

Eleven New Variations Found in 1963 Topps



By
George Vrechek



Sometimes it takes collectors awhile to find something, but 47 years to find something that was always right there in the open seems like a very long time. The “find” this time consists of 11 cards from the 1963 Topps baseball set that each have two slightly different images on the front of the cards. The differences are slight enough that you can only spot them when two versions of the card are placed side by side, but they are there. The 11 cards are true variations rather than printing differences, i.e., the variations were caused when the cards were organized for printing rather than when some glitch occurred during the actual printing.

McBean, Walker, and Wyatt Give the First Clues

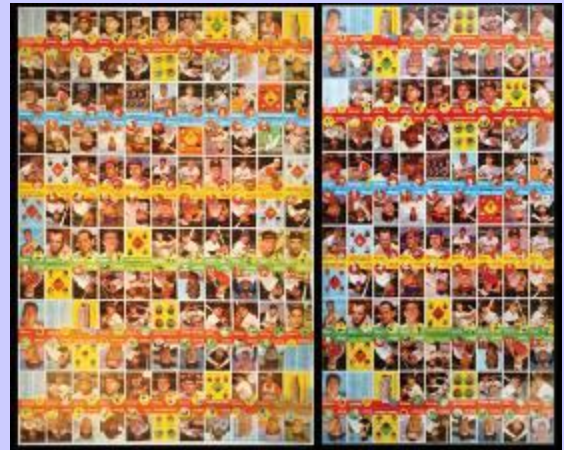
Over the last year variation sellers featured “unlisted, new variations” involving 1963 Topps. They were right. Card #387 of Al McBean was described as having one stripe or two stripes on the sleeve of his jersey. Jerry Walker on card #413 was found with a similar sleeve stripe difference. Card #376 of Johnnie Wyatt came with or without a complete column line on the back of the card. The 1963 Topps set has a few known variations and printing differences: checklists, two rookies cards, Fowler, Baldschun, and a handful of others. While none of these three new items involving McBean, Walker, and Wyatt was awe-inspiring, it did get me searching for the two versions of each card. They weren’t hard to find. Upon closer inspection of the Wyatt cards I noticed that, in addition to the back variation, the fronts also had the same slight difference as McBean and Walker as to how the player’s photo was cropped and in the placement of the small inset photo.

The differences reminded me of the 1962 green tints. The second series of the 1962 Topps baseball cards is found with either normal printing or with a hazy, green cast (the result of using a second printer per hobby veteran Irv Lerner). Sometimes the green prints are hard to distinguish from the regular prints. However, I found that all of the green tints are cropped slightly differently on the front than the regular cards. If you look at the image at the edge of the card you can see more or less of the player’s uniform, bat, fingers, glove, or background.

The 1963s of Wyatt, Walker, and McBean had the same type of small cropping differences. Because I found both versions of the two cards so easily, I suspected that these were not isolated changes by Topps or work by another printer. I also thought why would only three cards have such differences? I started looking at other 1963 Topps. The 5th series checklist card #362 shows that the series runs from card #353 to #429. Checklist #431 shows the 6th series running from #430 to #506. McBean and company were in the 5th series so I started looking there. With some digging at stores and shows I found #372 Don Lee, #407 Elroy Face, #409 Bob Oldis, and #388 Jim Davenport with the same type of differences that were apparent on Wyatt, Walker, and McBean. Shortly thereafter Bob Lemke wrote an *SCD* article reporting the independent find of Davenport with a noticeable difference where his collar lined up on the two versions of the card.

