

# ShowCircuit

## Tristar enjoys productive Houston event

BY ROSS FORMAN

**T**here was Rudy Tomjanovich, whose autograph is simply "Rudy T." There was "Mean" Joe Greene, who hasn't added his uniform number (75) to an autograph in more than 20

years. Nor does he sign his nickname, though every other letter in his autograph is perfectly legible.

Then there was Juan Marichal, clearly one of the classiest show guests of all-time. He not only posed for photos with anyone who asked, but also stood up for almost every photo.

Tristar Productions' 18th-annual Houston Collectors Show, held Jan. 9-11 at the George R. Brown Convention Center, attracted more than 4,000 collectors and a bunch of friendly, outgoing autograph guests. From Bob Horner and Don Larsen to Orlando Cepeda, Fred Lynn and Don Sutton, every signer was respectful and pleasant.

The show also featured David Aardsma, Clint Everts, J.R. Richard, Andre Johnson, Jim Palmer, Whitey Ford, Domanick Davis, Pete Munro, Taylor Buchholz, Roger Craig, Dontrelle Willis, Angel Berroa, Morgan Ensberg, Monte Irvin, Gaylord Perry, J.J. Moses, Butch Johnson, Joe Mauer and Warren Moon. In addition, Lester Hayes signed autographs in Houston.

"It was a great show with a great crowd, and the dealers did very well too," Tristar president Jeff Rosenberg said. "The show kind of felt like a show from years ago, when there was just a lot of excitement around a show."

"We've been hearing from our customers that they want a good quantity of guests, and guests who are at affordable prices. And that's what we delivered."

According to Tristar, the top six signers were Davis, Ford, Johnson, Marichal, Moon and Willis.

"We had great guests at this show, signers who really enjoyed being around the fans," Rosenberg said. "I had a number of dealers tell me that this was the best Houston show we've had in the past four or five years."

Tristar's January show in Houston is, arguably, one of the best regional shows of the year. Annually, dealers boast about meeting - and exceeding - their pre-show sales predictions.

"The number of shows across the country is leveling off to the reality of the marketplace, sort of like it was, oh, 15 or 20 years ago before the Internet came around," Rosenberg said. "As long as we bring what the people want, they're going to continue to support our shows."

The show featured card grading by Beckett Grading Services, memorabilia analysis sessions by Rosenberg and Tristar's Bobby Mintz and a popular Yu-Gi-Oh! tournament.

"I thought the Yu-Gi-Oh! tournament was phenomenal," Rosenberg said. "To see the number of kids attending was great, and that's really what these shows are all about."

Added dealer Kyle Boetel of Kyle's Sports-cards (Aurora, Col.): "I don't understand the Yu-Gi-Oh! craze and don't even understand how they play it, but there were people playing it all weekend. The tournament brings in a good crowd, kids who have 4.0 GPAs in high school, not the kids who steal things at shows. When the doors opened, they ran into the show to buy Yu-Gi-Oh cards, like was the case with baseball cards in the 1980s."

Boetel, a vintage card specialist, said Friday and Saturday were incredibly strong

sales days for sports cards. His sales included a 1949 Bowman Satchel Paige (\$1600), and a lot of three vintage bobble heads for \$600.

"A lot of the bigger ticket items are selling well again; that's items for \$300 and up," Boetel said.

He also sold; Near-mint 1959 Topps Bob Gibson (\$300); 1933 Goudey Rogers Hornsby, PSA-7 (\$1,000); and high-grade specimens of 1969 Topps Mickey Mantle (\$250) and 1969 Topps Nolan Ryan (\$175).

"The Mantle and Ryan are the kind of cards that, over the past two years, unless you've really dropped your price, they didn't sell," Boetel noted. "It seemed like the collectors who have been tight with their money are spending again. The sales were good."

Cards from 1967 and 1969 were "real hot," he said, along with relics from the 1970s, especially the late-1970s. Plus, Boetel noted strong sales of 1959-to-61 Topps baseball cards.

Carl Gerjes of T&C Investments (Alvin, Texas) said new card sales were "strong" all weekend, especially of basketball releases.

### REVIEW



Photo by Ross Forman

Warren Moon was among the autograph signers at Tristar's recent show in Houston.

"Houston definitely is the place to be in the sports and collectibles world over the next month or so, and you could tell that at this show," Gerjes said. "It was good to see so many new collectors, and a lot of the established collectors too. That's important."

"Basketball was very hot. Football is picking up some steam. Baseball looks strong, too. Sales were strong. They exceeded my projections."

"I think people are optimistic and the economy is looking up. People are more optimistic about the future; that's encouraging. I was pleasantly surprised with everything exceeding our expectations."

Gerjes noted solid sales of five basketball releases:

- 2002-2003 Topps Finest (\$10/pack)
- 2003-2004 Upper Deck Finite (\$15)
- Topps Pristine (\$31)
- 2002-2003 Upper Deck SPx (\$9)
- 2003-2004 Bowman Signature (\$28)

On the baseball front, Gerjes said Upper Deck Ultimate Collection (\$360/per box) sold exceptionally well. He also noted strong sales for Bowman Draft Picks & Pros (\$4), 2003 Upper Deck Sweet Spot (\$10) and Donruss Rookies & Traded (\$5).

Kevin Strunk from The Sports Page (Oklahoma City) said the hottest athletes included Albert Pujols, Cal Ripken, Barry Bonds, Alex Rodriguez, Donovan McNabb and Peyton Manning. LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony continue to sizzle as well.

"We might as well not even carry cards of any other basketball player beside those two," Strunk said.

"This was a typical Tristar January show," said vintage card dealer Paul Sjolín of Spring, Texas. "It was a good show. We sold the exact amount we were predicting. I didn't buy much, but normally don't buy much at this show."

Tristar's next show is Feb. 20-22 at the Cow Palace in San Francisco, headlined by a San Francisco 49ers' championship reunion. The show will feature autograph appearances by Joe Montana, Jerry Rice, Ronnie Lott, Roger Craig, Dwight Clark, Russ Francis, Brent Jones and Keena Turner, among others.

### YOUR TURN

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