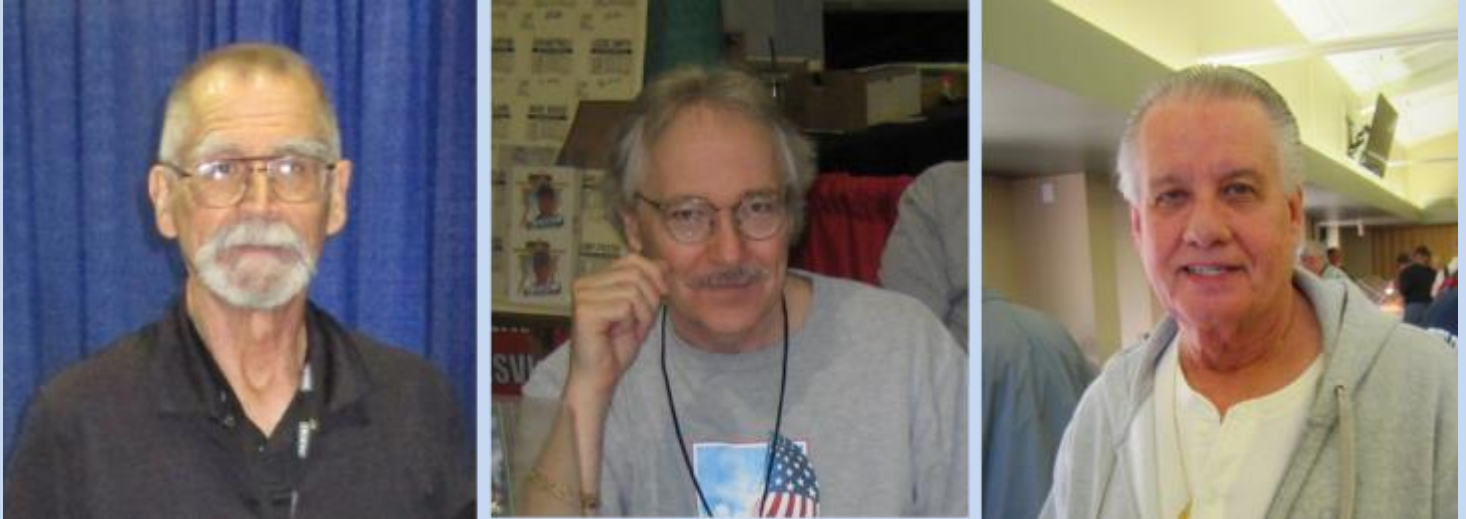


# The National streak of record holders

## Rumierz, Murry and Quinn



*Left to right: record holders John Rumierz, B.A. Murry and Pat Quinn, photos G. Vrechek*



By George Vrechek

Sure, there are memorable streaks in sports: DiMaggio's 56 games, Cal Ripken Jr.'s 2,632 games, the Celtics' 8 NBA Championships, UCLA's 88 and UConn's 90 basketball games.

But what are the streaks in the hobby of sports collectibles? Topps has been issuing baseball cards for 68 years. Another less known streak, until now, has been set by three individuals who have been the only ones to hold tables at all 38 National Sports Collectors Conventions.

### **Group #38**

Table choice at the National is based on a point system that rewards those who have participated the most. The top priority group is currently #38 which equates to the number of years a table holder has been at the National. Typically at 7:15 AM on Friday during the National, table holders in the highest priority groups participate in a lottery and quickly select their locations for the next year. It is sort of like boarding a Southwest airline flight. If you sleep in, you lose your spot. You know everyone in your priority group and have an opportunity to briefly socialize with them. You also take note of anyone missing from prior years. Priority group #38 consists of John Rumierz, B.A. Murry and Pat Quinn, per that threesome.

How did these fine sports collectibles athletes stay in such great physical and financial shape to keep hauling the cardboard and standing on those hard, concrete floors for so many years?

## John Rumierz

When you attend a National, you will likely spot booths that feature advertising banners, high-end cases and attractive displays. You can detect a quality “corporate” look. One of the first tables that you should see when you arrive is manned by John Rumierz. Rumierz’s table definitely does not convey a corporate look; there is no glare. His set up could fit in at a 1970s show of part-time dealers/collectors. That first impression isn’t far off. John Rumierz is a collector who has been at the National every year since it started. He continues to be just a collector selling duplicates to further support his collecting habit. His duplicates are scarce vintage cards.



