



STUCK ON YOU

THE RISE & FALL...
& RISE OF PANINI STICKERS

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Contents

Regression Is Nine Tenths Of The Law.	7
Just Like Old Times	10
Humble Beginnings	34
Enter Panini	43
The Age Of Panini	59
Those We Loved And Lost	74
The Men Who Sold The World.	91
Hulk Hogan Saves The Day	114
‘Maxwell Escapee Triumphs’	146
The Revenge Of The Cards	173
Rising From The Ashes	186
The Art Of Collecting	193
How Do You Solve A Problem Like England?	224
Books/Magazines	251
Cover Index	252

Introduction

Regression Is Nine Tenths Of The Law

HOW did my life get to the point where a national newspaper photographer was coming round to my house to take pictures of a 40-year-old with his sticker albums? And was it a good point?

Albert Camus, French philosopher and sometime goalkeeper, said, ‘What I know most surely about morality and the duty of man I owe to sport.’

Replace ‘sport’ with ‘stickers’ and you have it about right for a generation of children brought up collecting Panini albums during the 1980s.

STUCK ON YOU

My first betrayal came over a shared *Football* 83 album (a long story), early encounters with unscrupulous swappers gave further warnings of the harsh realities of life while the under-appreciated virtue of perseverance came from the ability to see the album through – or at least until you and your friends' pocket money ran out.

Twenty-five years after last collecting – save for a dalliance with Panini during Euro 2000, which coincided with a dalliance with a fellow returning collector – I was back in the game for the 2014 World Cup. Not just for the Panini album but also Topps and its *England 2014* collection. And thanks to a number of fellow online traders (along with the occasional friend or son of a friend) I managed to complete both albums – not just once but twice in the case of Panini. It even led to the aforementioned appearance in a tabloid newspaper, posing in various compromising positions surrounded by a small cross-section of my collection.

My re-birth in the world of football stickers had begun a year or so earlier when I uncovered my old albums at my parents' home – it's a familiar story.

Except what is less usual is not only did I want to collect in the 'here and now', I also vowed to have a go at completing all of my collections from yesteryear. It's a pursuit that will never be conquered – but isn't that the best way to approach your hobbies?

REGRESSION IS NINE TENTHS OF THE LAW

Us collectors are an unusual breed – particularly the more ‘mature’ among the throng – but as you will learn in *Stuck On You*, those involved on the other side are just as passionate about the collectables business.

They won’t reveal exactly how many packets they sell, because this is a cagey world full of espionage and unlikely interludes that have involved shady business dealings, glamour models and alleged kidnapping attempts...a world where if one company has the rights the other thinks it can sneak something under the radar (it can’t)...but aren’t these the most interesting worlds?

This is the world of football stickers.

This book is about the history of self-adhesive football stickers in the UK. It is this innovatory method that led to Panini’s initial success in Britain and has continued to sell in huge numbers ever since – primarily through Panini and Merlin/Topps.

Stick with it – it’s an appealing tale.

Just Like Old Times

SPEAKING around launch time in April 2014, Panini's head of circulation Rebecca Smith had predicted £40m of sales in the UK when speaking to conveniencestore.co.uk. By the end of its run, however, Smith was being a little more coy when it came to just how successful Panini's 2014 World Cup album proved to be in Britain.

Smith says, 'We came off sale on Friday 24 October and then the retailers had three weeks to get any credit back on stock because it is done on a "sale or return" basis. Monitoring sales on Epos (Electronic point of sale) it certainly looks like we are going to achieve that but we have licensors to protect so don't disclose specific figures.'

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

Maybe it was the way I put the question but, with a new-found experience of getting sales figures out of the football sticker industry, blood from a stone would be a darned sight easier.

Mike Riddell, Panini UK managing director, was happy to go on record in a press release to label the album the 'largest collectable in the UK this millennium'.

What can also be said with some conviction is the most recent Panini World Cup effort was the biggest-selling World Cup album ever in global terms, with the UK contributing significantly to the coffers – almost doubling the average increase of the 120-plus countries selling the collection.

