



SlantyCouch.com Interview with David Rudd Cycleback

The man behind Cycleback.com, David has a far-reaching and in-depth knowledge of vintage collectibles. His work has been used and/or cited by Maine Antiques Digest, Encyclopedia Britannica, Australian Society of Archivists, Indiana Historical Society, Beckett, Gridiron Greats Quarterly, WNET Public Television New York City, AuctionBytes Newsletter, New York City Department of Education and university courses. Whether you are a beginning collector or hobby veteran, SlantyCouch.com highly recommends reading the articles and insight David shares on Cycleback.com.

1) For those not familiar with you, share with us a little about yourself and your collecting habits.

I'm a print and photograph historian in Seattle who specializes in the issues of authenticity. I'm interested in the methods for properly judging the authenticity (or lack there of) of the whole range of art and collectable prints and photos, from Rembrandt etchings to Topps baseball cards. As a collector, I specialize in original fashion photographs.

2) Your knowledge touches on many things, but your specialty is photographs. What is so appealing about this type of collectible?

I find fascinating the technical aspects of photographs, such as the different processes used to make images. I also enjoy looking at photographic images.

3) The photos of Charles Conlon are among some of the most popular in sports photography. Though visually appealing, I'm sure subject matter plays a big role in their popularity. In terms of technical ability, where does Mr. Conlon stand?

Conlon wasn't the most technically proficient photographer, but he had an artistic talent. There were a variety of good baseball photographers from the time, including Conlon, George Grantham Bain, George Burke and Paul Thompson. Each had a personal style, and each collector is free to pick a favorite. My favorite is the gothic images by Bain, but most collectors would pick Conlon.

4) You state on your site that mint pre-WWII photographs are "as common as hen's teeth". I realize simply age, and sheer size, play a role in this, but assuming many photos were placed in folders, frames or albums, why are so many in less-than-perfect condition?

That comment was specifically about news service and press photos, which were well handled by the press. Though in general old paper photos that weren't mounted to cardboard backing are susceptible to corner and edge wear as they are made out of thin paper. The reason I made that quote was in part to show collectors that they shouldn't lose any sleep if a photo has a dinged corner or wrinkle on the border.

5) How do you feel about increased popularity of digital photography and digital prints?

If proof is in the pudding, I own a digital camera and, as a collector, have purchased a few original digital photos. A nice thing about today's digital photographs printed with the correct inks is that they are not susceptible to fading and discoloration over time. This makes them great for displaying. Certain kinds of real photographs, including the common modern color photograph, have a tendency to fade and discolor when displayed.

6) You've published an informative article titled "[Essential Tips for Starting Collectors of Vintage Baseball Cards](#)". New collectors may (understandably) get excited when purchasing an item and make errors in judgment. What are some of the most common mistakes new collectors make?

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Being a beginner in any area means being ignorant, inexperienced and making mistakes. The common mistakes in collecting include misidentifying, misdating, misjudging rarity and value. There's nothing wrong with making beginner's goofs. It's a natural and inevitable part of learning. I'm sure Fred Astaire stumbled across the floor during his first tap dancing lesson.

A problem in collecting is when total beginners start off by spending big money on high end items. No matter whether its trading cards or fine art, collectors should always start with inexpensive purchases. You want to be making your beginner's errors on \$5 rather than \$500 purchases.

7) Third-party grading has become enormously popular in recent years. Do you feel that it has been good for the hobby?

Speaking only about the top graders like PSA and SGC, I think professional grading is a useful tool for collectors. This is particularly true for online transactions where the buyer won't be able examine the card in person until after the money is paid. While graders are not perfect, grading is a way for collectors to get an experienced second opinion.

8) Technology such as the Internet has made easier finding and purchasing many items. At the same time, technology such as advanced printing and(fuzzy) digital photos on eBay have made deceit easier for many dishonest sellers. In your opinion, what percentage of cards sold on eBay are counterfeit?

I don't know the percentage, but there are home computer printer fakes and reprints on eBay all the time, whether it's of trading cards, stamps or 1800s cabinet card. The thing is that the experienced collectors are rarely fooled by these fakes. It's the gullible beginners who are buying them.

9a) Why is it that football, rather than baseball, is more popular with today's sports viewers?

Current football is more suitable to television viewers with short attention spans. Enjoyment of baseball requires more knowledge of the game and its subtleties. I also think that the National Football League is far better managed, resulting in desirable qualities such as team parity. In the NFL, the Tampa Bays and Green Bays of the league not only can win the Super Bowl, they do.

9b) Do you think as a result we'll see a long-term decrease in the price of baseball collectibles?

No. My guess is that the price for vintage baseball collectibles will remain healthy for a number of years. Baseball is still a healthy game and has a uniquely rich history in American sports. From a collecting standpoint, there is substantially more and more varied vintage baseball memorabilia out there than football. Simply compare the number of Pre World War II baseball card issues to Pre War football card issues.

I think the current popularity of football will create more interest and appreciation in early football material.

10) I read that you own(ed) a half-full bottle of shampoo and Chapstick that once belonged to Ted Williams. Unique to say the least! How did you come across those?

Soon after Williams' death, I purchased two of his World War II era leather traveling cases. One had a gilded dedication showing that it was given to Williams as a gift in 1943 Boston. The inside of one case had his 1940s toiletries. This included his half-used lip balm (as gross as it sounds), shampoo, brush with hair, comb, chrome soap dish with soap scum old enough to be my dad, shaving mirror, fingernail file, shoe horn and more. I had never used a shoe horn and it was a while before I found out it was.

11) Any elusive items that you've been after for an extended period of time?

Nothing I could afford.

12) Anything else you'd like to add?

Thank you for interviewing me.

Thank you for your time David!

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