

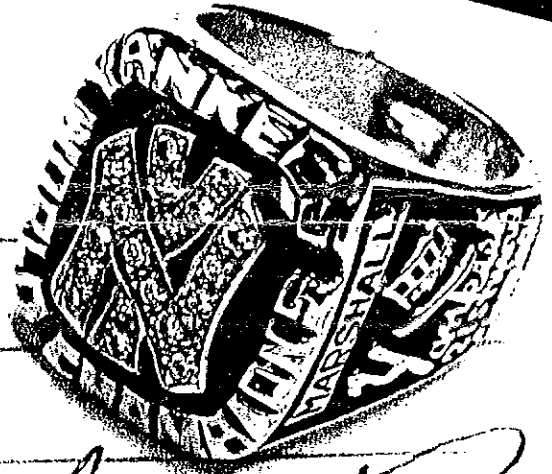
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# CINCINNATI

July 1995 \$1.95 Magazine

## THE FORGER



*Babe Ruth*



This one-time Reds batboy fooled the country's baseball collectors, sports memorabilia experts, even hockey's Wayne Gretzky. Here's how...





# THE FORGER

*How a former Reds batboy flim-flammed a generation of collectors, from the sports memorabilia experts to hockey's Wayne Gretzky*

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**S**pecial agent Dave Kukura remembers the meeting. It was in Cincinnati, after the FBI caught up with Randall Lee Marshall. By then, he was cooperating with authorities, sitting in the U.S. Attorney's Office, bragging about the signatures he'd forged.

His attorney slid a legal pad across the desk. "Okay, show us

**BY MICHAEL  
GRAHAM**



**T**his is a forger who made his own ink. To make one quart, he beat fireflies into a bizarre batter that included Nancy's Mustard and white Zinfandel wine. "All my techniques, I developed myself."

if you're so damn good."

Marshall took a pen and fielded autograph requests like a Barry Larkin taking infield practice.

Ruth.

DiMaggio.

Mantle.

He had the Big Red Machine down pat, notes an impressed Kukura, who led the multi-state investigation of Marshall. "Pete Rose was so easy, he said he could do it with his eyes closed."

It has been three years since the one-time Reds batboy and 1981 graduate of Little Miami High earned headlines as a forger of sports memorabilia. Since high school, Marshall—now 33—made or altered hundreds of items and sold them as authentic collectibles, most from the game he knows and loves. Baseball.

Nothing, it seems, was sacrosanct. Or beyond his ability. He sewed together flannel jerseys, then composed phony letters authenticating them as vintage uniforms worn by Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Honus Wagner, to name just a few of the players on whose legends Marshall

traded. He forged rare signatures onto old photographs, stitched names like Jackie Robinson and Ty Cobb into caps and gloves, and doctored baseballs and bats. He even made one-of-a-kind items, including a twenty-two-jewel silver watch said to be a gift to Charles Gould, a first baseman on the original 1869 Cincinnati Red Stockings.

"He was known to have brokered some of the most treasured collectibles in the sports memorabilia business," states the government's confidential presentence report on Marshall.

One item, in particular, captivated collectors

from coast to coast: a light gray flannel with the name "Ruth" in the collar. That's right. The Bambino. It was also signed. At one time, the jersey was consigned to a Beverly Hills auction house as the "finest known Babe Ruth autographed uniform," valued in the hundreds of thousands. Barry Halper of New Jersey, the so-called Sultan of Swap whose collection of memorabilia rivals that of the Baseball Hall of Fame, tried to acquire it based solely on a photograph.

Marshall says he made the jersey from scratch, starting with a nondescript uniform from a Goodwill store in Loveland. He operated out of different locations, including a "lab" in a storage garage on Reading Road in Sharonville. He did his deals over the phone and through the mail, using an assumed name—Geoff Wayne—and listing his address as a post office box in Maineville. When customers occasionally came to Cincinnati, he carried a fake ID and business cards, dyed his hair and wore disguises to avoid being recognized by friends who might blow his cover.

This is a forger who made his own ink. To make one quart, which would last him about a year, he beat fireflies into a bizarre batter that included Nancy's Mustard and white Zinfandel wine. He aged his jerseys by soaking them in human urine and wine, wrapping them in aluminum foil and straw, baking them in the oven, washing them in Amway detergent and tossing them in the clothes dryer.

What diabolical organic chemist cooked up these freakish processes?

"All my techniques, I developed myself," explains Marshall.

