

Nigel's Webspaces News

A newsletter distributed by [Nigel's Webspaces](#), a website dedicated to the history of English football cards 1965/66 to 1979/80.

Issue 7

Continuing on the story of A&BC Chewing Gum, and beginning the story of FKS Publishers...

A&BC Chewing Gum legal case

[A&BC Chewing Gum](#) formed in 1949, and closed their doors in 1974. Two brothers, Douglas and Tony Coakley, (the 'C' from A&BC) were there at the start and the end, and both have kindly contributed to various bits of the [company story](#) told via my [Nigel's Webspaces](#) internet site. I don't pretend to have written a complete history of A&BC Chewing Gum (particularly since I focus mainly on football cards and A&BC produced so much more), but I do hope that I've helped to record and acknowledge some of their great contribution. I know from the many emails I receive just how much the little pieces of card (forgetting about the actual gum) that they produced over a 25 year period still mean to people today. Football cards are a snapshot of our childhood.



A&BC's end was as a result of a court case which resulted in the company being wound up and the assets acquired by or passed to (I'm not sure which) the other party in the court case, the U.S.-based Topps Chewing Gum. I'm not a lawyer, but I've done my best below to set out the facts from the court case, as I understand them. Much of the material comes from [this website](#).

A&BC Chewing Gum began a relationship with Topps in the late 50s or early 1960s. The agreement gave each party access to ideas, products and rights from the other e.g. Topps did very well from A&BC's Beatles arrangements in the early 60s, while A&BC benefitted from Topps' brands of chewing gum, including Bazooka Joe.

In 1967 A&BC Chewing Gum adopted new articles of association entitling Topps to appoint and remove a director who was given powers equivalent to a veto, and by all three shareholders and the company entering into an agreement which required unanimity for a number of important policy decisions. Although a minority shareholder, Topps therefore enjoyed a position of equal control with the two remaining individual shareholders.

Interestingly, I understand that Douglas Coakley was Topps' nominee on the Board. Apparently the arrangement worked well for a number of years, and then A&BC Chewing Gum faced some serious liquidity problems. Topps invoked their right to remove their director, Douglas Coakley, and appoint Topps' international marketing executive. Douglas and Tony Coakley refused to accept this decision, so Topps petitioned for a winding-up order on the company on 'just and equitable' grounds, in other words the Coakleys were not willing to accept the wording of their agreements with Topps. The Coakleys argued, apparently, that the agreements had been amended by an oral agreement two years before the court case. A&BC Chewing Gum lost the court case and the company was wound up.

I am curious to know whether any readers of this newsletter could provide more information or insights into this legal case. I'm sure that the case would have been traumatic for Douglas and Tony Coakley, and the outcome even more so. From a historical perspective I would love to know more about the details of this case, as it signals the end of perhaps the greatest football card production company from the 1950 to 1970 period. Can you help with any additional information?

For those readers who collect A&BC football cards you may not realise how big the Topps company is/was, and how much Topps cards are now valued at in the U.S. There is an excellent website in the form of a blog if you are interested in reading more about Topps products - [The Topps Archives](#).

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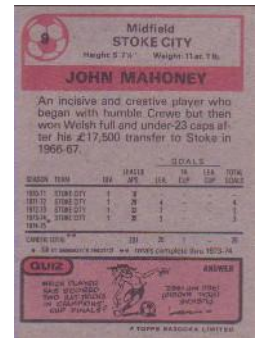
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Why Topps stopped producing football cards...

[Topps Chewing Gum](#) company took over from A&BC Chewing Gum after the 1974/75 court case. They physically moved much of A&BC's printing machinery and materials to Ireland and produced their first English football cards set in 1975/76 with a fairly unattractive set of cards on grey card paper. The market for A&BC cards would have been huge, but Topps produced



English and Scottish football cards for only seven years, until the 1981/82 season, and then came to a sudden halt. Their 1980/81 and 1981/82 sets were poor cards in sets of 3 players per card. I suspect that these sets will not become collectors' items. So what happened to Topps? Jeff, who was previously a writer for the Baseball Hobby News in the US in the 1980s, kindly supplied this information:



In the early 1980s Topps was in some financial difficulties. They had lost their monopoly in the courts on producing baseball cards, however that was not the main source of their monetary troubles which were a complicated array of issues, and Fleer and Donruss entered the market with baseball sets in 1981. The additional competition spread the baseball card dollar amongst 3 producers and after the 1981 season Topps decided to do some restructuring and cutting back at the Duryea, Pennsylvania plant and the factory in Ireland. They dropped their licenses for NBA basketball, NHL hockey, and English soccer all after the 81-82 seasons to cut costs, retaining only their Major League Baseball license and expanding to a full NFL license, having since 1970 only an agreement with the NFL Players Association and not the NFL itself.

