

The Jaspersen Legacy

Sportswriter and hobby publisher Bob Jaspersen remembered by friends and family



Bob Jaspersen left a scrapbook full of memories.



By George Vrechek

Many of the collectors in the early hobby history shared similar characteristics. They were interested in sports. They were organized and enthusiastic about collecting a variety of memorabilia. Many of them enjoyed writing about the hobby and meeting fellow collectors. They had mixed emotions about the escalation in hobby prices. It was nice that their collections were regarded as valuable, but they didn't like to pay higher prices to continue collecting.

Bob Jaspersen (1920-1982)

Bob Jaspersen could have been the template for such early collectors. He was a four-sport athlete in high school. He was organized and energetic and enjoyed pursuing a variety of collectibles: cards, books, autographs and postcards. He was a sports writer and a hobby magazine publisher. He planned his vacations around trips to see other collectors or attending conventions where he enjoyed just talking to collectors. He liked the bargains and the hunt. As a seller or publisher his goal was to cover expenses and support further collecting.

Bob died relatively young at 62 in 1982. Some of the long-timers in the hobby knew him personally, but there are many who just remember the name and not much about the man. His name has come up in many hobby history pieces, since it is impossible to describe the hobby history without mentioning him. Fortunately Bob's son, Mike Jaspersen, can tell us what we missed by not knowing his father.



Bob's son, Mike

Mike Jaspersen is one of four children of Bob and Helen Jaspersen and has spent most of his life involved with the hobby. He was born in 1955 and by 1963 he was buying boxes of Topps baseball cards at the local store. He went with his dad to look for collectibles and to conventions. As an adult, Mike has owned three card stores and has worked for Beckett Publications and Topps. He spearheaded the Topps Vault sales of their archive material between 2000 and 2014. He now owns a card shop in Redondo Beach, California, Jaspys HobbyLand. Mike shared his memories in a recent interview at his store.

Bob with Mike in 1967, Photo M Jaspersen

The young Bob Jaspersen, athlete and collector

"My dad was into meeting people and collecting. His passion was books, but his collecting was eclectic," said Mike. Bob was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 1920. Bob's father died when he was six years old. His mother worked as a nurse in St. Paul, and Bob was sent to Grantsburg, Wisconsin, to live with his uncle's family. In 1933 Bob discovered Goudey baseball cards at a local store, collected the set and headed down a path of collecting he never left. In high school Bob grew to 6'3" and excelled playing varsity baseball, basketball, football and hockey.

Early writing experience

Unfortunately Bob contracted tuberculosis in 1939 and spent the next two years in hospitals and sanitariums back in the Twin Cities. It was during this time that he directed his energies to finding other collectors. He and a friend started a one-page newsletter called "Bill and Bob's" that was an effort to connect with other collectors. In the early 1940s, Bob succeeded in contacting pioneer baseball card collector Lionel Carter (1919-2008) who had been through the same process and had connected with Jefferson Burdick (1900-1963), the "Father of Card Collecting."

Bob was always interested in writing and in sports. He found a job with a paper in International Falls, Minnesota, and was initially assigned to write obituaries. However, he worked his way up to the *Minneapolis Tribune* and then the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* becoming a sportswriter.

On the hunt for publications

Bob and his wife, Helen (1923-2002), visited flea markets for sports items: publications, programs and cards – anything of interest. With four children in the family and health problems, Bob watched his money; he wasn't too concerned about collecting card sets. He liked guides from *The Sporting News*, *Reach* and *Who's Who in Baseball*. He was particularly interested in publications, but would collect all kinds of things, especially anything related to favorite player Ted Williams or the hometown St. Paul Saints. He would sometimes trade cards for books and bought from legendary sports book dealer Goodie Goldfaden (1917-2010).

