

FEATURE AT SIX Persistence key to youngster's large baseball card collection

By Jeff Spreading
The Carlisle Mercury

Perhaps more impressive than Chris Kelley's extensive baseball card collection is his persistence.

After all, only a persistent chap could acquire more than a million cards.

Only through persistence could one obtain personal letters and autographs from baseball heroes like Bo Jackson, Mickey Mantle and Pete Rose, to name just a few.

According to Chris' father, Bobby, Chris once fell into the New York Mets' dugout trying to get an autograph.

This industrious 11-year-old has been collecting cards for about five years. One could easily say he has one of the most extensive private collections anywhere.

But, one must also look past the popularity of the hobby, the big money involved in advanced collecting and the thrill of making a big deal to find the reason why this Carlisle youth would amass such a collection.

"The reason is much more elemental," Bobby Kelley said.

Chris, or "Cat" as he is called, said the hobby started for him when his grandparents bought a few packs of cards for him in 1983.

To the baseball card collector, Chris might be considered a shrewd investor, a guru of sorts. His speculations have paid off with wise investments in cards that have become popular among traders.

"I'm lucky," he said of some of his cards boys.

And as far as the expertise element is concerned, "I've got a good memory on whose good" Chris said.

It's true. For an 11-year-old, he has an uncanny knowledge of sports trivia, including baseball players years before his time.

He advises beginning collectors to buy rookie, or first-year, cards of players.

"I try to get as many error cards as I can," he said.

Error cards are ones where companies have made printing errors in production. The errors might be the wrong name with a player or an incorrect spelling. Such cards are considered rarities, because the errors are corrected by card companies almost immediately, ultimately driving up the price.

In 1989, Upper Deck, a new card company whose product has become immensely popular, produced a Dale Murphy card with a reversed picture. Upper Deck corrected the error but some of the cards got on the market anyway. That card is now worth several hundred dollars.

In 1989, Fleer produced a Bill Ripken card with an obsolescence that is written on Ripken's baseball bat. Fleer made several versions of the card in an effort to correct it. However, that card is worth about \$25 and is considered one of the hardest new cards to find. Even the corrected version is rare and worth close to that amount.

The list of valuable cards is practically endless, and there appears to be no end as the hobby's popularity grows.

Baseball card collecting is now the nation's leading hobby.

Bobby Kelley said that based on what he has read, the hobby should continue to grow in popularity into the 1990s.

Again, though, its popularity for the avid collector goes beyond the money aspect.

"It's a lot of fun even if you never get a penny out of it," Bobby Kelley said. "It turns us into a little kid. It's not the

money. If you sell a card, it's just gone."

Several publications are available that list current prices, such as the Beckett Monthly and the Sports Collectors Digest.

Dr. James Beckett, considered the foremost authority on baseball cards also publishes yearly pricing books that list market pricing trends.

In addition to his card collecting, Chris also collects other sports memorabilia such as autographed baseballs.

One of his items, is an autograph advertisement from Chicago Bears quarterback Jim McMahon.

His luck prevailed in obtaining it. He could not find McMahon's address, so he sent the advertisement and a request for an autograph general delivery to Chicago, Minn. Finally, it came back autographed by McMahon.

Chris is also a baseball fan. His favorite team is the Oakland Athletics and he regularly goes to their games by watching ESPN, the cable sports channel.

His goal is to play professional baseball, but he's realistic about the goal. He plans to go to college also.

He already has collected most of this year's error cards and is currently pondering which brand will be the best

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A closetful
Chris Kelley displays some of the many baseball cards and sports collectibles he has amassed in his year as a collector. Kelley estimates that he has 1 million baseball cards.

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