He says he spoke with craftsmen, jewelers and tailors, and hung out at the art museum, looking at paintings "in sort of a backwards way." He wanted to learn how paints and canvases age, what causes discoloration. He read. He studied. He asked questions. "I spent hours, relentless hours, just examining, and of course there was a lot of trial and error."

As his attorney observes, "It was not a quick or easy con." Not if Marshall is telling the truth about making his vintage jerseys, for instance. He rummaged through antique shops, buying buttons and old dresses for thread. He made his own Spalding uniform tags. He had access to an X-ray machine. "I had to look at my uniforms and autographs the way a forensic scientist would. I was my own best detective." At one point he was working into the wee hours of the morning at his sewing machines and typewriters, and running eight miles a day. His weight dropped from 160 to 120. His hair turned Warhol white. "I was out of control. I really was. There just came a time when I wanted to see how far I could actually go."

Marshall says he "got off" on seeing his stuff in the catalogs and reading the writeups. He liked "getting the best of" lawyers, physicians, stockbrokers and other professionals who bought his memorabilia, as well as the experts who ok'd it. "The hobby itself is sort of lifeless and academic. It has surprisingly little to do with the game. When you take that into consideration, you realize you can con and pull these little scams on people."

Why did he do it?

"I was lazy. A coward. Not willing to accept the fact that I needed to work for a living in an honest manner. I thought it was a joke. I didn't really hold too much remorse about what I did because I didn't respect anyone I was doing it to. They didn't look at a Babe Ruth uniform because the Bambino was the essence of the game and the embodiment of everything we love about baseball. They looked at it as profit, like a CD or a bond. I knew they

were making money, so there were no victims in my mind." (He was ordered by the court to make restitution—\$6,500—to only one of his customers.)

Marshall wrote me letters, signing his first letter "Respectfully yours, Johnny Bench," and later revealed his recipe for "ageless ink." He sent photograph of himself surrounded by memorabilia from his personal collection, along with a note: "You know what's amusing? When I show people a collectible of mine and they ask if it's a fake?"

If the name Geoff Wayne was "good as gold" in the hobby trade, as Marshall boasts, it seems remarkable that he was able to run his scam from his hometown.

Didn't local collectors try to track him down?

"They may have. Who knows? You have to understand, we don't have a lot of guys on the high end here."

Weren't his friends suspicious?

"They thought I was nuts, baking a uniform. But that was about the extent of their interest in what I was doing. It wasn't like I had crack cocaine."

Marshall's older sister and four younger brothers all reside in the Cincinnati area, and while he was casting World Series rings and duping dealers, he lived for a time with his parents just outside Morrow. How did he conceal his

activities from his family?

"I didn't do too much at home. It just wasn't appropriate."

Since January, when Marshall was released from federal prison after serving eighteen months and six days for mail fraud and wire fraud, he has been drawing editorial cartoons and writing a weekly column on baseball history for the *St. Augustine Record* in St. Augustine, Florida, where his parents have retired. He is trying to go straight, but it won't be easy. Not according to those familiar with his work.

"People like him don't stop. He's too good at it," remarks Dwight Manley, a coin dealer in California who got stuck with a number of Marshall's fake uniforms, the most significant being the Ruth jersey.

Approach with caution. That's the advice of Marshall's attorney. "Going in, you gotta remember—my client is a con artist," warns J. Robert Andrews as he digs through two large cardboard boxes of Marshall's material in his office at the PNC Center downtown. Andrews lays two stripped-down jerseys across his desk: a yellow Pittsburgh Pirates pullover and a blue Kansas City Royals top.

Marshall did uniforms from any era. To create a valuable modern double-knit, he would buy one of a lesser-known play-

er and rip off the lettering and numbers, or in Andrews's words, "cannibalize" it. Among the memorabilia Marshall confessed he fabricated were jerseys allegedly worn by Pete Rose, George Brett, the late Thurman Munson, and Don Mattingly, each with what appeared to be the ballplayer's signature and an inscription.

His attorney also shows me a World Series ring. That is to say, it looks like one.

"This is part of Randy's allure," Andrews says, plucking the diamond-studded ornament off the bookcase behind his desk.

Actually, the ring is a "knockoff" of one worn by the 1977 world champion New York Yankees. Marshall made it for himself, inseting his initials.

"Everything he did," says Andrews, "was related to baseball," right down to the vanity plates on his car—a red, two-seat Mercedes. They identify him as "Batboy."

