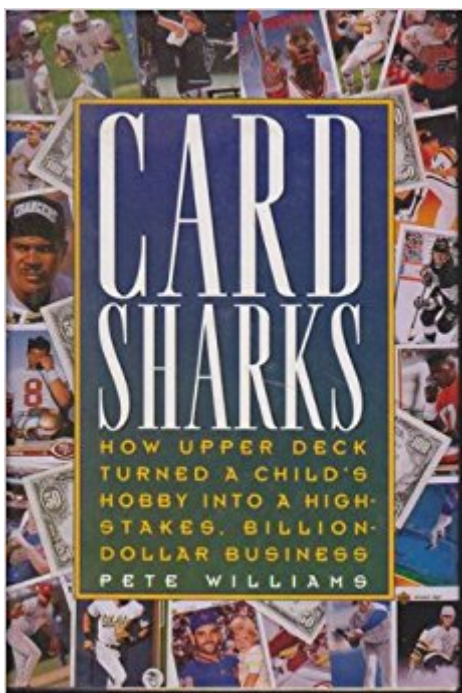


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Card Sharks: How Upper Deck Turned A Child's Hobby Into A High-Stakes, Billion-Dollar Business



Synopsis

Taking the reader from the birth of sports cards in the 1880s to the present, Williams investigates the success in the shady world of baseball cards. At the center of the industry is Upper Deck, the largest manufacturer, with sales of over \$260 million each year. Williams exposes how the power brokers in the game of baseball have changed this once-innocent hobby forever. Published in 1995 when Williams was a writer and columnist for USA Today Baseball Weekly, *Card Sharks* has been frequently cited by other authors and remains the definitive investigative look into the trading card business.

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Customer Reviews

"Card Sharks is the full-length expose we'd been waiting for. It will make you sick. But a good kinda sick; sicker but wiser. Williams provides 270 pages of details on perhaps the sports industry's ultimate insult to modern America."- Phil Mushnick, *The New York Post*"A disturbing tale"- *The Bergen (NJ) Record*"A well-researched, well-written look at the cardboard industry, from both historical and ethical standpoints - and Williams certainly does dig up the dirt."- *New York Newsday*"A dim look into Upper Deck and some of its business practices"- *The Orange County (Calif.) Register*

Sports cards were invented in the 1880s when tobacco tycoon James Buchanan Duke thought of

putting a piece of cardboard in cigarette packs to prevent them from getting crushed in shipping. The cards served as free advertising space and premiums to boost sales. Things have changed in 110 years. No longer a premium for another product, sports cards are the product. And a hot one at that. More than 10 million Americans collect sports cards, hoping one day to reap their "investment" benefits. How has the sports card industry, specifically the baseball card market, become a billion-dollar business in the past five years? Pete Williams, who has covered major league baseball and sports memorabilia for USA Today Baseball Weekly since 1991, has the perfect vantage point on what's caused this explosive success in the shaky and shady world of sports cards. His gripping narrative takes us from the birth of trading cards to the present, when the buying and selling of cards has become everyman's stock market. At the center of the industry is the Upper Deck Company. Once a one-man shop in Anaheim, California, it has grown into the largest manufacturer of sports cards, with sales of 1 billion since 1990. Along the way, Upper Deck has revolutionized the trading card business by introducing a stunning array of wildly designed cards with incredible action photos, ultraviolet coating, and holograms to prevent counterfeiting. Williams's account is the first solid investigative look at what goes on at Upper Deck and he reveals the tactics its owners use to dominate the trading card market. This book is a fascinating investigation of yet another facet of sports that has lost its innocence at the hands of greedy power brokers. But it's not just a story about sports; it's an absorbing tale about business, the costs of always going for the quick buck, and the way commercialism has seeped into every part of our society. Card Sharks will have you marveling at what this once-simple child's hobby has become.

Thankfully, it's finally released on Kindle. Great story on the inner workings of Upper Deck from its founding until 1994. It starts with the history of baseball cards and the founding of Upper Deck. It's a book about great ideas, greed, and greed. Since the story ends at the great strike of 1994, it would be great to have a sequel about how Upper Deck survived the big sports card crash that the industry has still never fully recovered from.

This book highlights the rise and fall of the Upper Deck corporation, but really could be broken into 3 parts: 1. A quick history of baseball cards and baseball card litigation 2. The idea and upstart of the Upper Deck corporation 3. The eventual take over of Upper Deck by Richard McWilliam and ensuing (questionable) business practices The first part of the book is really fun for those who might have grown up collecting baseball cards. The next couple parts have a fun baseball card part to them, since anyone who collected in the early 90s remembers how awesome Upper Deck was when it

came on the scene, but they also have some fun stories about business. It's interesting to see how the inner workings of a really small company are/were handled (albeit from second hand information). I think that people who were active in baseball card collecting in the early 90s and have a little interest in business could find this a really interesting read.

The back-stage temper tantrum of Mickey Mantle speaks volumes on what has become a multi-billion-dollar industry in baseball cards and sports memorabilia. Author Pete Williams shows an angry and bitter Mantle after a 1993 appearance on a national home shopping program that was in conjunction with the MLB All-Star Game festivities put on by Upper Deck - railing about the host's questions, which may not have helped in pushing his autographed merchandise - and attempting to negotiate the following weekend's appearances for the company into being considered as two events, which will make the Yankee legend closer to accumulating enough dates in the year for his nearly \$3 million salary to sign autographs on "exclusive" memorabilia. From the days when baseball cards were used as inserts to secure the packaging of tobacco products to the bubble-gum wars waged by Topps on other companies and a landmark judicial decision in 1980 that opened the doors wide open for a competitive marketplace in baseball card sets, Williams ambitiously covers the bases as he delves into the creation of Upper Deck, an idea from a frustrated card dealer who was tired of buying bogus memorabilia and an inventor who could add a unique identification tag to thwart counterfeiters. While the story is initially driven by an entrepreneurial spirit born in the 1980s, neither of the founders are in the picture a few years later as the company profits explode as it becomes the high-end retailer in sports cards and collectibles through aggressive marketing and the securing of legends with exclusive and lucrative promotional contracts, along with the baggage from any number of controversies and allegations of unsavory business practices and fraud. This is an incredible tale on how a kid's summer pastime became an industry monster that seemed so solid on the outside, but could pop at any time like a bubble blown too large from one small stick of gum. With the shrewd marketing of pop culture and the creation of a unique sports boutique based on its alleged rarity, Williams forges a classic story driven by the dreams of youth....and greed of adults.

Got this for my wife who worked at this company during its early days. The author's focus on the higher finance and hobby issues sucked everything that might have made this book a success. He should have gotten a little dirt, there was a ton of dirt to be mined from the halcyon days of this company.

I enjoyed the book. Very interesting chronical of the incredible meteoric rise of a new company started by a diverse group people. I had a personal interest in the story because a long time friend was the National Sales Manager.

The first 120 pages or so are a fantastic read on the history of baseball cards. But much like the hobby, the book kind of goes south once they reach 1989 and the arrival of upper deck.

If baseball cards are your hobby you'll find this book interesting. It describes the dark side of the industry, mainly the Upper Deck Company.

Informative but dry and repetitive.

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