As I can best remember they raised money through stock options and other various means so that by 1984 they were in much better shape. They returned to hockey that year and resumed their cooperative relationship with O-Pee-Chee in Canada. This relationship was very similar to that which Topps had with Scanlens for Aussie Rules Football and Rugby and, of course, with A&BC Chewing Gum for football. Topps eventually returned to the NBA in the late 1980s and finally purchased Merlin to give them an English based company for football.

Unfortunately, Topps only did a 1979 team logo set for the North American Soccer League (NASL), and missed a great opportunity to do sets with all the players that came to the USA from Europe and South America in the 1970s. The only NASL sets that exist were produced locally by the individual teams in varying years and are generally hard to get today.

Many thanks to Jeff for helping to add another piece to the puzzle of A&BC Chewing Gum and their football cards legacy.

Recently observed sales

- A complete set of loose stickers from the Panini Mexico 70 set sold for £4,300 (yes, you heard right!). I've heard many stories from ebay about sales not going through (spoilers having their few minutes of fun), so I'm wondering whether or not this was a genuine bid and whether the top bidder followed through on the sale.
- An empty album from this set, in excellent condition, sold for £747.
- A number of the A&BC Footballer Badges sold recently on ebay. Prices varied, including Jimmy Greaves £80, Nobby Stiles £60, Bobby Charlton £50 and Geoff Hurst £38.
- A complete set of 290 A&BC Chewing Gum 1971/72 purple backs sold for £511.
- An FKS Soccer 82 album, complete with stickers, sold for £62.

When you spot what you think are interesting items or prices, either on ebay, in dealers catalogues or auctions, please forward a link or email to cards@littleoak.com.au.

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FKS and Editorial FHER



While my website pays a lot of attention to A&BC Chewing Gum they were not the only football card or sticker producer during this period. [FKS Publishers](#) first appeared in England in 1966 through World Distributors, Manchester with an album printed in Spain. By 1967 they had moved to their own premises in London and began a 15-year period of producing very attractive and collectable stickers for the English market.

The clue to understanding FKS is to note that many of their albums are printed in Spain by Editorial FHER. Editorial FHER, based in Bilbao, appears to have been a printing and publishing company from the 1950s and still exists today. If I lived in Spain and my Spanish was a little better I would love to visit them and find out more. What is clear is that FHER produced a range of football sticker albums, perhaps starting with the 1966 World Cup for a world audience. The image above on the left is from an FHER Spanish collection from 1968, while the right is from the English FKS album. There are many similarities between these sets, including the use of coloured pen to cover over changes to clubs and strips!

FKS/FHER also produced albums and stickers in South American countries and the stickers and images are the same across the different countries (though obviously the language is different). The images below show an extract from a Peruvian edition of the Mexico 70 album (printed in Iberia) and the English FKS production (printed in England, though FKS were later to revert to printing their English albums in Spain). Interestingly, the text is not a Peruvian translation of the English version, so FKS perhaps had local producers or distributors developing their own player bios.



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One of the other common themes across these albums is the use of the 'kicking footballer' image. While not used for the English Mexico 70 album it was used for the 1966 World Cup Stars, World Cup 74 and Argentina 78 albums. The same image appears on the front on the 1970 Peru edition. I'm sure that there must be other country editions of FKS albums and stickers. If you know of, or own one, please let me know via this [email link](#).



Interestingly, the Argentina 78 wrapper has four different company names and addresses on the back of the wrapper:

FKS Publishers Ltd., Warwick House, 334 Kilburn High Road, London NW6 2QN

Vanderhout Internationale, Uitgaven B.V. Postbus 2356 Utrecht

Editorial FHER, S.A. Apartado 362, Bilbao, Espana

Ageducatifs, 30, rue Beaurepaire 75010, Paris

So, what is the history of FHER/FKS. By the early 1980s FKS in England had been taken over by an even stranger company called Quadriga. But perhaps that is a story for another day...

Nigel