

# Investing In Sport Trading Cards

Category Factsheet  
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# Introduction & Key Facts

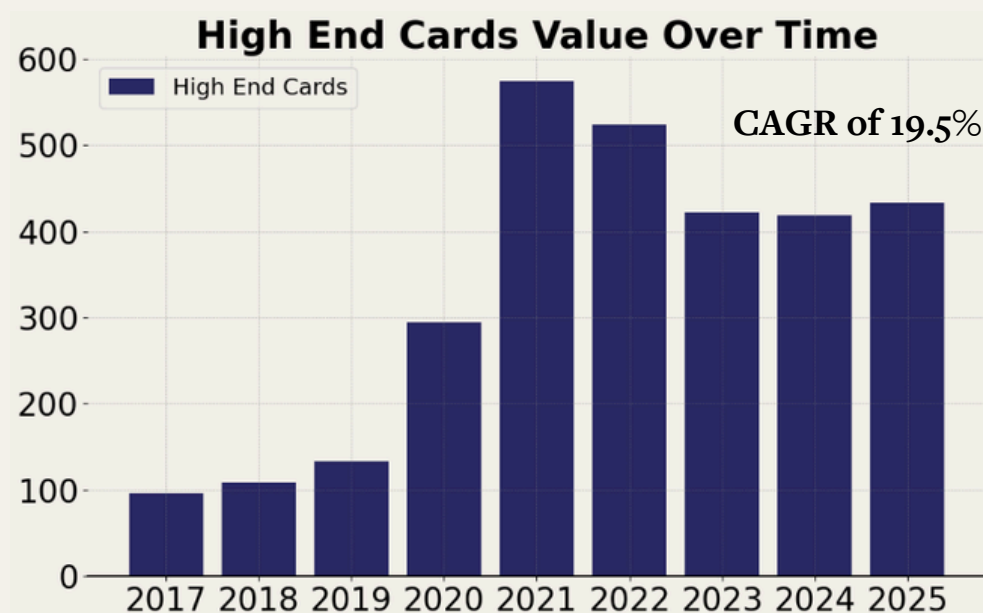
The market for high-end sport trading cards has evolved from a collector's niche into a globally recognized alternative asset class.

Coveted by top collectors and investors, these cards—especially rare, graded examples featuring legendary athletes—have demonstrated resilience, strong price appreciation, and increasing liquidity.

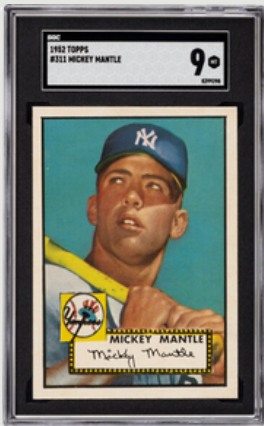
The sector is characterized by record-breaking auction sales, growing international participation, and a surge in digital platforms enabling fractional ownership and transparent trading.

## Key Facts & Market Data

- The global sports trading card market exceeded \$15 billion in 2024, with the high-end segment (cards valued above \$100,000) accounting for a significant share of transaction volume.
- Record auction sales continue to set new benchmarks, such as the 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle (PSA 9) selling for \$12.6 million in 2022 and the 2003 Exquisite Collection LeBron James Rookie Patch Auto (BGS 9) fetching \$5.2 million in 2023.
- The market is driven by scarcity, athlete legacy, card condition (grading), and cultural relevance.



# Subcategories & Their Specifics



## Vintage Cards (Pre-1980)

- Icons: Mickey Mantle, Babe Ruth, Michael Jordan, Pele
- Rarity and historical significance drive value; top-graded examples are exceptionally scarce.

## Auction Highlights:

- 1952 Topps Mickey Mantle (PSA 9) - €11.1 million (2022, Heritage Auction)
- 1909-11 T206 Honus Wagner (SGC 3) - €5.8 million (2021, Robert Edward Auctions)
- 1933 Goudey Babe Ruth (PSA 9) - €3.7 million (2021, Memory Lane)

## Modern Cards (1980-2010)

- Icons: Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky, Tom Brady, Kobe Bryant
- The “rookie card” phenomenon and limited print runs (often serial-numbered) are key value drivers.

