

January 2010 "COLLECTING WITH JEFF"
by **JEFF FIGLER**

Many of our readers have sent emails to Jeff, which he tries to answer within a couple of days.

As many of you know, Jeff lectures on "sports" collecting for Royal Caribbean cruise lines. He and Linda recently went for two weeks to Egypt, Jordan, and Dubai, on the Brilliance of the Seas.

If you know anyone who might like to receive this newsletter, please send their email address to me at collectingwithjeff@sbcglobal.net or you can call me at [\(858\) 679-1233](tel:8586791233).

Thank you,

Cathy

The following is an article Jeff wrote for the January 2010 issue of Autograph Magazine.

ALL-TIME MOST COLLECTIBLE ATHLETES (PART 1)

In my continuing analysis of the most collectible athletes, the focus is now on the most collectible athletes in the history of particular sports. Keep in mind that the selections were made of course by me, asking other colleagues if they agreed with my choices. Needless to say, most of them dared not disagree.

However, let me quickly add that my "scientific" selections were carefully made based upon my extensive experience in the industry. So there! Having set forth how the "selections" transpired, let's begin.

This month's article is on baseball, basketball, and football. Next month the discussion will be on hockey, car racing, and golf.

Baseball, our national pastime, has always been a sport full of collectibles. Kids grew up collecting baseball cards. Presidents traditionally throw out the first ball on Opening Day, and William Howard Taft himself set the groundwork for the seventh inning stretch. Baseball has indeed had its glory years, as well as years that haven't been so rosy. But it has always been a staple in American culture, and its importance to the nation was certainly brought out by none other than President Franklin Roosevelt's remarks that baseball must continue despite the developments of World War II.

Along with baseball's popularity, players have been put on pedestals, and many were, and still are, role models.

The player at the head of the class is George Herman (Babe) Ruth. He came along at a time when baseball needed a shot in the arm, and he certainly was the right player at the right time. Legends developed about the Babe, and he certainly went along for the ride. Fortunately, for collectors worldwide, Ruth was a very prolific signer, and there is a good deal of Ruth memorabilia that still can

be acquired for the right price.

With all due respect to players who have ever played the game, Babe Ruth is the most collectible baseball player of all time. Single-signed Ruth baseballs are still available, and can run the spectrum as far as cost. Major auction houses will have Ruth-signed balls, which will set back the high bidder anywhere from \$5000 upwards to \$50,000, if not more. Ruth's signature is very legible, and a Ruth-signed ball is a treasure of anyone's collection, mine included.

Ruth also signed wire photos, letters, checks, books, magazines, programs, and countless other items. A 1938 World Series program went for nearly \$3000, and a Look Magazine fetched even more. Baseball cards of Ruth can themselves cost upwards of nearly \$30,000, as was the case with a 1916 Ruth rookie card.

Keep in mind as well that Ruth would often sign baseballs with other players such as Lou Gehrig. A ball signed by those two superstars usually is worth more than a single-signed ball by Ruth. Team baseballs, such as of the 1927 New York Yankees or the 1915 Boston Red Sox are both extremely valuable. Both of those baseballs included Ruth's signature.

Despite the ongoing popularity of Babe Ruth and his collectibles, other players have challenged Ruth's lofty position, the most notable being Mickey Mantle.

"The Mick", benefited by playing in New York, as did Ruth. Mantle, of course, was more contemporary, and ended his illustrious career in 1969.

Mantle's fame was far-reaching, but unfortunately he was injury-prone and his career was cut short. However, his popularity has not waned, as evidenced by the value of his collectibles. In fact, the 1952 Topps card #311 of Mickey Mantle is generally considered the second most valuable baseball card of all time. What card does it trail, you might ask? Ask no more. The "Holy Grail" of sports card is the T206 card featuring Honus Wagner. However, a Mantle number 311 Topps Card has been auctioned for a quarter of a million dollars. Others of his cards go for considerably less, but a recent one sold for nearly \$44,000. Of course, the auctioned card was in pristine condition, and virtually flawless. Nonetheless, the thought of the value of that card is amazing. Most of the available Mantle memorabilia will cost you a lot less, but will still be pricey. Take, for example, an original Hartland statue. A Mantle Hartland will cost around \$1,500. Ironically, a Ruth Hartland will cost you only around \$300. So, go figure.

There you have it for baseball. Ruth is number one, with Mantle trailing, but definitely hanging in there.

