

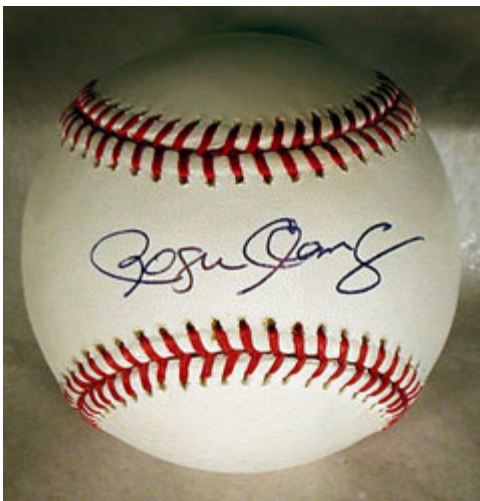
Collecting Baseball's Bad Boys

by Jeff Figler

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As Major League Baseball eclipses the All-Star break, the symbolic halfway point in its marathon campaign, the Hall of Fame ceremonies on July 27th are not far away. This year the "Cooperstown Invitational" will only induct one player, Rich "Goose" Gossage. Unless you are part of the Gossage family, not much excitement will be stirred up on the shores of Lake Ostego. In his illustrious 22-year major league career Gossage wore nine different uniforms, and he was with one team, the Yankees, twice.

A year ago two superstars – Tony Gwynn and Cal Ripken, Jr. – were inducted into the Hall of Fame and baseball immortality. Since 1936, when Ty Cobb, Walter Johnson, Christy Mathewson, Babe Ruth, and Honus Wagner were first elected, only 228 players have been enshrined, with Gossage slotting number 229. But let's face it: The luster of the Hall is tarnished because an all-star cast of characters probably will never have a place and a plaque. We have Messrs. Bonds, Clemens, McGwire, Palmeiro, Sosa, and, of course, the all-time hit leader, Pete Rose. Rose does go to Cooperstown every summer anyway to sign items at a shop a Roberto Clemente throw from the Hall of Fame. In his last career at-bat, on August 17, 1986 Rose struck out with Goose Gossage firing the final pitch.



Sinking like a stone: Buyers are wary of all things Clemens these days.

Being a notoriously curious individual, I compared recent auction prices of some of the aforementioned stars who may never have their likeness in the hallowed Hall, with auction prices of fairly recent inductees, namely Rollie Fingers, Gary Carter, and Paul Molitor. Those players are not yet in the same category as Ruth, Cobb, Mantle, and Musial, but they are still Hall of Famers. You be the judge of the direction of the auction prices.

Barry Bonds

A 2001 Game Used Jersey, \$459, and autographed balls for \$150-250.

Rafael Palmeiro

A 2003 Game Used Jersey, \$578, a game used bat, \$88, and an autographed ball, \$47.

Mark McGwire

A Big Mac jersey from 1992 for \$786, one from 1994 for \$717, and a 1999 jersey for \$1,673.

Rollie Fingers

Autographed baseballs ranged from \$20-78, but a signed rookie jersey was auctioned for \$6,653 by American Memorabilia a year ago.

Gary Carter

A 1992 Game-used jersey was auctioned by Grey Flannel for \$1,278, and signed balls average around \$50-60.

Paul Molitor

Recently, three jerseys have been auctioned for \$1,199, \$2,063, and \$3,743.

Even Tony Gwynn and Cal Ripken, Jr. items have not fared much better, with their jerseys going for slightly over \$1000, and signed baseballs around \$125.

Let's go one step further. A Bonds autographed pair of cleats, now selling for between \$150-250, were selling for several hundred dollars before his perjury indictment a few months ago. In September 2007 his "record-setting" home run number 756 ball sold for \$752,467. After his perjury indictment, the number 762 ball, his last home run, went for \$376,612.

In 1998, a Mark McGwire signed baseball sold for about \$500. Now it is worth only about \$100. Roger Clemens memorabilia are falling fast, as well, as his saga unfolds and unravels.

Memorabilia of current stars, such as Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez and Albert Pujols continue to hold their value even though they have not yet made it to Cooperstown.

Then there is Pete Rose, whose items are still being peddled, nearly 20 years after his banishment from baseball. There is too much against "Charlie Hustle" for him to ever be elected to the Hall, but his items still keep selling and selling and selling, but at about the same level as a Bonds item.

So, can we render a verdict? Not yet. At best, the jury is still deliberating. As for the players like McGwire, Bonds, Clemens, *et al*, buyers are staying away from their memorabilia or buying them at ridiculously low prices. For the players who have been recently enshrined at 25 Main Street in Cooperstown, New York, the value of their memorabilia is not breaking any bank. You can blame it on the current economy, but eventually the value of memorabilia of Fingers, Carter, Molitor, and the rest of the Hall's characters will definitely increase.

Memorabilia values of vintage Hall of Famers like Mickey Mantle, Hank Aaron, Stan Musial, Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Mel Ott, Sandy Koufax, and Shoeless Joe Jackson, will continue to increase under any condition.

Did I say Shoeless Joe Jackson? Shame on me.

Enjoy the remainder of the baseball season. It is still our national pastime.

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Jots From Jeff....

Now that Ken Griffey, Jr. has hit number 600 his memorabilia are soaring to new heights. His 1989 Upper Deck rookie card is very hot.

A T206 Honus Wagner card was auctioned for \$227,050 in a May Heritage auction. I thought it would have gone a bit higher, but it was graded a SGC 10 Poor 1. In that same Heritage auction, a 1967 game-worn Bob Gibson jersey went for \$44,812. Gibson memorabilia are at an all-time high, but after all, he was one of the greatest – and by the way, my favorite baseball player.

Will the absence of Tiger Woods affect his memorabilia values? Never! In fact, Woods' collectibles will most likely increase in value.

Don't tell me that people aren't dishing out big money in auctions. The 1976 ABA All-Star Game uniform worn by Julius Ervin in the game and the slam dunk contest was auctioned by Grey Flannel for \$188,321. Oscar Robertson's jersey went for a *mere* \$66,734.

By the way, did you see that an old painting left at a Goodwill store in Maryland was sold for \$40,600 at a Sotheby's auction? Makes you wonder if a pristine T206 Wagner card might turn up next.