Hornish and Moran Add Printing Information

I now had identified seven cards with variations. Some of the cards seemed to be harder to find than others. I thought there must be some logic that would help me determine if I had them all and how I could avoid the painstaking inspection of every darned card. Collectors Dave Hornish and John Moran gave me their understanding of the printing process Topps used with the 1963s. Dave and John also furnished small images of uncut sheets from other series of 1963 Topps. I couldn't find an image of the sheets involving the variation-rich 5th series. However, according to Dave, I should expect to find that the 5th series of 77 card numbers (including an extra checklist card) were printed on two sheets. Each 132-card sheet has 11 cards to a row and 12 columns of cards. Forty-four of the 77 cards were triple printed and 33 cards were quadruple printed for a total of 264 cards on 2 sheets. The cards have solid colored bottom borders which were color matched and lined up bottom to bottom for printing as Topps had printed the 1953 and 1954 sets. Other print runs had slightly different combinations to arrive at the 264 cards printed but were double or triple printed and not quadruple printed.



Dennis Elkin Comes to the Rescue

My hunch was that rows of 11 cards were printed two different ways. I had seven of them but where were the others? Collector Dennis Elkin, who has a good eye for variations, then joined me in the search for what I believed would be 11 cards with front cropping differences. I took a look at my seven cards all together. A light bulb went off. They all had red banners on the bottom. We were looking for cards with red name banners in the 5th series. Eagle-eyed Elkin started finding more variations on eBay listings, but their numbers were higher than the end of the 5th series - #438 Wes Stock, #439 Don Zimmer, and #445 Norm Cash. This was great but I was puzzled as to why we were now finding (endless?) differences in the next series.

Series Versus Print Runs

A partial uncut sheet of 8 cards popped up on eBay that answered my question. My variation buddies McBean, Oldis, and Walker were all there in a nice row just as I expected, but in the middle of the row was our new-found friend Wes Stock #438. I eventually learned that the Topps 5th series was not the same as the 5th print run. The print run went from #371 to #446 rather than #353 to #429 for the “series” as featured on the checklist cards. By printing a checklist of the 5th series Topps wanted the kids looking for cards that didn’t exist yet. Those rascals! I had been partially looking in the wrong haystack.



Uncut partial sheets confirmed that the variations all came from the same row of quadruple printed red bottomed cards. The variation cards are at the top of each of these partial sheets.

The Last Card

We had now found 10 cards and I took a look again at the uncut sheet from another series of 1963 Topps. Every row seemed to have a rookies card or a checklist. Even though the red banner is on the top of the rookies cards I guessed that my 11th and final card would be a red-topped rookies card that was printed upside down along with the red bottomed cards. I was right; #386 “1963 Rookies” also had two versions: either the four players’ heads were centered in the circles on the card or they appeared near the bottom of the circle. The rookies on the card are John Bateman, Larry Bearnarth, Ed Kirkpatrick, and Gerry Roggenburk.



Dennis and I checked the remaining red based cards as well as the green and gold based cards in the same print run without finding any more surprises. The good news (I think) for collectors was that none of the 11 variations were of star players. Sorry, Norm Cash.

How Scarce Are They?

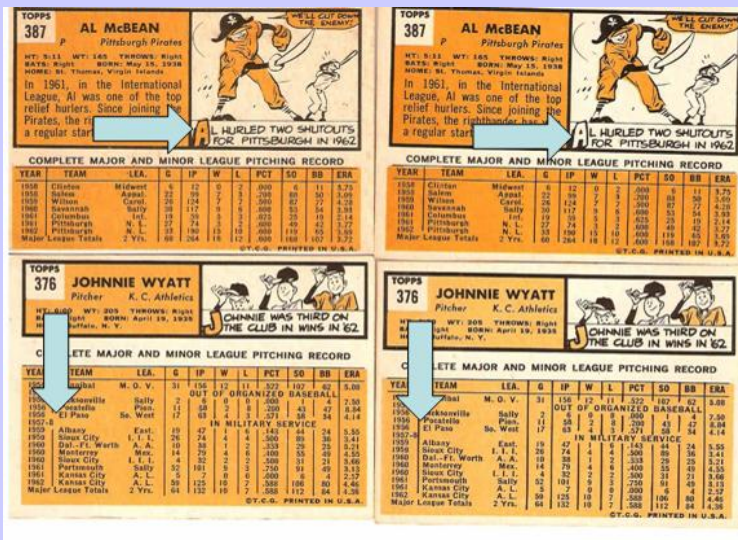
I knew we hadn’t discovered the mother load of cardboard variations in that the two versions of each card were too easy to find, but how easy were they? My next step was to survey the listings on eBay which I felt would be representative of the population of the two versions of each card in that no one else in the world was segregating them yet. The active and completed eBay listings covered as many as 73 cards of each player with an average of 53 cards per player. While none of the card variations were exactly 50/50 of the total listed, they were not too far away from an even distribution. They certainly weren’t distributed 1 out of 2 or 2 out of 3. They were closest to 1 for 1, that is, one version of the card was as likely to turn up as the other. For example, #409 Oldis had 63 cards listed; 32 of them had the player’s number in the background more visible than found on the other 31 cards. Therefore the 11 variation cards had to come from the 33 quadruple printed cards on the two sheets rather than the triple printed cards in order to have an even distribution.

