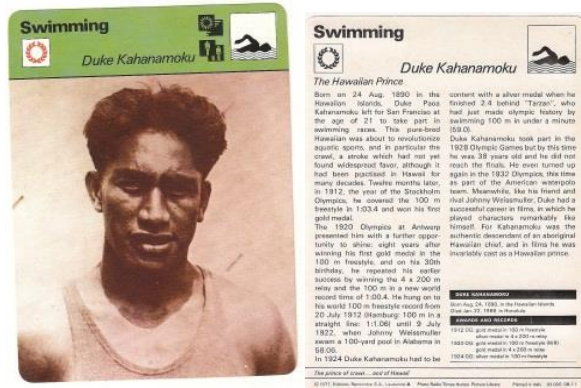


## Sportscaster - Leviathan of the Sporting Card Sets. Paul Circosta

Sports related card sets come in many forms. They may be dedicated to one sport or cover many sports. Most have a manageable number of cards to be collected. However, there is one impressively large and diverse set. These are the Sportscaster cards the undisputed monarch of the large sporting cards sets.

Large sports cards sets are not unknown, the Donaldson *Sports Favorites* set has over 500 cards and the 1991 Topps *Desert Shield* baseball set has 690 cards. These pale into mere Lilliputian size compared to the giant **2184** cards of the British and American Sportscaster sets.

Issued in the late 1970's and early 1980's the cards are snapshots of key people, events and games across the sporting world. They cover every major sport, Olympic Games, Soccer world cups etc. Each card is dedicated to a sporting topic with a related picture on the front and accompanying text on the rear. Given the breadth of sporting related topics this set is effectively an encyclopedia of sport on cards.



**Front and rear of a swimming Sportscaster card with its green band**

It is correct to speak of Sportscaster issues as sets. Individual sets were issued in several countries with each set having an identifying code number. The UK set was coded (13-064), the America (03-005), France (16-265), Germany (17-033), Sweden (47-021). As well, sets were issued in Finland, Belgium and Italy. These cards were not issued in Australia perhaps the market was considered too small to create a viable subscription base.



A subscription advertisement for the American SportsCaster set. Note the card storage box on the right that came with the subscription.

Not only are the sets large in number, the size of cards at 11.8 x 15.7cm make them quite big compared to the humble, standard size fag card. To give a point of comparison, one SportsCaster card occupies the same area as around eight standard cigarette cards.

Where did the SportsCaster come from? There doesn't seem to be a clear answer to this question. Each card is marked on the rear with the name "Editions Rencontre" a Swiss based organisation. The cards are sometimes known under the name *Focus on Sport*. To add another dimension to the mystery, Harris and Seymour attribute the cards to having been issued by Heron Books.

The cards were issued in packs of 24 cards known as decks. In all 91 decks were issued but even this was not clear sailing. Sometimes cards were reprinted and to show this the letter A, B, C, or D was added to the copyright line to indicate the reprint version of the card.



An original first deck of SportsCaster cards still in its wrapper. The control number code indicates that deck was issued for the American market.

Note the discus thrower image that appears on many SportsCaster materials.

Each card had a colored band at the top to denote the type of sport depicted. For example water sports had a green band, combatative sports were red and ice sports had a blue band. In total there were 14 different colored categories. A cardboard storage box was also included as part of the subscription as well as a set of dividers also with a colored band so that all the cards of the same sport could be stored together.

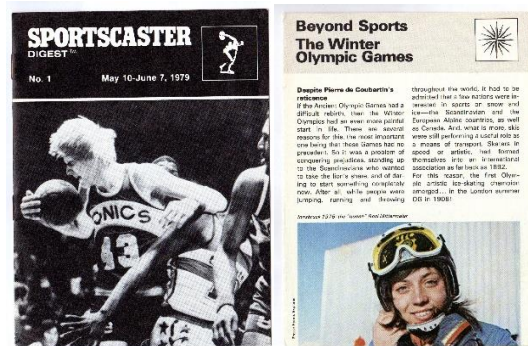
Another unique feature of SportsCaster cards is they were issued by subscription. That is collectors paid a subscription fee to receive a weekly deck of 24 cards. Collectors

obviously got tired of collecting over the long period. After 88 decks were issued only 3 more were issued and they were numbered 101-103.

The sets were not clones of each other just printed in different languages. They were tailored for the countries they were issued in. For example, in the UK set 124 cricket cards were issued (yes there is a Bradman!). While in the American set only two cricket cards appear reflecting the targeting of the cards to the local market. Surprisingly the Swedish set has at least four cricket cards.

Collecting a full set of these cards has a number of challenges – mainly to the collector's wallet. While bulk lots can be picked at reasonable prices some athletes such as Don Bradman, Jessie Owens and Muhammad Ali attract a premium. The earlier numbered decks are relatively common, the cards in the later decks are not as prevalent as collectors abandoned their subscriptions.

Sportscaster not only produced cards they also issued a set of small booklets known as *Sportscaster Digests*. These ten-page booklets contained short articles on sports, athletes and events. In addition, a set of small brochures known as *Beyond Sports* were produced with each dealing with a specific them such as the Winter Olympic Games



**Samples of the Sportscaster Digest and Beyond Sports booklets that were issued as supplements to the card decks.**

The Sportscaster set remains as an extensive documentation of many facets of sport. In the era of technology that allows for video and interactive media it is hard to see such a large-scale publishing production ever being undertaken again.

So, if you are a sports collector and have conquered all your collecting challenges and would like another one -there is always completing a Sportscaster set. Of course, there is also the opportunity to move onto the French, German, Finnish ..... sets.

## References

Alan Harris and Geoff Seymour *Cricket Cigarette and Trade Cards, A Further Listing*, Murray Cards International, 1993.

Sportscaster card variations:

<https://forums.collectors.com/discussion/1002468/sportscaster-cards-how-many-countries-variations-exists> (accessed November 2018)

This article was originally published in the Australian Cartophilic Society Newsletter in August 2012. This version has been slightly updated.