

PLEASE READ THIS FIRST

“This purpose of any premium offered inside or on a box of cereal has one objective and one objective only: to sell cereal.”

Premiums have been a part of cereal sales for decades: toys, glassware, clothing patterns, maps ... you name it, it's been used. Premiums used for promotional purposes are not only limited to cereal but also used to sell an endless number of other products as well. Nearly all premium promotions have a limited shelf life, usually lasting only a few weeks. Freshness of the promotions and limiting the timeframe of the promotion have always been key elements to a promotion's success. The company's overall objective is to keep the customer coming back to buy their product as opposed to others, one of the basic concepts at the heart-and-soul of free market enterprise. In the 1950s and 1960s, cereal companies such as Kellogg's, Post, and General Mills were feverishly competing for the cereal dollar, with Kellogg's leading the way and all the other competing companies attempting to match Kellogg's sales niche.

For those of us growing up as kids in during that timeframe, baseball was king, cereal was a breakfast staple, and sports cereal promotions brought us closer to the players and teams we so loved. Cereal companies pitched their cereal on radio and eventually on television (especially on specifically targeted television programs), they printed ads in newspapers and the comic inserts, and regularly pitched their products in newspapers and magazines that were the major media information source of that era. We collected baseball cards, primarily Topps bubblegum cards, much like our ancestors did who collected baseball “tobacco” cards in the early 1900s. We listened to baseball games on the radio, watched weekly games on television beginning in the 1960s, and played stick ball in the streets or at the parks as a common part of our daily lives. Oh yes, football, basketball, and hockey were popular sports as well, but their appeal paled in comparison to that of “Our National Pastime”.

Since their inception, cereal companies have pitched numerous sport-related premiums to include baseball, football, basketball, hockey, track and field, boxing, the Olympics, etc. etc. Joining a “club” with a mail-in membership, promoted by various sports stars, was also a popular marketing approach. All of the cereal premiums involved sports toys inside the packages, make-shift games on boxes, collectable ball cards inside or outside on the box, trinkets as prizes for club membership, and mail-in items (for box tops and a small fee) such as bats and balls, cards, and numerous other collectables. At the end of the day, nothing sports-wise moved the needle more during most of the 20th century than baseball related-promotions.

Unless the promotional item was included on the cereal box itself, nearly all premiums were “outsourced” to various companies that provided the premiums to the cereal companies for their promotion. These companies used either already existing products that were on the market or designed unique premiums at the request of the cereal company. Many existing premiums were often “reused” by more than one cereal company. Artist concepts of unique premiums were designed then forwarded to the cereal companies for approval before a contract was agreed-upon to design the product. For the most part, it was not generally in the best interest of the cereal company to create and design the promotional product itself, because of the additional expense it required; after all, the companies were in the business of making cereal, not promotional items.

That now brings us to General Foods including Post Cereal (Post), which is the primary focus of this book. In the 1930s, Post took advantage of the popularity of baseball star Lou Gehrig by contracting him as part of an aggressive marketing campaign to pitch their Huskies cereal. In 1955, Post launched an ambitious yet highly successful Sugar Crisp cereal campaign (primarily a children’s cereal) featuring baseball stars Ted Williams and Leo Durocher, who promoted baseball patches and a baseball fact book as cereal inserts and mail-in premiums; major advertisements were launched in newspapers and magazines, and commercials were shot and shown in the relatively new television market during targeted children’s programs. Though it would be another five years before Post launched another ambitious sports-related premium campaign, the 1955 promotion planted the seed in the minds of the Post marketing department that sports, primarily baseball, had such a broad appeal that it was a potentially major marketing resource that warranted being tapped into again.

In 1960, the marketing department made somewhat of a bold move by designing nine full back-panel sized baseball, football, and basketball “portrait” cards of major stars on the backs of two sizes of Grape-Nuts Flakes cereal: box side panels also had a description of the star depicted on the back. This was considered a bold move, because it required the design of nine separate boxes for the two cereal sizes, which went against normal marketing protocols. After all, this created additional effort throughout various functions of cereal box design and production that was not the norm for cereal companies; however, it should be noted that this approach had been occasionally used before with other promotions. But just as importantly, the players depicted were life-like artist designed portraits and required contracts to be signed with the nine players for the rights to market their images. Though they were not sports cards in the true sense of the word, Post was venturing into the uncharted territory of designing “a collectable sports card” for which there wasn’t a cereal-company precedent. Post had designed other collectable-card premiums, but they were not sports-related requiring player contracts. In the 1930s, Post had contracted several professional sports and Olympic athletes with their likeness on the back of Huskies cereal pitching sports tips, but the cereal panels had more of the appearance of a promotional pitch than a collectable card. Was the Grape-Nuts Flakes

promotion successful? Well, that is open to debate. Why Post chose to market the promotion on Grape-Nuts Flakes, an adult cereal, is somewhat puzzling, leading to a scarcity in today's market of the collectable cards themselves. After all, the promotion was geared towards kids; having said that, there is a potentially plausible explanation that the author has uncovered as to why an adult cereal was selected for the promotion, an explanation that is revealed later in this book. The most popular player in the set, baseball star Mickey Mantle, commands a steep premium of thousands of dollars in today's collectable market, especially since his card was depicted on the even less popular larger-sized Grape-Nuts Flakes. In the end, Post believed the promotion boosted sagging Grape-Nuts Flakes sales (through kids encouraging their parents to buy the cereal); thus, the promotion planted the seed for what was soon to follow.

