

# People in the hobby news – Coan, Keetz, Valacak and Rogell



Catching up with the hobby, from old-timers to social distancing

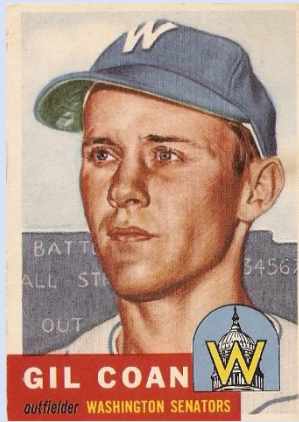
By George Vrechek

News and my contacts with other collectors continue during these difficult times. Here are some of the names and stories which have surfaced recently.



*Mrs Truman, Pres Truman, Connie Mack ALBAN BANKLEY,  
Clark Griffith, Gil Coan*

President Truman and Connie Mack were among those handing the ball to Gil Coan to start the season, April 18, 1949. Coan went 3 for 5 that day. photo and notations from Gil Coan

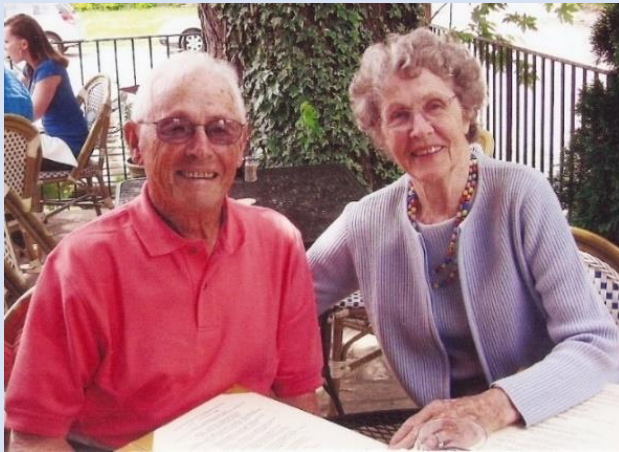


### **GIL COAN (1922-2020)**

I wrote an article (Super senior players still got game, SCD, February 8 and 22, 2013) about my fantasy team of the oldest then living major leaguers. Gil Coan was my American League left fielder. I was able to reach Coan and asked him if he could play the outfield still in my fantasy game. He said that in the last old-timers' game he played, he tore his rotator cuff. But he humored me and said he was fine playing on a fantasy team as long as he didn't have to use that shoulder again. I talked to Coan several times and wrote an article about his career. He sent me letters and the photos which appeared in his SCD cover story of October 13, 2013. Son Gil Coan Jr. was also very helpful in responding.

I talked to Coan again in October 2018. He had recently talked with ex-teammate Eddie Robinson, two years his senior. I thought about him around his birthday each year which was close to the same day of the month as mine. I learned recently that he died February 4, 2020, at age 97; I had missed his obituary. His wife of 78 years, Dovie, died November 18, 2019.

Coan had been the third oldest living former MLB player. His one-time teammate, Connie Marrero, had been the oldest living player at the time of his death at age 102 in 2014. All but two players of the 18 players from my fantasy starting lineups of 2013 have now passed away.



Coan, the 1945 *Sporting News* Minor League Player of the Year had 10 years of MLB service. Following his retirement from baseball, he was never very far from the western area of North Carolina where he had grown up. He was cordial, modest and one of the nicest athletes I have had the good fortune to contact. His voice reflected a polite, slower-paced local flavor and contrasted with the footspeed he was known for.

*Gil and Dovie Coan in 2009, photo Coan*

### **FRANK KEETZ**

Another 2013 SCD article covered Frank M. Keetz of Schenectady, New York, who was born in 1928. Ray Medeiros had told me about Keetz's collection and cataloging efforts to identify comic sports postcards, which he enjoys for their historical references and affordability. The field needed some additional organization beyond what Jefferson Burdick had started. With input from collectors, Keetz published catalogs on comic sports postcards and advertising trade cards between 1976 and 1997.

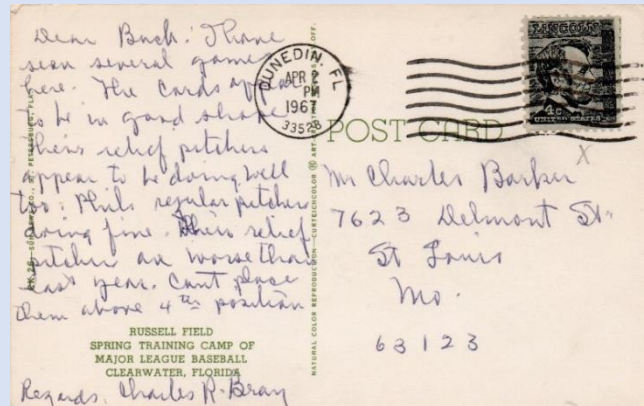
I received a letter from Keetz recently enclosing one of the many postcards he collects, which he generously thought I should have. I gave him a call.