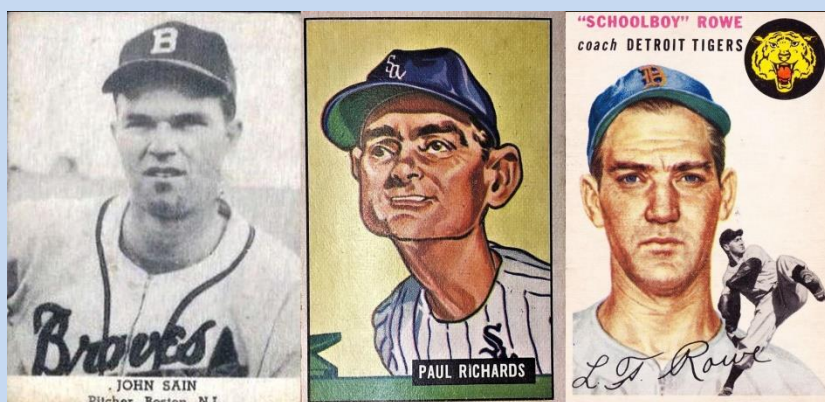
*John Rumierz is always near the National entrance,  
photo B.A. Murry*

### **Mom throwing out the cards was just the start**

Rumierz’s collecting story starts in 1952 in Dearborn, Michigan. He was enamored with the 1952 Topps cards and liked Walt Dropo even though he was in a Red Sox rather than a Tiger uniform. Bobby Shantz was another memorable card. He was disappointed in the 1953 Topps cards compared to 1952. The unusual cartoon drawing of Paul Richards’ 1951 Bowman is etched in his memory. He collected Glendales and hockey cards and traded all his Tiger cards for a 1954 Topps of Schoolboy Rowe. He bought a friend’s collection of 5,000 1952 Topps and accumulated 7,500 cards by the time he went to high school. But then the cards sat in the basement, and in 1969 mom finally threw them out – a pretty typical collector story up to that point.

However, shortly after mom tossed the cardboard, Rumierz went to a Detroit comic book show run by Tom Altschuler, found a box of old cards, saw the light and set out to replace everything he had once owned. Unlike many of those who were around in the early 1970s, Rumierz had the persistence to find other collectors and got serious about the hobby.

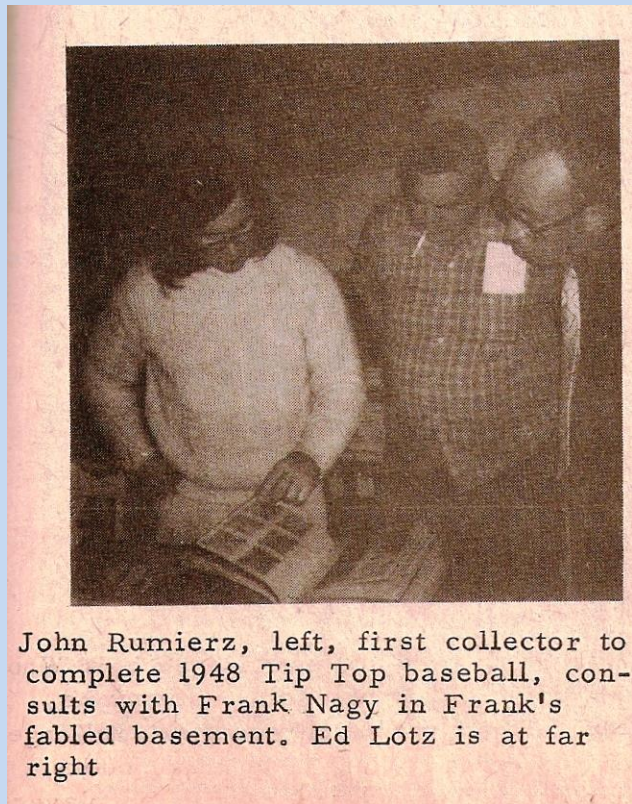
He had graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in chemical engineering and was gainfully employed as a chemical engineer at Chrysler. As a bachelor, he had the time on weekends to devote to collecting.