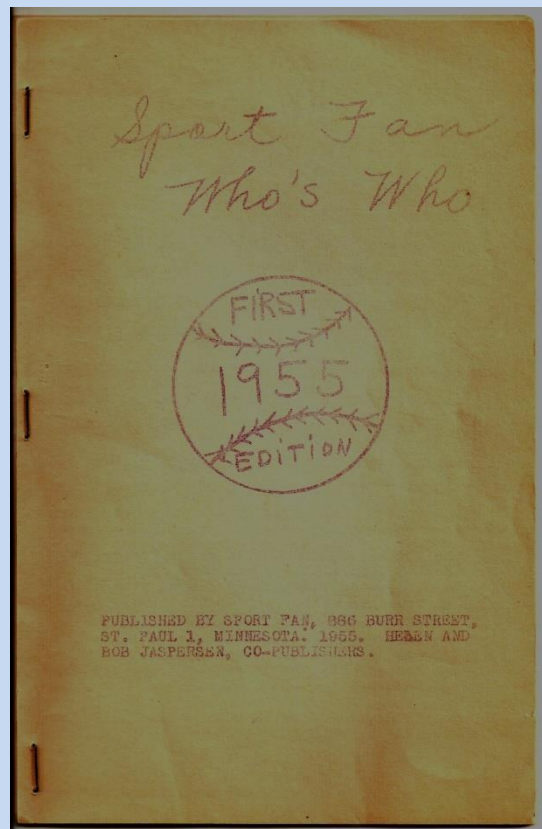
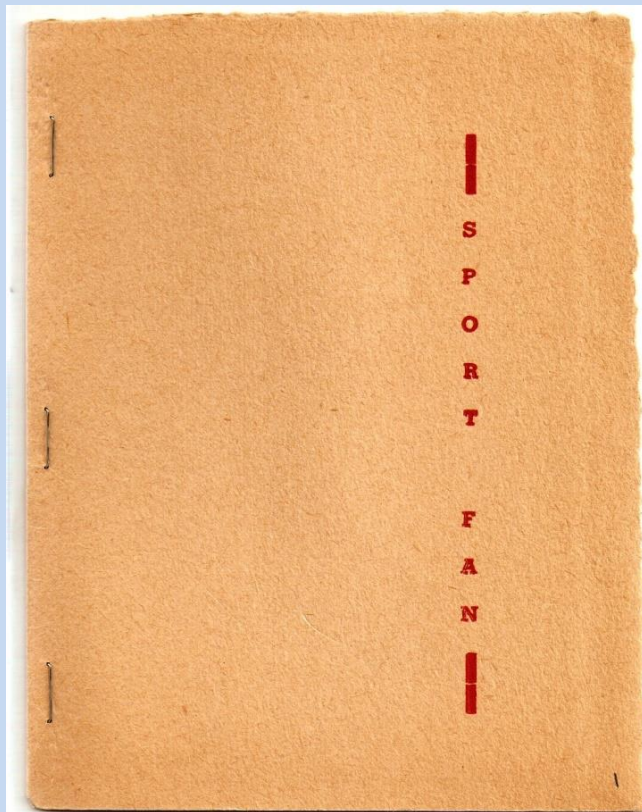
***Sport Fan* is born**

In 1951, Bob resumed his efforts to publish something geared to the sports collector. He obtained a printing press to produce a pamphlet, all in his basement. Helen joined in the effort. "She was the disciplinarian in the family," according to Mike. "She had been a sergeant in the Marines during World War II." The first issue called *Sport Fan* was an 8-page small pamphlet and was sent to perhaps 50 subscribers in March 1951. It covered a range of topics and had a page of ads. While *Card Collector's Bulletin* had been published since 1937, and there had been a few subsequent sports-oriented efforts, *Sport Fan* was the first publication to survive that was geared entirely to the sports collector.

