

ShowCircuit

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Tristar takes over National autographs

Show management expects five-year contract will end troubles with autograph stage

BY ROSS FORMAN

Tristar Productions has signed a five-year deal with The National Sports Collectors Convention to run the autograph pavilion for the annual event, starting this year with the Anaheim show set for July 26-30.

"The National is something very special to me personally and professionally," said Tristar president Jeff Rosenberg, who has been a National attendee since 1984, a booth holder since 1986, and promoter of the show twice (1995 in St. Louis and 1997 in Cleveland).

The National has had a new manager running the area every year this decade. "The last couple of years, there have been different organizations involved in the autograph pavilion," Rosenberg said. "The first thing we bring is consistency, along with quality and integrity, which is what the Tristar name stands for.

"One thing that is critical for the long-term success of The National is getting consistency in its management. Everyone knows that the autograph pavilion has been a critical cog in The National's success.

"The autograph guests create an excitement level that's important for the show on multiple fronts. First, it obviously gives collectors the opportunity to meet celebrities and get their autographs. At the same time, the autograph pavilion also provides a great opportunity to attract new collectors to the industry."

Rosenberg said Tristar has been in talks with National officials regarding the autograph pavilion for years. Tristar officially presented its bid to the National Committee last October and took over The National's autograph pavilion officially as of Feb. 1.

"Tristar is well positioned to make this the best National ever," said Mike Berkus, co-executive director of The National Sports Collectors Convention. "They have the experience doing megashows, the integrity and trust so important to making this happen properly, and a pipeline to the superstars. We look forward to working with them to provide a fantastic lineup."

"It's great to be a part of The National's management team," Rosenberg said. "We're really looking forward to offering collectors a great experience."

Tristar immediately announced the start of its lineup, beginning with Bart Starr, Joe Montana, Steve Young, Troy Aikman, Jerry Rice, Marcus Allen, Willie McCovey and Andre Dawson. Rosenberg said variety is important to the show, but Tristar will also shoot for the stars, literally.

"My goal is to have nothing but the best of the best appearing at The National, and we want to have something for everyone," he said. "We will have signers there for all tastes. That will be sports personalities past, present and future from all of the major



Tristar hopes to put together an autograph lineup that will create lines for The National like the huge show in 1991.

sports, plus some minor sports, such as soccer and the WNBA. We also will have Hollywood celebrities, especially those who have something to do with sports.

"We are going after the best of the best for autograph guests. We will start at the top, which most probably will agree is Michael Jordan, and go from there. We will work diligently to do whatever it takes, if possible and practical, to bring in the greatest names in sports history. That's our goal, nothing less. That said, you have to realize that some of those big-name athletes just don't sign; they don't do autograph shows."

Tristar has already put out inquiries to numerous big-time stars, Rosenberg confirmed. Tossing out the name of Jordan, a long-time Upper Deck spokesman, is an eye-catcher. Tristar will contact athletes who have exclusive autograph contracts with competing companies, Rosenberg said, "because The National is all-inclusive."

Rosenberg said the quantity of autograph guests is not as important as quality.

"I want to make sure the 2006 National autograph pavilion goes above and beyond what we've seen from The National's autograph pavilion over recent years," he said.

Rosenberg said the Hollywood roster will be filled with A-List talent, just like the sports side of the autograph pavilion. The company is looking at stars of music, TV and film, he said.

Tristar has had B- and C-List celebrities at several past regional shows, "and they were wildly successful," Rosenberg said. But those names won't suffice for The National, he said. "Historically, the National has not attracted the A-List Hollywood celebrities. But that's who we're going for."

The autograph pavilion will include the tradi-

tional VIP Package, which Tristar will expand with multiple price-point levels. The autograph pavilion also will include numerous interactive elements, which have become commonplace at Tristar shows, such as Q&A sessions with the stars and the Catch-a-Pass promotion. In addition, Tristar will offer its authentication service for all National signers.

Collectors can eventually purchase autograph tickets online via Tristar's website.

Tristar also will offer mail-order service for collectors unable to make it to California.

Rosenberg confirmed local legend O.J. Simpson will not be invited to attend, per the National Committee, which asked Simpson to leave the 2005 National after he appeared unscheduled. "O.J. Simpson is someone they are not interested in having at The National," Rosenberg said. "We don't want one athlete, for a negative reason, to cause a spectacle. The National is about the positive virtues of collecting."

Rosenberg said Tristar can help The National put its autograph stage controversies in the past and keep them there.

"We realize there have been some challenges, some issues with the autograph pavilion in the past," he said. "But we know we'll overcome those because of our integrity, because of our track record." ♦

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