*1947 Tip Tops, the 1951 Bowman Paul Richards and the 1954 Topps Schoolboy Rowe were of interest to Rumierz.*

### Joining other buyers in the 1970s

Jay Barry was one of the first local collector/accumulators he met, followed by guys like Pat Quinn, Don Steinbach, Rich Egan, Gar Miller, Irv Lerner, Bill Mastro, Dick Royce, Mike Cramer and Charles Brooks. Soon he was off and running with buying groups traveling the country. Rumierz's primary interest on these trips was to purchase cards he didn't already own or to upgrade. One year he remembers making 48 weekend trips to buy cards or to have a table at a show. (Rumierz remembered Gary Sawatzki did some mid-week selling and set up at 68 shows one year.) Rumierz never did it full-time, but he managed to get to Canada, California, the Northeast and Venezuela. He met Lionel Carter, Frank Nagy, Eric Lange, Jack Wallin, Bob Wilson, Fred McKie, Bill Haber and others. Several times he stayed with Buck Barker in St. Louis; both had an interest in obscure baseball sets like Hage's Ice Cream and Gunther Beer.



John Rumierz, left, first collector to complete 1948 Tip Top baseball, consults with Frank Nagy in Frank's fabled basement. Ed Lotz is at far right

*Rumierz and his Tip Tops in Nagy's basement, Baseball Hobbyist 1974*

### Memorable trips

One 1972 trip with Jay Barry was only across the Detroit River into Windsor, Canada. What did he find so close to home? He found a collector who sold them 352 1952 Topps cards, of which about 100 were high numbers. Rumierz feels that the reason for high numbers being found in Canada was that Topps required their distributor, O-Pee-Chee, to buy an equal number of cards from each run. The poor Canadians were stuck with all those unsold high numbers at the end of the season.

*Baseball Hobbyist* magazine ran a story about Rumierz in 1974. He was described as one of the "foremost collectors of regional card issues, the hardest to find in the country" and "the first collector in the world" to complete the 163-card 1947 Tip-Top baseball card set following a buying trip to Boston. *SCD* reported that the 1974 Detroit show was expected to draw more than 1,500 people and was organized by Dick Reuss, Lloyd Toerpe, Frank Nagy, Ed Lotz, John Rumierz, Jay Barry and *SCD* publisher John Stommen.

Rumierz joined Gar Miller and Eric Lange on a New York buying trip in the mid-1970s. They wound up with a T206 Wagner. Figuring out how to divide purchases ("pick 'ems") among buyers was always a highlight of such trips. In this instance, Rumierz wound up with the Wagner and completed his T206 base set. At one time he even had a second T206 base set minus another Wagner and a second Plank. He remembers buying collections with as many as 1,400 T206s and 700 T205s. He said, "T206s, 1933 Goudeys and 1952 Topps were relatively easy to find compared to the obscure regional issues."

From 1975 to 1997, Rumierz lived in King of Prussia, Pennsylvania, working in the mechanical testing industry for SKF Bearing Company. He moved back to his Dearborn boyhood home in 1997.

### **National streak starts**

It was natural for Rumierz to take a table at the first National held at the Los Angeles Airport Marriott in 1980. Gavin Reilly organized the show with Mike Berkus and Steve Brunner. Rumierz was active with many of the other people in the hobby then. He has maintained his health and enthusiasm and has continued to take a table at each National since then. He thinks he is likely the only one who has personally manned a table every day. Now it is the only show he does.

He spends more time talking to long-time friends than he does touting the rare cardboard in his cases. He stated, "With the evolution of sports collecting, the National experience has changed of course. Back at the early shows there was more social interaction. The collectors were less business men and more hobbyist pure and simple."

## **The Hobby's First NATIONAL CONVENTION**

With the hobby's first national convention only a few days away I think it would be appropriate to spotlight the people who have worked the many hours to make it a reality.



(Riley, Berkus, Brunner)

*Riley, Berkus and Brunner in the September 1980 Trader Speaks*

### **Cards above the bar**

Rumierz remembers the 1991 Anaheim National that drew 100,000 people as being significant, but his favorite show wasn't a National. The show was back in 1972, and he calls it "in my experience, the greatest baseball card show ever." Chicagoans Pat Quinn, Don Steinbach, Rich Egan, and Jim Rowe organized this gathering which took place over a four-day weekend and was held on the mezzanine above a Chicago bar that remained open until the wee hours. Collectors never got thrown out. "They did a great job of advertising in *The Sporting News* and elsewhere that they were buying old cards," Rumierz remembered. "The stuff that came in from all over was unreal. There were hundreds of exhibit cards, autographed cards, Plow Boy cabinets, T200 premiums, complete sets of *Sporting News* issues, including the rookie Ruth. If I had one hobby experience to relive, that would definitely be the one."

