



Setting The Record Straight: The 1994 Collector's Choice White Letter Variation(s)

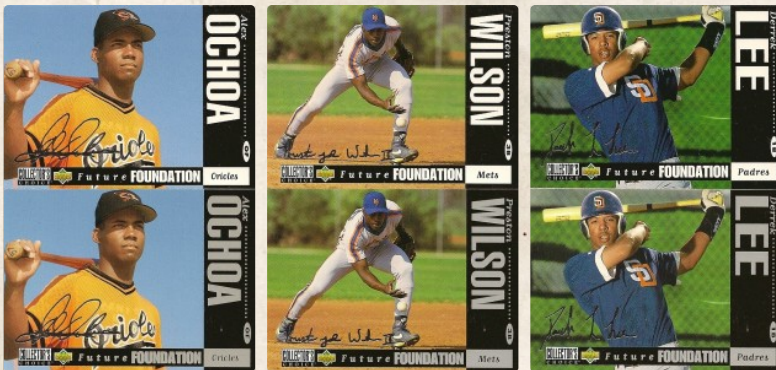
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I remember several years ago when I was in graduate school, learning eBay for the first time and selling off my card collection to raise some extra money for groceries, books, and beer. I listed a group of Alex Rodriguez cards that I had thought would fetch \$20, maybe \$30. In the end, the group sold for more than \$400 because it contained a rare variation of Alex's 1994 Collector's Choice Future Foundation Silver Signature rookie card. The variation had something to do with the color of the letter "A" on the back of the card, commencing Alex's brief biographical write-up. It was supposed to be gray, but the lone letter was white instead, and as far as I remember, the rest of the card featured the standard Silver Signature design, meaning that the text on the front of the card was all in gray, not white. Perhaps I am remembering incorrectly, but more than 10 years later I have yet to encounter another 1994 Collector's Choice White Letter Variation exactly like that.



The White Letter Variation for which collectors pay such serious premiums these days is different. Like the Derek Jeter card pictured to the left, the White Letter Variation shows the same silver foil facsimile signature, but the rest of the text on front is all in white. As you can plainly see from the other examples pictured below, every player in the Future Foundations subset can be found with this variation to his Silver Signature card, which is a parallel to the standard issue that does not feature any facsimile signature whatsoever. The Silver Signature parallels were seeded one per every wax pack and three per every jumbo pack. There also exists a Gold Signature parallel that was seeded one per every wax or jumbo box or five per every factory set. The Gold Signature parallels are some of the most coveted cards from 1994, and although some websites like baseballcardpedia.com reference them, it is unknown

whether the Gold Signatures can be found with a White Letter Variation. The Silver Signature White Letter Variations, however, do exist, and they are extremely rare, with ARod and Jeter examples selling for multiple thousands of dollars in top grades, and even common players who never played more than a few Major League games can fetch as much as \$30 to \$50 in raw condition.



There is perhaps no other variation from the 1990s more misunderstood than the 1994 Collector's Choice Silver Signature White Letter Variation. For several years, The Standard Catalog of Baseball Cards has included the following statement in its pricing for the 1994 Collector's Choice set: "#647 Alex Rodriguez White Letters. Some ARod Silver Signature parallels were mistakenly printed on base cards with his name and other details on front and back printed in white rather than gray." Currently, it is the

only price guide that acknowledges the variation, but because it only acknowledges the ARod variation, [Professional Sports Authenticator](#), or PSA, the industry leader in graded sports cards, refuses to acknowledge that the variation exists for other players besides ARod, most importantly Derek Jeter.



According to PSA, in order to register a variation of an issue, PSA's research department requires the submission of said variation to be accompanied by printed materials that directly reference the variation, and since The Standard Catalog only acknowledges the ARod, PSA has refused to hear the overwhelming collector demand that other 1994 Collector's Choice Future Foundation Silver Signature White Letter Variation cards be distinguished from their standard Silver Signature cards. Casual readers and even many long-time hobbyists may not understand the significance of this. No big deal, right?