Where there are winners, however, there must always be losers.

In the UK it only really happens during World Cup time (and to a lesser extent the Euros) but, with around 90 per cent of the collectables market, Panini won the World Cup in a manner that only Germany taking apart Brazil would be replicated by on the field during the actual tournament. With Panini's World Cup success in 2006 and 2010, Topps probably saw the writing on the wall for 2014 but even it must have been surprised by how emphatic the opposition's victory turned out to be.

Topps reduced the price of its sticker packets to 25p (half the price of Panini's and the cheapest for a Merlin/Topps collection since Euro 96). Even

STUCK ON YOU

with the rights to England, it made no difference. Its strongest suit of trading cards (Panini also did its own 'Adrenalyn XL' card range) was still overshadowed by the runaway winner.

Topps Europe vice-president Chris Rodman was philosophical after his company finished a distant second best in the collectables World Cup battle.

'Unfortunately how the team performs does drive consumer interest,' says Rodman, 'although a lot of sales are done pre the tournament and certainly in the early part. But if your team doesn't perform as well as you thought it will have an impact on your sales – without a doubt.'

No success happens by accident so the all-pervading presence of Panini in the run-up to and during the World Cup had a major impact on its UK success. Free albums were all over the place in an assortment of supermarkets and newsagents. Then, once you had the album, there was never any shortage of places in which to stock up on stickers.

'It was our largest distribution of promotional albums ever – that was the key,' says Smith. 'In the past we have given them away with a newspaper (and magazines) but this time they were available to pick up at any time. Despite this the more we gave away the more "starter packs" we sold. It seemed to be that if you saw your best friend had an album you then wanted to pick one up too and the starter

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

pack was a good introduction with the packets of stickers as well as the album.

‘Our retail base also expanded. Our focus used to be on WH Smith, McColl’s and generally locations that were near to schools for kids to pick them up. But they don’t have the reach of supermarkets when mums, dads and grandparents can pick up stickers for their children/grandchildren.

‘Once one supermarket came on board others followed. With the magazine sector declining it each found its own solution to promoting the album/stickers. When you get Tesco, for example, switching on its marketing machine it has a massive impact. That did lose share from convenience stores but getting them on to the check-out in supermarkets was key. Our aim was to get an album into the hands of every child and every dad who wanted one and to increase the number of albums per family so they could enjoy collecting together.’

Besides the supermarket and newsagent trade, Panini widened its distribution into other areas during the last World Cup in conjunction with a company named Click Distribution UK, run by Mark Hillier, an industry veteran who worked for Panini’s WH Smith Distributors (WHSD) arm in the 1980s and then co-founded Merlin in the 90s.

Click deals with the likes of Toys R Us, The Entertainer, Smyths Toys, Next, Debenhams, John Lewis, Sports Direct and Game – an attractive

STUCK ON YOU

network and customer-base of independent retailers used by both Panini and Topps.

Hillier went into the latest sticker offensive with optimism and was not disappointed.

‘We hoped it was going to be big and we had an inkling that it would be,’ says Hillier. ‘A World Cup in Brazil was always going to be pretty exciting. Panini was very good and open with us, we knew what its marketing campaign was going to be and they spent a lot of money on TV, sampling, had some really great initiatives and its use of social media was good and clever.

‘They had recognised in 2010, when it was held in South Africa, that there was this growing adult audience for World Cup stickers which at that time I think took them a bit by surprise. So I think they planned for that this time. We always thought that children would enjoy collecting it but there is going to be this additional adult audience as well, which they were really going for, and that proved to be the case. So I wasn’t surprised and actually they did a fantastic job – we never, ever, for one day ran out of stock on the product and the demand was phenomenal. Thousands upon thousands of packets a day were being sold – it was incredible.’

Paul Hewerdene, of London-based marketing agency Earnest, was full of praise for Panini’s approach to how to claim the market in 2014 – especially the distribution.

