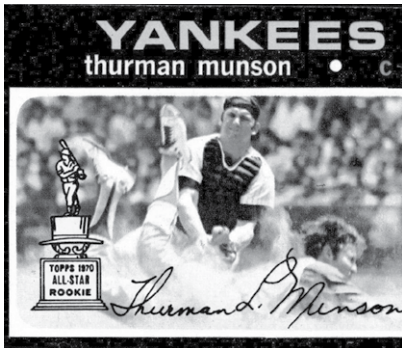
Roots and Rituals

Sharing Our Lifelong Journey Collecting Baseball Cards

BY MARIO NACINOVICH AND ATHAN REPPAS

Baseball card collecting has always been more than just a pastime. It's a bridge to childhood, a way to chronicle history, and for those of us from The Bronx (Mario), a lasting thread to the storied legacy of the New York Yankees. For those growing up outside of Boston (Athan), collecting cards was a rite of passage, a daily ritual that brought home echoes of greatness and a love for our national pastime. Mario: My journey through the hobby is forever intertwined with the tragic loss of Thurman Munson, a player who, even decades later, embodies my deepest connection to the game and the collecting community. Athan: My journey starts across generations, in a family living room where cardboard and my earliest childhood memories met.



Highly coveted for its black borders and rookie cup, the 1971 Topps Thurman Munson remains a must-have for serious collectors.

ATHAN'S BEGINNINGS

I was eight years old when my uncle first opened up his old collection. I was awestruck by the sheer number of cards, an entire world of baseball history packed into slim white boxes. "I was your age when I started collecting," he told me as I flipped through rows of treasures. Not long after, my dad unearthed his own collection and proudly revealed his Ernie Banks cards, each signed by the legend himself during a long-remembered visit to Dad's childhood school. Realizing those signatures connected my dad and uncle to the heroes of their youth, just as I was discovering my own, made me appreciate how much every card meant. Collecting isn't about cardboard but about stepping back into the time and place where you got that card, who you were with, and what was happening in the world. What began as curiosity quickly became a bond, linking my generation to theirs, united by a love for the game and tradition.

MEMORIALIZING MUNSON

Mario: The day Thurman Munson died in 1979 marked a turning point, both for my collecting and my life. Munson, captain and heart of the Yankees, was more than just a ballplayer. He was a working-class hero for kids like me. The sorrow of hearing about his plane crash, watching the memorials on grainy TV, and laying flowers outside Yankee Stadium brought the reality of loss into sharp focus. Suddenly, those small 2.5" by 3.5" cards became powerful relics – tangible links to a lost era and an idol. "The Captain" had left us far too soon.

Athan: Though I never knew Thurman Munson before hearing Mario's story, I soon realized how collecting represents so much more than the players or the cardboard itself. It's about preserving meaning, emotion, and memory across generations. Even for collectors like me, who never saw Munson play, you can sense his impact in the reverence others hold for him. That's the beauty of this hobby, it connects us across stories, emotions, and memories that echo long after the final inning.

THE MEANING

Mario: Every true collector has a card that means more than all the rest. It's not always the most sought-after or the most valuable, but it's the most treasured. For Munson, two cards embody his legacy: the 1970 Topps Rookie, shared with Dave McDonald, and his iconic 1971 Topps All-Star Rookie, his first solo card. The dramatic horizontal image of Munson, glove outstretched in the dust, symbolizes his grit and leadership. The notorious black borders make high-grade copies rare, adding to its legend. I've carried my own 1971 Topps for over 50 years. Like the NYC subway token on my keyring, it reminds me of my roots. As life evolved, marriage, fatherhood, moves across the country, that card became a steadfast symbol of family and loyalty, never leaving my pocket or my heart.

Athan: For me, that iconic card is the Tommy Leach (Portrait) from the 1909–1911 T206 White Border set. The T206 series is legendary – over a century old and celebrated as one of the most famous baseball card sets ever, highlighted by the ultra-rare Honus Wagner. Owning Leach's card connects me to that timeless baseball legacy.



T206 Piedmont 150 Tommy Leach Portrait

MAGIC AND MEMORY

Mario: Technology has transformed how we collect, trade, and share, but not why we collect. I will continue to hunt for my favorite players and chase new cards, fueled by the same excitement and nostalgia as when I started at eight years old. Whether online or at

(Continued on page 11)

Coaching Can Leave a Lasting Impact

BY KRIS PEARSON

Coaching youth sports is about so much more than just the game, the rules, the equipment, etc. It provides an opportunity to help younger people develop good habits and life skills. It helps build character, approaches to teamwork, responsibility, attitude, and effort.

I was approached recently by someone who I coached on a baseball team. He must have been about five or six years old when he was on my team. He's now about 10 years old and stopped me at a community event to say hi. He remembers me as his first baseball coach – and the person who took the time to teach him how to tie his shoes.



Kris with his son, Matthew, after a winning-season final game.

Even the little things matter.

You never know how your efforts will impact someone.



***Kris Pearson** is Vice President, Account Director, Publicis. He can be reached at Kris.Pearson@Publicis.com or 201-240-4723.*

Roots and Rituals *(Continued from page 10)*

a local show, the hobby's magic endures, where digital and traditional worlds coexist and keep each other vibrant.

Half a century after buying my first pack, collecting continues to anchor and connect many of us. It is a way to relive youth, link generations, mourn losses, and celebrate the enduring spirit of the game. Every Thurman Munson and Aaron Judge or Ted Williams or Roman Anthony card, every Yankees or Boston team set, every deal, whether struck in person or online, echoes with the hope that one more piece of childhood can be found, and that the legends of today will someday inspire collectors in generations yet to come.



***Mario Nacinovich** is Director, Marketing, Americas at BVI Medical, and host of The Spotlight Series Podcast. He can be reached at nacinovich@gmail.com.*



***Athan Reppas** is Product Manager, Thea Pharma, Inc. He can be reached at athanreppas7@gmail.com.*

Executing Strategy

BY JEREMY VANNATTA

It was the summer between my Freshman and Sophomore years in college. I was invited to play on a semi-professional soccer team in my hometown of Oklahoma City. About four games into the season, we were 3-1 and playing Dallas, the team that had won the league every year it was in existence. Their standout talent player was a star in the pro indoor league at the time and had scored in every game (indoor and outdoor) of the season.



Vannatta soars for header.

About 10 minutes before kickoff, coach told me he was starting me. I hadn't started a game yet and was the youngest player on the team by a couple of years. He said, "Just cover him. Annoy him. Don't worry about making runs up the field. Stay in his face. Make sure he knows what you ate for lunch without telling him. Just do NOT let him score." I followed coach's orders, rarely even watching what was going on at the other end of the field. That player was so annoyed that I never gave him space – even when the ball was 50 yards away.

Improbably, we scored a go-ahead goal with two minutes left in the game, my mark was held scoreless, and we beat a Dallas team that had been undefeated for three years. I played a role that evening – not a starring role, but the coach gave me very specific orders on how to execute his strategy, and it worked.



***Jeremy Vannatta** is VP – Account Director, AbelsonTaylor. He can be reached at 773-960-9595 or Jeremy.Vannatta@abelsontaylorgroup.com.*