One of Bob's early subscribers was stadium postcard specialist Ray Medeiros who remembered, "*Sport Fan* was instrumental in holding the hobby together during the 1950s, when there was no other publication devoted to sports collecting. While Charlie Bray put out the *Card Collector's Bulletin*, it had few articles and eventually was mainly an auction sheet, a good one certainly, but not crammed full of interesting and newsy commentary a collector wanted to have in his mailbox."

Articles and a directory

Bob recruited others to write for *Sport Fan* and articles appeared from Lionel Carter, Buck Barker, Frank Nagy, Fred Imhof, John Sullivan, Ron Menchine and others. Bob's own articles were enthusiastic, humorous, informative and, naturally, well-written. His column, "Just Between Us Sports Fan-atics," was jammed with news about collectors and collectibles, especially publications. In 1955 he started the annual *Sport Fan Who's Who Directory of Collectors* listing all his subscribers who would respond plus others in the hobby. It included 47 names, addresses and interests of those early sports collectors.



The first issue of Sport Fan in March 1951 was 8 small pages.

Jaspersen's first directory: Sport Fan Who's Who 1955

Jaspersen kept correspondence folders for each contact like this one for Goodie Goldfaden.

Correspondence

Mike remembers his dad would correspond with many collectors, "There were four typewriters on the kitchen table which he would use for various projects all going on at the same time. He might send out 10 to 15 letters in an evening." Sometimes subscribers would ask Bob for advice, or let him know they wanted to sell their collections.

Mike still has hundreds of folders for those letters to his dad. I looked through folders for book dealer Goodie Goldfaden and pin collector Tom Collier. Several years ago I went through Lionel Carter's correspondence. Letters from



Bob Jaspersen to Carter were numerous and were spread over 30 years. Many were in cursive and contained news about other collectors and publications. In 1954 Bob began promoting a national gathering of collectors in Chicago. He thought he had John Sullivan and Carter lined up to participate, but the mechanics were never worked out and the meeting never took place, although Bob and Helen did make a trip to Chicago to meet with Lionel and Irma Carter.

Illness and a move to Philadelphia

The annual directory and the magazine continued until Bob got ill again. This time it was diabetes. He combined the 1960 and 1961 directories, and then put *Sport Fan* on hold for several years. Bob continued to cover sports for the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, but in 1964 he made a major move and became a sports editor of the *Philadelphia Enquirer*. Bob, Helen and their four children moved to Rosemont, Pennsylvania, outside of Philadelphia. His work covering sporting events unfortunately kept him away many nights and weekends, when he would have enjoyed seeing his own children play ball.



***Sport Fan's* resurrection**

In 1970 Bob resurrected *Sport Fan*. The printing press in the basement had died during the 1950s and the new *Sport Fan* was run on a mimeograph machine and stapled together. Headlines were hand-written. It continued to feature articles from prominent hobbyists. Advertising was modest and the design of the magazine morphed a few times.

Mike Jaspersen holding some of the various formats of Sport Fan in the 1970s

Show time

Mike accompanied his dad to shows which were starting to pop up. They went to the second annual gathering at Jim Nowell's in California in 1970. They had show tables in Detroit, Chicago, New York and Florida in the early 1970s. Bob would talk to collectors and other publishers. Mike often manned the table selling the variety of items they had accumulated. Fellow journalist/collector Jim McConnell remembered, "Bob was one of those old-fashioned collectors who saved a bit of everything. He was always helpful to me and the younger collectors."



Helen Jaspersen with Satchel Paige at Cooperstown in 1973, Photo M Jaspersen



Jim McConnell, Bob Jaspersen, Ray Hess and Ray Medeiros at the first National Sports Collectors Convention held in Los Angeles in 1980, Photo M Jaspersen



Bob Jaspersen and John Spalding at the 1980 California show, Photo M Jaspersen

Attendees (below) at the first California "convention" in August, 1969 Left-right, standing: Bill Johnson, John Smith, John Thom, Don Ortolani, Dennis Graye, John England, Jim McConnell, Jim Nowell. Kneeling: Dale Britton, Hernandez, Bill Klink, Ray Medeiros, Ed Broder, Photo M Jaspersen



SPORT FAN

September, October, 1970

ROSEMONT, PA.

