

Better collecting through chemistry?

Alan Berman, owner of Signed Baseball Magic in Santa Rosa, California, claims he turns “foul balls into home runs.” Berman removes “unwanted signatures” from team and multi-signed baseballs using “a secret formula...a combination of a few different chemicals.” With the help of his daughter, an experienced art restorer, Berman then “finishes” the ball’s surface. Thus, Berman “creates” single-signed balls, which he resells at a mark-up. For a fee, Berman also will remove extraneous autographs and inscriptions from balls sent to him by other collectors.

On his website Berman displays a Jackie Robinson “single-signed” baseball that is part of his personal collection. The before photo shows a signed ball that is inscribed, “To Fred, Best Wishes, Jackie Robinson.” Below Robinson’s autograph is the signature of Ford Frick. The after photo shows the ball without the Frick signature and inscription.

“If you look at it with the naked eye you’re going to think it’s a single-signed ball,” Berman told *Autograph Collector*. “If you look at it with a magnifying glass, you’re going to swear it’s a single-signed ball.”

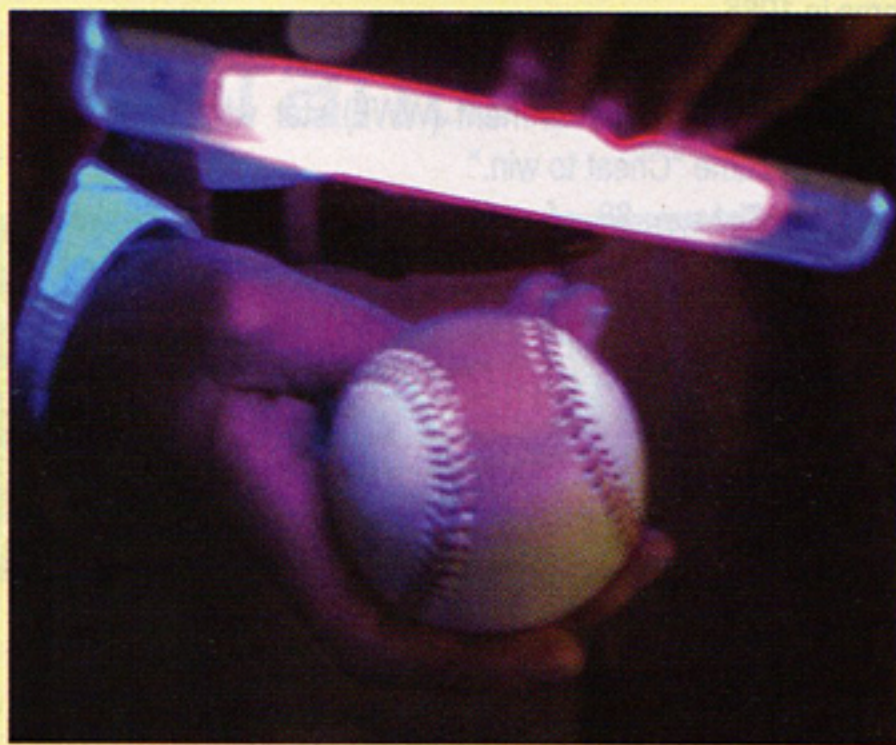
Berman says his balls are an affordable alternative for some collectors with small budgets and big dreams.

“To the purists, who want a true single-signed ball, this is not for them,” Berman says. “I’m looking for the person who can’t afford to buy the true single-signed ball and is happy to be able to add to their collection this way.”

Berman’s customers give his service rave reviews. Others are not so kind.

“I deplore the notion of altering a baseball,” says Tom O’Neil, a serious collector from New Jersey. “We are going from chemically-enhanced ballplayers to chemically-enhanced baseballs, all in the pursuit of a higher value on the secondary market.”

Autograph industry leaders express additional concerns. Several who spoke with *Autograph Collector* questioned the ethicality of Signed Baseball Magic’s business. Customers buying balls directly from Berman receive a certificate of authenticity documenting the item’s original condition. Clients who commission Signed Baseball Magic to remove signatures from balls they provide receive no such documentation, however.



An ultraviolet light shows “an ugly purple blob,” revealing alterations made to a ball by Signed Baseball Magic. Photo courtesy of RichardSimonSports.com

Richard Simon—owner of Richard Simon Sports and an authenticator who has worked with law enforcement agencies—warns that unscrupulous individuals will attempt to sell Berman’s “magic balls” as genuine, single-signed balls.

“Let’s be frank,” says Simon. “How many hands are these balls going to go through? At some point, if there is not full disclosure, there could be a fraud perpetrated.”

According to Kevin Keating, a respected authenticator and owner of Quality Autographs & Memorabilia of Virginia, Inc., one way collectors can protect themselves is by examining single-signed balls under an

ultraviolet light.

“A black light will show the differential in the altered spot, or spots, and the rest of the ball,” Keating explains. “You can tell immediately what has been altered.”

The U/V “telltale” is something Berman readily admits to. “I want to stress the fact that I am not trying to deceive anybody,” he said. “If you look at one of my baseballs with an ultraviolet light, it will be obvious...you’re going to see that, indeed, they’ve been doctored.”

But for Simon, Berman’s disclosure is not enough. In an effort to educate collectors about the potential for foul play, Simon issued a “Forgery Alert” about Signed Baseball Magic in his email newsletter.

—Joshua Platt

AUTOGRAPH collector MAGAZINE

home subscribe renewals back issues books clubs dealers shows & events customer support advertising info contact us

features **JANUARY 2006**

Jimmy Carter: An Exclusive AC Interview
Blaze Starr: Burlesque Queen of the 60s
Norman Mailer: No Holds Barred
Isabella Rossellini: Legendary Model/Actress

WIN Blaze Starr's Autograph!

ADVERTISERS
Profiles in History
Trish Hessey
Gallery of History
University Archives
Novaspac Galleries
MastroNet
PSA/DNA
LCG Signatures

FREE E-Zine subscribe!

Buy the January Issue Now!

THE OFFICIAL AUTOGRAPH PRICE GUIDE
4th Edition!

www.AutographCollector.com