

Hobby Odds and Ends

Wagner, Munson, Moore, and an old-fashioned show

By George Vrechek



The rest of a Wagner story

A few years ago in *SCD* I wrote about a 1972 *The Sport Hobbyist* magazine article by William Lowell that described his 1972 purchase of a T206 Honus Wagner card in mint condition. Subscriber Lowell, then 27-years old, had resumed card collecting about six months earlier. He ran an ad in Charles Bray's *Card Collectors Bulletin* and received a response from "an elderly gentleman in New York City" who had collected T206s as a kid. Initially the gentleman wasn't even positive that the Wagner was in his collection of 500 cards. I couldn't find any follow-up information on the Wagner or any additional collaboration of the unusual story...until veteran hobbyist Lew Lipset contacted me this year.

Lipset has had a long history in the hobby as a collector, writer, and full-time dealer. For many years he has run auctions of his own collection and those of others on consignment. Lipset remembered Lowell's Wagner vividly and provided the "rest of the story" as Paul Harvey would say.

In the late 1970s Lipset had been taking a table at shows and running ads in hobby publications including *Sports Collectors Digest* and *The Trader Speaks*. Bill Lowell was a doctor in the Navy, according to Lipset's recollection, and he contacted Lipset about buying his collection for \$35,000. The collection included what Lowell described as a "nice" Wagner.

Lipset recalls, "At Lowell's suggestion I rented a Marquis station wagon, which I would need to get everything in. He was right, it barely all fit. I left for Willow Grove (from Long Island for a show) on a Friday and left there Sunday night for Virginia and got there Monday morning." When he arrived mid-morning, Dr. Lowell greeted him and told him that he had to leave in a few minutes to get to the hospital for surgery, however the collection was on the table in the house, and that Lipset was invited to peruse what was there. The collection was in great condition, organized in plastic sheets, and included early tobacco cards as well as many cards from the classic Topps and Bowman sets.

Lipset gave Lowell a check and spent an hour packing the station wagon to the top with cards, never having an idea of how Lowell came up with the \$35,000 asking price. Lipset treasured the Wagner, at least until 1981 when it was time for dealer Lipset to monetize the Wagner. He put it up for auction and Bill Mastro bought it for \$25,011. Lipset's 1981 *SCD* ad auctioning the Wagner included a few other cards described as ex-mt including a T206 Plank, a 1933-4 Goudey Lajoie, 1939-41 Playball sets, a Batter-Up set, a 1935 Goudey set, and a 1941 Goudey set. What an ad! Lipset remembers the response at the time being lukewarm. According to Lipset, Mastro turned around and swapped the Wagner to Barry Halper for uniforms. Halper in turn wound up selling the same Wagner to the Baseball Hall of Fame. The

elderly gentleman-Lowell-Lipset-Mastro-Halper Wagner still resides at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown and is one of two Wagners owned by the museum.

I tried contacting Dr. Lowell, as did Lipset, but had no luck finding him. For more on Wagners in the hobby read Peter Nash's always-interesting online blog *Hauls of Shame*.

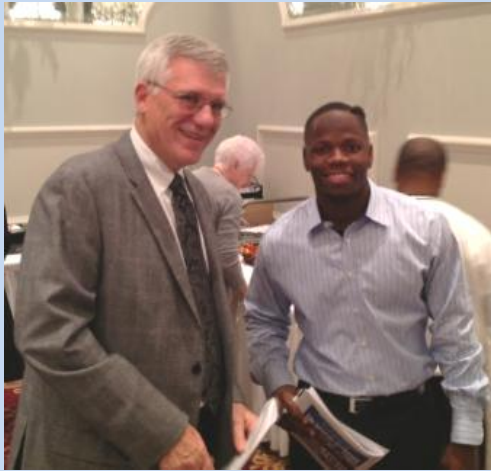
ESPN's Lester Munson

Attorney-turned-journalist Lester Munson is ESPN's legal analyst. I assist students in a journalism class at Chicago's Mount Carmel High School and asked Munson to speak to the class. Former Mount Carmel students have included Donovan McNabb, Simeon Rice, Antoine Walker, Chris Chelios, and current NIU quarterback Jordan Lynch. Among the many interesting points Munson made about sports journalism is that despite the decline in print media there has been a virtual explosion of sports coverage in recent years. More channels need programming, more contests and sports are televised, and there are plenty of issues to cover. Students enjoy reading and writing about sports and athletes but they don't get their information from the backs of trading cards much anymore.