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

He says, ‘A friend gave my kids a couple of albums that he picked up from Tesco and once we got that I said we should start collecting. Pretty much every newsagent or supermarket you went into, they would be there and even when we went on holiday to Portugal they were point-of-sale at Lidl. The on-line swaps element for the virtual album was also a brilliant concept.

‘You would be opening up virtual packets of stickers using codes from the back of the physical shiny stickers (five free stickers for every code) and the whole experience was amazing. You could swap with people from all over the world and it was fantastic for the brand. The virtual album was a slightly condensed version of the main album but with extra badges for each nation. There was even a leaderboard ranking those who finished fastest.’

Another key element to Panini’s success was its ability – for a fee – to use the branding that fans see elsewhere before and during the World Cup, both in terms of tournament logos and those sported by the competing nations.

Angus Montgomery of *Design Week* sees this as an important way to engage football supporters – a more discerning bunch than they are sometimes given credit for.

He says, ‘I think [design is] very important – but it’s not so much the design of the stickers and the albums themselves that’s the key thing, it’s the fact

that they are a collection of all the iconography and designs around the World Cup.

‘With each Panini album you’ve got something that brings together that year’s World Cup branding, badges of all the participating teams, photography of the stadia and portraits of the players.

‘I can’t really compare them with others because I don’t know much about Panini’s rivals, which is probably an indication of how dominant they are. I think what Panini does well is keep the editorial design relatively simple, create something that appeals to people’s completism and – most importantly – has the rights to show all the participating teams’ photography and branding (with the notable exception of the England team).’

John Baulch, publisher for *Toy World*, was one of many collectables insiders to get caught up in the excitement generated by Panini. He cites three major factors for Panini’s *annus mirabilis*.

‘Good product. Attractive price point. Tremendous media coverage – there seemed to be a groundswell of articles from journalists reminiscing about how they used to love collecting stickers as a kid (guilty as charged, I wrote a piece in my blog and got dozens of replies from people who felt exactly the same and were collecting them again for the nostalgic thrill).’

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

As this book will highlight, Panini's golden era in the UK was during the 1980s. Having launched over here towards the end of the previous decade, the Italian company offered a variation on an old product that managed to catch the imagination of a generation of youngsters.

Those 'Children of the Eighties' – along with the football sticker collectors of the 90s with Merlin – are now of an age where the nostalgia default setting has kicked in. While some look back on childhood hobbies wistfully but realise they are rightfully consigned to another time of their lives, others, in large droves, feel no shame in regression on a grand scale.

Panini benefited hugely from the nostalgia factor last summer, as Smith acknowledges.

'[Collectors rediscovering their youth] played a huge part. We could pick this up on social media but also through tracking sales on Epos. For example there was a group of independent retailers in Canary Wharf who were selling at a rapid rate because they were getting traders/bankers coming in buying boxes at a time. Tracking on Epos gives us the ability to view sales and allowed us to re-order to make sure we were never short of supply.'

Rich Johnson, of football nostalgia website Football Attic, was one of those returning collectors from the 1980s – although he was back in the game long before the 2014 tournament

STUCK ON YOU

– who firmly subscribes to the maxim ‘There’s Panini and then the rest’ when it comes to football stickers.

‘It sounds bad, but yes I do...Even now, where Merlin has had the official Premier League collection for years, meaning that’s technically what the playgrounds of Britain deal in, I can’t help but see them as sort of unofficial, knock-off stickers. That’s very strong social conditioning at work there! That said, I did collect two *Daily Mirror* sticker albums in 1987 and 1988 and thoroughly enjoyed their more free-form nature, but generally only have an interest in Panini now.’

While it was common for work colleagues to create a whole new social group by swapping among themselves, there were also plenty of adult collectors denied an easy route to getting rid of those doubles and trebles.

