

ShowCircuit

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Collectors strike gold at Tristar's Phoenix show

Hall of Famers Carlton, Sutton, Williams and Sandberg fuel autograph list

BY ROSS FORMAN

In and around the Phoenix sports and sports collectibles world, he's simply known as "Diamondback Claude," a 55-year-old Tempe resident who wears a size-56 D-Backs jersey and bellows out cheers for the local team.

"Diamondback Claude" is also a hobbyist who late last year purchased two cases of Donruss Prime Cuts from Box Seat Collectibles, a Phoenix card shop special-izing in baseball cards.

One of Claude's first pulls was a 1-of-1 Cal Ripken autograph card. "I thought I was doing pretty well at that point," he said.

He later found a 1-of-1 Enos Slaughter-signed card and a 1-of-1 Adam Dunn jersey card. He also discovered a Ted Williams rarity (9-of-9): a card featuring swatches of a game-used jersey, jacket and bat.

Then came the golden goose: a 1-of-1 Babe Ruth autograph card that also features swatches of a game-used jersey, pants and bat. "I thought I was going to have a heart attack when I pulled that Ruth card," he said.

Claude has starred at the card daily since finding the rare relic. Several friends suggested he sell the card on eBay, but Claude didn't want to pay the eBay seller's fee. "Plus, I wanted to keep looking at it daily," said Claude, who also owns a Ruth-signed baseball.

Claude was among the near-2,000 collectors who attended Tristar Productions' Phoenix Collectors Show, held March 4-6 at the Phoenix Civic Plaza.

Curtis Brown, a 46-year-old Phoenix resident and collector who works as a mail handler for the U.S. Postal Service, also attended the show.

On Saturday in Phoenix, Brown purchased a Donruss Prime Cuts 1-of-1 signed card of Ty Cobb for \$6,480 from Greg Lambert of California Card Shark of Modesto. Lambert then told Brown about Claude's Ruth card, which Claude just so happened to have with him.

Moments later, Brown owned both relics – the Cobb and the Ruth, which he purchased for a total of \$12,000.

"I thought it was a good deal, plus, I still have the Ruth-signed baseball," Claude said. "I pulled the

REVIEW



George Foster



Hall of Famer Steve Carlton (above) and the HOF's newest member Ryne Sandberg (below) were among the autograph guests at Tristar's Phoenix Collectors Show held March 4-6 in Phoenix, Ariz.



card; enjoyed it while I had it and am happy with the deal. I'm happy; Curtis Brown is happy. I paid \$1,800 per case. I spent some money; I made some money; I'm happy, very happy."

Brown also is quite content.

"These are my two biggest buys ever, of course," Brown said. "I basically did the deals because I never thought I'd get the chance to buy them again in the future. This was just an opportunity to pick up two great pieces of sports memorabilia from two of the greatest names in the game.

"Babe Ruth is baseball. And when people think of baseball, they think of Babe Ruth. And Ty Cobb was, of course, one of the best players ever."

Brown said he plans to keep the cards in his private collection, not sell them.

"I'm very excited to get these cards and I think I got good deals," said Brown, who attended the show Friday and Saturday. "The show was much better than last year, with a lot of good dealers and different types of memorabilia. Tristar put on a great show."

The three-day event featured Amare Stoudemire, Billy Williams, Ryne Sandberg, Don Sutton, Steve Carlton and others. Also appearing: Quentin Richardson, Steven Hunter, Leandro Barbosa, Joe Johnson, Will Clark, Felix Hernandez, Ian Stewart, Danny White, Brian Dopirak, Felix Pie, Dave Stewart, Dan Johnson, Rich Harden, George Foster, Andrew Walter, Nick Swisher and Huston Street.

"It was a good show, definitely one of the best of the year we'll have, granted we don't have too many three-day shows here," said Brian Marcy of Scottsdale Baseball Cards.

Marcy noted an abundance of vintage card set builders. He said there were an abundance of sales of 1967 high numbers and 1952 Topps singles, as well as graded stars. He also sold a 1948 Leaf Joe DiMaggio card and several cards from the late-1960s, such as Jim Palmer.

Cindy Philpott of Home Runs Sports Inc. in Tujunga, Calif., noted strong sales of current baseball and basketball packs. She said football sales were slow and hockey sales were non-existent due to no new products, but she was inundated with questions about NHL cards.

Philpott's best baseball sales were Diamond Kings (\$5 per pack) and Upper Deck Sweet Spot Classic (\$7). She also had success selling Upper Deck Game-Used Basketball (\$22), Upper Deck Hardcourt (\$3), Upper Deck Ultimate Football (\$90), Upper Deck Sweet Spot (\$7.50).