FOUNDED IN 1961

SPORT FAN ATTENDS COAST CONVENTION

By Bob Jaspersen

SPORT FAN Publisher



Left to right, Jim Mac Allister, Jeff Morey, Waite Hoyt, former major league pitcher; Bob Jaspersen and Pat Quinn.

AUTOGRAPH BUFFS STRIKE IT RICH AT COOPERSTOWN

By Bob Jaspersen

If we hadn't been there to see it with our own eyes we couldn't have believed it. Even after seeing it we still found it hard to believe. The scene was the huge lobby of the beautiful Otisega Hotel in Cooperstown, N.Y., and the time was the eve of the annual induction ceremonies into the coveted Baseball Hall of Fame.

There they were---Jesse Haines, Lou Boudreau, Ford Frick and Earle Combs, who were to be enshrined the following day, plus Casey Stengel, Lloyd Waner, Edd Roush, Luke Appling, Lefty Grove, Joe Mogen, Stan Coveleske, Ossie Bluzga, Mrs. Lou Gehrig, Red Ruff-

(Continued inside)

The second annual West Coast Sports Collectors convention, held at the home of Jim Nowell in Brea, Calif. on Aug. 22-23, gave evidence that these get-togethers are growing in popularity and will undoubtedly spread to all corners of the nation within a few years.

SPORT FAN publisher Bob Jaspersen and son Mike, who attended two earlier conventions this year, and Irv Lerner of Phila., publisher of Who's Who in Card Collecting, flew to California for their first meeting with collectors in that section of the country. Also attending from the Phila. area was Jay Ludwig, of Orland, Pa., who made the (Continued inside)



Front row, left to right, Jay Ludwig, Allan Kays, Rusty Washier, Jeff Johnson, Sam Baker, Steve Black, Paul Wright, Steve Brasell. 2d row, Pat Connealy, Harry Hoffman, Keith Jackson, Steve Marshall, Lionel Carter, Joe Deiprie. 3d row, Mike Jaspersen, Jim McConnell, Bob Jaspersen, David Meiners, Irv Lerner, John Thom, Ray Hess, Dale Britton, Ray Medeiros, Matt Matuszefski and Jim Nowell.

Attendees at the second California "convention" were featured in this October 1970 Sport Fan. Collectors appearing included: Lionel Carter, Mike Jaspersen, Jim McConnell, Bob Jaspersen, David Meiners, Irv Lerner, John Thom, Ray Hess, Ray Medeiros, and Jim Nowell. In an accompanying story on Cooperstown, Bob Jaspersen and Pat Quinn are with Waite Hoyt.



Frank Nagy and Bob Jaspersen at the 1975 Detroit Convention, Photo M Jaspersen

The Jaspersens would travel to Cooperstown for the annual induction ceremonies. In the early years, autographs were readily obtained from ex-players staying at the local hotels. If Bob could cover travel expenses with his table sale profits, he was happy. Veteran dealer Pat Quinn made trips like this as well and would see Bob two or three times a year at Cooperstown and the early shows. Bob always made a full report on the shows in *Sport Fan*.

Bob met Irv Lerner while in Philadelphia. They went on a few buying trips together and started to work on promoting a large Philadelphia show. Ted Taylor and Bob Schmierer wound up organizing the “Philly Show” in 1975.

Final years

In 1977 Bob decided to merge *Sport Fan* with Mike Bondarenko’s *Sports Collectors News* and had some regrets about the result. Bob looked forward to retirement and envisioned a cottage like that owned by his late friend Frank Jock where he would have a separate place to store his collection rather than in the basement. Bob created an annual collector recognition award in honor of Jock.