Fraud in memorabilia collecting turns out to be just one of the many legal issues involving sports that make the news. Murders, sexual misconduct, payments to amateurs, performance enhancing drugs, and recreational drugs all see the light of day in sports sections today. Sometimes they get combined as when O.J. Simpson used a weapon to try to recover his memorabilia. Sports reporting turns out to be a growth industry.



ESPN's Lester Munson spoke to Mount Carmel High School students about his experiences in sports journalism.



George Vrechek and D.J. Moore



D.J. Moore with kids from the Special Olympics

D.J. Moore – a very big man

D.J. Moore was a cornerback for the Chicago Bears from 2009 to 2012. In 2013 he moved to the Carolina Panthers but was injured during the season and released. I had the opportunity to meet him last year when he attended a dinner to support the Special Olympics in Chicago. I brought a Bears football used for autographs to the dinner and asked if he would sign it so that we could include it in the evening's oral auction. Attendees were generally parents of kids in the program and they were looking to raise a few hundred dollars from the auction. I was prepared to bid away on the D.J. Moore football. The price got to several hundred dollars when suddenly someone bid \$1,000 and won the ball. The winning bidder was D.J. Moore. I thought it was a wonderful gesture. Moore stayed for the entire event, talked to everyone, and signed autographs for anyone who asked. He is listed in programs as 5'9" and 190 pounds. I'm pretty sure he is actually not that big, but he made a huge impression with his big smile and gracious actions. I hope to see him back on an NFL team next year.

Mark Macrae's 29th Annual St. Leander Show

Mark Macrae and his mother started doing shows at St. Leander's Ryan-O'Connell Hall in San Leandro about 20 miles from San Francisco in 1985 when he was 24. Their most recent show on November 23rd maintained the tradition of a low-key, low-cost, friendly reunion of dealers and collectors. Admission was \$4 (\$1 for seniors) with a \$1 off coupon. Free parking is just out the door. About 35 vintage card dealers set up at 75 tables which are sold-out well in advance. Macrae told me, "We intentionally keep the show to a limited size... (it is) modeled after the best Bay Area hobby shows in the 1970s which were held at Acalanes High School in Lafayette. The Acalanes shows were promoted by Dick Dobbins (host), Jim Horne and John Spalding, and went defunct in '82. Greg Augusta and I were lamenting the loss of Acalanes at a show in '84 and next thing you knew, the St. Leander show was born. It has since turned into the longest running annual show in California, and second longest running show on the West Coast, next to the WSSCA shows near Seattle."

It is one of those old-fashioned shows with about as much discussion at tables as sales. West-Coast cards are abundant with Zeenuts, Bowman PCL, Sunbeam, Mother's Cookies, and other regional issues at several tables. I don't think I saw more than a handful of graded cards. Show dealers included collectors like economist Ron Knecht who writes about sports for his local paper in Carson City, Nevada, and sells cards so that he can collect a few more. One of his first cards was 1957 Topps card #400 of the Dodger sluggers in a nickel pack. He has continued the process of finishing sets including variations. Bill Christensen also writes for *The Wrapper* (a magazine for the non-sports collector which has been going since 1978) and has been bringing a fantastic assortment of non-sports cards to the show since 1984. Kevin Johnson started in his father's baseball card store about 40 years ago when he was 7, works full-time at South Bay/Peninsula Sports Cards, and was there to buy. I found about as many cards I needed at this small show as I typically find at a large show.

It was great to talk to guys I had never met, 2,000 miles from home, about the same topics that have interested me for years such as hobby pioneers, vintage cards, variations, and sports. Good to see the old-time shows still thriving, at least a few times per year.

The annual show in San Leandro, California, is one of those old-fashioned gatherings.





Bill Christensen's non-sport table

Collector/dealers like Doug Harper and Ron Knecht, right, enjoy discussing the hobby and selling a few cards while they are at it.



Mark Macrae and his mother, above, have been greeting collectors since 1985.

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