"The show was as expected, and that's good," Philpott said. "There was a good turnout of local collectors; they definitely support this show."

Carl Gerjes of T&C Investments of Alvin, Texas said the attendance was less than he anticipated, but it was a buying bunch nonetheless. He noted strong sales of Bowman Sterling Baseball (\$63 per pack), Upper Deck Ultimate Collection Football (\$120), Topps Signature Football (\$65) and Tristar Hidden Treasure Baseballs (\$45). Gerjes sold about 30 packs (one ball per pack) of Hidden Treasure Baseballs,

Show Circuit



including Mike Schmidt, Jim Palmer, Ralph Kiner, Orlando Cepeda, Harmon Killebrew, Curt Schilling and Ryne Sandberg, among others.

Gerjes also sold a 1986 Topps Barry Bonds (PSA 10) for \$245, and three vintage Emmitt Smith cards: 1990 Fleer Update (PSA 10, \$50), 1990 Score (PSA 9, \$95) and 1990 Topps Traded (PSA 10, \$30).

"The show was good, about what I expected," said Matt Doyle of MC Doyle LLC in Columbus, Ohio. "I sold a lot of high-end autographed inserts, and cut autographs were hot, too."

Barry Bonds and Albert Pujols were hot inserts, said Doyle, who also noted strong sales of LeBron James and Stoudemire inserts. In addition, he sold several Julius Jones and Steven Jackson inserts.

Doyle's sales also included a James-signed card, of 1-of-25, from Upper Deck Glass (\$1,500); a Joe Montana signed card, 1-of-10, from Donruss Elite (\$500); and a Cal Ripken signed card with a logo patch swatch from Upper Deck Ultimate (\$600).



Nick Swisher

"With a March show in Phoenix, we have the opportunity to bring in baseball stars of the past, present and future who are in the area for spring training," said Mandy Fuerst, Tristar vice president of events and marketing. "Over the years, bringing in top prospects before they hit it big has allowed us to develop relationships with players before they become big league superstars, such as Kerry Wood and Mark Prior."

"The city of Phoenix is abuzz with excitement about the Suns, so bringing Suns stars like Amare Stoudemire and others also proved to be a hit among collectors."

Al Ross, a veteran collector from Northern California, said weekend sales of *Sports Illustrated* magazines were steady, especially issues from the 1960s and late 1950s. Ross said baseball magazines were most popular, with his top sellers including covers featuring Carlton Fisk, Nolan Ryan, Pete Maravich, Roberto Clemente and Ron Santo.

"A lot of the show promoters nowadays are just bringing in the same retired ball players, but what

they need to do is bring in some tennis players, some golfers or maybe some track stars. I think those athletes would bring in some long lines," said Ross, who runs Big Al's. "There are a lot of collectors out there who want to die having the most signed *Sports Illustrated* magazines ever. So why not try to bring someone like Mark Spitz, Chris Evert or Frank Shorter to a show? You don't know how they'd do unless you try."

Tristar's next show is April 22-24 at the St. Charles Convention Center, marking Tristar's first St. Louis area show since 2001.

Scheduled to appear in St. Louis are: Jim Brown, Ernie Banks, Kurt Warner, Isaac Bruce, Gale Sayers, Bo Jackson, Mark Mulder, Jeff Suppan, Pete Rose, Mike Schmidt, Bart Starr, Paul Hornung, Forrest Gregg and Jason Witten, among others.

"We're extremely excited about the upcoming show schedule," Fuerst said. "Our return to St. Louis will be in a brand new, spectacular venue, the St. Charles Convention Center. The dealers and collectors have been asking us to return to St. Louis and we will be bringing them a star-studded show." ♦

Ross Forman is a freelance contributor to Sports Collectors Digest. Contact him via e-mail at: rossco814@aol.com.

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 1980 Carl Yastrzemski Liberty Matchbooks; Comp. Set of 10 diff. colors (NRMT) (Covers Only).....\$99.00
 1976 SSPC Uncut 9 Card Sheets - A) Inc Nolan Ryan (#593) & Willie - \$49.00; B) w/6 Red Sox Inc Carlton Fisk - \$9.00; C) w/8 Oakland As Inc Reggie Jackson - \$15.00; D) w/6 Red Sox Inc Yaz - \$15.00; E) w/9 Brewers Inc Yount & Aaron - \$20.00; F) w/9 Phillies Inc Carlton Lutzinski.....\$99.00
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 1953 Red Man (w/ab) (NRMT) #14 Duke Snider - \$180.00; #3 Berra.....\$150.00
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