

Vintage Cards

Collector digs up a jackpot with Mantle pull

BY ROSS FORMAN

Chris LeBlanc turned a \$20 investment into nearly \$20,000 and a story he can share for a lifetime.

The LeBlanc story starts June 4, in Crowley, La., when the 25-year-old went into his local Wal-Mart to purchase diapers and a few items for his 1-year-old son, Chris Jr.

"I was on my way back home from dropping my workers off, which is something I had been doing for about two months," said LeBlanc, owner of Precision Flooring, a flooring installation company. "I drive 150 miles out of my way daily to pick them up and this was, believe it or not, the first day that I had asked them for gas money, though I don't know why. Each gave me \$10.

"I've been collecting baseball cards my whole life and never buy cards with a check or credit card; I always pay cash," LeBlanc said. "So I used the cash I had in my pocket, the gas-money. I saw the Tristar Hidden Treasure with the 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle on the outside of the wrapping and just thought, 'Yeah, like I'd ever win that, but I'll take a shot nonetheless.'"

LeBlanc bought two packs and when he got home, his girlfriend, Meghan, was upset he spent the money on baseball cards.

LeBlanc opened the first pack of Tristar Hidden Treasures but was disappointed in the pull. "It was no one major and I thought I had wasted the \$20."

However, his second pack of Tristar Hidden Treasure was the Grand Treasure: a 1952 Topps Mantle, graded 5.5 by Beckett, and valued at about \$18,000.

"When I opened the second pack, it didn't completely hit me until I saw the replica Mickey Mantle card. That's when I turned pale white. My girlfriend actually asked, 'Who died?'" LeBlanc said. "I said, 'No one died; I just can't breath right now.'"

"I went online and showed her information about that card and its value, and now needless to say, she too is hooked on baseball card collecting. My friends are too.

"It was an awesome thing, truly a once-in-a-lifetime pull. I was speechless for at least an hour. I didn't know who to call, what to do, where to go."

So, he returned to Wal-Mart to buy a safe for the redemption card.

"It was an amazing experience," LeBlanc said.

LeBlanc was back at the Crowley Wal-Mart on July 30 - along with former major leaguer Ron Guidry, Tristar President Jeff Rosenberg and even the Crowley mayor, Isabella dela Houssaye and a throng of

\$20 investment could return more than \$20k to this lucky hobbyist

area media.

It was Grand Presentation Day, when Rosenberg actually traded LeBlanc the real 1952 Mantle for the redemption card.

"I still can't believe that I got a Mantle rookie card," said LeBlanc, who actually told only a few friends that he had pulled such a prized relic. "I'm thinking about keeping the card, but most likely I'm

"I'm a very big Mantle fan, a big Yankees fan," LeBlanc said. "I also like Alex Rodriguez and Derek Jeter, Roger Clemens and the Houston Astros.

"Just to own the '52 Mantle card, regardless if I sell the card in the future or not, is amazing."

Said Pepper Hastings, director of grading for Beckett Grading Services, the company that graded and authenticated the rare card, "This is the most sought-after modern-day baseball card. I am still amazed at how sought-after the Mantle '52 Topps card is and to have someone pull it right out of a packaged product in 2004 is incredible."

Added Matt Bayer, president and CEO of Beckett and Associates (not affiliated with Beckett Grading Services) whose company distributes trading cards

and collectible products to over 1,400 Wal-Mart stores, "It was such a great feeling when I heard that one of our customers in a Wal-Mart store found the 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle Rookie card Grand Treasure. The Tristar Hidden Treasures product line has quickly become one of the most popular sports items we distribute, and with so much excitement surrounding the Mantle rookie card find, it's great that we had a customer make such a great find in a Wal-Mart store."

Tristar Hidden Treasures is a packaged product produced and distributed by Tristar Productions, Inc. The Hidden Treasures product line currently includes the Graded Card Editions (baseball and football), autographed baseballs, autographed photos (baseball, football and wrestling) and autographed football mini helmets. The products are found in retail and hobby stores across the nation.

"I was thrilled to hear that the 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle Rookie card was found by a collector at the

Wal-Mart store in Louisiana," said Jeff Rosenberg, Tristar president and CEO. "It was always a dream of mine as a collector to own this card, and when I heard that Chris LeBlanc had pulled it from one of our Hidden Treasures Baseball packs, I was so happy for this collector."

Added LeBlanc, "I never thought I'd win something like this. It's been real special and Tristar has been amazing, especially Mandy Fuerst. They have kept in touch with me throughout the whole ordeal."



Collector Chris LeBlanc (second from left) shows off 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle card along with Crowley, La., mayor Isabella dela Houssaye, Tristar's Jeff Rosenberg and Ron Guidry. LeBlanc pulled the Mantle card from one of two Hidden Treasures packs.

going to sell it. No one really knows what someone might pay for this card - \$15,000, \$20,000, maybe more. It'd be great that much money for the business, or for my kids."

Plus, LeBlanc said he might take a vacation, perhaps to Las Vegas.

"Getting this card has been my lifelong dream; that's why I really don't want to sell it," he said. "The event was so exciting, overwhelming."

"Crowley is the home of the National Rice Festival, but a small town overall. This is very exciting for me, but also for the town of Crowley, a way to get national publicity for Crowley."

LeBlanc has been collecting baseball and football cards since he was 5, and claims to have "an extremely big collection," with about 5,000 cards valued at least \$3 apiece kept in individual holders. He even has a 1960 Topps Mantle card.

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