

AUTOGRAPH COLLECTING

By Jeffrey W. Morey

"Really, Bob, how does one begin to convey to others the thrill of receiving a beautiful, inscribed, 5x7 photograph of Bob Waterfield. Or hearing from Otto Graham. And the happiness found when -- while out of school with that annual earache -- a signed postcard picture of Gene Gedman came in the mail."

Bob responded with "...probably the same way I would be thrilled with finding a statistic or unknown game on microfilm." He caught me.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is how I have come to write this little bit for you on autograph collecting.

I sense that some current sports stars think people shouldn't humble themselves asking for autographs. Well, I've been humbly collecting them since I was ten years old. I've changed over the years -- I've not been very aggressive of late -- but I've learned much. Because the famous and near famous have taken the time to help me, I've become a better person -- taking time with people for whom I might not normally have taken time.

My life is now half completed (at least I hope it's half and not 90%). As a bank branch officer, I deal with people and their minor and major problems. Talk about humbling experiences! It's not easy to ask anyone for a loan. I find myself a better listener and more willing to help (within legal limits) than I might otherwise have been.

Research and autograph collecting go hand in hand.

But which came first, research or autograph collecting? Without the concern for autograph and photograph collecting, how would researchers complement their papers with fascinating illustrations?

Frequently, collecting autographs leads one to want to learn even more about his favorite sport by researching various facets of the game. On the other hand, how many researchers after learning about their hero decided they wanted to meet and obtain the signature of their hero?

One baseball pitcher is said to refuse to sign autographs because he feels people should respect their teachers more and collect their autographs. He might be right, but who every really appreciated his teacher until long after his school days? However, how many kids collecting autographs today might be better students because a hero encouraged them to complete their education? Or a hero acknowledges he can play a musical instrument? Or is not afraid to read a book? Or is just nice to other people?

Researching, autograph collecting ... they go together. Both are a learning experience. Both complement the real world and directly or indirectly make us all better.

My problem was research is that I tend to read too much of the papers I'm reviewing. I see the history at the time that has not been condensed in the history books. I'm sorry that I haven't the time to learn all of the many things that make life interesting.

Knowing that there are so many people who have made sports such an interesting part of life, I feel that someone must help in maintaining the information flow of what the personality was like. An autograph, a picture, a signed gum card ... all of this adds up to remembering the person.

Researchers, did you ever send some of the information you have uncovered to a living player for him to enjoy? It might add a new element to your interest in sports.

The next time you meet an autograph collector, introduce yourself. It may mean a new dimension in both your lives. Together, you might both grow to heights neither expected!