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THE #1 GUIDE TO SPORTS CARDS & COLLECTIBLES

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BIGGEST AND
BEST PRICE GUIDE!



TUFF STUFF

JULY 2000

Big Red

Ken Griffey Jr.
Is On His Way To
Home Run History



Griffey Is An Anomaly



Fans have been crying for the past two decades that player salaries are out of line. How can one person be worth \$13 million per year, as Ken Griffey Jr. is currently paid?

Of course, when Griffey arrived in Cincinnati after the much-publicized, Griffey-induced trade to his hometown, the city of Cincinnati and surrounding area promptly decorated the local landscape in a style that is best described as "new millennium modern 30 Griffey." Some estimates have placed his value to the Reds at \$20 million per year in ticket sales and merchandising revenues, not to mention the revenue that will be poured by tourists into the downtown Cincinnati area, which can use the money since it's currently decorated in "post-mortem orange cone cement barrier construction zone."

Griffey's impact aside, current players are obviously overpaid. There are hundreds of backups who make \$2 million per year and starters at \$4 million per year who put no fans in the stands, but their salaries require fans to pay higher ticket prices to support those salaries. The Griffey's and McGwire's are few and far between.

I learned about Griffey's impact first-hand when Upper Deck - Griffey's trading card and memorabilia company of choice for most of his career - treated me to a trip to Griffey's first National League game, played on Opening Monday in Cincinnati. You might remember that while the statistics counted, the game was rained out as a 3-3 tie and his first full game was played the next day. I proudly wore my

Milwaukee Brewers hat (well, proudly is a strong word), but was overwhelmed at the quantity of Griffey merchandise. Imagine what the stir is going to be like as he approaches the all-time home run record in a few years. Imagine what he'll be making per season.

Dennis Tuttle analyzes Griffey's impact on collectibles beginning on Page 48. We also point you in the direction of his trading cards that have a chance to hit you a home run.



FBI Busts

As you may have heard through the national media, the Federal Bureau of Investigation recently held a press conference to unveil the first batch of convictions in its Operation Bullpen investigation into the autographed memorabilia market. The FBI got to the root of a massive forgery ring that was based in San Diego, Calif. In the coming months, we'll let you know the names of all of the dealers, distributors, authenticators and forgers involved. Those who were named in this first

wave are identified in T.J. Schwartz's column on Page 56. We're treating this investigation as good news for the hobby. By the time the FBI is done, autograph collecting will get back to being nothing but fun again. In the meantime, smart collectors will continue sending out SASEs and buying from companies that they know held their own signings. ♦

- Rocky Landsverk

AND THE WINNER IS ...



People might think we're kidding, or there was something sneaky afoot, but Rocky Zero of Edison, N.J., was the winner of the Kobe Bryant contest from the March issue of *Tuff Stuff*. Rocky's name was chosen randomly by our editor from the entries in our March 2000 issue and he wins a basketball signed by the Los Angeles Lakers star. The autograph is authenticated by SuperStar Greetings, which witnessed the signing. Look for our best contest ever, beginning on Page 30 of this issue and running for the following two issues. Two lucky people and their companions will receive a trip to either Hawaii or its polar opposite, Lambeau Field for a Packers game, all thanks to The Highland Mint. It's our "My Favorite Highland Mint" contest.

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WEB STUFF

COLLECTING ON THE INTERNET

BIG TICKET

At first blush, \$103.51 might not seem like a big price to pay for a rare SkyBox Genuine Coverage jersey card, especially one of a talented rookie such as Lamar Odom. But when you consider that Odom is coming off his first season on what *Sports Illustrated* called "the worst franchise in professional sports history," pulling three figures for this card begins to look like just another of the great accomplishments in store for this Rhode Island star — once he signs with a better club.

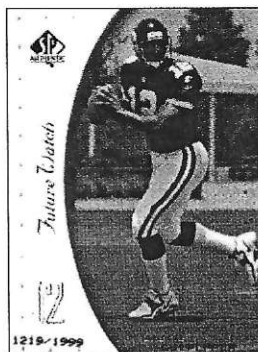


QUICK CLICKS

- With defensive players going 1-2-3 in the NFL draft, collectors may have to wait a couple years to see if this year's vintage will produce a Terrell Davis or Kurt Warner. Best bets for bargain-hunting auction-goers wanting to pluck unproven rookies from the vine before the season starts? Peter Warrick of the Bengals has the potential to boom or bust. Heisman Trophy winner Ron Dayne likely will start at running back for the New York Giants, a marquee position that will boost his auction cachet, at least at first. Running back Thomas Jones could be an instant impact player for the Arizona Cardinals, with Adrian Murrell gone. And with Vinny Testaverde trying to come back from treacherous Achilles' tendon surgery and his backup, Ray Lucas, looking like anything but a franchise player, New York Jets rookie quarterback Chad Pennington could rise to the top this year or next.