While Twitter had still been in its infancy in 2010, the social media site now created a swapping fraternity on a grand scale – much of it co-ordinated by Panini’s own Twitter feed. With the hashtag #gotgotneed playing on the old patter from the playground routine, mature collectors were encouraged to swap with perfect strangers. A huge amount of trust was required to take part in the process but it seemed to work. Panini could be seen to be doing its bit for harmonising domestic and even international relations.

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

It might be a cliché, when adults are buying products aimed predominantly at children, but in some cases it really was ‘for my kids, not me’ when it came to purchasing Panini World Cup stickers. Living vicariously through one’s children proved an effective, and simple, way to bond in the technological age.

Hewerdene says, ‘As parents, they were making that call to pay for their children and would probably have remembered doing it themselves as a kid. From my own perspective it was great to get the kids away from the TV or iPad and sit down at breakfast every morning to work on our album. It’s a nice family thing to do. My children were starting to recognise more of the players and the badges – it’s a brilliant way to market the World Cup to children. It makes the World Cup more accessible and interesting for the kids to engage with the tournament.’

That engagement was duly acknowledged at the Licensing Awards 2014 in September, the Panini 2014 World Cup collection winning in the Best Written, Listening or Learning category. Panini UK followed that up with the Product of the Year title at October’s National Federation of Retail Newsagents (NFRN) Awards.

It wasn’t just Panini itself that capitalised on the company’s heritage during the summer of 2014.

One of the more ambitious projects around the Panini motif in and around the last World Cup was

STUCK ON YOU

the brainchild of Rob Manley, curator at the Proud Archivist gallery.

The site in London (N1) had already secured a photo exhibition called I Scored A Goal In A FIFA World Cup Final, featuring casual shots of all the living players to have achieved that feat prior to Mario Götze's effort in July 2014. Management then turned their attention to what else they could focus around the World Cup in order to bring people in over the tournament.

Manley elaborates, 'We thought to ourselves, we had our wonderful 60-foot by ten-foot light wall so what could we do with that as a support to the photo exhibition – it started life as coming up with an idea of what we could do as a support act to the key exhibition.

'The idea of Panini came into play because of its World Cup history and poignancy to schoolboys around the world, including England, and for me and my partner here, Hector Proud, Panini was big for us growing up. So when the word "Panini" came on to the table my first idea – and it was almost laughable – out of my mouth came, "What if we could get every Panini sticker that they have ever produced for World Cups on our light wall?"

'I knew that no matter how many stickers there were we could do it because we have such a vast square footage of light wall space to do it on that no matter how small or otherwise we would size the

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

pictures to fill the wall. Every single sticker they've ever produced for a World Cup on our light wall, oh my God wouldn't that be incredible. It just so happened that our light wall is made up of 12 panels and it just so happened that Panini started its World Cup albums in 1970 so between then and 2014 there were 12 World Cups. There was a numbers poetry that just worked by coincidence and was a "meant to be" kind of idea.'

With the germ of the concept only popping into Manley's head 11 weeks before the tournament, a race against time ensued to get the exhibition ready for the start of the tournament.

With Panini's World Cup album launching around this time in the UK, it did not prove easy for Manley to attract the attention of its Tunbridge Wells base.

As will become apparent throughout this book, however, many roads in the history of football stickers lead to Peter Warsop, now group licensing director at Panini following a career of more than 30 years in the business (with time for a period in retirement somewhere in between).

Manley, the Proud Archivist and all those who got to see the exhibition have good reason to be grateful to Warsop.

Manley reiterates, '[Peter's] an incredible guy and when I got to him he made it happen because before too long I was right into the bowels of the

STUCK ON YOU

Panini art studio and we were talking about their entire collection and we established that they have it all in archive. When I looked up the history of Panini and realised how many times it had changed hands I wondered whether all the archive had changed hands efficiently and was still around? They could easily have said, “We don’t have 1970 and 1974, we don’t know where they went between this takeover or that.”

