

The Ultimate Pre-War Collector's Dream: 1930s Wheaties Football Cards

BY JEFF PAYNE AND JOE SQUIRES

Close your eyes and imagine the absolute perfect vintage pre-war football set. All of your favorite players are included: Red Grange, Ernie Nevers, Bronko Nagurski and Don Hutson... so are famous college stars and coaches: Wayne Millner, Williams Shakespeare, Cotton Warburton, Bernie Bierman, Pop Warner. Well you, my fellow collector, are in luck!! A set like this need not be imagined, it already exists and it's called the 1930s Wheaties Set. Cut from the backs of Wheaties boxes, these cards are listed in price guides as multiple sets produced between 1935 – 1937 but most Wheaties

collector's view these 50 cards as one tough master set to tackle.

As the story goes, Wheaties cereal was invented in the early 1920s when a Washburn Crosby Company worker accidentally spilled a wheat bran concoction on a hot stove. The result was a crunchy, tasty flake that the company worked on for two years to perfect as the world's first boxed flake cereal. Originally called Washburn's Gold Medal Whole Wheat Flakes, the name was changed to Wheaties in 1923. Washburn Crosby merged with other mills in 1928 to form General Mills, the company that still sells Wheaties today.

In 1934 Wheaties began featuring athletes on the sides and back of its boxes in conjunction with a new advertising campaign proclaiming the cereal "The Breakfast of Champions". Original athletes featured on Wheaties boxes include Lou Gehrig and Jimmy Fox (baseball), Ellsworth Vines (tennis), and Elinor Smith (aviation).

All of the 1930s Wheaties football cards have an orange background and blue images. Their standard size varies from set to set. With no guidelines for cutting these from boxes, you will see various sizes even within a set. Here are details about each set that comprises the 50 card master set.

Wheaties Box Athletic "Firsts"

First athlete on a box	1934	Lou Gehrig	Baseball player
First African-American athlete on a box	1934	Jesse Owens	Track star
First athlete depicted on the front	1958	Bob Richards	Pole vaulter
First woman athlete depicted on the front	1984	Mary Lou Retton	Gymnast
First football player depicted on the front	1986	Walter Payton	Chicago Bears
First superstar wide receiver on the front	1988	Steve Largent	Seattle Seahawks