

# Strat-O-Mania Hits For Yet Another Year

By DAVID DRIVER

HYATTSVILLE, Md.—In January, hundreds of baseball fans are expected to converge again on a factory/warehouse building on Long Island.

In the dead of winter, they'll take a number outside the place and stand in line to be among the first to buy 1993 season cards for the tabletop baseball game Strat-O-Matic.

"People come from all over the country to pick up the cards," says Harold Richman, who created the game in 1958. "We had about 300 or 400 people last year."

Strat-O-Matic, based in Glen Head, N.Y., and celebrating its 35th anniversary, takes pride in its realistic player cards for virtually every major leaguer. The game is played with three dice, plus fielding and ballpark charts. Individual player cards determine the outcomes of dice rolls and include ratings for

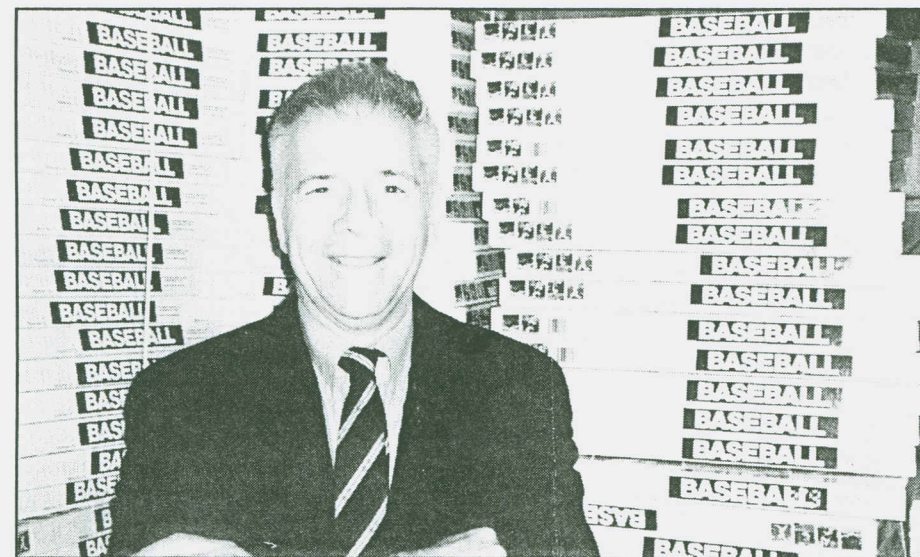
fielding, bunting, running, holding runners on, etc., based on performances from the previous season.

When the 1981 players' strike postponed the July 14 major league All-Star Game at Cleveland's Municipal Stadium, a Strat-O-Matic game was played there on that day with representative player cards.

A radio station in Boston, with the aid of 28 affiliates, played the Red Sox schedule during the strike with S-O-M recreations. One newspaper in California ran daily accounts of all 571 unplayed 1981 games using S-O-M.

Richman's tabletop creation eventually became the first of its kind to be displayed at the Hall of Fame.

When the white die is thrown, a one, two or three means the batter's card will reveal the outcome. A four, five or six reverts to the pitcher's card.



**Strat-O-Man.** Inventor Harold Richman gives diehards a delayed Christmas

The two red dice are added together and will reveal typical baseball results on all player cards: groundout, walk, flyout, single, strikeout, etc.

Managerial strategies are best utilized in a one-on-one game against an opponent, though many youngsters and adults have played thousands of games solitaire. Players can decide when to bunt, change pitchers or use pinch-hitters.

S-O-M is really two games in one. A basic-version game can take about 30 minutes. The advanced version takes about an hour and compensates for lefty-righty matchups, weather and ballpark sizes.

"I have played in a league every year of my life, and I've played solitaire every year," says Glenn Guzzo, managing editor of the Akron Beacon-Journal in Ohio, who began playing S-O-M in 1963 growing up in Dearborn, Mich. "Very clearly the biggest change in the game was in 1972, when they added the advanced version with two-sided cards with lefty vs. righty."

Guzzo handles the editorial content for Strat Fan, an independent monthly publication with 2,000 subscribers.

Chicago financial planner John Kreuz has been playing the game nearly since it was released to the public in the early 1960s. Since

1986, he has run an annual S-O-M tournament sanctioned by the company. This year's tournament will be held in Chicago the second week of January using the 1992 cards, with 1993 cards released before the players return home.

"It's almost like a delayed Christmas," Kreuz says.

Kreuz and Bill Meinhardt of Boston, the defending champion, are the only two-time winners. This year's fee is \$150. Some of the professionals represented in past events include lawyers, doctors, accountants, a delivery man, students, salespeople, teachers and government employees.

Strat-O-Matic, founder Richman says, plans no major event to celebrate its 35th anniversary. But the \$38 game will get some free, unsolicited exposure this spring when it's featured in Spike Lee's next movie, "Crooklyn."

"He was an avid player in the 1970s," says Richman, whose company sent cards to the film producers. "During the movie two, three or four boys will be playing the game on the stoop throughout the film."

And they didn't have to wait in line outside a Long Island warehouse to get their cards.

*David Driver is a free-lance writer based in Hyattsville.*