

ShowCircuit

Dealers report strong sales in Phoenix

Tim Fyke was a little disgruntled when he opened a Hidden Treasures baseball that he had purchased at Tristar Productions' Phoenix Collectors Show, held March 12-14 at the Phoenix Civic Center.

The ball was dirty and there was no signature on the sweet-spot.

"I thought I had gotten a screwed-up ball," said Fyke, 35, of Anthem, Ariz.

But then he looked a little closer, and his anger turned to ecstasy.

Fyke had, instead, found a game-used baseball, signed by Mark Prior, complete with details of the game and the pitcher's performance.

"I thought it was great to get that ball. I was very surprised and very happy," said Fyke. "That ball was as good as any card I've ever gotten out of a pack."

Fyke's find was from a Sept. 16, 2003 win, Prior's 16th of the season for Chicago in which the Cubs defeated the New York Mets, 3-2. Prior pitched 8 2/3 innings, allowing eight hits, two runs and striking out 13.

And all stats were penned on the ball by Prior.

"I put that ball up there with the Lou Gehrig and Cy Young autographs that I've gotten on cards," Fyke said.

Tristar's Phoenix show attracted about 2,000 collectors for the three-days, with a mix of past, present and future baseball stars leading the autograph lineup.

Hall of Famers Orlando Cepeda and Phil Niekro headlined the show that also featured Luis Gonzalez, Tim Hudson, Ryne Sandberg, Steve Garvey, Jose Canseco, Vida Blue, Bob Turley, Rich Harden, Angel Berroa and Mark Mulder.

Plus, prospects Bobby Crosby, Jeremy Reed, Merkin Valdez, Angel Guzman, Chris Lubanski, Justin Jones, Rickie Weeks, and Prince Fielder, and Bart Starr, Joe Perry and Dante Hall appeared.

"We exceeded any Phoenix show we've ever done," said Roger Neufeldt of Sports Memories (Norman, Okla.). "The last four shows that I've done have been good. The year definitely is starting out great for vintage cards and memorabilia."

Neufeldt said sales in Phoenix were strong for 1940s and 1950s Topps baseball cards, especially those from 1952-55. He sold every high-number 1952 and 1967 card that he had.

And, as usual, Mickey Mantle was the most sought-after superstar, followed closely by cards featuring members of the 1955 Brooklyn Dodgers.

"I actually was surprised at the number of people who were buying, given the number of people at the whole show," Neufeldt said.

Mike Philpott of Home Runs Sports, Inc. (Tujunga, Calif.) said current baseball cards were the weekend's top draw, surprisingly ahead of basketball. And hockey cards were hot too, he said.

Bart Starr and Ryne Sandberg (above).

The hot boxes included Donruss Diamond Kings baseball (\$75) and Topps Heritage (\$59).

"I was very pleasantly surprised with the Phoenix show, especially with the number of dealers who had very good shows," said Jeff Rosenberg, president of Tristar Productions. "I think the dealers really like going to Phoenix and they really think it's a strong marketplace. We just have to figure out how to get more people in the building. We really want to draw more collectors to that show. We aren't drawing as many collectors to Phoenix as we are to other markets."

"Nonetheless, I think we have a solid foundation to start on, in preparation for future Phoenix shows."

Rosenberg added, "It was great to see so many of the baseball prospects who, for many, were appearing at their first card show ever. By having them there, it gives the fans a chance to get free autographs, which is something I strongly believe in."

So how important are free autographs to shows? Critical, Rosenberg said. "Tristar and the rest of the industry have to provide some free autographs to attract more collectors, particularly kids, who would love to get involved in collecting ... and what better



Luis Gonzalez and a fan.



Tim Fyke holds up the Mark Prior Hidden Treasures game-used baseball he bought at the Tristar show in Phoenix.



Orlando Cepeda



Vida Blue

way than through free autographs.

"I'm really bullish that we need to keep up the free autograph aspect of shows. It's a real important part of the industry."

Tristar has been giving away free autographs, or free with a wrapper redemption, since 1987.

HIGHLIGHTED SHOWS

Apr. 30-May 2 - 87th Philadelphia Sports Card & Memorabilia Show, Fort Washington Expo Center, Fort Washington, Pa.

Apr. 30-May 2 - 26th Annual Toronto Sports Card & Memorabilia Expo, Toronto International Centre, Mississauga Ontario.

May 2 - Dedham Extravaganza Sports Card Show, Dedham Holiday Inn, Dedham, Mass.

May 2 - Mike Riccio Sports, LLC, Stratford Ramada Inn, Stratford, Conn.

May 16 - Cardshow Classics, Taunton Holiday Inn, Taunton, Mass.

May 29-31 - Sports Collectibles of Houston show, The Maplewood Center, Houston, Texas.

June 4-6 - The West Coast Sports Collector's Expo, Hollywood Park Casino and Convention Center, Los Angeles, Calif.

June 4-6 - Tristar Collectors Show in Houston, George R. Brown Convention Center, Houston, Texas

June 5-6 - WSSCA 32nd Annual Sports Collectors Show, Seattle Center, Seattle, Wash.

June 6 - Dedham Extravaganza Sports Card Show, Dedham Holiday Inn, Dedham, Mass.

June 6 - Mike Riccio Sports, LLC, Stratford Ramada Inn, Stratford, Conn.

YOUR TURN

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