, 1972 Comspec, 1972 Icee-Bear, 1973 NBA Photos and 1974-5 Nabisco.*

### **A Savage perspective**

Dealer Kevin Savage was asked for his thoughts on basketball card collecting and commented that, in addition to the 1957-8 Topps and 1961-2 Fleer sets, the Topps sets from 1969 through 1980 are also popular. “They are easily collected - as they have fewer cards than their counterparts from football and baseball- so they are ‘doable’ for collectors on a budget, who may not have the resources to build a 500 or 700 card set. Finishing a set of 132 cards is an easier task. Another great thing about collecting basketball sets is the higher percentage of rookies and stars in each set compared to commons, when stacked up against their baseball and football brethren. Overall, I think there are many fewer basketball collectors than football or baseball collectors, but when you compare the number of basketball collectors to the small number of vintage sets available, it makes vintage basketball a very good seller.”

### **Collecting vintage basketball**

The vintage basketball cards I have described total about 3,700 cards. With the explosion of basketball cards after 1980 there are now more than 700,000 vintage and modern “items” in the Beckett online data base. If you had all the vintage Topps and Globetrotter regular cards and inserts, you’d have about two-thirds of the 3,700 vintage basketball cards. However the remaining 33% of the universe can be pretty expensive and hard to find. I contacted seven collectors who had been working on basketball sets. Their collections averaged 2,400 cards or 65% of all the vintage basketball cards.



*The majority of vintage basketball cards are from Topps. There are a few other national and regional issues, but the rest of the universe is generally small, local issues starting in the 1950s.*



**RANGE**

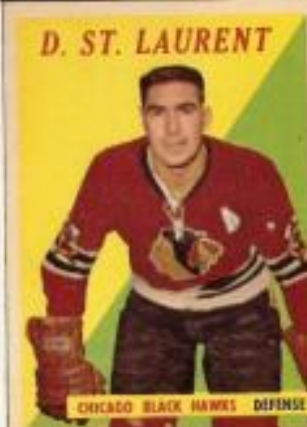


TORONTO  
MAPLE



**RED WINGS**

**DOUG BARKLEY** defense

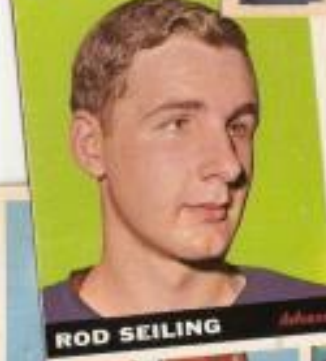


**D. ST. LAURENT**

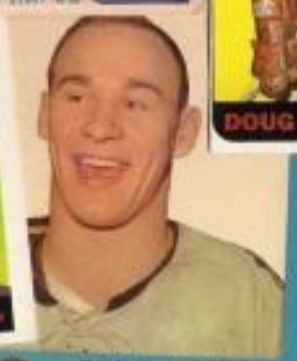
CHICAGO BLACK HAWKS DEFENSE



*Andy Bathgate* - wing



**ROD SEILING** *Defense*



**REG FLEMING**  
CHICAGO BLACK HAWKS FORWARD



**ORLANDO KURTZBACH**  
FORWARD  
BOSTON  
BRUINS

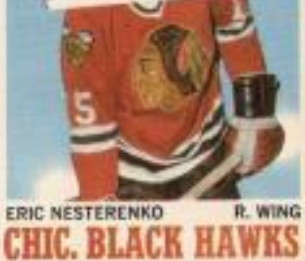


Allan Stanley



*Bill Bruner*

8



ERIC NESTERENKO R. WING  
**CHIC. BLACK HAWKS**



ROBERT PULFO



**DOUG ROBERTS** / R.W. DETROIT RED WINGS



TEAM 1968-69 N.H.L.  
**Beliveau**  
CENTRE





*Hockey cards by Parkhurst, Topps and O-Pee-Chee*

## HOCKEY

### **Hockey – the popular sets**

There is a surprising number of vintage hockey cards, primarily due to Topps producing sets for both Canada and the U.S. Topps first issued a set in 1954 (I'm going to consistently omit referring to the cards as covering two years 1954-5). Topps returned again for good in 1957. The Canadian O-Pee-Chee Company produced hockey cards in the 1930s. In 1968 they entered into a licensing agreement with Topps and had Topps print nearly identical cards with the required English and French bios until 1994. From 1974 to 1977 O-Pee-Chee also produced WHA sets. Topps-produced sets increased from 66 cards to 132 to 264 and finally 396 (multiples of a standard 132-card sheet).