## Auction Highlights:

- 1986 Fleer Michael Jordan Rookie (PSA 10) - €0.6 million (2021, Goldin Auctions)
- 2000 Playoff Contenders Tom Brady Rookie Ticket Auto (BGS 9) - €2.7 million (2021, Lelands)
- 2003 Exquisite Collection LeBron James Rookie Patch Auto (BGS 9) - €4.6 million (2023, PWCC Marketplace)



# Subcategories & Their Specifics

## Ultra-Modern & Contemporary Cards (2010–Today)

- Icons: Lionel Messi, LeBron James, Shohei Ohtani, Patrick Mahomes, Erling Haaland
- Limited edition autographs, memorabilia patches, and “one-of-one” cards command premium prices.

## Auction Highlights:

- 2018 Panini National Treasures Luka Dončić Logoman 1/1 – €4.1 million (2022, PWCC Marketplace)
- 2020 Panini National Treasures Justin Herbert 1/1 – €1.6 million (2024, Goldin Auctions)
- 2017 Panini Flawless Patrick Mahomes 1/1 – €2.8 (2023, Goldin Auctions)



# The Unique Value Drivers of High-End Sport Trading Cards

## Limited Series and Serial Numbers: The Core of Rarity

In high-end sports trading cards, rarity hinges not only on limited print runs but also on each card's individual serial number. Cards like 1/99 or 23/99 gain premium value due to symbolic significance and collector demand.

- First & Last Cards (e.g., 1/99, 99/99) are seen as set bookends and often fetch higher prices.
- Jersey Number Cards (e.g., 23/99 for Jordan) are highly desirable, often trading at 2–3x premiums.
- One-of-One (1/1) cards are unique and command top-tier auction results due to absolute rarity.



## Market Examples and Trends

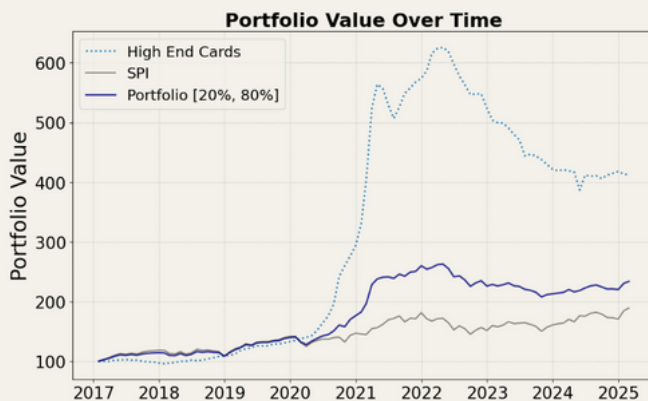
- A LeBron James rookie card numbered 23/99 (matching his jersey) has sold for multiples of the price of other cards from the same series.
- The last card in a run, such as 100/100, is viewed as a “capstone” for a collection, attracting competitive bidding from collectors seeking to complete or headline a set.
- “Bookend” cards (first and last) and “jersey match” cards are often highlighted in auction catalogues and digital marketplaces, with provenance and serial number clearly stated to drive up competitive interest.

# In Depth View: Return & Risk 1/3

## Opportunities (Quantitative)

Three major benefits can be observed by including High End Cards as an asset in the portfolio:

- Reduced overall portfolio risk
- Higher average annual returns
- Consistent track record



(1) Portfolio represents 80% SPI and 20% High End Cards

## Reduced Overall Portfolio Risk

The less-than-perfect correlation between High End Cards and SPI (SXGE) results in a combined portfolio with lower risk compared to traditional assets alone. By analyzing the combined portfolio, this is captured by the following metrics:

- Lower standard deviation
- Lower beta
- Higher Drawdown risk

Assets	Std Dev	Beta	Drawdown
Cards	0.19	0.08	0.38
SPI	0.12	1.00	0.20
Portfolio (1)	0.11	0.69	0.21

(1) Portfolio represents 80% SPI and 20% High End Cards Index

## Higher Average Annual Returns

The positive effect of compounded returns is captured by the higher compound annual growth rate (CAGR) from 2017 to 2025.

Assets	CAGR
High End Cards	19.5%
SPI	7.3%
Portfolio (1)	10.6%

(1) Portfolio represents 80% SPI and 20% High End Cards

## Consistent Track Record

The combined portfolio has consistently outperformed the SPI benchmark, with a historical return of 333% compared to 79% over the past 8 years.

## Other Opportunities

- Wealth preservation
- Increasing demand, limited supply
- Cultural value

## High expected return with lower risk?

Short answer: Well, it is possible.

