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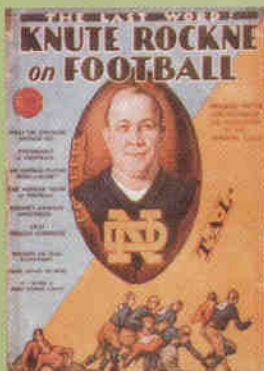
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Knut Rockne football book from the 1920s.

Hidden in basements around the country are cards, buttons and jerseys commemorating sports legends. Some are kept by fans; some are kept by the players themselves. But if it's a piece of history that canonizes a sports immortal — a player whose feats transcended a single sport or a single era — it won't remain hidden for long. Joel Platt, co-founder and curator of the Sports Immortals Museum in Boca Raton, is on a mission to present the greatest collection of sports memorabilia ever collected under one roof.

Babe Ruth's last baseball jersey, Muhammad Ali's championship belt, Jim Thorpe's personal scrapbook, Michael Jordan's basketball sneakers, Chris Evert's tennis racket, Wayne Gretzky's uniform — these are just some of the amazing artifacts on display from Platt's collection, which he has established with the collaboration of his son, Jim. Visiting the museum offers a truly unique trip down sports-memory lane.

In what may be South Florida's best-kept secret, the Sports Immortals Museum exhibits 30,000 pieces of a collection that totals more than one million items. This showcase includes a baseball from 1865, a program from the first Harvard-Yale

Largest auto-graphed bat in the world, signed by 60 Hall of Fame greats. "Double No-Hitter Ball" Chicago v. Cincinnati, 1917.



MECCA

F O R T H E S P O R T S F A N

football game in 1875, and a rare Honus Wagner baseball card valued at more than \$500,000. To call this just another collection is like calling Babe Ruth just another baseball player, or Michael Jordan just another basketball player.

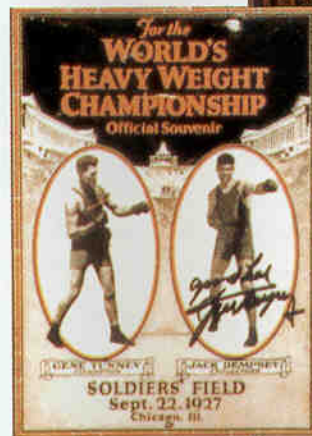
Like the legends whom he collects, Platt's story is one of myth and fantasy, dedication and hard work. A pursuit of passion that started when he was just four years old and bed-ridden from an accident. "My parents bought me baseball cards to cure my boredom while convalescing. In that pack of cards was one of my favorite players, Babe Ruth," Platt recalls. "One night I had a dream where the Babe visited me and told me not to give up — that some day either I would become a major league baseball player or I would build a museum out of my baseball cards."

An elbow injury sustained while playing at Duquesne University curtailed Platt's chances of becoming a baseball player, but nothing has kept him from his dream of establishing the Sports Immortals Museum.

The Platt collection is so valuable and rare that the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C. not only borrowed

(continued on page 38)

Program from the "Long Count" bout, Jack Dempsey v. Gene Tunney, 1927.



Glove used by Lou Gehrig, 1927.

BY NOAH DAVIS



Jim and Joel Platt are the proud possessors of over 2,000 uniforms of the greatest athletes of all time; over 6,000 autographed baseballs dating back to 1865; and a World Series pin collection dating back to 1911. Photo: Matt Silk.

Hand-painted mug presented to Walter Camp, 1880.



pieces for their Bicentennial Celebration, but also has called the collection "absolutely the most outstanding single collection of sports..." The National Portrait Gallery, also in Washington D.C., has shown pieces from the collection for their American Sports Hero's exhibit.

All the major sports are represented in the collection: football, baseball, basketball, hockey, boxing, car racing, horse racing, tennis and golf. No matter the pastime, there's guaranteed to be something of interest at the museum. As NFL Hall of Fame running back, Franco Harris says, "The Platt collection is like having all of the Halls of Fame under one roof."

The sports legends displayed within have helped add to this collection. At a meeting with Muhammad Ali, Platt asked if he could have a pair of the Champ's gloves, shoes and a robe for the museum. When one of Ali's managers returned moments later with just the gloves and shoes, Ali



Pele's New York Cosmos uniform.

Photo: Matt Silk



The Sports Immortals collections has been recognized by the Smithsonian Institute as "...absolutely the most outstanding single collection of sports..."



Sports Immortals has been featured on national television and in *Sports Illustrated* — no wonder! Photo by Matt Silk.

Photo: Matt Silk



The Sports Immortals Museum also features the Memorabilia Mart, with more than 10,000 items for sale — though none of these items are from the permanent collection. The Memorabilia Mart specializes in hard to get, one-of-a-kind collectors items that you won't find elsewhere. Visit the Sports Immortals Web site where you can learn about the museum and view the collection online, at www.sportsimmortals.com.

The Sports Immortals Museum
6830 N Federal Highway
Boca Raton, FL.
(561) 997-2575

Open Mon.-Sat., 10 a.m.-6 p.m.,
Sun. special hours.
Admission: Adults \$5.
Children under 12 \$3.
Handicapped accessible.

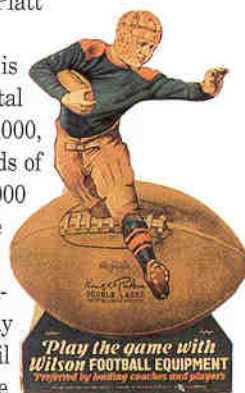
STB has 30 passes to give away. To win, submit your name, address and the number of tickets you need to Simply the Best, 900 SE 8 Ave., Suite 104, Deerfield Beach, FL 33441.

asked, "Where's the robe?" Flustered, Ali's manager could only stammer, "But Champ, you only have one robe, and you need that to train in." Ali responded, "I may only have one robe, but the man only asked for one robe! Now give it to him." The story may sound incredible, but Platt walked out moments later with gloves, shoes — and that one robe. Platt estimates that 95 percent of his collection is donated.

The showcase currently on display is incredible, but it is just a tiny fraction of Platt's entire accumulation. The total collection has an estimated value of more than \$50,000,000, and the overall numbers are truly staggering. Thousands of uniforms worn by all-stars of every sport, more than 6,000 autographed baseballs, 10,000 programs, more than one hundred thousand autographed mementos, and more than one million cards, await display in a more permanent home. The remainder of the collection not on display is stored in a high-security facility until Platt can realize his ultimate goal — the Sports Immortals Complex.

Platt envisions the Sports Immortals Complex to be an all-encompassing sports entertainment destination, with a museum featuring interactive and participatory components as its crown jewel. This muse-

um would bring to life the fascinating stories that the memorabilia commemorate using the latest multimedia technology. "I always looked upon myself as a curator on a mission to establish...a Smithsonian-type attraction that would honor and enshrine the greatest athletes of all time," says Platt. ■



Wilson ad circa 1920 with Red Grange promoting a Knute Rockne football.



Turn of the century games.