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20-Year-Old Photographer's Shots Land in Bowman Baseball

April 29, 2024 By [Chad Cushing](#)

In just five short years, Brendon Baranov's photography journey has evolved from dugouts of high school sandlots to camera wells at major league ballparks across the country.

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Baranov graduated high school in spring of 2021 and wasted no time pursuing his dreams of becoming a sports creative. He moved to Tempe, AZ and enrolled at Mesa Community College for the upcoming fall semester. However, after a photography internship opened with Major League Baseball at the heralded Arizona Fall League, it became clear to Baranov that his time was best spent at the ballpark, not the classroom. Baranov stuck with school through the following spring until he signed on with Camelback Ranch Glendale, the Spring Training home of the Dodgers and White Sox, when he decided it was time to go full-time as a blossoming baseball content creator.



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(Baseball photographer and videographer Brendon Baranov, 20, at Camelback Ranch Glendale during 2024 Spring Training. Photo courtesy Brendon Baranov)

With the release of 2023 Bowman Baseball came the return of the subset “AFL All-Stars,” which showcases 15 of the prospect league’s top performers from the previous season. Baranov’s photos were featured on the cards of Luisangel Acuna, Heston Kjerstad, Luis Matos, Masyn Winn and Nick Yorke. The Bowman 1st of Justyn-Henry Malloy also uses his photograph.

While he was optimistic to make the print edition, Baranov says the decisions on which photographs are included in the set is left a mystery to photographers. “(Topps) doesn’t tell you when they’re using your

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(Left to right: 2023 Bowman cards of Luisangel Acuna, Heston Kjerstad, Luis Matos, Masyn Winn, Nick Yorke and Justyn-Henry Malloy)

With no communication from Topps on where his photographs lie in the set, Baranov was left on his own to dissect images and pick out which of his may have made the cut. "When you start going through cards, you're no longer looking for the name on the card, you're looking for if that picture is engraved in your brain already," he said.



“If you looked at a picture, you would know instantly if it’s yours. You see a picture of

Luisangel Acuna running back to the dugout with his uniform covered in dirt and you’re like, I saw that one get posted by the Fall League, I uploaded that one.”

Since Baranov’s work for the Arizona Fall League was subsidized by Major League Baseball, Topps does not have to compensate Baranov for rights to the images. From interactions with other industry photographers, Baranov shared that photographers who do get paid from Topps receive a flat rate for their rights, regardless of how many images are used in print.

Whatever AFL cards Baranov failed to pull from packs were hunted down online and added to his personal collection. “I have each one cased up,” he said. Baranov began collecting during the 2020 pandemic and saw it as an opportunity to share a new passion with his friends. The ripping experience that got him hooked came when he pulled a Luis Robert pink refractor rookie card out of 2020 Topps Chrome.



(Baranov greets Chicago White Sox #1 prospect Colson Montgomery. Montgomery played for the Glendale Desert Dogs of the Arizona Fall League in 2023. Photo courtesy Brendon Baranov)

Now, his personal collection consists of fan-favorite Dodgers like Andre Ethier, Matt Kemp and Will Smith, as well as cards of players he's become friends with through work. His most prized cards are Bowman 1st of friends Colson Montgomery, Heston Kjerstad, Jackson Merrill, Noelvi Marte and Max Muncy. "It's become not just investing in the card, it's investing in the person himself because I'm so attached to the guy already, I'm already rooting for him," he said.

For an avid card collector and sports photographer like Baranov, there are few bigger accomplishments than finding your way onto a baseball card. However, Baranov joked when reviewing his work that made it to

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The crossover between collector and baseball professional is growing in popularity recently, even to the point where players like [Matt Strahm](#) rip cards in Major League clubhouses. Baranov met Strahm recently and the two talked about the hobby on-field at Citizen's Bank Park in Philadelphia. Baranov said Strahm's love for collecting was apparent, "He had told me he'll never stop doing it as long as he's in the bigs."

Creating personal relationships with players was the most redeeming part of Baranov's two years with the Arizona Fall League and Camelback Ranch. In his time as a photographer and videographer for the AFL's eight teams, Baranov captured game action of over 30 now- big leaguers.

"It's an unbelievable opportunity that isn't publicized correctly I feel," Baranov said of the AFL, "From a player standpoint, it's a great way to connect with players ... they don't take anything for granted and take everything as a gift still."

Some of the hobby's hottest prospects like Jordan Walker, Henry Davis, Jackson Merrill, Matt McLain and Jasson Rodriguez all played in the AFL before making their way to the senior circuit.

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(Baranov fist bumps San Francisco Giants #1 prospect Marco Luciano. Luciano played for the Scottsdale Scorpions of the Arizona Fall League in 2021. Photo courtesy Brendon Baranov)

Baranov followed a similar path to those he photographed when he made the leap from the Fall League to Major League Baseball in Spring of 2023 as a live content creator for the San Francisco Giants and Oakland Athletics. It was a homecoming for the Bay Area native.

“I never got to go to Opening Day as a kid. We grew up in the bay and were Dodgers fans, the Dodgers never played Opening Day in San Francisco,” Baranov said. “I don’t take any of it for granted, but I’ve been to a World Series game, a playoff game, an All-Star Game, a Home Run Derby, I’ve done all that- but I’d never

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The Bay-Area native's first Opening Day didn't disappoint, as he documented then-Angels' star Shohei Ohtani make his second Opening Day start. Ohtani struck out 10 over six innings pitched, but the game's most memorable play came in the bottom of the 5th, when Angels right fielder Hunter Renfroe made a miraculous no-look catch. "I can't tell you anything that happened in that game besides Hunter Renfroe's catch," Baranov said. "It's all a fever dream ... being back home felt better than anything."



(Baranov shares a laugh with Seattle Mariners outfielder Julio Rodriguez. Photo courtesy Brendon Baranov)

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The opportunity with Victus blossomed after they reached out to Baranov to freelance an offseason workout session with Mariners' outfielder Julio Rodriguez. Due to the private nature of the workout, Victus wanted to ensure Rodriguez was familiar with their content team. Thanks to a mutual agency connection between Rodriguez and Guardians' pitcher Triston McKenzie, a friend of Baranov's, Victus discovered Baranov was the right man for the job.

At just 20 years old, Baranov has climbed the baseball creative ranks and is excited for his next chapter with Victus, where he will work alongside Fernando Tatis Jr., Adley Rutschman, Adolis Garcia, Julio Rodriguez, Anthony Volpe and more for MLB's 2nd most-swung bat company.

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(Seattle Mariners outfielder Julio Rodriguez poses for Baranov's film camera. Photo courtesy Brendon Baranov)

Baranov's job with Victus entails documenting behind-the-scenes happenings such as crafting custom orders for professionals, private cage sessions and promotional content for new releases. The brand's latest endeavor tasked Baranov with creating marketing material for the release of the "Pencil Bat," a two-piece composite bat designed to look like a classic No. 2 wooden pencil.

The bat, now entirely sold out in every size, exploded in popularity on social media thanks to Baranov's clips of Fernando Tatis Jr., Adolis Garcia and internet personality Eric Sim blasting moonshots, garnering millions of views.