‘Anything could have gone missing but it hadn’t. What was interesting was the earliest stuff hadn’t been digitised so there was a certain amount of extra work to do there. What worked in my favour was that after each World Cup they had brought out a complete book and they had the pages of those books for me. God forbid I had had to do any scanning because that would just have looked messy anyway. What went on the walls were the pages from the books – the early stuff is what they digitised – because after each Panini collection they now bring out a whole book in annual form.

‘So we did it. It was incredibly stressful. There were times in the space of a couple of hours when it was happening then not happening – there was no way it was going to happen, hang on we have a chance, oh no it’s not...that could have been two hours in one day on the journey to putting up these panels of Panini stickers. So that is how it came about – from the word “Panini” and what that

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

invoked in me as a schoolboy sticker collector and then, now as a gallery director, we had every single World Cup sticker that they've ever produced on a wall.'

Parents and children flocked to the exhibition while Panini even had its World Cup party at the venue after visiting employees were taken aback by the pervasiveness of 'their' brand that struck them upon entry.

Media attention was huge with *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *FourFourTwo* among those to cover the exhibition in print while BBC's *The One Show* and *ITV News* – the latter just ahead of England's game against Uruguay – shed further light.

An exhibition on the same theme is now set to be replicated at the FIFA museum in Zurich while Manley believes there is more scope for his own gallery to work with Panini again.

'I said to them when they left their World Cup party that I had a feeling we would be doing another project with Panini before the 2018 World Cup,' says Manley.

The National Football Museum in Manchester upped the ante when it re-introduced the 'Swap Shop' concept to its buildings in the lead-up to and during the World Cup. From that idea was forged the most spectacular piece of artwork to use football stickers in a collage – granted it might be

STUCK ON YOU

the first so had no competition at that stage – that had ever been seen.

Adam Comstive, marketing and communications officer for the museum, was the man behind an ingenious way in which to make the most of unwanted doubles.

He explains, ‘As we had a museum swap pile to help get the meets going, we noticed the huge amount of swaps and spares that were building up. The idea for the artwork came about as a way to make some good use of all those spare Ronaldos, Toures and Higuains in particular that every collector got with their album.

‘I thought that a piece of giant pixel art depicting an iconic World Cup moment would be a great use for them, and be something that could go on display in the museum.

‘Once we found an artist to work with we realised we’d need to involve all the stickers and give them their own colour reference based on the shirt colour, with team photos and stadiums and of course shinies given their own role. We’re pretty sure this hasn’t been done before, but ended up with a 4m x 2.5m canvas split into 20 sheets so people could easily put their stickers on. In total it uses 3,000 stickers.’

The artist in question was Dan Farrimond, a specialist in pixelated art through his Illartrate brand, who was in overall charge of making sure

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

thousands of Panini stickers were placed in an orderly fashion.

‘We agreed on the image very quickly,’ says Farrimond, ‘which is testament to how iconic it is – in fact, I had already used the 1966 photo of Bobby Moore in my initial downscaling tests even before we spoke about what picture to use. When Englishmen think of the World Cup, I suppose [Bobby Moore lifting the World Cup] is the first thing that springs to mind, so that’s what we went for.

‘Having settled on a source picture, I transferred the image to a grid 36 high by 85 wide. Then, each pixel was assigned a colour from one of 13 categories incorporating each of the 640 stickers in the 2014 Panini World Cup album to create a gigantic painting by numbers canvas.

‘I would say it actually took longer to prepare the grid – that is, cutting the boards down to size and drawing out markings and numbers – than putting the design together. Of course, collecting and applying the stickers took longer still, even with numerous helpers over the course of a couple of months. But since that was the fun part, it felt more like five minutes!’

Viewed from the top floor of the museum, the final exhibit is as eye-catching a piece of football-related artwork as one could wish to see. Farrimond is rightly proud of his involvement.

STUCK ON YOU

‘As a football fan myself, browsing the wonderful assortment of historical artefacts at the National Football Museum makes me feel like a kid on the terraces again. It’s an honour to have had a hand in something that is displayed alongside all those prestigious trophies of football lore, and I think many who helped create the piece would feel the same way!’