### **Staying the course**

Rumierz has intentionally kept a low profile. Sometimes he will hear things about cards that he knows may be off base, but he prefers to avoid conflicts. He acknowledges he "doesn't argue well." Collector/dealer Mark Macrae has known him for years and stated, "Once you get to know him, he is a very knowledgeable, sharing and caring collector." Rumierz added, "I am a friend of anyone who is a real card collector."

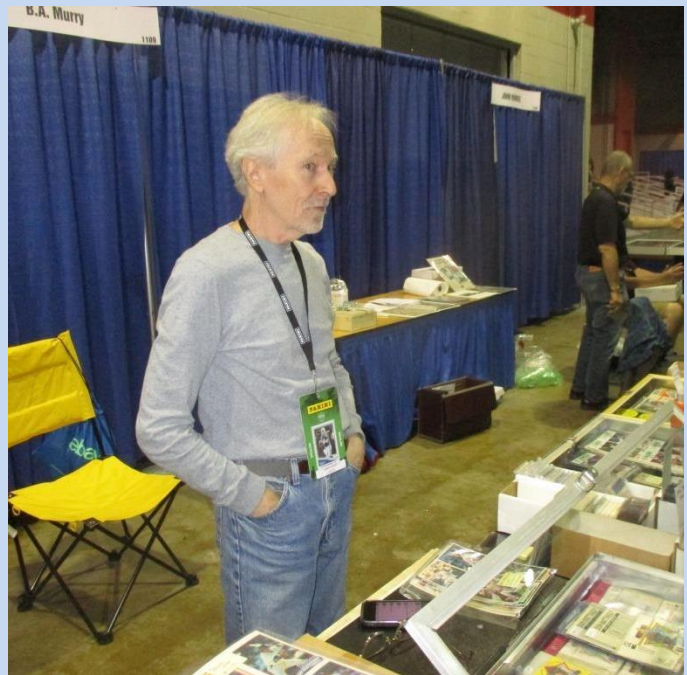
Rumierz sells cards on eBay, seller ID "enigma1132" and remains focused on vintage baseball cards (especially rare sets), some variations and a few non-sport sets. He has many Venezuelan cards. His only limit is that he tries not to start any new set and won't even be tempted with a type card. He just keeps collecting, rather than liquidating a collection that he enjoys.

He remembers talking to his friend Buck Barker at his hospital bed about a list of Charles Conlon photos Barker wanted. Barker died a day or two later.

## **B.A. Murry**

B.A. Murry (his grandfather was also known as B.A.) has made every National and has generally been within a few feet of Rumierz's table. Murry was born in 1947 and has lived primarily near Carbondale, Illinois. He liked Stan Musial and 1954 Topps. Murry collected baseball cards during grade school, kept at it until early high school and then resumed after college and the military. His parents recognized how serious he was about his collection, and they never tossed his original 7,500 cards.

A 1955 *The Sporting News* ad enlightened him to the opportunity to purchase complete sets. He started buying sets from 1957 to 1963 from Sam Rosen (Woody Gelman's father-in-law) and from Larry Fritsch. He subscribed to early hobby publications, *Card Comments* and *Card Collector*, and retained price lists from Rosen's Card Collectors' Company. He also collected Posts, Red Mans, Leaf and Fleer.

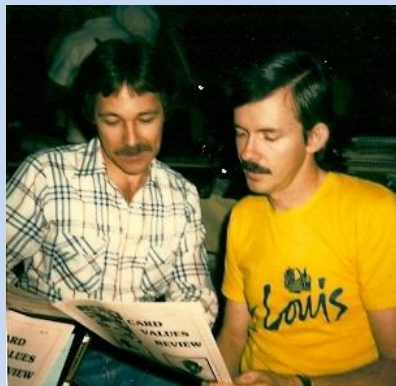


One of his few regrets was giving all his 1954s to another kid in town when the "new" 1955s came out. "Who needs these old cards now," he thought at the time. Murry caught up with his old cards when Houston dealer Larry Dluhy bought them from Murry's neighbor 25 years later. Dluhy (House of Cards) somehow remembered Murry from those early hobby publications where kids like Murry, Dluhy, George Husby and Larry Fritsch wrote about their collections.