In 1961, under the leadership of Fred K. Smart, Product Group Manager, Post launched an innovative ground-breaking three-year baseball card promotion that is unprecedented in the annals of cereal-premium promotions. Fred was inspired by a correspondence he received from a gentleman some years back who suggested that Post consider the use of football cards on its cereals. Though the idea was not immediately implemented, the concept triggered an idea that eventually led to the inaugural 1961 Baseball Card Promotion. Fred launched this unparalleled campaign believing that by tapping into the popularity of baseball, he would be able to catapult Post to significantly higher sales levels. The intricate levels of planning and execution of the 1961 promotion actually began immediately after the 1960 Grape-Nuts Flakes promotion was headed to the store shelves. The 1961-1963 Post Baseball Card promotion was not only extensive in terms of its complexity and duration, but because of its popularity and success, it served as the foundation of the promotion's expansion into the Post Canadian and Jell-O (Jell-O) gelatin markets (both of which were subsidiaries of General Foods). To take the promotion one step further, the overall success during the course of the three-year promotion spawned an American football promotion in 1962 and 1963, as well as a 1962 and 1963 Canadian Football League (CFL) promotion in Canada. (Note: There was also a 1964 non-CFL-related football promotion in Canada that will be covered elsewhere in this book). When you add in the fact the technology that exists today is vastly different from what was available in the 1960s, one begins to appreciate how Post utilized older methodology in its package design and production that would seem antiquated by today's standards. Like our flights into outer space and the moon in the 1960s, Post found ways to make the promotion a success despite the technological limitations that had to be overcome. The three-year promotion ended after 1963 when Post determined that the promotional benefit had run its course, though to this day it is considered remarkable that such a cereal promotion lasted as long as it did.

Over the years, serious 1955-1964 Post-Jell-O Baseball-Football-Basketball collectors have attempted to describe in great detail all the anomalies and nuances surrounding the promotions, to include designing detailed card checklists. Collectors have also documented the various known promotional items. Unlike, for example, Topps bubblegum cards, which were

produced in series with a few variations in each set and simplified in its distribution, the Post-Jell-O promotions were a completely different animal: How were the cards produced? What packages and sizes were the different players depicted on? Which packages produced the various scarcities? Why aren't the company-provided checklists accurate and what are the errors? How can I tell which package size and variety a particular card comes from? How do I collect a Master Set containing each card from each size package for a given year? What store marketing tools/displays existed? When were the cards actually designed? What were the dates of the marketing ads? What were the dates that the promotions actually ran? When were the press releases and articles published? How was each promotion specifically marketed? Why is each-and-every promotion completely different in its marketing and design from the others? What parallel General Foods products were part of each of the overall promotions? Has anyone seen what certain promotional items look like? The list goes on-and-on. The bottom line is that what really makes these collectibles so unique is not just the collectable items itself, but also trying to gather as much information as possible about the promotions, acquire each of the items, especially as all of this relates to what I refer as the ground-breaking 1961-1963 General Foods Baseball Card Promotion. Much information, history, and data has been lost and/or undocumented, and collectors still to this day are attempting to piece everything together. Collaboration between collectors adds to the joy of finding, documenting, and collecting these unique promotional items in a way that no other sports promotion collecting series comes close to replicating.

This now brings us to the first of two reasons why this book was produced. As previously mentioned, much of the history and data surrounding the 1961-1963 General Foods Baseball Card Promotion has been lost. Until Now ...

On January 30, 1962, the Frank H. Fleer Corporation (Fleer), a major competitor of Topps Chewing Gum, Inc. (Topps), filed a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission claiming that Topps was in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. Specifically, the initial complaint claimed that Topps engaged in "... unfair methods of competition in gaining control of the baseball picture card industry ... creating and effecting a monopoly in the manufacture and distribution of baseball picture cards in commerce by resorting to various acts and practices alleged to be unfair and to constitute unfair methods of competition in commerce within the intent and meaning of Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act". Those in the card collecting hobby are fully aware of the various court battles between Topps and Fleer which eventually led to competing companies being able to produce sports collectible cards along with Topps. In this particular complaint, Topps was initially found in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act, a decision that was quickly reversed on appeal: among the reasons cited was that as Topps' contracts with the players were for baseball cards packaged with bubble gum, Fleer (or other companies) could still compete in the market by selling packages of cards containing

other (non-gum) novelty items. This decision did not settle the overall long-term dispute but laid the groundwork for the landmark 1980 legal decision that broke Topps card monopoly.

