

Baseball Cards

Baseball cards, with their colorful player photographs and plentiful statistics, used to be a way to keep close to the sport of baseball. But now they are collector's items.

The first baseball cards appeared around 1887. They were sold in packages of cigarettes. The set most coveted by collectors is the American Tobacco Company's *T-206 Series*. This set includes the Honus Wagner card, which may be the most valuable card of all time. The Wagner card was produced in 1910. Only about 50 of the original cards exist. One of the Wagner cards sold for \$451,000 in 1991. The Wagner cards are so valuable because they were pulled from circulation very soon after they were issued. Wagner asked that the cards be pulled because he didn't like the fact that they were issued by a tobacco company. He didn't smoke and didn't want to endorse the habit. In addition, Wagner wanted the cards pulled because he wasn't paid any royalties to have his picture printed on the card.

Tobacco companies weren't the only businesses that tried to boost product sales with baseball cards. Magazines and candy companies also issued cards. By the 1920s, baseball cards were no longer just bonuses for buying something else. The cards could be purchased by themselves, and they often were sold in vending machines.

Gum was included with baseball cards starting in 1939. During World War II, gum and baseball cards took a hiatus. The nation needed all its resources for the war effort, including the rubber that was used to make gum and paper used in the baseball cards. Following the war, gum and cards were sold once again. The Topps company, founded in 1952, was the most successful vendor. Today, several companies manufacture baseball cards.

Unit 8

Some of these baseball cards have become quite valuable because they contain errors. For instance, Aurelio Rodriguez's 1969 card shows a picture of a batboy instead of Rodriguez. A 1982 card of right-handed pitcher John Littlefield bears a picture of him throwing left-handed. The negative was reversed when it was printed.

- Why does an error on a baseball card enhance rather than detract from its value?

- Name some of the qualities you would need to discriminate if you were a baseball card collector.

- Why would knowing a baseball player's potential help you if you were a card collector?