

# BASEBALL DIGEST



## OPENING DAY EDITION



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*By Abe J. Shear*  
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When I started this series of baseball related interviews in 2000, I had no idea how to access people. Sometimes I was lucky and a few people I knew said yes. Then I hit pay dirt when I found Harvey Meiselman's address list. An inch thick, it has thousands of addresses for players, coaches, managers and umpires. And some of them fortunately agreed to be interviewed.

Of course, this list is used mostly by autograph collectors and, in baseball, there is nothing like Harvey's list. I've sent out numerous letters and never received a return with a "wrong address" notation (though a few people have ignored me).

Ultimately, it would be very difficult today to collect baseball autographs without Harvey's source material and Harvey did not disappoint me with his stories. Many people today still send index cards (or baseball cards) in the mail along with a return and stamped envelope, of course hoping to receive a signature from players they remember. Most of these autograph seekers have Harvey to thank.

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### Harvey Meiselman "Addresses = Autographs"

**Shear: Here we are. I'm with Harvey Meiselman.**

Right.

**So Harvey, tell me please, where did you grow up?**

In the Bronx, New York, 7 blocks from Yankee Stadium.

**And did that make you a Yankee fan or a Yankee non-fan?**

A Yankee fan. My first game was Don Larsen's perfect game in '56.

**Is that right? So you were only going to World Series games?**

My Uncle Al worked the box seats and he happened to be working 3 sections behind the Yankee dugout. One of the ushers that he worked with said he had a couple of tickets for that game and if my father wanted to take me over there he could. We got there in the middle of batting practice and saw a heck of a

really made up for it.

**I've interviewed Richardson.**

Right.

**Who is as nice as they come.**

He really is.

**And, I've interviewed Ralph Terry and Larsen, who are also very nice.**

Right.

**Those aren't words that you describe all these players that play today.**

No, no, a very small percentage of them because what's happening is, you can quote me on this, the American game is not the American game anymore. The old guys weren't paid much and were from immigrant families. They couldn't go from team to team. Today a lot of players are not from the United States.

**Baseball was a poor man's game and it was really a stick ball game and you could play with almost no equipment**

"My first game was Don Larsen's perfect game in '56."

game.

**How old were you then?**

8 actually.

**And had you followed the Yankees?**

**Who were your favorite players on that team?**

I liked the whole infield – Skowron, Richardson, Kubek and Boyer. I liked Ford. Elston Howard was one of my favorites. You know, a lot them were kind of stuffy but the ones that were nice

**and you could learn to play in the park or the backyard, you could learn to play in the street and you didn't need a big field.**

Right. Basically we had a park across the street from my house in the Bronx, we had a stick ball field where, you know, at 4:00 or so everybody would meet out there and we played.

**When you were a little boy, did you play in organized leagues or did you**

**just play in the field at the park?**

When I got to DeWitt Clinton High School, I played on their team for three years. I played little league up until then. After DeWitt Clinton, I really didn't get involved with leagues other than coaching. But, you know, it was still an interest of mine and I wanted to be involved in some of the local little leagues. I coached, I managed a couple, and stayed involved.

**What position did you play as a child?**

First base.

**And does that mean you were a left-handed hitter?**

Switch-hitter. Left-handed fielder, switch-hitter and I always kidded Skowron before he left the Yankees that I was going to take his place.

**So your favorite player was probably Mickey Mantle then.**

No, you're wrong. You're wrong. I liked Mantle, but he wasn't my favorite – when I was growing up, I liked him. But, to be perfectly honest with you, before I moved to Florida I went to his restaurant in New York. I saw how much he drank.

**Larsen pitched that perfect game in 1956. So when you were a little boy, did you collect cards or autographs or magazines? There was a lot going on then.**

I collected cards. I didn't start collecting autographs until 1969. A friend of mine and I saw in one of the old sports newspapers that Jack Smalling was advertising his address list.