So, what is significant about this complaint? During testimony provided throughout the course of the hearing, literally thousands of pages of testimony and related exhibits were recorded/filed. Testimony not only came from those directly related to Topps but also from outside entities such as Fleer, Bowman, Leaf, Salada Tea-Junket, and countless others. Included in that testimony list was that of those who were employed by General Foods during the 1961-1963 timeframe, specifically those directly associated with Post cereal and Jell-O gelatin desserts. The author has dedicated hundreds of hours over a ten-year period researching and documenting this hearing testimony relevant to the 1961-1963 Baseball Card Promotion, testimony which holds the key to unlocking this most sought-after historical information.

Three General Foods employees testified at the hearing regarding the 1961-1963 Baseball Card Promotion: Fred K. Smart, Regional Sales Manager for General Foods who served as Product Group Manager for Post when the promotion began in 1961; Robert E. Haynes, Product Manager of Jell-O gelatin for General Foods; and William L. Jackson, who in 1962 succeeded Fred K. Smart as Product Group Manager for cereals. Because the hearing testimony is public record, the author was able to access the testimonies of these individuals; their testimonies included countless exhibits of press releases, company memos, samples of marketing and store display items, company marketing plans, etc....and of course, the cards themselves. The author has thoroughly reviewed the complete hearing record identifying and documenting those portions of the record relevant to the Post and Jell-O baseball card promotion; this record provided many of the missing links and the background information behind the 1961-1963 promotion that was previously “lost” or unavailable. All-in-all, the narrative regarding the 1961-1963 Baseball Promotion, which is based on the transcripts and exhibits from the FTC hearing, plus additional sources of resource material, comprises the first three chapters of this book.

The second reason for the writing of this book is that no other publication exists outlining the “ins-and-outs” and specifics of the 14 General Foods sports-related promotions that occurred from 1955 through 1964. In the fourth chapter of this book, the author provides comprehensive narratives in great detail about each of the promotions during a ten-year period to include all that is currently known about the referenced promotions, to include background information and details about the collectible items themselves. Of the 14 promotions: ten of them were centered around sports collectable cards, one centered around baseball patches and a baseball fact book, one centered around an action basketball game, one centered around a toy football player, and one centered around a toy football player plus an action football game. Of the ten promotions that centered around sports collectable cards, all were on the back of packages, with the exception of one promotion that included a mail-in offer for the cards as well; additionally, one of the promotions was a joint promotion between two products (though

classified by collectors as two separate promotions), and one promotion featured a variety of intertwined products under the General Foods umbrella. Five of the ten promotions that centered around sports collectible cards also included additional collectible items.

The fifth chapter of the book includes “Essential Highlights” with additional short narratives relevant to information covered in the first four chapters, separate but important enough for the author to include as essential to the overall promotion story. The author has provided in the chapter a short narrative of Post’s sports-related promotions between 1935 and 1937, which was Post’s earliest known venture into the sport-related premium world, and has also included two sports promotions that were conceptually planned between 1955 and 1964 but were rejected by the Post marketing department. Finally, appendices to this book contains comprehensive charts, matrices, listings of articles written over the years by hobby icons in leading collectible publications, and checklists which include errors, variations, and nuances.

The fourth chapter and the appendices are meant to serve as a “handbook” for those that collect these treasured collectible items. Yes, there were various sport-related cereal promotions before 1955 and after 1964, but they are not the focus of this book; as you will see, the 1955-1964 promotions were directly intertwined during a unique period of cereal and gelatin promotion history.

These five chapters and appendices complete Volume One of Cereal and Gelatin (subtitled “Essential Highlights”). The author has also put together a Cereal and Gelatin website designed to be the “go-to” website for a comprehensive repository of images related to the promotions highlighted in the book; the website is designed to be a “living website” that is constantly updated as new images and information throughout the hobby is provided. Finally, Volume Two (subtitled “The Rest of The Story”) is slated for publication approximately three years after this volume’s initial release centering around miscellaneous areas of interest important to further understanding the ins-and-outs of each of the overall promotions, provide reproductions of various historical literature related to the hobby, and recognize hobby icons (with many related testimonies and interviews) who have shaped our unique “collectors’ niche” to what it is today.

There is one additional note the author wishes to add. As previously mentioned, numerous icons in the Post-Jell-O sports-collectable world have written publications that were critical to the hobby and are in-and-of-themselves groundbreaking in their nature. Out of respect, the author has taken great pains to ensure that those publications written by these icons are not infringed upon. I have spoken with each of the authors, and they have reviewed this book to their satisfaction. These outstanding publications are referenced throughout this book of which readers can read for that particular information that is not contained herein.

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