Murry learned to be patient and not give stuff away or underprice cards that were likely to appreciate. Murry admits to being on the frugal side anyway.

### **Returns to collecting**

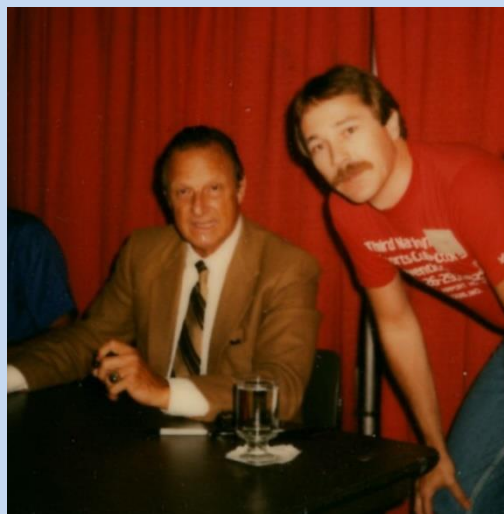
When he got back into collecting, he was more interested in everything since his youth rather than the pre-war cards. In the early 1970s, he connected with the St. Louis collectors group which included Rich Hawksley and Buck Barker. Barker attending a show was always a big event as he would drop in with egg crates full of obscure cards and let them go for reasonable prices. Nearby contemporaries were Paul Marchant, Mimi Alongi and Bill Stone. He later joined them in promoting the 1982 St. Louis National.



*Murry and Paul Marchant, Murry (1980s) and Murry with Bill Henderson, photos B.A.Murry and G Vrechek*

### **Into the numbers**

His business degree from Southern Illinois University led to a 13-year career in accounting at SIU starting in 1973. He juggled doing shows and buying trips with work, but eventually became a full-time dealer in 1986. In collaboration with Marchant, he published 16 issues of *Card Values Review* starting in 1980. Because of the card pricing experience, Murry was hired by Jim Beckett as their technical services manager to develop price information for the increasing number of Beckett publications. When he moved to Texas to join Beckett in 1989, there were about 20 employees. When he left a few years later, there were over 100. Murry returned to doing shows in the Midwest, often with Bill Henderson, the “King of Commons.”

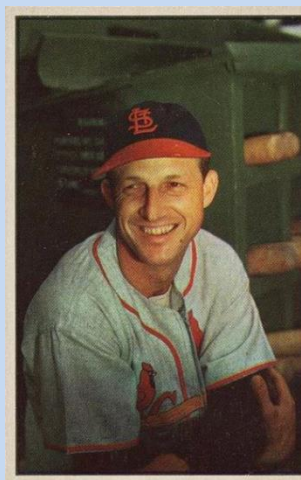


*Murry met Stan Musial at this 1983 Kansas City show, photo B.A. Murry*

### **Player card niche**

A 1979 conversation with Don Steinbach in Chicago at the Sport Collectors Store became a pivotal moment. They were selling complete 1979-80 Topps hockey sets with the Gretzky rookie card for \$10. Just the Gretzky card was also priced at \$10. Steinbach explained that some collectors were just interested in their favorite player and didn't want to bother with the rest of the set.

Murry saw a niche by buying cases, breaking up sets and selling players individually. He started with the food issues and other oddball cards and stickers which escalated in the 1980s. While it was hard work, he had an accountant's sense of organization and could deal with the avalanche of sets. Starting in 1998 he was one of the largest, by listing, card dealers on eBay and has currently over 10,000 items in his eBay store, “bamcards.” The typical listing is a buy-it-now, post-1980 card or two for \$5 to \$10.



## Early Nationals

Murry has a tsunami of information which he is quite willing to share. The National is the only major show he does now. He remembers the first six Nationals as hotel banquet room events, like the 1982 National he co-promoted in St. Louis. Most out of town dealers would stay at the hotel and could readily get together. Break-out seminars were held.



At Left: The 4th National comes to Chicago and the fun begins. Brett, Bruce and Bonita Paynter are joined by past national hosts Carol Toerpe, B.A. Murry, Gavin Riley and Bill Stone.