**Probably was in Trader's Digest.**

Could have been, could have been. I don't remember that. We bought the address list, and, you know, we'd sit down and write letters. Then we were writing to guys like Elmer Flick, Dave Bancroft, you know, guys like that. A lot of Hall of Famers were still alive and they were still signing. Now, a very, very small percentage of Hall of Famers sign.

**When you tried to collect, did you send index cards? Is that what you collected?**

If I had a baseball card, I would send that. If not, I'd send a couple of index cards, yeah.

**And you'd send them with stamped, return envelopes and they would just send them back?**

Yeah, yeah. At the time, it was really just out of courtesy, but now, I doubt you'd get a response if you didn't send a self-addressed stamped envelope.

**And my recollection is that at some of the ballparks, like the Yankees', you could stand outside and collect autographs from the players as they came in, right?**

Oh yes. That's how I got to be good friends with Elston Howard. When I got

that really told it like it was. You know, Rizzuto was always a team player, and when he went up into the booth he kind of watched what he said.

**Right.**

Bill White never pulled any punches and they used to argue about it all the time on the air. It was really interesting to watch them when they got together.

**So I always thought that was great fun when I was a child.**

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“I'm just trying to collect the all-time Yankees set.”

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to high school, I was at DeWitt Clinton High School. Do you know the Bronx at all?

**Not well.**

Okay, there's the train that used to go in front of the stadium – it's the Jerome Avenue L. Yankee Stadium was at 161st Street, I lived at 174th Street and DeWitt Clinton was at 233rd Street, the last stop on the train.

**Sure.**

When I got out of class at about 1:30, quarter to 2, I used to take the train right down to 161st Street. If my Uncle Al was working, I'd pay the seventy-five cents bleacher fee to get in and I'd go looking for him and he'd put me up in a good seat. If not, I'd sit at the end of the train station where you could actually see between the right field and centerfield stands. There was a spot where you could see right through there to the field.

**Now, you've talked about Uncle Al a few times. Were your parents and your siblings baseball fans?**

Nah, it was a job to Uncle Al, nothing more. He was a Mets fan and we used to fight over it all the time.

**Oh, but what about your father?**

He was a Yankee fan. Not strong but, you know, they were the closest team to us so that's who he rooted for.

**When you were a little boy did you listen to the ball games, watch them on TV, how did you --?**

For what the TV broadcasts were at that time, yeah, I watched whatever I could.

**Who were your favorite announcers back then?**

Mel Allen and Phil Rizzuto. When Bill White came to the Yankees, I really liked him a lot. He was one of the first

Oh yeah, I'll tell you a funny story about the Yanks and the Mets. My wife and I are big Billy Joel fans. About two years ago up in Animal Kingdom, at one of the restaurants there, the waiter happened to come over to us and he says, “Boy, I've waited on a lot of people but never Billy Joel before.” He was in a private room, and I said okay let me ask you a question, “If I write out something on a napkin, could you bring it over to him.” And he said sure, if he'll accept it. And I wrote on the napkin and he took it and the next thing I know someone is tapping on my shoulder and it was him, Billy Joel. He sat down with us for about 10-15 minutes. His kids were there. They came and got him, otherwise, I'd think we'd still be sitting there. He asked for my address and about a month later, I received 4 albums on DVD, and pictures and a couple of really nice things. And he said, “You speak a lot for the Yankees, I may have to root for them.” But he's still a Mets fan. He has a life-long contract to play for the Mets and to play at ...

**Madison Square Garden.**

Yeah, at Madison Square Garden. He plays there once a month.

**So, when you were done with high school, did you stay around New York or did you go away to college, or?**

No, I moved actually from the Bronx to Flushing, Queens.

**As a Yankee fan, you were allowed to do that?**

Yeah, I got a lot of kidding, but I was allowed to do that and about '83 is when I moved down to Florida, mostly to get away from my ex-wife.

