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**Are Your Sports Memorabilia Faux?**

**By J Shipper**

Sports Memorabilia

There is a huge interest in sports memorabilia, and sports-related items include signed commemorative photos, baseballs, footballs, basketballs, pucks and jerseys. A Google search of companies hawking these items comes up with almost 5 million businesses!

Some of the items on offer cost thousands of dollars.

Where there are so many eager and gullible customers, fraud is sure to appear. A San Diego federal judge who recently sentenced several sports autograph forgers to prison said, "Life, liberty and the pursuit of the national pastime, has been undone". The prosecution stemmed from an FBI investigation called Operation Bullpen, which closed down a professional criminal organization that forged and sold bogus autographs.

60 search warrants were served, more than 2 dozen people arrested, and a warehouse with 10 million dollars worth of forged merchandise was seized. The ring leaders received 3 years in prison and forfeiture of assets to the IRS. Both current and "vintage" items were involved. Any sports fan who has a signed souvenir may now want to question its authenticity.

Phil Halpren, the assistant U.S. attorney who worked to prosecute the forgers stated that fraud is so pervasive in the sports memorabilia market that unless you personally see an item being signed by the athlete, odds are greater than fifty percent that it is fake. The most athletes most well-known the the public are popular with forgers, too. Halpren said, "If you are looking at a Mark McGuire signature, it's almost a guarantee, 99.9 percent it is a forgery." Certificates of authenticity can be fabricated just as easily as the collectible item they supposedly validate, so this is no protection.

Vendors are fighting back in an effort to maintain the integrity of the market. Disney, which owns ESPN, will begin next year to auction signed sports memorabilia online. Disney says it will authenticate the signatures with holograms encrypted with the item's identifying information and package seals, videotaping the entire process.

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Sophisticated forgers can even produce holographic seals which appear, on casual inspection, to be real. However most forgers are amateurs, and the more sophisticated the anti-forgery system, the less likely criminals are to attempt to copy it.

Baseball and football are most popular in America, but a few famous hockey players such as Wayne Gretzky and Bobby Orr are popular targets for forgery as well.

With all the items available, both off and on the internet, fans can avoid a lot of fraud by using common sense. For example, a baseball autographed by Babe Ruth selling for \$500 is obviously a fake, because such a price is unbelievably low, too low for real market conditions. Also, it pays to know a little bit about the development of baseballs and pens. If you see baseballs supposedly signed in the

'20s and '30s with Sharpie pens, these are obviously fake, because these pens were not invented yet in that era. To quote Phil Halpren : "I have seen Babe Ruth balls signed on a Bobby Brown American League President ball. So, you know, he was president in the early '80s. That's impossible to have been done. But someone did it."

So, while it's enjoyable to own a piece of sports history, the motto to follow is : buyer beware. Unless you are a professional trader who knows how to authenticate merchandise, don't buy an item strictly for its potential resale value, because you may be disappointed by what you eventually get for it. Buy an item you personally like and intend to keep, and don't spend thousands of dollars. This ensures that you will be happy when you look at your purchase, without the lingering doubt that you have wasted a large sum of money on something of dubious value.

J Shipper loves Sports Memorabilia

<http://www.sports-memorabilia-now.info>

### **Determining The Worth Of Your Sports Memorabilia**

**By Linda Polansky**

Everyone that collects sports memorabilia would like to believe that they are sitting on a goldmine, but the truth of the matter is, a collection of memorabilia is only worth as much as someone will pay for it. This makes determining the worth of any kind of memorabilia rather tough to figure out, but with an understanding of what makes memorabilia valuable, you can begin to know a ballpark value of your collectables.

There are a few things to consider when you are trying to determine the worth of sports merchandise, but the most important factor tends to be whether or not the item is autographed. A Michael Jordan game jersey is certainly an important piece of sports history, and to a serious fan it would definitely be an interesting piece of memorabilia to own. However, if that same jersey were signed by Michael Jordan it could fetch an even higher price. If it were signed by the entire Bulls team, the price could

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skyrocket even more.

While autographs do increase the value of your memorabilia there are properties about autographs that make their worth even greater. These factors include who signed the item, if it can be authenticated, and what exact item was signed.

The most important thing to look at when determining the value of an autographed piece of sports memorabilia is who signed it. Was the player in the hall of fame or did they just make it to the pros for one season. Did the player achieve notoriety off the field or on the field or both? Is there a strong amount of interest in the athlete that signed the item. Is the athlete still alive or has he or she died, limiting the amount of signed memorabilia that this person produced? If the athlete is deceased, how long has it been since he or she died? The longer a person has been gone, the less memorabilia about their career seems to survive in good condition. Does the athlete that signed your collectable limit the amount of autographs they give? Does the athlete who's signature you have charge a lot for autograph sessions, making their signature rare? Was the item signed by more than one person. Having a ball signed by the 1998 American League All Star Team is a very unique piece of sporting history and possibly worth much more than having the individual signatures of each athlete on the team. Each of these things factor into the value of the signature on your collection, but they aren't the sole determining factor.

It is great to have an autographed program from the football game you attended last fall, but if you can't prove that you really have Jerome Bettis' signature on the program, the value of the piece is lessened. A great way to authenticate an autograph is to take a picture of the athlete as they sign it. There are also several authentication services that use a variety of methods to study your piece and determine if the autograph is real. They will then issue you a certificate of authentication that proves the piece was in deed autographed by the name that resides on it. If you buy autographed merchandise from a retailer or dealer, always buy pieces that come with a certificate of authentication so that you can be completely sure that you are getting what you pay for.

Another important factor in determining the worth of autographed sports memorabilia is the item itself that was autographed. An autographed seat from Three Rivers Stadium can be worth a lot more money than an autographed Steelers shirt, because the stadium no longer exists. When you own that signed seat, you not only own a valuable signature, but you own a piece of sporting history. If you are

thinking of taking an item to a game or show to have it autographed think carefully to determine what type of item will hold the most value down the road.

The most important thing to remember when placing a value on sports memorabilia is to leave sentimentality behind. Just because a player is your absolute favorite, doesn't mean that everyone else loves him causing his memorabilia to be valued high. While it is nice to know what your collection is worth and sports memorabilia is a fine investment, it is also important to only collect what you love. If you don't love the things you collect, what is the point?

Linda Polansky writes about Sports Memorabilia and Worth of Sports Collection

<http://www.teamlogoandgear.com>



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