- Will the Derek Jeter 1993 SP No. 279 rookie ever plateau? From the looks of his early-season surge on the online auction block, it won't be happening any time soon. At press time, ungraded specimens of this card were selling for \$100 to \$300. Graded mint copies — even those graded by lesser-known companies — were ranging from \$400 to \$800.

- It's interesting to see how as soon as Jeff George was signed by the Redskins, Vikings quarterback Daunte Culpepper's stock rose quickly. His BGS 8.5 (Nm-Mt) graded 1999 SP Authentic #99 RC sold for \$223.49 on April 11. Before George was signed, the same card booked for \$50.



Take your Culpepper with a grain of salt — at least until he plays in the regular season.

AVOID GETTING FAKED

Rumors abound about fake autographs sold online and off — the FBI claims that at least half, possibly 90 percent of autographs are not authentic. In April, the agency did its part to purge the memorabilia market of forgers with "Operation Bullpen," the culmination of three years and \$15 million that so far has netted 25 forgers and thousands of photos, jerseys and equipment.

Parts of the sting were ugly. Assisting in the hunt for fakes was San Diego Padres great Tony Gwynn, who said he found a fake of his signature selling in one of the team's official gift stores. Other details were comical, such as the "Mother Teresa Ball," a baseball purportedly signed by the future saint (of the Catholic church, not the team formerly coached by Mike Ditka).

How can bidders protect themselves from fakes? First, know what the sig of the athlete looks like and don't purchase items whose listings are accompanied by a small or badly scanned picture (or none at all). Secondly, make sure the seller's return policy includes a money-back guarantee — spelled out either in the auction listing or in e-mail correspondence before the bid. Thirdly, pay for the item with credit card or check. Best of all, especially if the bid is more than \$50, use an escrow service to broker the payment. Of course, the best way to assure an authentic signature is to get it in person, which can be a lot of work, but worth it when you risk buying so many fakes.



San Diego Padres star Tony Gwynn was one of the key figures in the FBI's Operation Bullpen.

SURFING SAFARI

This month's recommended site:
www.sunspot.net/sports/cal/

Cal Ripken Jr.'s milestone game in late April not only made him the 24th major league baseball player to top 3,000 hits and the seventh to hit 400 home runs, it also separated the wheat from the chaff as far as Ripken Web sites go. Many fan sites had training camp updates or news stories on Ripken's injury last season that put his hunt for 3,000 on hold. Whose site was on top of its game? None other than hometown newspaper the *Baltimore Sun*, whose Ripken tribute page includes a year-by-year retrospective as well as a "Cal Ripken 3000" section that catalogs his numerical milestones, organizes his hits "A to Z" according to the last name of each pitcher and includes game photos taken by some of the country's best photographers. While individual fan sites are great — and often more reverent — here's a rare case where the big boys do it right.



Compiled by Don Fluckinger.

Address your questions and comments to tuffweb@aol.com.

The FBI Is On Your Side Too



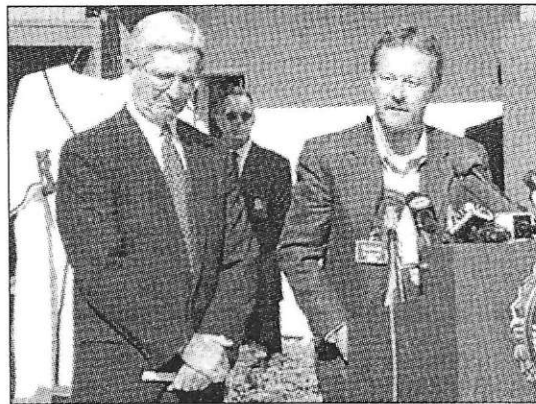
Several months ago, I wrote a column about a 20/20 report on phony memorabilia and an FBI investigation dubbed Operation Bullpen. I have received hundreds of calls and e-mails asking for more names involved. There were only a few names reported by 20/20 at the time, but on April 12 the FBI went public with a lot more.