Turning to the hardwood floors, basketball has not experienced as long of a rich history as baseball. However, one player stands out as the most collectible basketball player of all time. This is a no-brainer, or in basketball vernacular, a slam dunk. I'm sure by now you've got it. Oh yeah, it was that guy on the Chicago Bulls who wore number 23.

Michael Jordan is the runaway winner in my analysis. In fact, he is virtually at the top of the list of the all-time most collectible athletes. Let me cite a few examples of his collectibles' values.

Here's a real whopper. In September 2008, his 1983 game-used North Carolina road jersey was auctioned for \$114,000. How about another one. His 1984 rookie Chicago Bulls jersey went for over

\$55,000. I guess when you make it to the pros then the value of your jersey is reduced by half! His Fleer 1986 #57 card was auctioned for nearly \$4,000. Game-used sneakers have recently gone for as much as \$2,500. And how about one more for the record. Michael Jordan's high school yearbook from 1980 that he signed at the time. That's right. Jordan's yearbook when he was a junior went for \$1,800.

Michael Jordan's popularity has maintained over the years. Obviously, his accolades are mind-boggling. In 1999, he was named the greatest North American athlete of the twentieth century by [ESPN](#), and he was second to Babe Ruth on the Associated Press' list of athletes of the century.

Jordan's basketball rise is well-known. He finally made his varsity high school team as a junior, and was a McDonald's All-American as a senior. As a sophomore at the University of North Carolina, in the 1982 NCAA championship game against Georgetown, Jordan made the game-winning jump shot. He would later say that the shot against Georgetown was the major turning point in his basketball career. He signed as a professional after his junior year at North Carolina, but did receive his college degree in 1986. Despite being arguably the greatest basketball player of all time, (some people might argue that it was Wilt Chamberlain), he was only the third player selected in the 1984 draft. Of the two players selected before him, Akeem Olajuwon had a stellar career, but injury-prone Sam Bowie was a bust. So much for the draft experts.

Okay, now to football. The most collectible football player of all time? Well, well. Let's say that the answer is not clear cut by any means. With the resurgence of Brett Favre, there is a good case you can make that it is him. However, we have already anointed Favre as the most current collectible football player, so we will pass on him as the all-time most collectible football player. Arguably, [Jim Brown](#) is the greatest player of all time, but there are not too many Jim Brown collectibles. The collectibles that do exist of Brown are quite valuable. Take the case of Jim Brown's University of Syracuse helmet that was found in a closet. It was subsequently auctioned for over \$27,000.

Putting that aside, [Joe Montana](#) is the all-time most collectable football player, with another 49er Jerry Rice not far off. An early 1980s signed Montana jersey was auctioned for nearly \$5,000, his 1981 Topps rookie card went for over \$2,100, and autographed footballs for over \$300.

Jerry Rice, the all-time leader in touchdowns for now, which may be broken down the road by LaDainian Tomlinson, is highly collectible as well. His 1995 signed San Francisco 49ers game-used jersey went for nearly \$1,700, his cleats for \$400, and an autographed football for nearly \$200.

There you have it, my friends. My all-time most collectible athletes from baseball is Babe Ruth; basketball, Michael Jordan; and football, Joe Montana.

Next month I will discuss the all-time most collectible athlete in hockey, car racing, and golf.

EMAILS:

QUESTION #1: I have a 2009 World Series baseball signed by all of the Phillies and a 2009 All-Star ball signed by the Phillie players. Can you tell me how much both balls are worth?

ANSWER: The World Series ball is worth around \$600. The All-Star ball is worth about \$350.

QUESTION #2: I have a copy of Baseball Digest from 1946 with a picture of Red Schoendienst turning a double play and throwing the ball to Stan Musial at first base on the cover. I have personally had it autographed by both men in the last five years. Does it have any value or is it just a good memento for a Cardinal fan?

ANSWER: It is worth between \$60-65.

TRIVIA QUESTIONS:

Easy: Who holds the MLB record for most RBIs in a season?

Moderate: Who scored the most NFL touch downs in the 2000-2009 decade?

Difficult: Who was the second MLB player to get 3000 hits in a career?

TRIVIA QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FROM THE DECEMBER NEWSLETTER:

Easy: Who was the second leading NFL career rushing leader, next to Emmitt Smith?

Walter Payton

Moderate: Who was the first high school player to jump to the NBA without playing college basketball?

Tony Kappen (1946-1947)

Note: If you thought the answer was Moses Malone, he was actually the fifth high school player to enter the NBA. He did it in 1974.

Difficult: Who was the first MLB player to get 3000 hits in a career?

Cap Anson