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# Sports memorabilia: What it's worth & how to evaluate it

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To a sports fanatic, a piece of sports memorabilia may qualify as an MVP: most valuable possession. Whether the item holds monetary or sentimental value, people who care deeply about sports and their teams spend big dollars to obtain a coveted piece of memorabilia. Collectibles run the gamut from rare trading cards, to signed photographs, to pieces of a uniform or an entire NASCAR race car.

Since collectible pieces can vary so widely in quality and price, a set of guiding factors is used to determine relative worth in individual situations. Depending on what kind of sports memorabilia is being authenticated, the "key value factors" used to ascertain quality can also vary. If a piece is signed, there needs to be a way to establish provenance. If the piece is a photo, size matters, as does the quality of the paper. Is an item framed? Mounted? In a Plexiglas case? These are all important factors to determine how much an item is worth. If the piece is a trading card, the brand needs to be established. The best way is via a reputable card-grading service. If any collectible piece has already been authenticated by a professional company, that authentication becomes a key value factor as well.

### Buyer Beware

The demand for sports memorabilia has spawned a lucrative market for fakes. If potential buyers do not do their research before making a purchase, there's a very real chance that they could be acquiring an item that is not worth the money. A fake collectible could be anything from a photograph of Babe Ruth with a forged signature in the corner, to an unsigned football jersey that's simply not made with the same materials as the ones the pros wear.

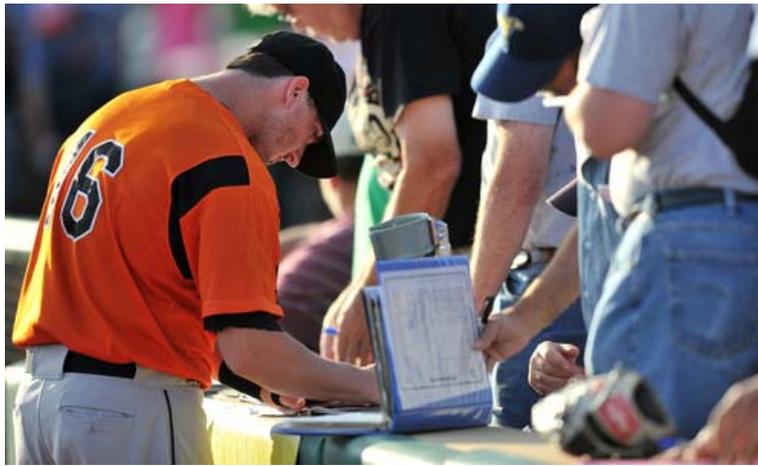
Another issue that may arise when assessing sports memorabilia, particularly playing cards, is the prospect of reprints.

In one case, an insured listed a loss of a gifted set of baseball cards on a claim sent to Enservio. The insured mailed in a spreadsheet with the card publication year, manufacturer, player name, team, and card worth. In the case of a Mickey Mantle Bowman card, the claimant listed the worth as "N/A" and asked Enservio to assess the amount.

The card was cataloged as manufactured in 1959 but after the company examined the badly damaged card, the card was deemed a reprint because of a red stripe running horizontally across the back. Enservio recognized this red stripe as an indication of a Bowman reprint and determined that instead of the card being worth \$1,000 to \$2,000 as originally thought, it was actually valued at \$1.

The best way to avoid purchasing a knockoff sports item is to be prepared for the possibility of being presented with one.





### Do Your Homework

When looking to buy a signed piece by a certain athlete, Google and study that player's signature first. Bring pictures of the actual signature to do a side-by-side comparison. Generally, it's safest to purchase from organizations known to be reliable for selling authentic memorabilia. For instance, if buying an actual player's jersey for any sport, consider doing so through the sport's official store. The MLB, NFL, NBA, NASCAR, and NHL all have stores where authentic sportswear is available.

If precautions are taken such as utilizing key value factors when purchasing sports memorabilia, true fans can have a pleasurable buying experience, enjoying their authentic keepsakes for years.



### Identifying Authentic Sports Memorabilia

Because there are so many different types of sports memorabilia, there is only one universal factor used to classify them; that being whether or not the piece of memorabilia has been examined and approved by an authenticating company such as Professional Sports Authenticators (PSA) or Memorabilia Evaluation and Research Services (MEARS). If the item has passed review by a professional company, it should have a certificate of authenticity. Other criteria used to determine the value of a piece of memorabilia vary depending on the item in question.

#### Autographed items can be assessed by the following key value factors:

1. The identities of every athlete whose signature is on the item.
2. Whether or not there is a photograph of the item being signed.
3. Whether or not the item was authenticated by a professional service.

**Photographs can be assessed by the following key value factors:**

1. The identities of who or what is in the photo.
2. Size of the photo.
3. Whether or not the photo is mounted, framed and/or matted.
4. Whether or not there are extras with the photo that ties it to an event such as a jersey, race tire, baseball bat, etc.
5. Whether or not the photo is signed.
6. Whether or not it has been authenticated by a professional service.

**Trading cards can be assessed by the following key value factors:**

1. The card manufacturer's name (Topps, Upper Deck, etc.).
2. The athlete on the card's name, the card number, and the card year.
3. Whether or not there are extras with the card that ties it to the player.
4. Whether or not it is autographed
5. Whether or not it is mounted, framed, or in a case
6. Whether or not it is graded by a card grading and authentication service like Beckett or PSA

**Miscellaneous sports items can be assessed by the following key value factors:**

1. What the item is and to which athlete and/or event it's related.
2. Whether the item has been authenticated by a professional service.



**Authenticating Services**

When evaluating a piece of sports memorabilia, be sure to make note of the defining key value factors that are associated with specific authenticating services. The most reputable ones will share their entire process for authenticating items. For example, Steiner Sports prepares a notarized affidavit that is signed by the athlete and a company representative. The notarized affidavit records the date and location of the signing and also details the items that were signed by the specified athlete. After the hand-signed collectible is examined for quality and signature condition, it is then affixed with a tamper-proof Steiner Sports hologram and secured in their offices. The collectible is not handled until it is delivered to a buyer.

As a roundup, here's a list of trusted sports memorabilia authenticators and sellers:

- PSA/DNA
- Steiner Sports
- Upper Deck Authenticated (UDA)
- Tristar Productions
- Mounted Memories (MM)
- Global Authenticated (GAI)
- Online Authentics.com (OA)

*Scott Lacourse is director of marketing for Enservio, which offers software and services across the entire value chain of contents claim processing—from onsite inventory capture of non-restorable contents—to transcription, appraisal, valuation, payment, replacement and predictive analytics.*

#### **Additional resources**

[How to Authenticate Sports Memorabilia](#)

[PSA and PSA/DNA Services](#)

[Various Sports Memorabilia Authenticator Processes](#)

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