

ShowCircuit

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Sometimes it's not who's signing but how they sign it

BY ROSS FORMAN

Paul Krause paused as he signed a helmet featuring fellow members of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He offered comments about many of the players and then stopped after viewing Joe Montana's signature.

He paused again and re-examined Montana's signature.

"Who is that," Krause asked. Joe Montana, he was informed. Krause was shocked, surprised at how unreadable Montana's signature was.

Krause, after all, was one of many autograph signers at Tristar Productions' Kansas City Collectors Show, held Oct. 15-17 at the Overland Park International Trade Center, with a perfect signature.

Every letter intact, every autograph.

The former Minnesota Vikings safety and all-time interception leader in NFL history takes pride in his penmanship. And after witnessing several others at Kansas City display their own flawless scripts, it appears many others felt a similar obligation to provide a readable signature.

Hall of Famers such as Bart Starr, Steve Carlton, Whitey Ford, Jan Stenerud, Harmon Killebrew, Tony Perez, Robin Roberts, Phil Niekro and Don Sutton all come to mind when considering legible signers, but not all legends adhere to the standard.

"What we've seen over the years is that every athlete has his or her own autograph. But one thing we've definitely noticed over the years is that those autographs that are very legible are very well-received from customers," said Mandy Fuerst, Tristar's director of events & marketing. "When customers have to look at an autograph and are not immediately certain who it is, it seems to trigger something in collectors' minds about whether or not the autograph is legitimate.

"Some signers, such as Roger Clemens, have an autograph that can be difficult to read. And if it's the first time you see it, you might not recognize it. But when collectors see an autograph like Clemens' that is the same, time and time, that becomes a case of consistency. Legibility and consistency are very important in autographs."

Tristar's Kansas City show featured 23 autographing guests, including Monty Beisel, Bart Starr, Bob Dernier, Chris Horn, LaMarr Hoyt, Kenny Houston, Bobby Bell, Billy Shaw, Lou Creekmur, Jim Rice, George Foster, Fergie Jenkins, Maury Wills and Terrell Davis.

Bart Starr was the biggest draw, signing about 250 autographs for the public. Davis, Carlton and Ford were also big draws with the public with Davis making his first autograph appearance since retiring.

About 2,000 collectors attended the three-day event.



Roger Neufeldt of Sports Memories of Oklahoma discusses some of his products with customers during the Kansas City Collectors Show.



Green Bay Packers legend Bart Starr made a rare signing appearance in Kansas City along with several other NFL Hall of Famers.

"The show was a success. It's clear that Kansas City still brings out the football fans," Fuerst said. "The attendance was not quite what we hoped for going into the show, but the total was nonetheless on par with other shows. And those collectors who did show up were hard-core collectors."

The October event was Tristar's second major show Kansas City has hosted this year and with the city also hosting NAXCOM's August show.

"With three major shows in the city in one year, what we heard from collectors was: Kansas City is now on the map," Fuerst said. "The collectors seemed very enthusiastic about three shows in their city in the same year."

Jack Hegwood of J&J Sports Cards of Rock Spring, Ga. said there was no clear-cut favorite among new releases. "I sold a little bit of everything, but nothing exceptionally well," he said. His top sellers: Leaf Limited Baseball (\$215), Leaf Certified Football (\$75), Fleer Hot Prospects Football (\$109), close-outs, such as 2003 Playoff Hog Heaven Football (\$45) and all 2001 football releases.

Mike Williamson of Bryan's Collectibles said the KC show was "decent," with sales about as strong as he expected. "There's a good collector base here and they came out," he said. Williamson noted strong sales of 2004 Topps Baseball factory sets.

"The show was great for us," said dealer Paul Sjolin of Spring, Texas. "Sure, the attendance was not very good, but people were buying. We had strong sales of high-grade vintage commons and minor stars, and off-grade big-stars, such as Hank Aaron and Willie Mays. Rookie cards did exceptional, as usual."

Sjolin also noted strong sales to set builders.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the show," said veteran dealer Bill Goodwin of St. Louis.

Randy Cook, host of the only major Internet radio sports collectibles show, said the KC show featured "some serious buyers." The hottest current player, Cook said, is St. Louis slugger Albert Pujols. The hottest insert, he said, is from Leaf Limited products.

Cook offered more than 100 inserts at his table, including an Al Kaline 2004 Leaf Limited autographed patch, numbered 95/100 (\$90). He also had a 1952 Topps Willie Mays card (\$525).

Gene Komisarow of Kirk's Collectibles Covington, Ga., said KC sales were "very good" for his array of game-used college football helmets.

"Each day, I exceeded my projected sales totals," said dealer Kip Ingle of Acworth, Ga. "With multiple major shows in the city this year, I really wasn't sure coming in as to how much money the collectors would still have. But, it's been an above-average crowd and it's been an above-average spending show."

Ingle noted strong sales of various St. Louis Cardinals items, such as publications. He sold the Cards' 2004 yearbook for \$15, the '04 League Championship Series program for \$10 and various 8-by-10 photos for \$5-\$10.

"This show definitely was better than I thought beforehand," Ingle said. "I came to Kansas City thinking this might be the last hurrah for this market, but the Kansas City collectors definitely showed that I need to come back."

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