

ShowCircuit

Clemens highlights annual AstrosFest event

BY ROSS FORMAN

Roger Clemens autographs for \$5. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? And, you get to personally meet the future Hall of Famer too. Now it really sounds amazing, right?

Well, such was the case Feb. 14, when Clemens appeared at the Houston Astros' annual FanFest, held at Minute Maid Park in Houston.

Clemens signed 400 autographs during his 90-minute appearance, pleasing many who had started waiting for his appearance at 10:30 p.m. the night before.

REVIEW

Clemens left his sons' high school baseball games to attend FanFest. After going back to watch the conclusion of those prep games, the former University of Texas standout returned to Minute Maid Park to join Rice University alum – and Houston teammate – Lance Berkman in tossing the ceremonial 'first pitch' before Texas-Rice game played in the College Classic.

Clemens then went into the clubhouse to change into his tuxedo to attend the Heart Ball, a Valentine's Day benefit hosted by the American Heart Association. Houston teammate Jeff Bagwell bought a table at the charity gala and invited Craig Biggio and Clemens to be his guests.

Clemens' season started a week later when he reported to Kissimmee, Fla., to begin his 21st season.

Houston's FanFest featured appearances by every major Astros' star, from Bagwell and Biggio to Andy Pettitte and Wade Miller. Each player signed for 50 minutes. Autographs from any and all were \$5 (limit one), benefiting the Astros In Action Foundation.

In addition, Houston-based Tristar Productions brought nine athletes to the FanFest, most with ties to the teams in the College Classic. Among the athletes who were at the show courtesy of Tristar were Major Applewhite (Texas), Billy Cannon (LSU) and B.J. Symons (Texas Tech). Also appearing in the Tristar section were Wes Walker, Casey Hampton, Fergie Jenkins, Ell Roberson, Andre Ware and David Klingler.

All but Cannon and Jenkins were free.



Not surprisingly, Roger Clemens was a popular attraction at the recent Houston Astros' FanFest.



Former Yankee left-hander Andy Pettitte was another of the Astros in attendance at this year's FanFest.

Tristar also produced a card show, held on the stadium's concourse level. Plus, the company offered its traditional 5-by-7 digital photo-booth, so fans could have their picture take (\$10) with various superstars.

"We really enjoyed the opportunity to work with the Astros, to add some additional elements to the team's annual FanFest," said Tristar's Mandy Fuerst. "This was the first time since the event moved to Minute Maid Park that the autograph sessions were held on the same level that the exhibitors were located on.

"In moving all the action to the main concourse level, this achieved the result Tristar was looking for, which was to

create more traffic around the exhibitor booths.

"There's no question that the expectations of the Astros are huge this year. With the additions of Andy Pettitte and Roger Clemens this year, the fans of Houston feel like this could be their year. This was definitely evident at FanFest, as people lined up hours in advance for a chance to meet the Astros, especially Pettitte, Clemens and Bagwell."

Fuerst added: "We are extremely excited about Roger Clemens joining the Astros. Having worked exclusively with Clemens on his autographs for many years now, Tristar sees new memorabilia opportunities with him joining his hometown team."

"The Astros approached us about partnering with them to help take their annual FanFest to another level. We saw a number of opportunities related to the event, specifically reaching out to sports fans who may not necessarily be collectors, and exposing them to Tristar and sports collectibles in general."

Mission accomplished.

HIGHLIGHTED SHOWS

Mar. 13-14 - Sports Collectibles of Houston show, The Maplewood Center, Houston, Texas.

Mar. 14 - Cardshow Classics, Taunton Holiday Inn, Taunton, Mass.

Mar. 19-21 - 28th Annual *Chicago Sun-Times Sports* Collectible Convention, Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, Rosemont, Ill.

Mar. 21 - Dedham Extravaganza Sports Card Show, Dedham Holiday Inn, Dedham, Mass.

YOUR TURN

To contribute to this section, send an email to kessenicht@krause.com, write to Tom Kessenicht, SCD, 700 E. State St., Iola, WI 54990, or call the SCD Hotline at 715-445-4612, ext. 789