

LIFE BEHIND THE LENS

Cards inspired photographer Jeff Moreland to get into journalism — and his work on cards has reignited his passion for collecting

By Chris Olds | Editor

I imagine spending your career in a profession that allows you to travel, attend national events and then get rewarded when the proof of your journey appears in, say, *Sports Illustrated*.



That's exactly what 41-year-old Kentucky-based photographer Jeff Moreland does — but *SI* doesn't quite compare to one of the other fringe benefits.

"Honestly, the magazines are cool, but the cards have just been the biggest thrill for me," he said. "I love *Sports Illustrated*, and seeing my images of Kentucky basketball, Bryce Harper and others on the pages has been great, but those cards are just on a different level. I still get a kick out of finding a new card that has one of my images on it, and as soon as I know a release date is out for a product, I'm on eBay searching for singles to buy that I've shot."

While his day job is a publisher for a small-newspaper group, he's also a photographer for Topps — one of at least a dozen who regularly shoots NFL games for the company each year.

It makes sense since collecting is nothing new to him. It was a family thing even before he got his chance to help create collectibles.

"I have always been a collector, and I still am today," he said. "My wife's uncle ran a card shop in the years before she and I were married, and I was always in there hanging out. We all went to card shows together in the 1990s, and it was a real family thing for us. Much later, in the years before he passed away, he got our son into collecting, and it's just been something we all enjoy."

And now they all enjoy collecting even more — specifically, the hunt for cards with his photos on them.

"We still go to some shows and card shops today, but primarily, we're trying to collect the stuff I've shot now," he said. "I'm still working on my collection, and I am very close to owning a copy of each card I've shot, with the exception of some of the brand-new stuff that has just come out, and one or two of the more expensive cards featuring autographs and jersey pieces."

Moreland's background is much like any other in his field — and he's worked his



way up the ranks just to have the shot at working for Topps.

"I majored in journalism in college, and my full-time job is as a newspaper publisher," he said. "I started out as a part-time sports reporter for my hometown newspaper right out of college, and I've been fortunate enough to advance up the ladder over the past 15-20 years, working as a sports editor at a daily paper and on from there."

And he actually credited baseball cards as one reason he pursued journalism and photography from the start.

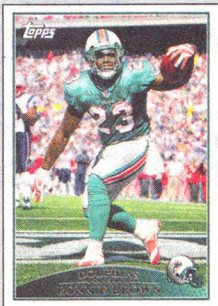
"Topps had a lot to do with my interest in sports photography," he said. "As a kid, I

SIX PHOTOGRAPHER FAVORITES

Topps' Jeff Moreland selected six of his favorite images on cardboard and told us why ...

2009 Topps #95 Ronnie Brown

This is one of my favorites because I was always a huge Colts fan, and didn't care for the Patriots. I shot this in 2008 in Foxboro, Mass., on the day Ronnie Brown and the Dolphins ran all over the Pats (Tom Brady had been injured the week before) and it was also the game in which the Wildcat offense was born. Brown scored one of his rushing touchdowns, and as luck would have it with my position on the field, he came directly in front of me as he celebrated.



This game was tense from the beginning, with lots of physical play. This shot was taken after Johnson scored a touchdown, and in the image, he is talking to and taunting the Tennessee fans. It was a great game to get to see, and the photo was used on this footballcard, as well as on a 2011 Topps Prime football pack.

2009 Topps Unique #54 Peyton Manning

This photo was taken in the old Metrodome in Minneapolis in 2008. I have always been a huge Colts fan, and Peyton is my favorite player still today. This was the first of many of his games I've had the good fortune to see, and this card came from that game. The Colts trailed all day, and the Vikings scored five field goals in the game. Peyton threw a late touchdown to Reggie Wayne, then Adam Vinatieri kicked the game-winner as the clock ran out to end it.



2010 Topps #187 Torry Holt

I always liked Holt when he played for St. Louis, and it was fun to get to shoot him for Topps. The card was really interesting to me when it came out in packs. I shot him in Jacksonville as a member of the Jaguars when they hosted the Titans, but

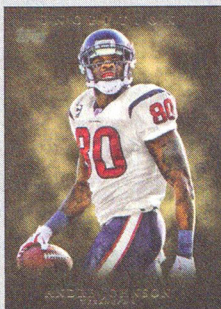
when the card was released, he had signed with the Patriots. Topps had completed the process and put him in a Pats uniform, which the card shows. You can



see my original photo here, alongside the card that shows the change. I remember seeing baseball players on cards who had been traded with the cheesy airbrushing when I was a kid. This was much different, and I think Topps did a really good job on it. I've had other cards like this since, but this was the coolest to me.

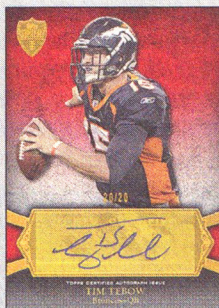
2011 Topps Inception #48 Andre Johnson

I shot this in Tennessee in late December 2010. Just a few weeks earlier, the Texans and Titans had a big brawl, featuring Andre Johnson and Titans cornerback Cortland Finnegan.