Frank Jock’s collector cottage, Photo M Jaspersen



Frank Jock, postcard photo

Bob wrote Carter in May 1982, “I’ve thrown in the towel. I notified my managing editor that I wanted out, so he drew up a retirement package. I am hoping to sell the bulk of my collection because I have too much stuff that is of no more interest or use to me. I’d like to find some dealer out here to back up his truck and haul it all away.” Bob and Helen were planning on moving, but Bob died on December 18, 1982, from complications due to diabetes. Hobby veterans wrote tributes about how well they remembered him.

Ray Medeiros still misses his friend, “Bob had no axe to grind for his objective was to use *Sport Fan* to inform and in so doing he made friends all over the U.S. In Bob you had everything you would want in a person: everlasting genuine friendship. My memories of visiting back and forth with him are precious.”

Mike Jaspersen and the hobby business

Mike Jaspersen went to shows with his dad starting with the 1970 gathering at Nowell’s in California. He remembers being offered THE Wagner by Chuck Blazina for \$800 in 1970. He was 15 years old and actually had \$400 but needed another \$400. His dad advised him to pass on the expenditure. The card was eventually purchased by Bill Mastro. Mike was in the military for three years and was always coming

back to see his family and go with his dad to shows. Although he initially envisioned a career in photography, he decided that what he really liked was to work in the hobby. He owned two stores in Southern California named Sport Fan Collectibles in the 1980s.

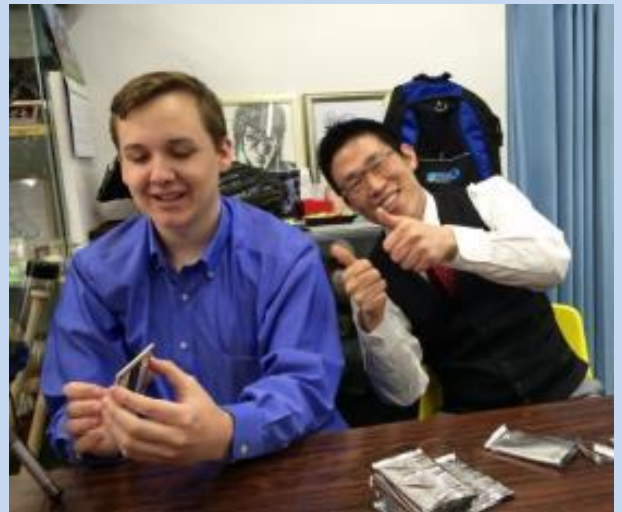
In 1993, Mike went with Beckett Publications in Dallas, working on their vintage magazines and price guides. In 2000 he moved to Topps in New York to assist in selling the extensive Topps archives which included contracts, photos and artwork for their products. He inventoried and then auctioned through eBay 300,000 items during his 14-year tenure with Topps. The Topps Vault sale is an interesting story that should come from Mike. Mike has now been involved in the hobby for more years than his dad was.



Mike Jaspersen in his store, Jaspys HobbyLand, Redondo Beach, California

The third generation and case breaks

Now Mike is back in a card store, but doing business in a new way. His store, Jaspys HobbyLand, specializes in breaking cases and arranging distribution to collectors who look for certain teams, players or card types. Cases are opened live before an audience of customers connected by the internet. Pricing, advertising, incentives and shipping are important elements in the business. The collecting language of the store involves hits, jerseys, patches, autographs, rookies, inserts and numbered cards. The last National featured an entire area devoted to case breaks. One of Mike's three children, Nick, works in the store and can readily identify with many of the customers. Nick represents the third generation of collectors in the Jaspersen legacy.



Nick Jaspersen, left, on a 2015 case breaking trip at a Tokyo card shop, is with Kazu, the owner of BROG Sports Cards. photo M. Jaspersen

George Vrechek is a freelance contributor to Sports Collectors Digest and can be contacted at vrechek@ameritech.net. This article appeared in the May 12, 2017, issue of SCD. Thank you to SCD for allowing us to post this on the OBC site.