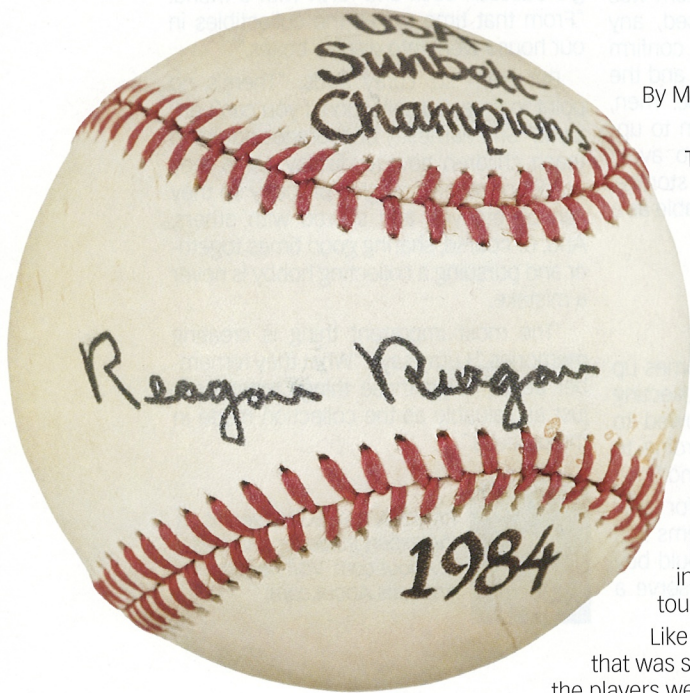


Making a Connection

BASEBALLS SIGNED BY NON-ATHLETES
ILLUSTRATE COLLECTING'S HUMAN FACTOR

By Michael Moline



THE HUMANITY OF HISTORY is what drew me to collecting.

Looking back, I truly grew up during the "Wonder Years." As an 11-year-old in 1968, I wandered into a coin shop and really didn't fully understand what the place was about until I noticed "The Wall." It was covered with all kinds of coins inside cellophane envelopes, stapled onto paper cards. There were columns to write your bids for these coins. It was my first experience with auctions.

I was drawn to a particular 1864 Indian Head penny. In history class, we had been studying the Civil War and learned that Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated in 1865. So, as I looked at this 1864 penny, I imagined this particular coin in Lincoln's pocket. The more I looked at the coin, the more I believed and after a short while, I had convinced myself that *this very coin actually was Lincoln's penny* and I had to own it. I placed my bid and ended up winning the coin for a grand total of 10 cents.

The human factor was the reason I bought that coin, and ultimately got hooked on collecting. The experience taught me that nothing beats connecting with history, and it really was possible to own items that people from history touched, used or owned.

Like most kids, I played and followed all sports. When baseball season arrived, well, that was special. I loved spring training, and really enjoyed researching and learning where the players were from and what they did for fun.

Most of my friends collected cards. Cards were OK, just not really special to me. I was always looking for a bat, a ball or something actually used in a game. A friend from my neighborhood had met Don Drysdale, the Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher who would later be inducted into the Hall of Fame. Somehow or someday, I traded for a broken Ron Fairly bat my friend had gotten from Drysdale. Again, the human factor mattered to me. It was cool that I could hold a bat that was used in an actual Major League game. I still collect game-used items.

As a high school student, I was into music and played bass guitar in a rock 'n' roll band. Some of my truly talented musician classmates actually went on to become well-known rockers, forming the group Toto ("Africa" and "Rosanna"). In college, sort of tying my love for baseball and music, I thought it would be cool to have famous non-baseball people sign baseballs. It began with a few Los Angeles rock 'n' rollers and evolved into U.S. presidents. At one point, I had one ball signed by five presidents: Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan and Clinton.

Today, my collection includes baseballs signed by famous non-baseball players, such as Wayne Gretzky, George Foreman and Muhammad Ali. I also have baseballs signed by celebrities, politicians and a special O.J. Simpson Trial baseball collection (which includes most of the people involved with the "Trial of the Century," such as attorneys Marcia Clark, Robert Shapiro and Johnny Cochran; the only person not included, by choice, is O.J. himself). I have also purchased items from dealers and auctions. My most recent acquisition is a shirt worn by rock 'n' roll icon Buddy Holly.

Collecting is about connecting. I look at my collection as a nostalgic glimpse at my life. As people progress with their own collecting paths, they will have been drawn to buy certain items. For me, it's always been about the human factor.

Collect on.



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A baseball signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1984 (top) realized \$5,975 at an August 2011 auction, while one signed by 29 of America's first 30 astronauts (above) realized \$13,145 in 2010.