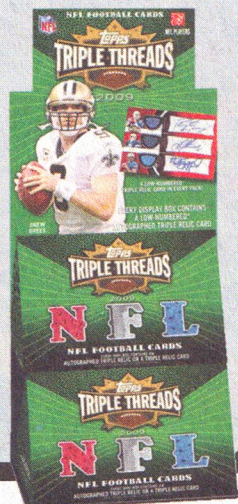
2011 Topps Supreme Autographs Red #SATT Tim Tebow

I shot this photo of Tebow in Dallas in the pre-season of 2010. It was the first time I had been to the new Cowboys Stadium and my first time to see Tebow. I had followed his career in college, and the hype around Tebow's NFL career was huge at the time. It was cool to get to watch him play, then see my photo on this card that was at one time selling for \$200 and up on eBay.



2009 Topps Triple Threads football box

I was very pleasantly surprised to find this photo I took of Drew Brees on the packaging of the 2009 Topps Triple Threads product. I shot it in late 2008 in New Orleans.



You can see more of Moreland's card work as well as other photographs at jeffmoreland.com. You can find him on Twitter, too, @nflphotographer.

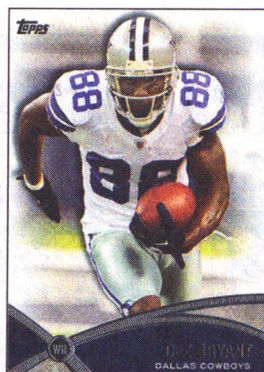
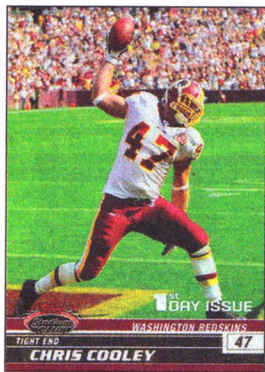
was a baseball nut. I lived for it, and when we weren't in school or playing baseball in the neighborhood, my friends and I always collected and traded cards. I remember loving to get my favorite players, but the photos were always part of what attracted me to an interest in photography.

"I always had some kind of camera, even as a kid, whether it was one of the old Polaroid instant cameras, or a little point-and-shoot 35mm film camera. I have some photos I took as a kid that I thought were great, just because they had Pete Rose or

Dale Murphy in them. From there, I advanced to a little better equipment as I got older, and it has progressed from there."

These days, when he's not shooting for Topps, he covers events in and around Kentucky for a variety of news outlets.

"In addition to shooting for Topps, I do work for some wire services, and my work for them includes Kentucky basketball and football, the Kentucky Derby, NASCAR, NCAA [basketball and volleyball] Tournament play and more."



Moreland explained how working for Topps works.

"My work for Topps is done on a per-game basis," he said. "Each season, around mid to late June, I get a schedule from Topps with the games I'll be working that season. In the week before each game, I get what's called a hit list, which is the names, numbers and positions of the players I'll be shooting for a specific game. I used to keep that list in a pocket, then on a lanyard around my credential. I have learned that the best method is to put it in a play sleeve on my left forearm, just like the quarterbacks wear with the plays on them during the game."

So, how did it come about? He got his break — at least in the hobby — back in 2007 when he looked into working on cardboard instead of newsprint.

"I had a contact name, and I sent a sample CD of images of my work to Topps," Moreland said. "I called the guy a little later to be sure he got my images, and he told me he liked what he saw. He said to call back in two weeks. I did, and again he told me to call back in two weeks. This went on for a while, and finally he told me if he needed anything, he would let me know. I took that as a brush-off, and thought I would never get a chance to work for Topps. Then one day a few weeks later, I got a call with a strange number on my caller ID.

"It was an editor with Topps asking me if I was available to shoot a preseason game for Topps in Pittsburgh between the Steelers and Packers. The preseason is usually

where players get to show what they can do and see if they can earn a spot in the league. I guess it's the same for photographers. I shot that game in 2007, and from there I got a couple more games that season.

"The next year, I shot a lot more games. I've done it every year since, and I've traveled all over the country for Topps. The only NFL teams I have not seen play are the Seahawks and the Panthers."

Moreland's cardboard debut came in the 2007 Bowman Chrome set. He described the experience of finding his work inside a pack for the first time.

"I remember the first card of mine that I found in a pack," Moreland said. "I knew the rookies I had shot in preseason would be released in the 2007 Bowman Chrome football set, so I went to a store and purchased a few packs. One of the packs contained a card I had shot of a rookie tight end named Matt Spaeth with the Steelers. Even though I had seen my work published in newspapers and magazines over the years before, the feeling of seeing my photo on a football card was unbelievable. I had always been a collector as a kid and even as a young adult, but this got me hooked all over again."

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