Parkhurst also issued 904 cards in sets from 1951 to 1964 (except for 1956). Parkhurst sets range from 50 to 105 cards. The cards get pricier and harder to find if you work your way back from the 1970s. Cards of Gordie Howe, Maurice Richard, Bobby Hull and Bobby Orr will be expensive regardless of the year, but at least there aren't any noticeable single prints or high numbered series. If you are in Canada or near the border, the older cards should be easier to find than elsewhere.

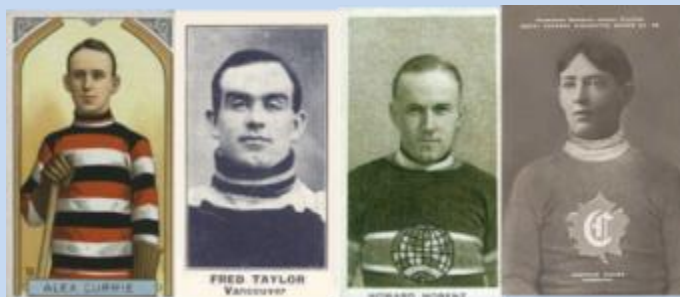
If you collected all 64 regular Topps, O-Pee-Chee and Parkhurst vintage sets from 1951 through 1980, you would have 9,360 cards and you might start looking around for what hockey to collect next. Topps wouldn't be Topps if they didn't produce some pesky inserts. If you ignore coins, stamps and cards that turn into rings, I counted about 280 cards from the 1970s in 11 sets from Topps or O-Pee-Chee which you can add to your quest. There was also a 1966 Topps 66-card USA test issue which is real expensive.



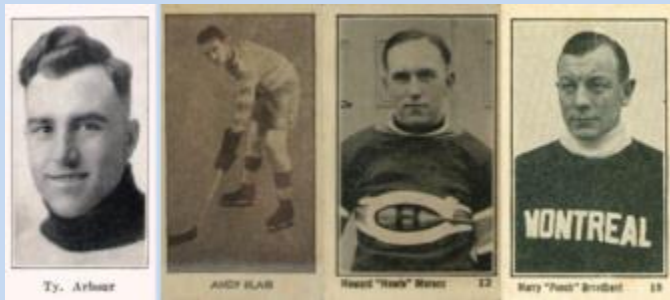
*Hockey cards evolved from the tobacco era, to early gum cards, to the post-war cards of Parkhurst and Topps.*

### Hockey cards 1900-1929

Hockey has been played in Canada since the 1870s. Lord Stanley's Cup was first awarded to the best amateur team starting in 1893. By 1910 a variety of professional leagues and teams developed including the Montreal Canadiens. In 1918 the NHA morphed into the NHL which was a three-team league for its first two years. Had there been sets of NHL players then, you would only need about 30 cards. While there were seven players on the ice then, rather than six, there were only three or four guys on the bench.



*C55, C57, C144 and Sweet Caporal*



*From the 1920s: V128, V129, V130 and V145*



*The Crescent Ice Cream Selkirks of 1923-4 sported the flying fish on their sweaters.*

Let's start at the beginning as to the earliest appearances of hockey cards. All of the cards in this grouping are going to be expensive unless they have been run over by a Zamboni. The oldest card seems to be a 1906 Ogden Cigarette issue showing an outdoor hockey game at McGill University and titled McGill Men of Hockey. Thanks to the tobacco insert card hey-day, there are a few sets of hockey cards produced in the 1910-2 era – C55, C56 and C57 (131 cards). Pioneer pro players in those days included Georges Vezina, Newsy Lalonde and Art Ross. Sweet Caporal tobacco issued 45 postcards of hockey players in 1910-1. There were many candy sets and one more tobacco set issued in the 1920s. Jefferson Burdick found most of them and gave them the following catalog numbers:

- C144 1924 Champs Cigarettes – 60 cards
- V122 1924 Champion Athletes
- V128-1 and V128-2 1923 and 1928 by Paulin's Candy – 160 cards
- V130 by Maple Crispette 1924 – 29 cards
- V145-1 and V-145-2 from 1923-3 – 100 cards

There were also 14-card sets in 1923 and 1924 of the Crescent Ice Cream Selkirks Fishermen sporting big fish on their sweaters but, of course, no helmets. Other issues during the 1920s included cards or photos such as the 1924 Crescent Falcon-Tigers, 1924 Holland



Creameries, 1925 Dominion Chocolates, 1927 LaPatrie and 1928 LaPresse photos. There seem to be about two dozen issues and about 700 cards before 1929 featuring hockey players based on Beckett's most recent price guide for hockey.

### The 1930s and 1940s

Many teams joined the NHL in the 1920s but started to fade away again in the 1930s. By 1942 there were only six teams left which have been referred to as the "Original Six" although a more apt name would be the "Surviving Six."

Five annual sets of O-Pee-Chee hockey cards started in 1933. Worldwide Gum also issued hockey sets in the 1930s. Again Burdick found most of the issues and gave them numbers. Compared to the portraits on the 1920s cards, some of these players looked to be almost in action. At least they might have a stick in their hand and you could see their skates. The equipment and uniforms look like players in wooly pajamas with newspapers for shin guards compared to hockey outfits today.

- V252 1933 Canadian Gum – 50 cards
- V288 1933 Hamilton Chewing Gum – 21 cards
- V129 Anonymous from 1933 – 49 or 50 cards
- V304 O-Pee-Chee comprised of 180 cards in sets between 1933 and 1937
- V301 1939 and 1940 O-Pee-Chee Hockey Stars, 5 by 7 photo card premiums – 150 players
- V356 1936 World Wide Gum Ice Kings – 135 cards plus 6 premium cards



*Hockey cards from the 1930s with a little color and sticks in hand: V252, V288, V304 and V357*

There was a 1934 Montreal issue from Sweet Caporal consisting of 48 photos inserted in programs. The Goudey Sport Kings set included four hockey players: Eddie Shore, Ching Johnson, Ace Bailey and Howie Morenz. Photos of hockey players were issued by Beehive (from the St. Lawrence Starch Company, Port Credit, Ontario) starting in 1933 and continuing in three distinct stages to 1967. There were about 1,031 cards plus plenty of variations. Quaker Oats issued 230 player photos between 1938 and 1954. There were also matchbook covers with hockey players and cards from Sweden and England, but I'm leaving them out of the card count. There were a few smaller NHL and minor league team sets issued in the 1930s as well. The

Exhibit Supply Company had 65 hockey players in their arcade cards for Canada. Only a few hockey sets were issued in the 1940s resulting in perhaps 43 sets between 1930 and 1949.



1939 OPC, Exhibit, Laval Dairy and Beehive

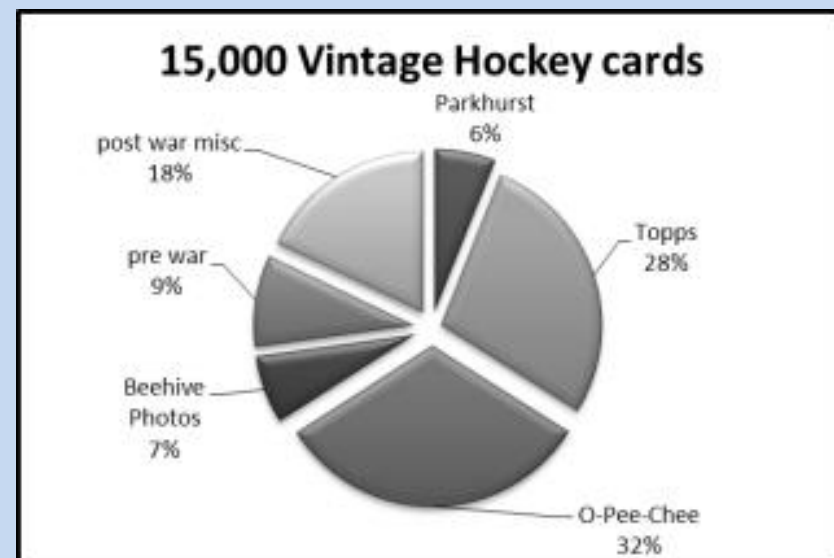


Four hockey players were in the 1933 Goudey Sport Kings set.