Uncut Sheet Assumptions

I was never able to locate the entire two uncut sheets from the relevant printing, but when I do find one I believe it will show that the 11 variation cards were printed four times on two sheets for a total of 44 samples of each card. Twenty-two of the cards are cropped slightly differently than the other 22 cards of the same player. Twenty two of the cards are probably located on the edge of the two print sheets. The accompanying chart reflects my idea of the breakdown. Green and gold based cards are found three times in each print run. Red based cards without variations are found four times in each print run. Each of the two variation cards of the 11 players are found two times in each print run. There has been no previous distinction made between commons that were quadruple printed versus triple or double printed. The variations are a little tougher to find than the triple-printed cards. I'll let the price guide gang take it from here as to whether there should be premiums on the 11 variation cards.

Details to Identify the Variations

Even though Topps would double, triple, and quadruple print each player, we seldom have seen differences like these on either the fronts or backs of the multiple printed cards on the same print run. Of the 11 variation cards, Dennis Elkin and I found two with back differences: the #376 Wyatt card with the broken stat line and #387 Al McBean's cartoon back has the "A" in his name either in yellow or in white. These back variations are not in addition to the front variations.



In looking at the front variations you will see differences involving both the player's photo and the small circled inset photo. Elroy Face comes with or without a complete box in the grandstand. Davenport's collar is higher or lower in the photo. Wyatt, Zimmer, McBean, and Walker's sleeves come with either more or wider stripes. A player behind Oldis appears with or without most of his uniform number visible. Cash's elbow is at the bottom of the photo or just off the bottom.

However, the most universal way of describing the differences would be to use the placement of the player's head in the inset photo. One version of the card will have the player's head further right or left than the other version. Wes Stock has the most insignificant differences in his photos but the inset photo is found either right or left in the circle and there is even a thin gap up the back of his leg in one version. In examining partial uncut sheets we found that the variation players' heads in one row were consistently either further to the right or further to the left. The rookies card with no inset photo could be categorized as heads centered or heads at the bottom of the circles.

It wouldn't surprise me that some collectors had noticed some of these differences in the past and had dismissed them as printing differences or as insignificant. I think the 11 cards all in a row liven up the story. And you didn't think there was anything new under the sun after the greater collector world had spent 47 years looking at these particular pieces of cardboard?

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**Topps 1963 Baseball
Print Run 371 to 446 plus extra checklist**

Color of base containing Name	# Players, including variations	# Times Printed	Total Cards
Green	22	3	66
Gold	22	3	66
Red Normal	22	4	88
Red - A Variation, head left	11	2	22
Red - B Variation, head right	11	2	22
Total	88		264

The top row of cards could be categorized as version A with the players heads in the inset photos generally further to the right than those of the players in the bottom row, version B. Players' hats, sleeves, or hands vary as to proximity to the card edges.