**How did you get into the autograph,**

**well maybe it's not the autograph business, how did you get into the address book business, for autographs mostly I suppose?**

Well, I had worked about 12 years as a skip tracer for one of the major banks down here and, quite frankly, I was good. **Skip-tracers find people that owe the banks money?**

Exactly. For car loans, credit card debt, whatever. They'd send it to the collection department. Once they lost track of this person, they would give it to me to find them. And I had an extremely good track down record. And, when I married Gail in '94, I had been working for Jack for a couple of years helping him update his lists.

**Jack who?**

Jack Smalling. He was basically paying me in autographs, and I would take deceased players' autographs for doing the work. After a couple of years, Gail says to me, "You know, you're working for Jack Smalling and the addresses that you found are so much more accurate than his. Why don't you start to put together your own lists?" So, I spoke to Jack about it, and all he asked me was, "Since you've been working for me for a while, if you're going to put out a baseball list, just don't put it out for five years. Anything else I don't care about." So that's what happened. In '96, I came out with my first four lists and then in the coming the years I came out with five more, and then in 2002 I came out with the baseball list. Because of the sources that I use, it is a lot more accurate.

**So your list is all baseball but it includes players, umpires...?**

Managers, coaches, yeah. I just added this year announcers to it. It's been

are probably going to die at the end of the year because they're just such bad signers.

**The auto racing people?**

Auto racing and wrestlers. Yeah, they're horrible.

**Maybe it's because the wrestlers can't write but the...**

Could be.

**...the auto racers make a lot of money.**

They do, but they just don't care about the public which is astounding to me. But, I have a file in the back of the list – it's about a page and a half long – as far as auto racers that will charge to sign and it's almost as long as baseball's.

**I bet the hockey players sign.**

They do. They are, of any sport, the best signing athletes.

**I have no doubt. They didn't make a lot of money, they're pretty normal.**

**Most of them grew up in pretty small rural areas.**

In Canada or North Dakota or small towns in Minnesota. And they appreciate the fans. I mean, believe it or not, one of the nicest guys, if you meet him, is Pavel Bure. He is super, super nice and he's probably one of the top ten players that ever played the game.

**And, tell me, do you still collect autographs?**

I collect Yankees. I'm just trying to collect the all-time Yankees set. And out of about almost 1,200 players, I think I need about 38 or 39 to complete the collection. And these go back to the early 1900's.

**That's pretty cool.**

About five years ago, I put a large part of my collection up at auction. And really the only thing I collect is the Yankees, Nobel Prize winners and astronauts.

wall and into the complex where Ichiro Suzuki lived. And he takes about 25 photographs, knocks on the door and says "Can you sign these for me"? And Ichiro must have said sure, let me just get a pen, hold on and he called the FBI. And when they saw that my name and address was on the list...

**They asked you not to encourage that?**

They, yeah, there's a line right on the front page that says please do not go to these players' houses for autographs.

**Now, if a player asks you not to be listed, do you not list?**

I will not list their address. I'll put a note instead. I'll put in there that the player requests that his address not be listed. I have about probably maybe 14, 15 names like that through all the lists.

**Since you know something about so many of these players, little tidbits about where they live, and this and that, whether they're nice, whether they sign, that kind of stuff, does it change the way you watch games? I mean, are you rooting for people that you like or are you rooting for teams still?**

The one person I would always change the channel when he came to bat was A-Rod. I do not want anything to do with him. Don't want to watch him on a game, take an at bat, I cannot stand him. He's such a hypocrite and unfortunately, he's going to make the Hall of Fame.

**It might take a while.**

I have a feeling that once Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire make it, it's going to open up the floodgates.