### The 1950s through 1980

Berk Ross had four hockey players in their multi-sport set in 1951. Royal Desserts had eight in 1952. Team issues started to be more common as we have seen in other sports. I estimated that there were about 10 sets issued each year on average between 1960 and 1980, including sporadic sets for NHL, AHL, WHL and other minor league teams. Some of the older card sets include Laval Dairy, Juniors Blue Tint, Bas du Fleuve and St. Lawrence Sales. Many issues were strictly in Canada. There were also cards issued in Sweden.

From 1960-3 York Peanut Butter issued 135 hexagonal cards of Canadiens and Maple Leafs. In 1963-5 there were 65 Chex Photos. Post had 13 players on their cereal boxes in 1967. In 1970 Dad's Cookies had 144 cards. 1970 Esso had 254 stamps. There weren't many other large or continuous issues. It is worthwhile to get a hockey-only catalog and peruse what is available and affordable in this period.



*The universe of vintage hockey included Topps, O-Pee-Chee, Parkhurst and a variety of other issues*

I estimated that the vintage hockey card universe exceeds 15,000 cards providing fertile territory for avid hockey collectors and those moving to hockey after working on other sports. With “just” the post-1950 Topps, Parkhurst and O-Pee-Chee regular sets, you would have two-thirds of the vintage hockey cards. The rest of the vintage hockey cards are going to be a little harder to track down.



## BOXING AND GOLF

The production of boxing and golf cards were the polar opposite of the basketball and football cards. There were few basketball and football cards before 1948. Whereas boxing and golf cards had several sets issued in the tobacco era and in the 1920s and 1930s, but there were few vintage issues after 1951. I counted at least 800 boxing cards issued before 1952. The 1951 Topps Ringside set and boxing cards in the T218 set are available and relatively affordable. With golf card collecting you can pick up interesting issues from the U.K. such as those from Churchman. Golfers and boxers are also included in many of the same multi-sport issues previously discussed.

*Boxing cards were more plentiful in the early 1900s than later – T210, T218, Exhibit Supply Co. and 1951 Topps Ringside*



*T218, 1928 Churchman and Goudey Sport King golfers*



## OTHER SPORTS

Also appearing on vintage cards, thanks primarily to the creativity of the tobacco card issuers, were wrestlers, swimmers, track stars, billiard players, roller skaters, auto racers, horseshoe players, tennis players, cyclists, skaters, skiers, boaters, jockeys, oarsmen, bobsledders, curlers, bull fighters, canoeists, fencers, cricket players, lacrosse players, soccer players, weight lifters, tobogganers, snow shoers, shooters, horse riders, sailors, hand ball players, walkers (professional pedestrians) and aviators. N43, Allen & Ginter's 50-card World's Champions, was an early favorite of collectors. Sports like rowing attracted huge crowds and the best athletes in some parts of the country. Tobacco company insert cards would pair nice-looking young ladies with a variety of subjects ranging from sports to ancient mythology to yacht club colors. The 48-card Goudey 1933 Sport Kings set was a gum card classic. The 1977-9 Sportscaster cards included 2,184 athletes in 146 sports with 82% of the cards depicting sports other than baseball, football, basketball and hockey. I did not try to add up the rest of this crowd. You may be able to collect every vintage card of participants in some of these sports, making them the most realistic sport completion goal.



*Multi-sport sets covering a wide range of athletes have been issued periodically starting in the early tobacco era. They give you an opportunity to collect the entire universe of trading cards in a sport, as long as the sport you pick is obscure.*

## FINDINGS

An important finding is that if you pick up a catalog for any sport that includes modern cards, make sure you have an adequate magnifying glass or a microscope. In order to control the phone-book size of some of the price guides, the font sizes get shrunk to almost nothing. Vintage cards need to be in a separate book from modern cards in order to do them justice. Unfortunately price guides may go the way of the phone books and be available only online in the future. I hope not, because the catalogs are a history of the hobby and interesting casual reading whether you collect the cards or not.