As a high school senior, Marshall did more than stack bats for Reds players. Much more. He answered their fan mail. He signed baseballs and other souvenirs. It was the same deal in Minnesota the following season as a batboy for the Twins. The clubhouse manager once asked him to autograph a ball for Billy Martin, manager of the visiting Oakland A's, and present it to a Twins stockholder. He says a Milwaukee Brewers player brought "stacks" of his rookie cards for him to sign. "I knew I could sign any name to anything and satisfy any audience, whether that would be one receiving a gift or paying for it."

Marshall forged "hundreds if not thousands" of autographs as a batboy.

"I really didn't believe I was doing wrong," he says. "At least I could rationalize it. You know, 'The kids are going to be disappointed if they don't get something back, and I'm sitting here doing nothing.' It was also fun, of course, making up the inscriptions. I'm sure some of the kids are professionals now, with the photographs and cards framed on their walls."

He set out to become "one of the best artists in the world," not fool people. At 15, Marshall was doing caricatures and oil portraits of celebrities on the outside of envelopes, which he mailed with letters requesting their autographs, and appeared on the national TV show, *Real People*, to discuss his "envelope art." At Scymour Johnson Federal Prison camp—a minimum security facility on the air base by the same name in Goldsboro, North Carolina—he painted logos on the war-planes, and murals and frescos in the base

## Randy Marshall's Top Ten Forgeries

1. Lou Gehrig silver MVP bat (1936). "Made from German coin silver. Perfect hand engraving. My finest."
2. Babe Ruth snake cane. "Probably in pure artistic terms, my finest work. The cane was displayed for several months at the Babe Ruth Museum in Baltimore."
3. Hand-carved Tara Harp. "Took me six months to complete. It was alleged to be the harp of Helen Ruth, Babe's first wife, who died in a fire on January 11th, 1929. I made it out of cherry. The harp was fifty-eight inches tall and had lion's claw feet. ... I lost money on this forgery, but certainly gained a great deal of knowledge and admirers. Many who did see it found it stunning. Robert Ettinger bought the harp at The Cincinnati Hotel in 1990 or '91. As far as I know, it was displayed at the Babe Ruth Museum and sold thereafter to a physician in New York by Ettinger."
4. Charles Gould watch (1888). Twenty-two jewels, German coin silver.
5. Babe Ruth home uniform (1927).
6. Babe Ruth St. Mary's Industrial uniform (1911). Ruth grew up at St. Mary's, a Baltimore reform school.
7. New York Yankees World Championship bowl (1923). Made out of silver.
8. Dallas Cowboys Super Bowl trophy (1972). "Actually, this was not difficult in comparison with the Gehrig silver bat and Yankee championship bowl. The design was pretty simple, but the engraving was somewhat difficult because it was machine-done."
9. Yankees World Championship ring (Waite Hoyt, 1927). "Wish I kept this."
10. Pittsburgh Crawfords Negro League Championship autographed photograph (1935). "Should not be included in the list, except for the fact I spent horribly long hours on research."



Marshall's attorney, J. Robert Andrews, with some of the evidence. He describes his client as "one of the great forgers of our time."

hospital, until prison officials discovered he was also doing portraits of the military brass. "They thought I was running a big business on the side and making a lot of money."

Before going to prison, he told authorities he earned between \$80,000 and \$100,000 a year from the sale of both his memorabilia and his paintings and drawings.

"His sister believes that all of his talent, coupled with his observation of the wealth and status associated with major league players, made the defendant lose sight of his moral values," states the government's pre-sentence report. "[She] believes her brother became greedy and wanted a lifestyle similar to the ones he observed while working as a batboy for the Twins and Reds in his late teens and early 20s."

Marshall began counterfeiting, in earnest, eight years ago. By then, trading memorabilia had become a serious hobby, moving from shoeboxes and garages into

auction houses and convention centers. "Because it was in its infancy, you had very few experts. I quickly established myself as one. There was really no one there to question or doubt any of the items I did sell, not that everything I sold was fake. I did sell an awful lot of good memorabilia as well."

The FBI, however, discovered trails of bad goods. A collector in Illinois, for example, bought \$13,000 worth of memorabilia from Marshall in 1992, including a Ty Cobb cap and Sandy Koufax warmup jacket. It was learned Marshall took a real Dodgers warmup jacket, worn by a coach, and altered it to reflect Koufax's number, and stitched Cobb's name in a 1930s Detroit Tigers cap. When agents intercepted a shipment from Cincinnati to Pittsburgh, they

found a pair of Rocky Marciano-autographed boxing gloves and a football with the signatures of five U.S. presidents—all forgeries. They also seized a three-fingered baseball glove with Jackie Robinson's signature and his Brooklyn Dodgers number stitched in the leather. Kukura remembers it well.