In San Diego, federal investigators made public the results of their three-year investigation, along with the names involved with a national counterfeit memorabilia ring. Here is a partial list of the more than \$10 million in bogus memorabilia seized: more than 10,000 baseballs; more than 150 photos signed by Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa (they've never done a joint signing); a barrel of fake Michael Jordan signed basketballs; dozens of Mark McGwire signed items, many bearing the inscription: HR.NL. 62, 9-8-98; dozens of cut signatures of HOFers such as Babe Ruth and Ty Cobb; and items signed by valuable names like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, JFK, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, James Cagney, Walt Disney, Ronald Reagan, the Marx brothers, Hillary Clinton, Bruce Lee, Princess Diana, Albert Einstein, the Beatles, Clark Gable, Vivian Leigh and Mickey Mañtle. The worst was a baseball signed by Mother Teresa. MOTHER TERESA? "I think that pretty much says it all," FBI special agent in charge William Gore said.

The three-year investigation had the support of San Diego Padres star Tony Gwynn, who made an appearance at a Padres gift store in 1997 and noticed baseballs for sale bearing his signature. Problem was, he didn't sign them. And this was a team owned store! He complained to the team and to Major League Baseball security, who in turn notified federal law enforcement officials. Upper Deck Co. CEO Richard McWilliam also had contacted the feds expressing his concerns that phony autographs were damaging his company and Upper Deck Authenticated, due to the glut of phony autographs being sold at less than his guaranteed authentic products. Three years later, the FBI is doing something that

should be great for the hobby.

Among those named in the indictment is noted sports artist Angelo Marino, 67, who owns and operates Front Page Art in Escondito, Calif. Prosecutors said Marino had operated legally for years before going bad. According to Deputy U.S. Attorney Phillip Halpern, Marino and others forged autographed memorabilia through his company and then marketed it through wholesale distributors. He then used the business to launder the illegal gains. The



Upper Deck CEO Richard McWilliam (right) talks about the results of Operation Bullpen, along with FBI special agent in charge William Gore.

rest on the list: Wayne Bray, 35, of San Marcos; John Marino, 36; Gloria Marino, 64; Kathleen Marino, 38; Greg Marino, 38, all of Escondito; Mike Moses, 32, and Robyn Moses, 33, both of Newport Beach; Reno Ruberti, 42, and Karen Ruberti, 40, both of San Clemente; David Tabb, 32, Costa Mesa; Ricky Mitchell, 30, San Diego; Mike Lopez, 41, Rosemead; Mike Bowler, 48, Oceanside; Ricky Weimer, 53, Escondito; Sheldon Jaffe, 65, Tustin; Richard Laughlin, 55, Mission Viejo; Michael Tapales, 33, Buena Park; Carmen Lombardo, 43, Del Mar; Jon Hall, 58, San Diego; Lowell Katz, 36, Long Beach; Bruce Gaston, 38, San Diego; Frosty Golembeske, 48, Fullerton; Anthony Marino, 42, Apple Valley; Scott Harris, 68, and Mary Lou Harris, 67, both of San Clemente.

It took undercover informants, a dummy company, wiretaps and 60 search warrants to prove the autographs were not authentic. Investigators seized a fake George Washington signature and a cache of

Ronald Reagan autographs produced in anticipation of a greater demand after his death.

In addition to all the fake memorabilia, federal agents confiscated more than \$1.8 million worth of property that included cars, houses and \$500,000 in cash. Halpern said most of them have agreed to plea bargains resulting in penalties ranging from probation to jail time. Investigators also are expecting dozens more arrests in coming weeks.

So what does all this mean? I've been on this campaign through these pages for a decade now. I've given you all the basic rules of thumb. If it seems too good to be true, etc. Is the sky falling? Is it all over? Should we all just close up shop and go home? I think not, fellow collectors. Any time people are making money off something, bad guys will figure out a way of faking it to cash in the easy way. You don't see art galleries closing up because a master forger got caught and the same will hold for real, honest, hard-working autograph businesses and stores.

The fact that there are such elaborate schemes to fake memorabilia tells us that the real stuff is great to own and collect. Believe me, there is plenty of good stuff to be collected. Even though the FBI maintains at least 50 percent of the industry is fake, I say that might only hold true for the biggest stars like Jordan, Sosa and McGwire. Who's going to fake a Bob Feller? Now, the Internet is making selling these fakes a whole lot easier, but there are many honest dealers out there who go out of their way and pay a little more to ensure their customers get the real McCoy. We all should thank Gwynn, McGwire (who assisted), McWilliam and the FBI for helping get a bunch of junk off the market. Bravo.

Until next month, I remain ... On Your Side. ♦

You can call T.J. Schwartz directly at (818) 760-3800, fax him at (818) 766-7900, or write him in care of Tuff Stuff, 700 E. State St., Iola, Wis. 54990-0001. You also can send him e-mail at tjschwartz@loop.com.