

Baseball cards no longer just a hobby

By Thomas Prowell
Emerald Editorial Editor

Kids have been collecting and trading baseball cards for decades, but nowadays it seems as though they could be swapping their bubble gum cards for gold American Express cards.

Baseball cards have become a big investment, and collectors have changed.

The returns on baseball cards are as astounding as Mike Scott's split-finger fastball. A complete set of 1985 Topps Company cards sold for \$20 three years ago. To get one now would cost a consumer \$125.

On some individual cards, the percentages are even more incredible. Mark McGwire's 1985 Olympic team card was worth only pennies when the first baseman was still in the Oakland Athletics' farm system. He was called up in 1987, and started slugging home runs at a rookie-record pace. His card climbed in value to \$1. A year later, that same card has a street value of \$20.

The baseball card market in Eugene is booming as well. There are several card shops in town; the exact number seems to fluctuate as often as George Steinbrenner's faith in Billy Martin's managerial capability.

Robin Chase of the Baseball Card Shop claims to have established the earliest card shop still existing in Eugene. She set up roots in the Oakway Mall a year ago after her son's shop in Springfield closed. Today, she's aware of six other shops that have started after her business venture.

Part of the sudden popularity in collecting, Chase claims, is it doesn't take much of an investment to get involved.

Money to be made through collecting, trading

A beginner can get a card album, protective sheets and a decent number of cards for only \$10.

Chase admits that most novices getting into the hobby now are interested in the tremendous profits involved. She warns however, "If you don't love the sport, you don't enjoy kids and you don't enjoy talking to people — if you're just in it for the money — then stay out."

A self-admitted tomboy, Chase said she has loved baseball ever since she was a little girl. As a fifth-grader growing up in Cucamonga, Calif., she had to campaign to get on the local little league team. She went on to play first base, catcher and pitcher for the team.

Chase says the line-up of customers frequenting her shop is a varied one. Most are sixth-grade boys whispering in reverential tones about the exploits of McGwire, Clemens, Boggs and Mattingly. Some are 40-year-old fathers hoping to double their investment in months. There are many female collectors as well.

And all collect for different reasons. The principal of a local grade school buys boxes of cards to reward pupils who behave well. Some of the women buy only "good-looking" ballplayers. "I have a few people who collect Ron Darling (a pitcher for the New York Mets) because he's cute and does commercials," Chase says.

She says there is a crew of grade-school regulars who make the Baseball Card Shop their hangout. "They're good kids. Parents say we're the best babysitters in town."

The most frenzied monetary trading is in rookie cards. A rookie card is a company's first issue of a particular player, which doesn't always correspond to a player's rookie year with his club. Many of the card companies issue "Future Star" prints of ballplayers still in the minors.

Investment in rookie cards is heavy because if the rookie goes on to become a superstar, the card becomes highly valuable. Currently, Mark McGwire, Cory Snyder, Gregg Jeffries, Kevin Seitzer and Ellis Burks are the hottest cards.

Cole Rich, 33, claims that the 1988 team set for the woeful Baltimore Orioles could be a good investment. "It's a record-setting team," he says, and records are what fix the price of cards.

Rich began card collecting through his 13-year-old son, Chip. What began as a simple father-and-son activity has started to take over the whole house. "We're going to have to devote a room to it — the ol' kitchen drawer isn't cutting it no more." Chip proudly admits that he has accumulated more than 16,000 cards.

Greg Sharp, 11, is another big-time collector with more than 10,000 cards. He estimates he spends no more than \$20 a month on cards, mostly through trading with other collectors. Still, Sharp's parents don't like their son's hobby. "They think I'm wasting my money," he complains.

Bob Leonard, 43, doesn't think his son is wasting money. Leonard collected as a kid growing up in

Oklahoma, and had several Mickey Mantle cards. Mantle was a Hall-of-Fame slugger for the New York Yankees who grew up near where Leonard lived.

"I don't remember it being so value-conscious," as collecting is today, he says. He's painfully aware of it now — Mantle cards from the 1950s are among the most valuable, fetching anywhere from \$1,000 to \$6,000.

Those cardboard renderings of the boys of spring have been around for a long time. Baseball cards were first invented in 1860 as something to keep cigarettes flat in vending machine packages. They were smaller than today's card, and were somewhat misleading — many of the cigarette cards had pictures of ballplayers who didn't smoke.

The modern era of baseball cards started in 1952, when Topps Chewing Gum Co. issued its first set. Topps is the oldest and best known company. Beginning collectors usually start out with this company because their cards are easy to find.

Today, there are four other card companies. Donruss and Fleer, two outfits established in 1981, print luxurious, expensive cards generally worth more to collectors than the cards Topps produce.

Score and SportsFlics are the new kids on the block, but production problems have made their cards hard to find and have jeopardized the future of those two companies.

Ironically, although these companies are expected to go out of business, their cards will probably become extremely valuable because of their rarity.

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Best of modern Broadway focus of program

By Frale de Guzman
Emerald Reporter

An evening of musical fun is in store for students tonight as All of the Above presents a repertoire of Broadway show tunes in "The Best of Times" at Beall Concert Hall.

"As performers, we felt that it would be great to do some of the

new music from Broadway," said All of the Above group member Kimberly Robinson, a senior majoring in pre-law and music. Thus, the idea for "The Best of Times" was born.

According to Robinson, group members wholeheartedly supported the idea, and by December a variety of Broadway tunes were selected and rehearsal times were set.

From that point forward, rehearsals were devoted to the memorization of song lyrics and choreography of dance numbers — a routine familiar to group members, who have been performing together for the past two years.

The wide range of musical selections will emphasize the group's versatility while highlighting the talents of individual performers, Robinson said. Program selections include songs from current Broadway productions such as "Cats," "Evita," "La Cage aux Folles," "Barnum" and "Les Miserables."

Although many of the songs to be performed have been nominated for Tony Awards, they are not always the song numbers that people will recognize, said group member Mary Russell, a senior majoring in rhetoric and communications. However, "It's some of

the songs that are not that well known that often are the best ones," she said.

"We want to make the program interesting and educational, but at the same time we want to give the audience a feel for how Broadway has changed in the 1980s," Russell said.

Because the songs are taken out of context, a transition is needed between numbers to maintain audience interest and to clue them in to the change, she said. "If the song is not set up properly, it simply becomes just another song, and the meaning behind it will not be known," Russell said.

Having worked together since 1986, group members are aware of the time commitment needed to ensure a production's success. But group members were willing to devote this extra time and energy to the production, and with the imminence of curtain time, they are confident of their success.

Showtime for "The Best of Times" is 8 p.m. and admission is free. For more information call the School of Music at 686-3764.

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