"I called the man who supposedly authenticated the glove just a month or so before I got my hands on it, and he said that Marshall had indeed sent it to him. He told me it was from Robinson's era but that he had no way of knowing if it was actually Robinson's. When I asked him about the autograph, he replied, 'What autograph?' He said it wasn't there when he had the glove.

"Well," says Kukura, "I knew Jackie Robinson hadn't signed it."

The Hall of Fame second baseman died in 1972.

After pleading guilty, Marshall went to work for the feds. He thumbed through catalogs of auction houses, including

Sotheby's and Christie's, identifying fakes. Several pieces were pulled from Richard Wolffers Auctions in San Francisco: *Who's Who in Hollywood, 1955*, a magazine with Marilyn Monroe on the cover, which Marshall signed "Norma Jean DiMaggio"; a 1971 Pittsburgh Pirates team photo on which he forged all the signatures; and bogus Dwight Gooden and Don Sutton jerseys. Each item had been consigned by a different dealer, all of them major players in the industry, according to a spokesman for the West Coast auction house.

Authorities used Marshall until they discovered he was up to his old tricks while out on bond. He had set up a bogus business, "The Batboy," at an address in Forest Park which, in fact, was a mail and telephone answering service, assumed another false name, and consigned some of his memorabilia to an antique shop in California. Marshall claims he informed the FBI and his probation officer of his activities, and faxed them copies of items he intended to sell. District Court Judge Arthur Spiegel sentenced him two months early.

Quite frankly, it's sometimes hard to believe Marshall. He insists, for example, that a baseball he bought for \$6 at an antique shop in Waynesville and signed with the names of the 1927 Yankees has been displayed at The Smithsonian. He also claims a number of his forgeries have found their way into the Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown and the Babe Ruth Museum in Baltimore.

Discussing his current job with the St. Augustine paper, Marshall says, "I still want to win a Pulitzer awfully badly."

"A Pulitzer?"

"Yes. I was very close to winning one in 1989."

"For what?"

"For political cartooning. I was named best political cartoonist in the country by the National Newspaper Association."

In fact, he did receive the Best Editorial Cartoon award from the NNA while working as a contributor for the *Little Miami Express*, a weekly in Morrow, but his winning entry later was clouded by charges of plagiarism.

Marshall says between batboy stints in Cincinnati and Minnesota, he was a scout for the Yankees. How does a kid who played two years of high school baseball get a job judging talent for the big club in New York?

"Remember, I knew an awful lot of people in baseball, and I had an indelible personality. I could really impress people right off the bat. Maybe it was a con, but I certainly understood the game. I knew the



fundamentals and I knew the history, probably seventy years' worth at the time."

After a while, you begin to wonder if anything is real, or if Marshall isn't a bit like a thief confessing to hundreds of other robberies he may or may not have committed. On a brief visit to Cincinnati, he shows up at my office with his catalogs.

"That's mine," he says, pointing to a photo of a Honus Wagner jersey up for auction in 1993. It's listed as a flannel by Spalding (circa 1900), valued between \$175,000 and \$200,000. The caption reads: "With the name 'Wagner' stitched in red in the collar, the proper tagging and a letter of authenticity. This is the only known Honus Wagner Pittsburgh Pirates player jersey and it is as spectacular as the Flying Dutchman himself."

The boots are apparently Marshall's, too.

"Harry Wright's boots, presented to him in 1868 by a team of American Indians whom Wright brought in to play a series of exhibition games against the Cincinnati Red Stockings," begins the description in a 1991 catalog. Wright organized and managed the first professional baseball team.

Marshall says his first faked memorabilia was a 1933 Lou Gehrig All-Star Game uniform. "I don't want to incriminate myself, but I sold it to a collector out in California. I did all the stitching. Made the tags." By the time he made the Ruth road jersey, he had already done the Babe's home pinstripes, his caps, his bats, his driver's license, his Triple Crown award. He sold a teakwood cane to Robert Ettinger, a New York City real estate mogul and art collector who brokered a lot of his memorabilia. "I carved the face of a snake into the top of the cane and engraved the initials GHR—George Herman Ruth—into a fourteen-carat gold band." Ettinger flew to Cincinnati to buy it. They dined at The Maisonette.

Curious, I assume the role of prospective buyer.

"Why did Ruth need the cane?" I ask.

Marshall: "He was stricken with throat and lung cancer in 1945 or thereabouts, and lost a lot of weight. He weighed 169 pounds when he died."

"Where did you get the cane?"

