

# Strat-O-Matic cards find market

**M**AINAINING, or better yet, increasing the value of trading cards requires in part one simple rule: Don't touch. To bend, spindle or mutilate is highly unwise when it comes to fragile cardboard as we know it.

And while condition is a consideration no matter what the card, Harold Richman says there's a not-so-common collectible that relaxes the rules. That is, Strat-O-Matic cards were made to be played.

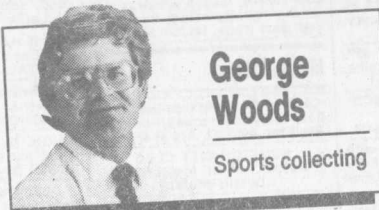
"What's driving up the prices is people want to play with them," the game's creator said.

Strat-O-Matic, a fantasy baseball product, is celebrating its 35th year, although the company has only been in existence since 1961. But it was in 1958 when Richman, then 11, created the game's first official version.

Fans of the game want to retrieve early versions generally to "revive" the old players. Hence, the game's cards have become collectible. "There is a market," Richman said.

According to Richman, the 1961 and '62 versions are worth \$500 each. Only 350 of the '61 sets were produced, retailing for \$4.25 at the time. Most were distributed by mail order, with only a handful released to retailers in Indiana and New York. Their scarcity is unquestioned.

Richman said collectors tend to seek individual teams. For example, the 1973 Braves, with their trio of 40-homer players (Hank Aaron, Darrell Evans and



**George Woods**

Sports collecting

Dave Johnson) prices at \$40 — nearly half the value of the complete game from that year.

Of lesser interest are individual players. A 1972 Steve Carlton card is \$5; an early George Brett fetches \$1. The prices also show that older Strat-O-Matic cards are not untouchable — in more ways than one.