It wasn’t just professional artists who turned their hand to capturing Panini in a new light at the last World Cup. One A Level in art and two enthusiastic doodlers was all it took to produce one of the more off-beat stories of Brazil 2014.

Oxford might be some way from the beaches of the Copacabana but for a few weeks in June and July a couple from that city had the nation (OK, some of it) on tenterhooks to see if they could fulfil an unlikely pledge.

A tight budget and a bit of alcohol was all it had taken to unleash Alex and Sian Pratchatt – the ‘Panini Cheapskates’ – upon an unsuspecting world.

Alex explains, ‘I had wanted to get the album and stickers in the run-up to the tournament when I saw a few friends had done so, but Sian quite rightly pointed out that there were one or two things that it might be a bit more sensible for us to spend our money on.

‘It was actually quite spontaneous...it was during the build-up to kick-off of the opening

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

Brazil–Croatia game on the first day, and I was staring at the empty album which I thought would remain forever unfilled, when I remembered a half-drunk conversation between the two of us from the pub a couple of nights previously where I’d suggested the drawings in a very non-serious way! It popped in to my head again and I blurted it out, and Sian (to my amazement) said, “OK, let’s do it.”

So began a voyage involving a host of pastel colours, late nights and 15 minutes of fame on the back of a pub conversation.

Once the commitment had been made and a loyal band of followers had been acquired there was no turning back – each of the 640 stickers from Panini’s 2014 World Cup album had to be drawn into their respective slots. Not to mention the media who had proffered space to the duo: BBC Radio 2, BBC Radio Wales, BBC Oxford, Heart FM, various websites and even an Oxford film-maker named Sam King, who put together a four-minute tribute.

There were periods when they might have felt there were easier ways to follow the World Cup but the intrepid couple doggedly stuck to their task.

‘Finding time was definitely the hardest part of the month,’ Alex admits. ‘We both have full-time, proper jobs – I manage a card shop in Oxford, Sian is an occupational therapist working with kids with autism – which meant the project took up a crazy

STUCK ON YOU

proportion of our free time. An average day went something like this: Wake up at 7.30am, drawing until 8.30am, work from 9am–1pm, draw for an hour on my lunch break, work until 5.30pm, then home by 6pm, with an evening of drawing, photos, tweeting, blogging, doing interviews, being on the radio etc...it was crazy!

‘If we were lucky, we could at least do all this with an actual game on in the background. I’d say in total Sian probably drew a fraction more than me, on the condition I handled all the other stuff. The blog ran to about 14,000 words (having never had a blog before) over the month, and I sent over 2,300 tweets (having never used Twitter before). Plus every picture had to be photographed and uploaded etc. It was quite an undertaking.

‘There really was no time to spare, to the extent that Sian went on a hen do during the month and had to spend time on a beach in Devon drawing Franck Ribery, and we both attended a friend’s birthday BBQ in London and spent the whole evening sat in a corner of their garden surrounded by pens and pencils.’

If the Proud Archivist and the National Football Museum could parade their Panini artwork last summer, why not an arts centre in Oxford? Not content with parading their ‘unique’ depictions online, the Cheapskates were also asked to make an exhibition of themselves in public.

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

Alex says, ‘We ummed and ahed about auctioning the album, when interest was at its peak, but in the end we realised we’d become too attached to it, so ultimately we’ve ended up keeping it. We hope to show it to our baffled descendants one day. We were asked to exhibit our “work” at an arts centre called Fusion Arts, but realised that our little album might be a bit small on its own, so we got a huge vinyl print of (almost) all of our stickers made, actual size, and hung that on the wall, with the album itself stationed on a little table in front.

‘Sian even went the whole hog and got some (tongue-in-cheek) white cotton gloves for people to wear so they could have a peruse. It went down very well, everyone at the launch was super lovely about it.’

The 1966 World Cup had Pickles the dog, 2010 had Paul the octopus while Brazil 2014’s cult attraction came brandishing a pencil case. While the pooch and mollusc failed to make it back for the following tournament, we might not have heard the last of Alex and Sian.

