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Mint Condition: How Baseball Cards Became An American Obsession

Mint Condition

*How Baseball Cards Became
an American Obsession*



DAVE JAMIESON



Synopsis

When award-winning journalist Dave Jamieson's parents sold his childhood home a few years ago, he rediscovered a prized boyhood possession: his baseball card collection. Now was the time to cash in on the investments of his youth. But all the card shops had closed, and cards were selling for next to nothing online. What had happened? In *Mint Condition*, his fascinating, eye-opening, endlessly entertaining book, Jamieson finds the answer by tracing the complete story of this beloved piece of American childhood. Picture cards had long been used for advertising, but after the Civil War, tobacco companies started slipping them into cigarette packs as collector's items. Before long the cards were wagging the cigarettes. In the 1930s cards helped gum and candy makers survive the Great Depression. In the 1960s royalties from cards helped transform the baseball players' association into one of the country's most powerful unions, dramatically altering the game. In the '80s and '90s, cards went through a spectacular bubble, becoming a billion-dollar-a-year industry before all but disappearing, surviving today as the rarified preserve of adult collectors. *Mint Condition* is charming original history brimming with colorful characters, sure to delight baseball fans and collectors.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If, like me, you are a baseball fan who collected baseball cards as a kid, you will find this account of the history of the baseball card industry to be a good read. It occurs to me that there are characteristic differences between how a journalist and an academic approach a book like this (I'm

assuming from his bio on the flap of the dust jacket that Jamieson is a journalist). With an academic, you are likely to get a rather dry discussion, but one that is thorough. With a journalist, you are likely to get a lively discussion, but one that leaves some holes in the narrative. Jamieson's discussion is certainly lively. He spends considerable time on some of the oddball characters who have been involved in the baseball card industry over the years. Getting to know something about these people makes the story more interesting, which is why journalists always include the "personal element" in a news story. If you want to write a newspaper article about an increase in foreclosures, you start the article with an account of the Smith family being forced out of their home. Only then do you give the reader the big picture. Jamieson takes this approach. An academic is more likely to be concerned with nailing down all the facts, and adds color only as an afterthought. In a book like this, the journalistic approach is probably the better way to go. But there were a number of points where I wished Jamieson had taken more trouble with the facts. For example, he spends some time on the boom and crash in baseball card production and in the prices of collectible cards during the late 1980s and early 1990s. But I didn't feel I was getting the complete story. It would have been nice to have had some more details on how high the prices of particular cards went and how far they crashed.

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