Marshall: "From an old ballplayer. Due to considerations on his part, I really would like to keep that confidence because he's ashamed to give up this item."

"I'm really going to have to have a letter of provenance."

Marshall: "Well, I will speak to the man. I can't promise anything, but certain-

ly I will do my best for you."

In a couple of days, explains Marshall, he would have a letter. "I would research my records for players Ruth might have roomed with, pull out my letterheads, type the letter and sign his name."

Eventually, he was faking artwork—primarily Baroque and Flemish paintings—and selling them too. Or so he says. "That was my ultimate goal. To fabricate the masters. If man can make it, I can fake it. God didn't make the Mona Lisa. Da Vinci did. I'm not talking about duplicating the Mona Lisa, of course. Who's going to believe you've got that? I wanted to make up artwork that was recently discovered hidden in some German family's home or stolen from a Jewish family in WWII." Marshall says he sold probably 150 to 200 of his art forgeries, including a fake Goya for six figures. "I had a lot of failures, I kid you not. I embarrassed myself several times. There was some stuff that just wasn't marked as authentic. They were good paintings but bad fakes."

How did Marshall finally lose his con game?

Roy Maiwurm bought his first major league baseball jersey from Marshall in 1987: a Fernando Valenzuela. He paid \$125 for the Los Angeles Dodgers uniform, despite its blurred autograph.

"When we first started," recalls Maiwurm, who owns a food service company in Minneapolis, "I was strictly collecting on the come-bet because I could see what was happening in sports. But there was no verification of any of his stuff. No one would put their ass on the line and say, 'This is real and this is not.'" In the beginning, Maiwurm didn't even demand a letter of provenance identifying the origin or source of the memorabilia, now common practice.

Marshall sold a number of fake uniforms to Maiwurm between 1987 and 1989, including the Yankees road gray jersey, supposedly Babe Ruth's, for which the Minneapolis businessman paid an estimated \$30,000 in cash and trade. Maiwurm then sold it as part of a collection of jerseys to Dwight Manley, the young California coin dealer, for \$175,000. After Superior Galleries, a Beverly Hills auction house, determined the uniforms were bogus, Manley filed a complaint with the FBI and demanded his money back from Maiwurm, who in turn sued Marshall. At that point, Marshall's scheme began to unravel, so to speak.

Maiwurm was a regular customer, hooked by a small advertisement in *Sports Collector's Digest* in 1987. Marshall placed the ad under his alias, Geoff

Wayne. No dealers, it said. Just collectors and hobbyists. "The one thing I found out about Geoff," says Maiwurm, "was that he did filter in some real stuff."

There was nothing real, though, about the Ruth jersey. For starters, it was a size 38. As Marshall later conceded to investigators, "Ruth's left arm was probably a 38."

No one apparently noticed. Not Maiwurm. Not Manley, who consigned the uniform to Superior Galleries, where Bruce McNall and Wayne Gretzky planned to offer it for sale at a blockbuster sports card and memorabilia auction in 1991. McNall, owner of the Los Angeles Kings hockey team, and Gretzky, the Kings' superstar, had stunned the memorabilia world by purchasing a Honus Wagner baseball card for the astronomical sum of \$451,000. Marshall laughed when he saw a full-page ad in *Sports Collector's Digest* with the pair holding up his homemade jersey.

"That was about the end," he says. "I was just so sick, so pathetic. I didn't care whether I was caught or not."

Superior sent the Ruth uniform and its letter of authenticity to George Throckmorton, a forensic document examiner in Salt Lake City. Throckmorton looked at the autograph on the shirt and determined the words had been written with a roller tip pen, which wasn't manufactured until 1970. The letter was Xeroxed. Dated March 9, 1948, it is addressed to a Mr. M. F. Kauffman and carries the letterhead of the Brooklyn Dodgers, who employed Ruth as a coach:

*Dear Mr. Kauffman,*

*Mr. Rickey [Branch Rickey, the Dodgers' owner] requested I personally thank you for your outstanding help and advice in the successful fund-raiser for the American Junior Legion baseball program. The children of this city equally offer their sincere gratitude. The bats and balls and new gloves will help many of the youth realize a dream come true on the sandlots of Brooklyn. I find it most gratifying and heartening to know there are people who think and feel as you do about this program. I have enclosed a uniform top I wore during my days with the Yankees.*

*With all the good wishes, I am yours sincerely,*

*Babe Ruth.*

The FBI in Minneapolis has the letter and jersey. Special agent Kukura says there are plans to put them on display for tour groups. □