**Do you think most of the people who collect autographs are older or younger, and are most of the people investors or collectors?**

I'm going to say investors from what I've seen. I recently just quit every sports collecting website that I was on because I really got tired of seeing "sent 12, signed 12." Because you know one's going into collection and the rest are going on eBay. You know, it's ruining the hobby. The most I would send under any circumstances is three and only if they're different cards or different items. And you know, if you want to send more than that, in your letter to the players, say look, I've got three or four other cards of yours, would you mind if I sent them to you to sign also for my

**"Probably my favorite signature is a Walt Disney full check that I have."**

evolving over the years.

**And other than baseball, or is it just baseball?**

That book is just baseball. I also have a separate list for football, a separate list for hockey. Then I have one for auto racing, which is kind of new, it's only about two years old. My wrestling list is about two years old. And those two

That's about it.

**Do you still go out to find people, to go see people to get autographs or do you do them mostly by the mail?**

I tell people not to knock on people's doors. About 2005 or something like that, I got a call from the FBI in Washington. It seems someone bought my baseball list and snuck over the

collection. Ninety-nine percent of them say yes. But, they know, they're not stupid. When I get a notice from one of my customers that someone just started charging for their autograph, they usually attach a copy of the letter they received from the player just so I can have it as a backup. And nine times out of ten, it says because of the eBay factor and the fact that sports autographs are getting to be an investment, they are now charging and giving the money to charity.

**It's funny, I was looking through some stuff I had the other night and you know, when you start to collect as a child or a younger person, you don't know what you're doing, you collect all kinds of stuff.**

Sure.

**I was looking at a 1975 World Series program and I was going to give it to a friend of mine and I looked in there and there was my buddy the hairdresser, Bernie Carbo's autograph.**

He's one of the nicer guys.

**I have to say, I'm not sure whether or not that makes the program more or less valuable. But, the 1975 World Series program is a really pretty program.**

It is, it is.

**I was going to give the program to one of my colleagues at work and he opened it up, and not only did he see Carbo's autograph but he saw that I had scored the game. And, I said I've got to take my program back and that I'd bring him another one. So I**

**brought him back a beautiful program with four square corners, but not Carbo.**

Okay.

**Just two or three other little questions. Do umpires respond very well? Just always been curious. I've never interviewed an umpire, and the couple that I've written to have not responded.**

There's a group that does, mostly the older umpires. The newer ones that came into the league, let's say after 2000, are kind of hard. You've got to write them about two, three, four times, and the best time to get them is probably around Christmas time.

**Really?**

You schmooze it up with them, you send them a Christmas card.

**That's a smart idea.**

Yeah, yeah.

**If you could have one autograph, who would that be and why?**

Man, interesting question, one that I don't have?

**You can make it one that you like having the most.**

Only because my wife and are so into Disney, probably my favorite signature is a Walt Disney full check that I have.

**Oh, that's nice.**

Yes, it's really nice. He had beautiful, beautiful handwriting and, you know, he didn't write out the payor and the amount and all that, but the signature is real and I have that framed with a couple of photographs on my wall in the office.

**That makes me smile. One of our**

**founding partners at our law firm represented Disney a long time ago, maybe 60 years ago, and the stories about how nice he was and the relationship are quite special within our firm.**

He wasn't the nicest guy towards employees that he thought were trying to take advantage of the company, but for the public and everything he was great. I've spoken at length to one of the guys that was a Senior Vice President, probably 40 years ago. You know, that's why when they purchased the land in Orlando. He had to create a phony corporate structure and buy it under that name because if they found out, of course, the price would multiply 10 times.

**Yep. Well, let me ask you my last question which is really not an interview question. Usually I do these in person, you were nice enough to do this on the phone.**

Oh boy, I've enjoyed it, it's made me forgot how bad I feel right now.

**I always try to get an autograph from the person that does the interview so if I send you a ball, with a return address, will you be kind enough to sign a ball for me?**

You think my signature is worth anything?

**It is to me.**

Okay, you got it!

**Again, thank you. This was wonderful.**

Harvey Meiselman  
"Addresses"  
"Autographs"

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