‘Plenty of folk got in touch asking us to do a sticker of them, mainly for use in the “My Panini” space in the inside front cover of the album,’ says Alex. ‘Scott Gordon, a former professional who used to play for Southampton, asked us for one and he loved the results, despite my ham-fisted rendering of his face. Someone from Spain wants

STUCK ON YOU

us to do a La Liga album, someone from France wants a Ligue Un album.

‘The football team I play for, Union Street FC in Oxford, travel to Germany every May for a tournament with 31 other (German) teams. There’s plenty of characters there, with some good faces...I have a feeling we may have to have a stab at a few of them too.

‘We’re open to the idea of doing something similar again. In fact, I’d be amazed if we don’t end up doing one when the Euros roll round in 2016!’

Journalists found themselves getting immersed in the craze as everyone wanted to know about this Panini phenomenon (Simon Jack from BBC Radio Four’s *Today* programme took up the challenge as part of an investigation into the cost of collecting, for example). Panini’s World Cup albums even now have a resident chronicler in the form of *Guardian* feature writer John Crace, who has been collecting from the very start in 1970.

‘In 2010 I noticed it was taking off again,’ says Crace, ‘as I wrote a piece in *The Guardian* in April/May that got picked up because the *Today* radio programme asked me to come on. But in 2014 it went bonkers on Twitter, eBay and chat rooms and I was asked to write bigger pieces. The last sticker I needed for 2014 came from a friend of my daughter up at university who contacted me via Twitter and very kindly forwarded it in the post.

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

‘There was an e-mail group set up at *The Guardian* where collectors regularly put up their swaps online. People just want numbers, it doesn’t matter who or what is on it. I remember my wants from the numbers.’

While Panini made a lot of money out of the tournament, so did a number of eager sticker/card dealers, keen to make a killing while the sun shone on the brand.

Pavle Djordjevic conducted a painstaking piece of research for his Cardz Review website, based around the number of items sold on eBay from early June until late August 2014 using the keywords ‘Panini World Cup’:

- * 371,823 new items listed
- * Average price for the item – \$14.82
- * Average starting price for these soccer cards and stickers – \$4.58
- * Total sales – \$4,080,075
- * Total bids – 756,119
- * Items offered – 1,119,212
- * Average bids per listing – 2.03
- * Sellers per day – 1,509

Most of the very best-selling Panini World Cup items during the period came under the ‘Panini Prizm’ autographed range – a high-end trading card collection – along with a lot of money being

fetches for the earliest World Cup collections. Nonetheless the overall contribution towards that \$4m-plus figure for what were, seemingly, readily available stickers from the latest World Cup album was considerable.

Even players and celebrities got in on the act for the 2014 World Cup, doing Panini's public relations for the company.

Italy forward Mario Balotelli, whimsical fellow that he is, managed to generate both positive and negative press for the brand in quick succession – a microcosm of the man himself. When he scored the winner against England his decision to tweet his team's double-page spread in the Panini album covering the player spots entirely in his own sticker, strapline "Why Always Me?", was seen as another maverick act by a highly-coveted striker. Two games later, with Italy having exited the tournament following two subsequent defeats, the soon-to-be Liverpool attacker was then lambasted by teammate Daniele De Rossi who said, "We need real men, not Panini stickers or characters."

Costa Rica forward Joel Campbell's decision to post the empty-packeted after-effects of his vain attempt to find himself in 50 packets of stickers was considered less narcissistic. A relatively low profile and affiliation to a tournament underdog can do wonders for perception.

JUST LIKE OLD TIMES

Singer Ed Sheeran, comedian Josh Widdicombe and politician Ed Balls took time out from their day jobs to regularly tweet their wants and swaps on Twitter while TV presenter Ben Shephard thanked Panini for helping his kids to complete their album.

In the words of Blur's song 'Bang', 'Everybody's doing it so – do it too.'