

THIS ISLAND EARTH

Mickey Mantle's foul balls

Hall of Famers do have a sense a humor

by Bill Jensen

There's a standing offer of a million bucks for Mark McGwire's 70th home-run ball. At an auction at Christie's on Nov. 3, Lou Gehrig's 1938 uniform is expected to fetch 80 grand. Yes, the prices for sports memorabilia are obscene. But at least with the Mickey Mantle auto-graphed baseballs that are being auctioned off on the Internet this month, you are getting what you pay for: balls signed by the Mick with heartwarming greetings like "Fuck You! Mickey Mantle."

The auction by the Las Vegas-based Gallery of History, which claims its 177,000-piece collection of original historical documents is the largest in the world, runs 24 hours a day through Oct. 28. The prize of this particular event is a letter from John Paul Jones written to Thomas Jefferson, requesting money owed to him for his victory battles in 1779, which included Jones' famous "I have not yet begun to fight" brawl with the British warship *Serapis*. The letter is expected to fetch as much as \$200,000.

But for a mere \$2,000 minimum bid, you can be in the running for official big-league balls with some of Mantle's most inspired autographs. "Willie Mays Sucks! (signed) Mickey Mantle" reads one of the balls. "Joe DiMaggio Sucks!" reads another. Then there's "Marilyn Monroe told me Joe D Sucks!—Mickey Mantle—I agree MM." These obviously weren't written for some sick kid in the hospital.

"They were acquired from a collector who had some access to him," says Garrett Williams, senior vice president of the gallery. "It wouldn't be given to you or me at the ballpark." Williams defends the auction, citing posterity: "History is history, and these are an actual and real representation of what he did."

Last November, a lawsuit from Mantle's estate forced Leland's of Manhattan to pull 33 items, including the Mick's prescription drug bottles and bathrobe, from a 200-item auction of memorabilia belonging to Mantle's agent-girlfriend Greer Johnson.

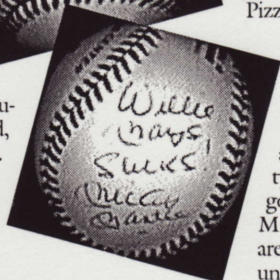
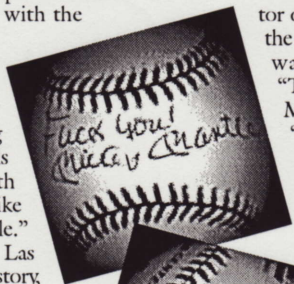
Wayne Miller, who became co-executor of the Mantle estate last February, told the *Long Island Voice* that his only concern was that the foul balls are genuine. "There are a lot of forgeries out there," Miller said from his Dallas law office, "but it's not inconceivable to see Mickey having a few pops and doing something like that." Miller is in the process of reading over Angelo Pizzo's script for a movie based on the life of the hard-living Yankee slugger.

According to Norman Segel, 59, co-owner of Doubleheader Baseball Cards and Comics in Oceanside, a typical Mantle autographed ball goes for \$200 to \$250. He says Mantle's off-color dedications aren't unknown in the collector universe.

"I've seen 'F-U Mickey Mantle' before," says Segel, who wears Gil Hodges' 1969 World Series ring, which he bought from the late Met skipper's family. "I had done shows with him where he was the nicest guy. He would take a kid and put him up on his knee. Other days, when he was bombed, he would just sign with his head down the whole time."

The Mantle collection on the Internet isn't just about balls. For a minimum bid of \$1,750, you can get a protective cup with the inscription: "Protector of the Family Jewel!—Mickey Mantle—Not Game Used Too Small To Have Been Mine!" If you want to spend a little extra in the crotch department, you can pick up a small athletic supporter that is expected to attract bids of \$5,000 to \$10,000. The inscription on the very tiny jockstrap reads "Joe DiMaggio's jock/X Small—Mickey Mantle."

To make a bid, go to <http://www.galleryofhistory.com>.



Let's play two!

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