Center: Mike Berkus (far left) and Gavin Riley (far right) hosted the 1st National in Los Angeles. Here they are pictured with Lloyd and Carol Toerpe after the Toerpes were selected as hosts of the 2nd National.

The program for the 4<sup>th</sup> National included those involved in the first four Nationals. B.A. Murry is in the top photo.

For example, the 4<sup>th</sup> National at the Holiday Inn in Rosemont, Illinois, had 173 dealers at 244 tables. Promoter Bruce and Bonita Paynter had two tables as you came in the door. *Sports Collectors Digest*, Larry Fritsch, Howie and Mike Gordon, and Quinn's Sport Collectors Store had two tables each within a few feet of the entrance. Rumierz and Murry had tables in the first row. I remember it being crowded and hot. The Nationals were warming up quickly.

Murry remembers many details like the \$50 table prices, but he said, "The cost then was not very important. Every dealer did well selling their stuff."

### **Growing into convention halls**

The 1992 National in Atlanta continued a trend to large convention halls and 800 plus tables. Murry remembers what happened, "To our disappointment corporate giveaways in the back of the convention floor caused early arriving collectors to charge past our tables at the entrance to get to the freebies in the back. The freebies were viewed as rare and valuable." The Chicago 1993 National at McCormick Place featured huge ceilings, an expanse of windows and thousands of people.

The corporate attraction and autograph area trend has continued to pull collectors in the door, but not necessarily stopping at the first table they see. The dealers around the entrance tend to be the long-time, high priority vintage card dealers. Nearby you'll find Kit Young, Kevin Savage, Roger Neufeldt, Wayne Varner, Bill Stone and others.

### **Pat Quinn**

Pat Quinn was born in 1940 and came from a tough part of Chicago's South Side at 43<sup>rd</sup> and Cicero. As a kid he played ball, went to White Sox games and pursued players for autographs. He collected cards starting in 1951, but his early collection was more significant for the autographs he obtained. He had the initiative to write players like Ty Cobb and get several of their autographs. He might even get a player to send back an autographed photo. He only had a few hundred cards and a few hundred autographs, but he hung onto them.

When he got out of the Navy in 1967, he was recuperating at home with a broken leg and noticed ads of people wanting to buy autographs. He thought he would make some money selling some autographs, but wound up trading a few key autographs for hundreds of others. Instead of selling his collection, he was acquiring more stuff, a lot more. In 1968 he started running monthly mail auctions which he still runs today.

### **Eye opener in Detroit**

He was working for *Look* Magazine in Chicago, but got enthused about buying and selling hobby material. In 1970 he became good friends with Don Steinbach and got to his first big show in Detroit. He said, "That show really opened my eyes. A lot of collectors at the time were just interested in trading, and I didn't have that much to trade, but here you could buy and sell. Someone would have a table with cards on it and not even be sitting there. You'd wait for the person to come back, and they'd say they wanted something like \$7.50 for the cards you picked out. I would try to buy their whole table."



*Pat Quinn (right) was the sharp-dressed man chasing the autographs in this 1970 Sport Fan photo with Jeff Morey, Waite Hoyt and Bob Jaspersen at Cooperstown*





### Early Chicago organizer

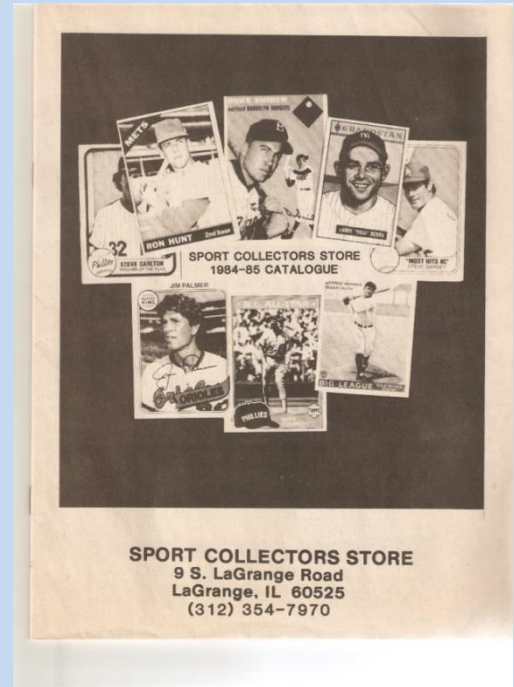
Quinn was among the organizers of Rumierz's favorite Chicago show above the bar (not far from Quinn's home). He helped organize many shows in the early 1970s. Bob Jaspersen reported on most of these in *Sport Fan*. In the first few years, *Sport Fan* would list everyone who attended. Nearby collectors mentioned included Lionel Carter, Bob Solon, Bill Mastro, Bill Loughman, Jim Zak and Elwood Scharf. Some of these 1970s shows were touted as "national conventions" since it was arguable as to how "national" a convention was.

