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Strat-O-Matic Booms in Glen Head

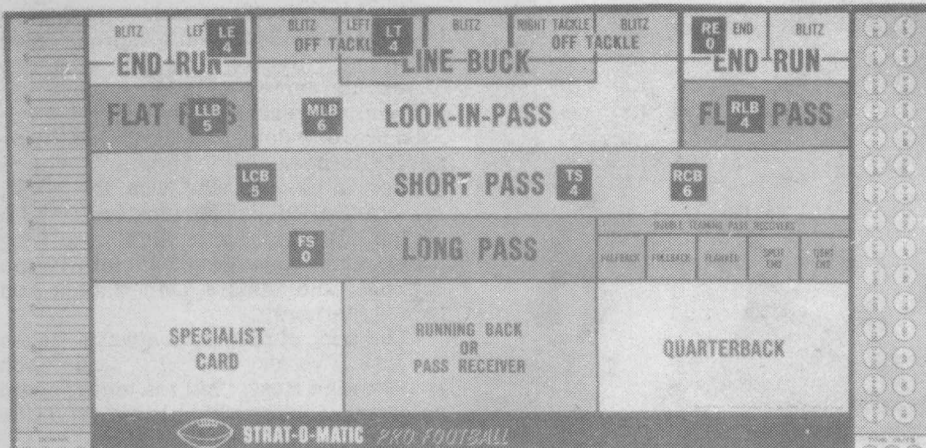
by Steve Pappas

Harold Richman, private owner of a Glen Head business, marketed Strat-O-matic game products in 1961, which have now become so popular that they have generated a new breed of humans -- the "Strat-O-Matic Fanatics."

Even though the theory of the tabletop game seems quite simple Richman asserts, "For a game to be successful, it has got to depend on something more than throwing dice, it's got to be complicated enough to be challenging." In an age when most sports games seem to beep and boop, Strat-O-Matic uses a game board, dice and player cards and charts of the batting, fielding and pitching records of real-life major-league players to re-create game situations.

What makes the product so popular is that the individual playing becomes more responsible for the outcome of the game than just the throw of the dice. Once each player chooses his major league team, he then has to be able to manipulate his players so as to achieve the best results possible. Throughout the game the player is faced up against many tough managerial decisions. Should he allow Willie Randolph to attempt to steal? Should he pinch hit for Ron Guidry? Should he intentionally walk home-run hitter Dave Kingman? The excitement and pressure that these questions create is what has made the game so popular.

Strat-O-Matic, however, was not always the prospering Glen Head business that it now is. Like many



inventions it began in a modest basement and then developed into a successful enterprise.

As a child Richman was an avid sports fan, always a devout follower of the N. Y. Yankees. He said, "Since I was only an average athlete I was not able to satisfy my intense thirst for sports through active participation." Richman then tried to develop a game which would enable him, in an indirect way, to become associated with professional sports. At the age of eleven, in 1947, Richmond created the forerunner of Strat-O-Matic, a board game that simulated the production of professional athletes. For the next few years he was ... well, like a kid with a new toy. Knowing that his product was far from perfect he constantly revised it, adding and diminishing.

his idea to a toy company, Richman began to market the product himself. "In 1961, with a ping-pong table and a typewriter in my dad's basement, I went to work," said Richman.

For more than two years Richman was losing money at a quick rate. It looked as if Strat-O-Matic (originated from a non-existent word, strategicamatical) would go into oblivion. But in June and July of 1963 the orders for the product increased tremendously, and Richman started making a profit.

From that point on it was a dream come true. "My business in Glen Head is the embodiment of all the hopes and aspirations I had as a kid," said Richman.

What makes Strat-O-Matic so interesting is the fanatical followers that it has attracted. At North Shore High School there are many students who play the game consistently. Each summer juniors Robby Babich, Donald Tag, and Anthony Curiali get together and play the baseball version. All three students said that no matter how many times they roll the dice, they never get tired of the game. It becomes addicting after awhile.

Glen Head is not the only town with "Strat-O-Matic" fanatics; in fact they exist in almost every town within the United States. Each edition of the game, Baseball, Pro Football, College Football, Basketball, and Hockey, has its own cult. All across the country conventions are held where the fanatics gather to hold tournaments and share the many Strat-O-Matic joys they have experienced.

For five years Richman believed his idea was unique, but in 1952 a friend of his introduced him to another tabletop game which was quite similar to Strat-O-Matic. Richmond enjoyed the game but, "I was shook up. Now I had to think of something that would change the game so as to make it a commercial product. After a few years I developed the idea of the three dice, which was the key to Strat-O-Matic uniqueness."

From that point on Richman knew his future would be in games. Even after graduating from Bucknell University in 1958 with a business degree he still held that belief. Richman's father had an insurance business and wanted his son to join. "I knew I was guaranteed some success, but I just didn't want to sell insurance," Richman said.

After many successful attempts to sell