



AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH JIM BECKETT

It's been 30 years since Dr. Jim Beckett launched the first Beckett Baseball Price Guide magazine. And in that time, of course, some things have changed. For one thing, the covers have improved dramatically over that first blue cover that featured a 1965 Topps Roberto Clemente card (Jim's favorite player), and a 1977 Topps Dale Murphy RC, autographed by Murph, from Jim's personal collection.

The back contained a full-color image of Ryne Sandberg, taken by local Dallas photographer Brad Newton, who would go on to become the Texas Rangers' team photographer.

Since that launch, the Beckett name has become a global brand that has been the backbone of the industry throughout its growth and maturity. While Dr. Beckett is no longer at the helm of the business he founded, Beckett Baseball is still rolling along. And so is Jim Beckett, now the Director and CEO of Beckett Interests, Inc.

Thirty years after the publication of his first price guide magazine, Dr. Beckett recently offered a few insights into what helped pave the way for a publishing business that far exceeded even his most optimistic projections.

Question: You had published price guide books before the launch of the first Beckett Baseball. At what point did you begin to think about a monthly magazine? What were the biggest hurdles to that?

Jim Beckett: "The first price survey was in 1976, the first price guide book was in 1979, but the possibility of a monthly concept emerged for me in the summer of 1984. That summer I studied up on desktop publishing, printing, distribution, and laid out my idea of a monthly publication that would be useful to collectors and dealers."

Q: At the time, did you leave a regular "day job" to dive into publishing?

JB: "Yes, in the sense that I resigned my full-time position as a Vice President of a statistical consulting firm. However, I continued consulting as an independent contractor, taking on plenty of work for the next two years, but working around price guide deadlines."

O: How much time, on average, did you put into the pricing for the first magazines?

JB: "It seemed that the first few years involved taking a short break for a week after the baseball monthly came out and then going long hours for the next three weeks to get the next month's issue out. After four years we decided to start the football monthly, followed closely after by basketball and hockey. Thankfully we found high quality analysts who shared the desire to put out a fair and accurate price guide."

Q: As the popularity of the Beckett name grew, was it difficult for you to keep your personal life and public life separate?

JB: "Not so difficult; I don't enjoy the limelight that much or seek it out."

Q: How difficult has "celebrity" been the last 30 years?

JB: "It has been a great ride, looking back. Any celebrity I had was probably inversely proportional to the free time I had. So, more free time and less celebrity is fine with me at this point in my life."

Q: At the time you started publishing monthlies, was there ever a goal - either a monetary goal, a growth goal, or anything that could be considered measurable?

JB: "Direction was more important than goals. We were doing the right stuff the right way and the rewards and results flow from that. If I would have had measurable goals, perhaps that would have been a limit to growth, as I am sure we far exceeded any goals that could have been reasonably expected or projected."

Q: What was the most difficult part of the day-to-day business for you?

JB: "There were never enough hours in a day."

Q: What was the most rewarding part of the day-to-day business for you?

JB: "Doing what I loved doing with people I enjoyed working with."

Q: Within the framework of the business, what do you consider your greatest achievement?

JB: "Probably the firsts – first baseball price guide book and first baseball price guide magazine, followed by the respective first books/magazines for football, basketball, and hockey."

Q: When did you first begin to understand that Grading could be an important extension to the company?

JB: "Grading was always a part of our price gathering process but increasingly so as the internet gained steam and cards were being bought and sold unseen."

Q: What were your initial concerns with Grading (if you had any)?

JB: "I wanted to be sure we were not a "me-too" grading service since we were following after PSA, i.e., that we brought something fresh, that we would be more collector-centric rather than dealer-centric. We introduced or popularized half grades, CCES report card transparency, a better slab, and guaranteed turn-arounds.

Q: Do you still collect? If so, what?

JB: "I am currently working on creative ways to display my collection, most of which pre-dates my price guide involvements."

Q: Do you ever have time to enjoy your collection?

JB: "Yes, as I go through old boxes of cards, I regularly come across cards I remember acquiring three or more decades ago and that's fun."

Q: Finally. . .what would you like your legacy to be? How would you want people to remember you and your contributions?

JB: "To be known for accuracy and integrity would be an honorable legacy."