Keetz still is a dealer at monthly shows in Albany. photo Keetz



Russell Field - Major League Baseball, Clearwater, Florida



Bray postcard to Barker

The postcard pictured Russell Field, Clearwater, Florida, where the Phillies trained. The card was mailed on April 2, 1967, from Charles Bray to Charles "Buck" Barker and described the spring training games Bray had seen. Bray lived in East Bangor, Pennsylvania, and took over as editor of the *Card Collector's Bulletin* from Jefferson Burdick. He was a Phillies fan. Barker of St. Louis was a die-hard Cardinals fan and fellow editor of the *American Card Catalog*. Bray wrote that the Cards "appear to be in good shape." Correct he was, in that the Cards won the World Series that year. He didn't pick the Phillies to finish higher than fourth – correct again, they finished fifth. Keetz remembered coming across the card in a lot that he received maybe 15 years ago. He enjoys reading the messages on the cards and was pleasantly surprised to find this correspondence from a hobby pioneer.

Until shows were suspended recently, Keetz still had a table at the monthly sports card show in nearby Albany. He also attends a semi-annual postcard show nearby. Keetz hasn't lost his interest in the hobby and will still buy something he likes, although he is primarily selling a few postcards at this stage. He said he "always finds something of interest to read in SCD." He doesn't do much on the computer, so I mailed him my thanks and my comic sports postcard wantlist – on a postcard.

### T.J. VALACAK

Schaumburg, Illinois, collector T.J. Valacak knows something about social distancing and its impact. In 2013 Valacak was coaching high school softball, teaching special education, attending card shows and getting to card shops. All that changed when he was diagnosed with leukemia. His treatments proved successful in beating cancer, but he encountered many issues resulting from the bone marrow transplant, which resulted in a weakened immune system. It

has been a slow, careful process to improve, but his positive attitude and the hobby have helped.

Valacak recalled, "I can remember being in the hospital, bidding on some T206s and won maybe an 8-card lot. (My wife) would bring any mail that she thought contained cards to the hospital. I remember how much it brightened my day to get cards. It was a moment of normalcy amidst all the chaos of being in the hospital."

For several years, he was not able to venture out without a mask and needed to avoid any crowds. "Surfing through eBay or looking at a Huggins and Scott auction catalog brought a sense of normalcy to me, even if I wasn't bidding."

Friends at oldbaseball.com (OBC) learned of Valacak's condition and helped as well. For example, they came up with the last seven cards he needed to complete the 1952 Bowman baseball set, including a Mantle.



*Valacak (left) holds two of his T-3 Turkey Red Cabinets, which he started collecting after his diagnosis. In the background are autographed baseballs. Also Valacak with his 1952 Bowmans. Photos by Valacak*

Valacak recalled: "When I finally started going to shows and card shops again, I was very cautious, always wearing a mask, never shaking hands, always a fist pump. I was always trying to keep some space. I remember going into a shop and, as soon as I walked in, the owner said he had a cold. That was the end of the visit for me. Said hi and bye. If I was at a show, I would try to hit tables with few people. If a bunch of guys were crammed around a bargain bin, I wasn't going through that bin.

"For me, it never gets old. I have always enjoyed the hunt. I have been more active in trading the last few years. The Bench (thebenchtrading.com), trading card database and Twitter are three that I have used, and I know people trade on Facebook as well. So, I think if you're able to take some time going back and forth and working a trade, there are a lot of opportunities out there."

## **BILLY ROGELL**

Billy Rogell, the Tiger shortstop of the 1930s, turned up recently. I wrote a story in 2009 about a 109-card, under-the-bed find of the quite rare R304 Al Demaree Die-Cuts from Leaf Gum. I concluded as a result of the find, that there were 149 known players in a 168-card set, and that there were likely 19 more players to be found. Two of the missing 19 cards turned up for grading at PSA in the last decade - #119 Fullis and #138 Lee.

A woman in Minnesota just found Billy Rogell on missing card #27 in her grandmother's keepsake box and contacted me. She plans to sell it someday. I had guessed that Rogell would be on card #27 to round out the starting lineup for Tigers' game cards. If you have been hunting for this mystery card, let me know.

*#27 Rogell, photo by owner*

*George Vrechek is a freelance contributor for SCD and can be contacted at [vrechek@ameritech.net](mailto:vrechek@ameritech.net).*

*This article appeared in the May 22, 2020, issue of Sports Collectors Digest. Our thanks to SCD for allowing us to post the article on the OBC library page.*

