

Popular past hobby now sees dollar signs

By Dionne Searcey
Staff Reporter

Collecting baseball cards is still a popular hobby, but people aren't in it for fun anymore — they do it for money, local merchants said.

R.J. Harris, owner of Bases Loaded Sportscard, 2061 S. 16th St., said people of all ages collect the cards for financial gain.

"They may start out doing it for fun, but most people do it for money," he said.

Merle Schlotfeld, owner of Merle's Baseball Card Shop, 3939 N. 48th St., agreed.

The hobby could start when a 7-year-old buys a lot of baseball cards — just to chew the tasty gum inside, Schlotfeld said.

"You used to get a big chunk of gum. The gum was as big as the card," he said. But now the "nickel-a-pack" cards cost between 50 cents and \$1 — and the piece of gum is smaller, too.

But, Schlotfeld said, collecting cards pays off.

"There's money in baseball cards," he said.

Well, not literally.

A pack today comes with about 10 cards, he said, in addition to the gum.

Harris said a 50-cent pack might contain "rookie" cards worth \$5 — "if it's a rookie that a lot is expected from, like Frank Thomas or a card that's likely to be somewhat valuable."

New cards are printed every year during baseball season, he said.

"But there's nothing today that will be truly rare."

The cards that really pay off are the ones that date back years ago, he said. Old cards are worth anywhere from "a nickel to hundreds of thousands of dollars."

A Mickey Mantle card recently sold for \$49,000 and a 1968 Nolan Ryan card sold for \$1,200.

And "tobacco cards" from the late 1800s are the most scarce, Harris said.

Collectors travel to collector's conventions across the country to find special cards, he said.

But, Schlotfeld said, the love of baseball doesn't drive people to invest in the cards. Most people are not true "collectors," he said, but "collector/investors."



Michelle Paulman/Daily Nebraskan

The 1968 Cincinnati Reds rookie card of Johnny Bench and Ron Tompkins sells for \$500 at Casey's Sports Cards & Collectibles, 233 N. 48th St.

Opening Day celebrated at local sports bars

By Erik Unger
Staff Reporter

Opening Day is more than just the start of baseball season.

It is a tradition that stirs memories in any baseball fan's mind. Whether they remember huddling around a radio straining to hear every word of Red Barber's play-by-play, or sitting in a big league park watching their favorite team in action — fans remember.

But baseball tradition transcends the ballpark. It is also a big draw for bars across the country. Lincoln is no exception.

Both the SportsPage and Bleachers reaped the benefits of being sports bars on Monday's Opening Day.

The SportsPage Lounge, 13631 Energy Way, had 35-40 people watching baseball on its five televisions Monday afternoon, up from the usual afternoon crowd of one

or two, according to manager Roger Draper.

Bleachers, 5601 S. 56th St., had 15-20 fans taking advantage of 12 television screens showing baseball as well as a World Football League game and the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Yet despite the variety, the fans were there especially for Opening Day.

"It's a good excuse, Opening Day, to go to a bar and watch baseball," Brad Berka, an assistant tennis coach at Northeast High School, said. "We are here tonight to watch Nolan Ryan pitch," he said.

Bleachers owner Gary Weiss, a diehard Milwaukee Brewers fan, said baseball is good for his bar. This will be the first full season his bar will be open.

"It's a good beer-drinking sport," he said. "You don't have to pay attention to every play of the game. It's a lot of fun," Weiss said.

However, beer isn't the only lure to Opening Day.

"For people who have experi-

enced Opening Day at a major league park, growing up with baseball, Opening Day is an event," he said.

SportsPage owner Bobbie Dorn said Opening Day symbolizes the coming of spring and is one of the bar's big attractions.

Dorn, an avid Boston Red Sox fan, shows loyalty to his team by decorating his bar with a symbol of the Red Sox. A patron can't reach the restrooms in the SportsPage without passing through a wall designed as a replica of Fenway's Green Monster.

The wall is covered with other sports and baseball paraphernalia including photos of Ted Williams, World Series team photos of the 1961 New York Yankees and 1986 New York Mets, a Japanese baseball uniform and a picture of old Ebb's Stadium, home of the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Dorn said it helps to add atmosphere and uphold the sense of tradition the game holds.

"Wrigley Field and Fenway are tradition and that is how it is," he said.

But not all the fans watching baseball Monday are interested in the tradition.

"I'm a baseball fan now for self-defense," Dianna Ratzlow of Lincoln said.

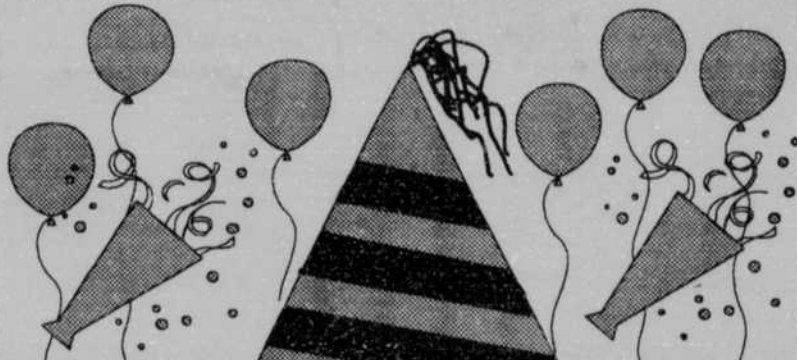
She was watching the Rangers-Brewers game at Bleachers with her husband Russ. He said he had been a fan all his life, since he listened to games on the radio.

Now that they both have an interest, the couple will take a baseball vacation this summer, taking in games in Kansas City, Chicago, and Milwaukee.

She said the best part of the game for her is seeing the rookies come up and following their progress.

At The SportsPage, in which baseball clientele makes up 90 percent of its afternoon business, drink and food specials are offered during the Chicago Cubs televised games, Draper said.

"Baseball is one of the leading forms of entertainment," Weiss said. "There is something special about baseball."



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