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09/07/13--06:57: Was this 1972-D half dollar struck by a concave reverse die?



By Mike Diamond

Collectors' Clearinghouse: Errors & Varieties column by Mike Diamond: Was this 1972-D half dollar struck by a concave re...

Several years ago a production run of 2001-P Kennedy half dollars caused a bit of a stir when it was realized that their cross-sectional profile mimicked — at a very small scale — a bowl-shaped design. A similar feature has been adopted for the 2014 National Baseball Hall of Fame commemorative coins.

The reverse face of an affected 2001-P Kennedy half dollar bulges out to such an extent that the coin rocks when you press lightly anywhere along the obverse rim. This is a case of global die subsidence (a sunken die error that affects the entire die face). The die steel was abnormally soft and sank in when the die was set to work striking half dollar planchets. The softness could have any number of causes: selection of the wrong grade of steel, impurities or microscopic cavities in the steel, or improper die preparation (annealing, quenching, tempering).

The reverse die also shows an odd pattern of semi-circular die cracks that run through the cirlet of stars and the arc of clouds on the reverse face. These cracks may mark the boundary between softer steel in the center and harder surrounding steel.