

Aurora's Robert Thomas makes the cut in this year's Tim Hortons Upper Deck 10th Anniversary NHL Hockey Card set

There's growing evidence that Aurora's Robert Thomas has arrived as an NHL star.

The veteran centre, who won the Stanley Cup with St. Louis in 2019, led the St. Louis Blues in scoring in 2023-24 with 86 points and earned his first All-Star berth. Another sign that trumpets his ascension to the NHL's upper echelon is Thomas's appearance in the core set of this year's milestone edition of Tim Hortons' Upper Deck NHL Trading Cards.

It is the second year in a row that Thomas has made the cut in the base set that features 119 top NHL players, along with the legendary Tim Horton who is card #1.

The usual visual delights are available for aficionados in this colorful 234-card Tenth Anniversary edition.

In addition, there is a distinctive York Region presence in the 2024-2025 set.

Thomas is one of six York Region-born players in the base 120-card set, including his St. Louis teammate Jordan Binnington (#37), who was born in Richmond Hill; Nobleton's Adam Fantilli (#6) of the Columbus Bluejackets; Markham's Steven Stamkos (#9) of the Nashville Predators, but shown in his Tampa Bay Lightning jersey in this set; Newmarket's Quinton Byfield (#11) of the Los Angeles Kings; and Edmonton Oilers' superstar Connor McDavid (#97), born in Richmond Hill, but raised in Newmarket. The Aurora-born Thomas is also featured in the Above the Ice Subset as #AI11.

Interest in Robert Thomas cards by local collectors has grown over the last few years, according to Darryl DiRocco, owner of Box of Cards on 41 Industrial Parkway South in Aurora.

"I've sold a number of his cards at a premium. Interest in Robert Thomas cards is increasing. There's always more interest in local players just as there's more interest in cards connected to the major Toronto sports teams. Of the three major league teams, the Leafs make up 75% of card sales, followed by the Blue Jays at about 20%, and the Raptors at 5%. Basketball cards are less popular than baseball cards and hockey cards. It's hockey that pays the rent."

DiRocco, whose sports card business is booming, credits the Tim Hortons collections with stimulating the trading card market.

"The arrival of the first set in 2014 kick-started many collectors back into purchasing NHL cards. The first Tim Hortons set definitely got people back into the hobby."

The amiable owner of Box of Cards is a licensed Upper Deck dealer and is very familiar with the quality of the Tim Hortons Upper Deck cards.

"I really like the subsets this year. The set has good variety, high quality, and they are beautiful cards."

He commented on the value of the rarer cards in the collection, especially in the subsets, and confirmed the retail value of the Franchise Trios card #FT4 featuring the images of Draisaitl, McDavid, and Hyman: "The Franchise Trios will have good value and this card is already worth over \$100. I like the Sidney Crosby Retrospective, too—a great way to mark his career."

The Sidney Crosby Retrospective is, indeed, a charming feature of this 10th Anniversary collection. Crosby—who tallied his 1600th point last month to join an elite group of NHLers—has had a career worthy of such a tribute.

The cards are white-framed and backgrounds are in gold and black.

The nine cards are arranged chronologically from Sid the Kid being drafted #1 in 2005 to a card depicting his 1500th point. Conspicuously missing from the Retrospective is Crosby's Golden Goal for the Canadian Olympic team in 2010 in Vancouver. It's a disappointing omission.

The 2024-2025 Collector's Series features the traditional 120-card base set with all 32 clubs represented by two to five current players. The Leafs have six, including Horton. Embossed action images of the league's 119 top players, plus a vintage photo of Horton from the mid-60s, are superimposed on a metallic matte background that features twenty rays of light emanating from the bottom of the card with the lower corners presented in lines of team colors.

They are, indeed, dazzling shiny objects and the back of the cards delineate offensive production for up to five seasons. Disappointingly, the players' 2023-24 season stats are not included and the cards must have gone into production before last year's regular season ended.

The choice to go to production in the Spring instead of Summer has consequences for this collection since it does not acknowledge the movement of the Coyotes to Utah, the movement of big free agents like Stamkos to Nashville, and, eerily, two Johnny Hockey? cards serve as a chilling reminder of the tragic death of Gaudreau and his brother in August.

The Gaudreau cards, #48 in the base set and Pure Gold #8, encourage a sense of reflectivity when one glances through the album, reminding all collectors about the transitory nature of this life.

The 120-card base set is followed by eight subsets which dazzle the collector's eye, including: Frozen Hotshots, which features action photos of 18 of the game's top stars superimposed on a flaming hockey puck skidding across a cool blue ice surface; the Crosby, Bedard, Matthews, and McDavid cards are keepers in this subset and the backs of the cards offer a performance highlight from the 2023-24 season; True North Future is a salute to eighteen Canadian-born players whose action shots are superimposed on a red maple leaf sitting atop a metallic silver backdrop bordered by two red bars; the subset celebrates the depth of talent Team Canada will have in upcoming international competitions. The prospect of Bedard, Stamkos, Marchand, MacKinnon, McDavid, Stone, Cozens, Tavares, Burns, Makar, Suzuki, Marner, McTavish, Power, Crosby, Kyrour, and Fleury pulling on a red, black, and white maple leaf jersey is a dream come true for national team fans.

Pure Gold is the third subset of the collection and features 18 top players superimposed on and framed by a metallic gold background; the best-looking cards in this subset are of players presented in their white jerseys, especially Guentzel, Hertl, Jones, Forsberg, Keller, and Kopitar; refreshingly, none of the players in this subset appeared in the first two subsets.

Above the Ice changes the collector's eye to a horizontal orientation as the fourth subset features unique photos taken above the rink capturing superstars in full stride; the color images are superimposed on a metallic grey surface framed by white top and bottom borders to set off multicolored bubbles or 'snow globe' effects. McDavid, Kaprizov, and Point followed by intriguing aerial views of goaltenders Shesterkin and Demko are compelling, but the shot of Panarin AI15 in his blue Rangers uniform with the classic red and white trim is the best-looking card of the bunch.

However, this is only a supporting cast because it's Sidney Crosby that graces the cover of the 2024-2025 Collector Album. Simply stated, this is Sid's set.

The Kid from Cole Harbour, Nova Scotia is featured fourteen times in the 10th Anniversary collection with Card #87 in the Core Set, FH1 in Frozen Hotshots, TN16 in True North Future, AI8 in Above the Ice, SC1-SC9 in the Retrospective section, and Card#1993 in the Timbits to NHL subset. If you're a Sidney Crosby fan, this card collection is a must-have.

Collector Tips: The Tim Hortons' Upper Deck 10th Anniversary Collection is available until November 18 or until supplies last. Hockey Card Trade Nights are scheduled for Thursday, November 7 and Thursday, November 14 from 6 ? 8 p.m. at participating Tim Hortons' stores.

Box of Cards will host its monthly Card Show on Sunday, December 1 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., featuring 25 vendors who will be stocking a variety of cards from high-end to bargain bins. It's great time of year for card collecting.

By Jim Stewart