This can be explained by the low correlation ( $R = 0.05$ ) between SPI and High End Cards. Correlation ( $R$ ) measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables:

- $R = 1$ , assets move together
- $R = -1$ , move in opposite directions
- $R = 0$ , no relationship

# In Depth View: Return & Risk 2/3

## Sharpe Ratio (SR)

All these benefits can be captured by a single metric. The Sharpe Ratio measures how much excess return a portfolio generates per unit of risk. It is calculated as:

$$SR = \frac{\text{Portfolio Return} - \text{Risk-Free Rate (Rf)}}{\text{Std Dev}}$$

- Best used for comparing investment on a risk-adjusted basis
- A higher Sharpe Ratio is better, as it indicates more return per unit of risk taken

In this case, the combined portfolio's Sharpe Ratio is 0.94, vs 0.64 for SPI (2017–2025).

Assets	Sharpe
Cards	0.98
SPI	0.64
Portfolio (1)	0.94

- (1) Portfolio represents 80% SPI and 20% High End Cards  
(2) Risk-free rate of 1% for the sharpe ratio calculation

## Risks Management

The previously mentioned risk metrics are useful for evaluating volatility and downside capital risk. A further step in risk management would be the calculation of:

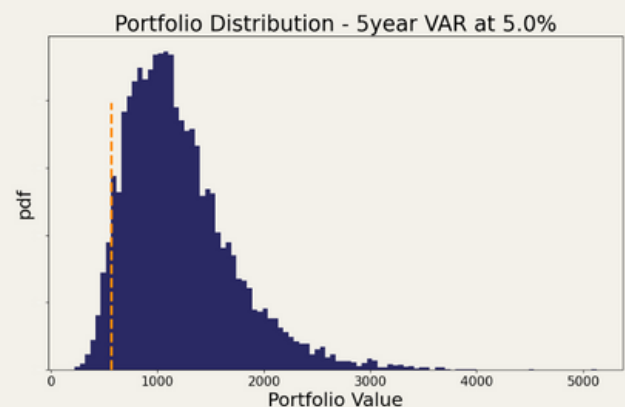
- Value at Risk (VaR)
- Skewness and Kurtosis

## Value At Risk (VaR)

What is the maximum amount that could be lost over a period, given a specific probability? VaR attempts to answer this question.

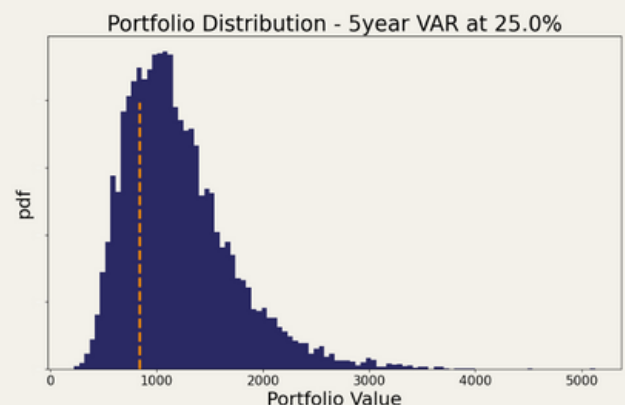
### 5% VaR

By investing EUR 500 in High End Cards Index as a standalone investment, there is a 95% chance that the initial investment will exceed EUR 568 after 5 years.



### 25% VaR

In the case of a 25% VaR, there is a 75% chance that the initial investment of EUR 500 will exceed EUR 841.



# In Depth View:

## Return & Risk 3/3

### **Skewness and Kurtosis**

Skewness and kurtosis describe the shape of a probability distribution.

#### **Skewness**

It measures the asymmetry of the probability distribution. Hence, for:

- skewness > 0.5, more extreme positive values
- skewness < -0.5, extreme negative values
- otherwise, approximately symmetrical

The skewness of +2.83 for the annual returns of High End Cards over the past 8 years indicates a higher likelihood of positive returns.

#### **Kurtosis**

Kurtosis quantifies the presence of more extreme values. For this study, excess kurtosis was used to evaluate it.

Hence, for:

- kurtosis > 0.5, higher risk of extreme returns
- kurtosis < -0.5, lower risk of extreme returns
- otherwise, low risk of extreme returns

The excess kurtosis of +10.51 for the annual returns of High End Cards over the past 8 years indicates a high risk of extreme returns.