Wrong! To designate a separate line item for the White Letter Variations in PSA's population report would essentially create a new Derek Jeter rookie card for [Set Registry collectors](#) to pursue. Moreover, creating a separate category for the variation would also highlight its scarcity. Since so few are known to exist in any condition, in another ten or twenty years it will most likely stand as one of the single rarest Derek Jeter rookie cards to encounter in PSA 10 Gem Mint condition, commanding prices as high as \$10,000, or more.



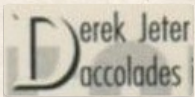
Although it is not a print resource, Baseballcardpedia offers a somewhat better statement on the White Letter Variation. "A legitimate variation on the Alex Rodriguez card (#647) was verified several years after release. The standard card features the "A" from Alex on the card back text in grey/silver whereas the variation features his name in white. It's believed that the A-Rod "White A" variation is a significantly tougher card, but exact estimates of its scarcity are not known. In subsequent years, other cards (such as Johnny Damon) were also verified to have this white letter variation – thus it's generally believed that the entire Future Foundations subset was produced with white (and standard grey)

letter variations." This acknowledgement, however, sounds more like the variation I described in my introductory anecdote than the variations clearly pictured in this post. Although they supply no visual proof, further down in their listing for the 1994 Collector's Choice set, Baseballcardpedia also states: "Like in the base set, "White Letter" variations also exist for the Gold and Silver Signature parallels of the Future Foundations subset." Gold Signature White Letter variations! What?

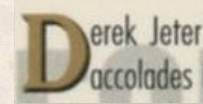
Here is the BGS population report for the 1994 Collector's Choice Derek Jeter variations, including an erroneous category for a standard, non-facsimile signature White Letter Variation:

Set	Player	#	7.0	7.5	8.0	8.5	9.0	9.5	10	Total
1994 Collector's Choice	Derek Jeter	644	2	6	11	28	14	6	0	67
1994 Collector's Choice Gold Signature	Derek Jeter	644	0	0	2	9	12	1	0	24
1994 Collector's Choice Silver Signature	Derek Jeter	644	1	2	8	15	19	2	0	50
1994 Collector's Choice Silver Signature White Letter Variation	Derek Jeter	644	0	0	2	3	1	1	0	7
1994 Collector's Choice White Letter Variation	Derek Jeter	644	1	4	8	34	60	13	0	124

To make things even more confusing, [Beckett Grading Services](#), or BGS, the industry leader in modern graded sports cards, mistakenly created a separate grading category for the Derek Jeter White Letter Variation of the standard, non-Silver Signature issue in addition to a separate grading category for the Silver Signature White Letter Variation. While we certainly appreciate Beckett's effort to distinguish the Silver Signature White Letter Variation, to set the record straight, every regular non-Silver Signature issue shows a white letter on back, so don't be fooled into buying one of these under the impression that it is the Silver Signature White Letter Variation.



Variations, parallels, printer's proofs, errors, and misprints comprise the core of advanced collecting. Most of the 514 cards comprising the legendary T206 Tobacco set, for example, can be found with 16 different advertisement backs, the rarest of which command small fortunes at market. The 1949 and 1954 Bowman sets and the landmark 1952 Topps set are also rife with variations. So, too, is the 1994 Collector's Choice set. Exactly how many, however, remains a mystery. Clearly, there is the Silver Signature White Letter Variation, pictured multiple times in this post, and this variation should absolutely be recognized by all grading companies. Perhaps a better name for this variation, however, should be the Silver Signature "White Lettering" Variation, because who knows if The Standard Catalog and my graduate school memories aren't both correct. Maybe there is a Silver Signature variation that looks exactly like the Silver Signature parallel except for the lone letter on back appearing in white instead of gray. An accurate name for this variation would then indeed be the Silver Signature "White Letter" Variation, as opposed to the "White Lettering" Variation. Do these two different variations also exist for the Gold Signature parallel, that is, a Gold Signature White Letter Variation as well as a Gold Signature White Lettering Variation? I've never seen either, but if they do, they'd be worth a boatload, and I sure hope to find one someday.



Happy Collecting,

Dave Thorn at Small Traditions

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