

CHASING MANTLE

A surprise encounter in '94 spurred Swearingen to build the ultimate Mantle collection

By Mike Scott

It was 1994 and Randall Swearingen had just popped out in a scrimmage at Mickey Mantle's fantasy baseball camp in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. As Swearingen began jogging over to the bench, a slightly hunched figure pacing the first-base coaching box called him over.

It was Mickey.

Swearingen, a Houston native, was stunned since he hadn't even noticed his boyhood idol had even been on the field. Mantle told him to keep his weight back while in the batter's box.

Then Mantle broke it down to its simplest form.

"He told me that he never paid any attention to what the coaches told him when he played in the majors," said Swearingen who in the last decade has amassed perhaps the largest and most impressive collection of unique Mickey Mantle memorabilia anywhere. "He said he just tried to hit the hell out of the ball every time he went to the plate."

You could say Swearingen, president of his own software company for over 20 years, has taken The Mick's simplistic approach to hitting a baseball and used it to build his collection.

Go hard after any piece of memorabilia you want.

In that collection are numerous photos of Mantle; everything from a Frank Bowman original dated April 26, 1951, just days before Mantle's first home run to a fantasy camp picture from that 1994 conversation along the first base line.

But without doubt the gem of the collection is a one-of-a-kind 1999 Harley Davidson motorcycle Swearingen bought at a Guernsey's auction at Madison Square Garden. The motorcycle is painted and decorated with images of Mantle, has a seat made out of an original Mantle baseball glove, and a replica Mantle signature.

Swearingen had never ridden a motorcycle in his life when he bought the bike, but he's since taken up the hobby a few times a week in his neighborhood.

The motorcycle is so valuable that the local Harley Davidson dealership wants no part of servicing it.



"I guess I'm going to have to learn how to service a motorcycle myself," Swearingen says with a laugh.

So what motivated a baseball enthusiast to become a fanatic Mantle collector?

"That week at the fantasy camp was so special to me. I was literally walking on cloud nine for months afterward," Swearingen says.

Swearingen had been a Yankee fan growing up even in the Deep South because, "every time I turned on the television to watch a baseball game it seemed the Yankees were on, and every



kid's favorite Yankee was Mickey Mantle."

Mantle passed away in 1995 but from that point on Swearingen decided to auction off the Nolan Ryan memorabilia he had been collecting for years so that he could amass Mantle merchandise. Since then he has been in contact with Mantle's brother, Ray, and has purchased such items as Mantle's 1955 World Series ring,

an authenticated Mantle Yankee warm-up jacket and a 1965 authenticated Mantle road Yankee jersey. He owns several team programs signed by Mantle, including a 1949 team program of the minor league Independence Yankees signed by the entire team, including manager Harry Craft, who later piloted the Houston Colt 45s.

In addition he has literally thousands of smaller items, including virtually every game-used Mantle card produced by Upper Deck in 1999-2000.

But Swearingen is more than just a collector of Mantle memorabilia. He has assisted in constructing and updating the websites www.mickey-mantle.com and www.heroesinpinstripes.com, the online site promoting Mantle's baseball fantasy camp that still exists today. He's also the chairman of the advisory board researching the possible site of a Mickey Mantle Museum in his birthplace of Commerce, Okla. Whether such a museum will ever be constructed there, or in larger cities like Oklahoma City or New York, remains up in the air. Regardless, Swearingen has a vested interest in the legendary Yankee slugger.

"After the stock market technology crash in 2000, I lost some money like the rest of the world," Swearingen says. "So I decided then, why not invest my money in something I really enjoy? His memorabilia is still appreciating in value."

Another unique item in Swearingen's possession is a public relations bio sheet Mantle filled out for Major League Baseball when he first arrived in the majors in 1950. On that sheet, Mantle provided a brief history and wrote what the biggest thrill in his life would be.

"He wrote that it would be hitting his first big-league home run," says Swearingen.

Lest anyone think Swearingen's admiration for Mantle isn't genuine, he named his two youngest sons Mickey and Charles (Mantle's middle name).

"It just goes to show the appreciation and respect I have for the guy."

Mike Scott is a freelance writer and contributor to Beckett Baseball Card Plus.