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THE NEW SPORTS COLLECTIBLES INDUSTRY: A NEED FOR RESEARCH

BY

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While people have collected sport related items for centuries, the advent of the Internet changed the scope of the sport memorabilia industry forever. The birth of Internet auction sites (ebay being the most popular) allowed buyers accessibility to items virtually unavailable for years. Before the Internet, collectors were limited to trade shows where dealers were limited to a selling space the size of a table. Today at the click of a mouse you can bid on 45,000 items related to Dale Earnhardt--ranging from an autographed photo to a race-worn glove. Further, sellers using the Internet can inexpensively advertise their items to millions of buyers throughout the world. Recently, a man from Ohio sold a Kirk Gibson game-used baseball bat to a woman in Spain. It is doubtful that the seller would have "met" the buyer without the Internet much less the 227 potential buyers who viewed his auction. Additionally, and most important to the world of sport memorabilia, Internet auctions have become commonplace for determining the "value" of an item. It is difficult to locate a person who either buys or sells sport memorabilia that does not know what their items sell for on the Internet. Trading card dealers, market vendors, and memorabilia store owners all rely on the Internet for determining minute-by-minute value of their goods. Even professional leagues (e.g. Major League Baseball, NFL, PGA Tour), and sport professionals (e.g. Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, Pete Rose) use the Internet to sell merchandise related to their careers.

Without question, the Internet has increased the number of collectors, dealers, and investors in sport memorabilia. The Internet has also caused problems. Issues such as fake items, non-authentic autographs, and incorrectly described items plague the "new sport collectibles industry". While the click of a mouse ease of buying items attracts some users, the lack of accountability to fraudulent items keeps many potential buyers and sellers away. Experts estimate that as many as 85% of autographed items are not authentically signed.

The dramatic change in the way sport memorabilia is bought and sold has increased the need for research in this area. This special issue focuses on sport memorabilia and the "hype" behind sport collectibles. With contributions from dealers who have spent a lifetime in the "hobby", economists who attempt to determine the best time to buy and sell sports collectibles, and academicians who discuss the process through which collectors determine what the items mean, this issue serves as a catalyst to conversation, debate, and future study.