### **Other Relevant Risks for High End Cards**

- Authenticity
- Conservation and Storage
- Illiquidity Risk
- Subjectivity Risk
- Concentration Risk

### **Authenticity**

Mitigated by rigorous due diligence and partnerships with leading experts.

### **Illiquidity Risk**

Mitigated by a long-term approach, the focus on highly desirable high-end cards and a strong collector network enhance exit opportunities.

### **Subjectivity Risk**

Reliable historical data, market trends, and expert insights are used to identify cards with enduring value.

### **Concentration Risk**

Reduced by diversifying portfolios across athletes, periods, brands, reducing dependency on any single segment or trend.

### **Assumptions**

For the quantitative calculation:

- Average risk-free of 1% for the past 25y
- High End Cards considers cards whose last sale was greater than \$5k.
- 99 monthly data-points (2017-2025)
- Thresholds for kurtosis and skewness are provided as guidance. Different investors may have different orientations.
- VaR considers historical CAGR and standard deviation as parameters.

# Market Trends & Developments

## 2025 Market Trends: Sports Trading Cards

The high-end card market is evolving rapidly through tech, global demand, and institutional interest.

- Blockchain & NFTs: Panini and others offer digital-physical hybrids, NFT pairing, and fractional ownership—boosting provenance and accessibility.
- Auction Innovation: Dutch auctions and live online bidding drive transparent price discovery and global reach.
- Serial Number Premiums: Jersey, first, and last-numbered cards trade at 2–3x premiums; personalization options add value.
- Global Growth: Demand rises in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, with Gen Z and millennials driving digital-first adoption.
- Institutional Interest: Hedge funds and family offices are entering for diversification and inflation protection.
- Security & Grading: AI-driven authentication, blockchain tracking, and secure vaulting enhance confidence and asset safety.



# This is Our Expert

## K3Y Asset: Curating the Hobby into an Asset Class

K3Y Asset is a platform created to contextualize iconic sports cards—bridging hobby passion with sports history—while identifying attributes that elevate them into long-term investable assets.

Founded by renowned collector and curator Spinotron (Dinyu Yang), the platform reflects decades of expertise. Yang has shaped the modern card landscape since 2009, completing ultra-rare sets like the 1997 E-X2001 NBA Credentials. As one of only two collectors ever featured by Panini America, he's recognized for curating grail cards well ahead of the curve—like acquiring a 1997 Kobe PMG Green for \$16K in 2011 (now valued at \$1.75M+).

Recently, he made headlines again by securing the Ohtani 50/50 record card at auction—cementing his role as one of the most influential tastemakers in the modern hobby.



Sports cards have quietly become one of the best-performing alternative asset classes over the past 5–15 years. With a conservatively estimated \$200B+ market cap—and room to grow—cards backed by iconic athletes, licensing, and cultural resonance are now legitimate stores of value.

More than collectibles, cards are a window into generational memory. They combine nostalgia, storytelling, scarcity, and innovation—creating emotional and financial upside for both collectors and investors.

# Why Splint Invest?



## **Curated Investment Opportunities**

Splint Invest only selects Trading Cards that pass a thorough due diligence process, with emphasis on market liquidity, provenance, purchase price, historical performance, and relevance.



## **Diversification without Complexity**

Investing in Trading Cards through Splint enables instant access to a historically low-correlated asset class with proven returns — ideal for portfolio diversification.



## **Secure Storage & Insurance**

All sport trading cards are stored in a bank vault, ensuring asset safety and long-term preservation.



## **Expert Validation**

We collaborate with trusted sport trading card advisors to identify cards with growth potential, and ensure authenticity and valuation accuracy.



## **Data-Driven Decision Making**

Our investment decisions are backed by in-depth market data, trend analysis, and pricing databases, ensuring each Asset is selected based on objective insights rather than speculation.

## Reach Out To Us

"Sports cards offer compelling opportunities for a wide range of investor profiles—whether you're driven by the thrill of high-upside modern rookies tied to generational talent, or prefer the resilience and prestige of proven blue-chip cards with historical significance. The beauty of the hobby is how it connects both your portfolio and your passion." - Mario von Bergen, Head of Investments & Co-Founder

Together with our sport trading card expert, we are looking forward to supporting your journey in building a meaningful and resilient portfolio.



*Mario von Bergen*

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