*Pat Quinn at a Chicago show 1973, SCD*

### Sport Collectors Store

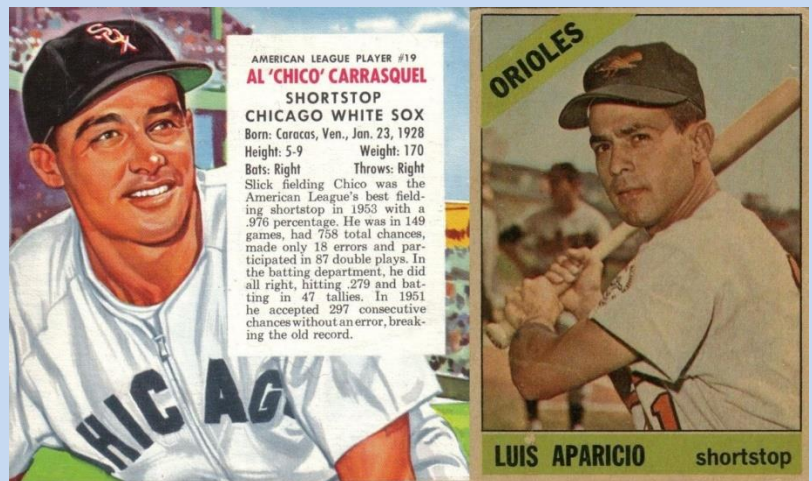
Quinn, Don Steinbach, Roger Marth and (early on) Jay Barry bought millions of cards from The Trading Card Company of Detroit (Jay Barry) and the Card Collectors Company of New York (Richard Gelman). In the mid-70s Quinn was the only one in his group doing this full-time. Quinn remembers having 500 Rose rookie cards and 500 Ryan rookies. He made hundreds of buying trips across the country and five memorable ventures to Venezuela accompanied at various times by Steinbach, Mastro, Rumierz and Chico Carrasquel (SCD, 2/17/17).

Quinn's group opened the Sport Collectors Store on Archer Avenue in Chicago in 1976; they moved to LaGrange, Illinois, from 1983 until 1997 when Steinbach died. Steinbach and Marth were chattier with customers, but Quinn was often the person you dealt with if you were interested in selling cards. Quinn was also the guy you wanted in your corner, if you got into a dispute with local buyers when invading "their" turf on buying trips, although Quinn says, "Rumierz was really the guy you wanted."



### Autographs and publications

Quinn has maintained his interests in autographs and publications. Autographed 1933 Goudeys and 1952 Topps were in his collection. Publication dealer Goodie Goldfaden (1914-2012) would sell Quinn publications in bulk. It would have been interesting to listen in on those two tough negotiators making a deal. Quinn remembers buying out Goldfaden two or three times. Goldfaden remembered selling out his entire inventory seven times.



*Quinn recruited Carrasquel for trips to Venezuela where they also visited Aparicio*

## Still roaming

As a full-time dealer, it was logical for Quinn and the Sport Collectors Store to set up at the first National and to easily attend all the Nationals in Chicago. Twenty-two of the 38 Nationals have been held in the Midwest, and it isn't surprising that the three record-holders are all from the Midwest.

Even though Quinn has sold his own collection and most of his old store inventory, he still has balls, bats, cards, autographs, programs and uniforms to bring to the National. He probably spends as much time roaming the floor as manning his table, his version of the internet. You won't find him by going to eBay or social media. Like Rumierz and B.A. Murry, his table is definitely low-key and you might not notice him, but he has been there for all 38 shows and plans to keep going.

Way to go, guys. Keep it up.

George Vrechek is a freelance contributor to SCD and can be reached at [vrechek@ameritech.net](mailto:vrechek@ameritech.net).

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**Hobby Dealers**  
by George Vrechek

# The beat goes on

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