It is challenging to determine what should be counted as a vintage sport card. Whatever totals are derived will lack precision and universal agreement. The more you know about scarce, vintage sports issues, the more you realize how extensive the field is, and how difficult it is for anyone to be expert in all vintage cardboard. Vintage card collectors may likely have different experiences as to what cards are candidates for sets to pursue next and may have different information on some of the myriad of issues covered in these articles. Any feedback on these subjects is welcomed.

However the order-of-magnitude numbers I calculated are that 73% of the vintage single cards are baseball, followed by football (13%), hockey (10%) and basketball (2%). Let's not forget the boxing, golf and miscellaneous other sports. We will arbitrarily assign them 2% of the pie. The entire pie of vintage sports cards is conservatively estimated at over 150,000 cards using my definitions of cards and what I could find.

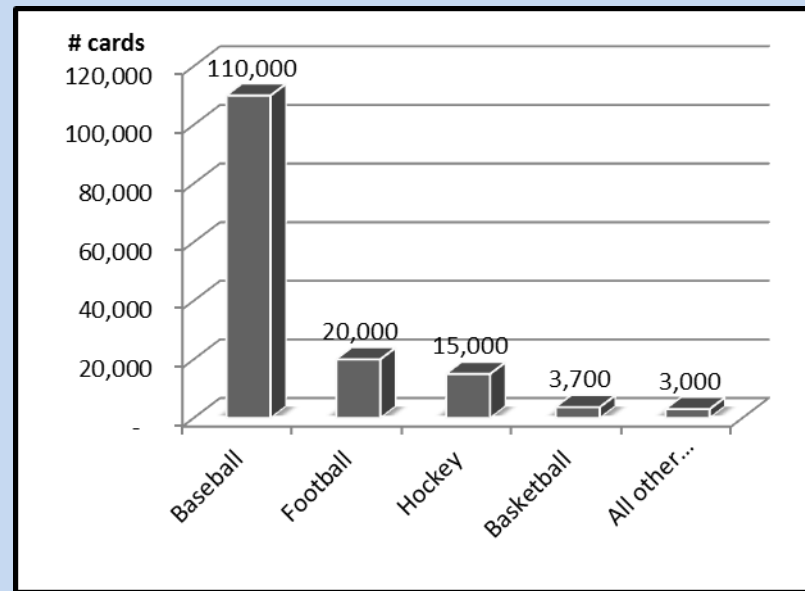
Vintage basketball is the smallest card category of the major sports and is the most likely for garnering most of the cards unless they have George Mikan on them. You can also conceivably collect a majority of hockey cards, especially if you are at shows in Canada. Football collectors will have trouble finding many local team sets; however, the only really old football set is (N302) 1884 Mayo. It is possible for collectors to pick up 75% of the universe of football cards. Collecting all vintage baseball cards is impossible. Jefferson Burdick told us that years ago. There are at least 110,000 vintage baseball cards and most collectors will be lucky to ever get 25% of them.

*It is estimated that baseball cards account for about 73% of all pre-1981 sports cards.*

#### **Vintage tier level idea**

Any reader who has even half of the vintage sports card pie (75,000 singles) is invited to write the next *SCD* article on how you did it. I know a collector who is just about at that level, however the veteran set collectors I surveyed averaged 28,000 vintage sports cards. Some people gauge collections based on graded conditions. I think it would be interesting if people targeted increasing their singles of vintage sports cards. You could reach certain tiers of recognition.

If you had 35,000 single vintage sports cards you would be in the Charles Bray (pioneer editor and auctioneer) Tier. At 50,000 cards you would be in the Lionel Carter (pioneer baseball card collector) Tier. When you reached 65,000 cards you would be elevated to the Buck Barker Tier. Barker would have been enthused about this concept since he attempted to collect every baseball card and was always looking



for the obscure player in obscure sets. If you reached 80,000 cards you would enter the Jefferson Burdick (Father of Card Collecting) Tier. If you owned over 100,000 vintage single sports cards you would get to name the tier yourself. Of course there would have to be some fancy (and well-paid) independent organization to certify all this and do surprise audits to take the rubber bands off your cards and count them all. If you would like to let me know where you stand in my whimsical tier system, I will be glad to report the results anonymously.

It is fun to try to figure out what to collect next, even if it is an endless pursuit. Now where did I put those non-sports type cards?

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