

mySI PERSONALIZE SI.COM WITH NEWS & SCORES FROM YOUR FAVORITE PRO & COLLEGE TEAMS. IT'S FAST AND FREE!



GET THE GIANTS CHAMPIONSHIP PACKAGE | SUBSCRIBE TO SI | GIVE THE GIFT OF SI

 Search

EXTRA MUSTARD | FANNATION | PHOTOS | SWIMSUIT | FANTASY | DAN PATRICK | SPORTSMAN | SI KIDS | HIGH SCHOOL | TWACKLE
 NFL | COLLEGE FOOTBALL | MLB | NBA | COLLEGE BB | GOLF | NHL | RACING | SOCCER | MMA & BOXING | TENNIS | MORE | VIDEO

Posted: Friday December 17, 2010 10:23AM ; Updated: Friday December 17, 2010 10:23AM

The Bonus

[More Columns](#) [Email The Bonus](#)

Behind scenes with Major League Baseball's authentication process

Story Highlights

MLB has taken steps to insure its official items from games, players are authentic MLB authenticators attend games to tag, bat, balls, jerseys, bases, other items Counterfeiting big business, resulting in \$600-700 billion in lost revenue worldwide

[PRINT](#) [EMAIL](#) [FACEBOOK](#) [DIGG](#) [TWITTER](#) [RSS](#) [SHARE](#)

By Kyle Stack, Special to SI.com

It's the top of the first inning in Game 2 of the NLCS in Philadelphia, and Roy Oswalt is getting ready to throw his sixth pitch of the game. The Philadelphia Phillies' righthander has a 1-0 count on San Francisco Giants second baseman Freddy Sanchez with one out and the bases empty. Oswalt struck out Andres Torres to lead off the game, giving the electric Citizens Bank Park crowd an energy boost they've taken into this at-bat.

After a hitting at least 92 on the radar gun with his first five pitches, Oswalt hurls an 85 mile-per-hour change-up to Sanchez. This time, the ball completely misses its mark, smacking the dirt behind home plate before bouncing into catcher Carlos Ruiz's glove. It's an innocuous pitch to the 46,000 people in the stands and the millions watching on TV, but it's an important one for the Major League Baseball Authentication Program.

Ruiz hands the ball to home plate umpire Dan Iassogna, who gives the scuffed-up ball to a waiting Phillies batboy. The batboy runs back to the dugout to clean it, then hustles over to MLB authenticator Dennis Watson, who's sitting in a small field box between the first base camera pit and the front row of seats behind home plate. This is the first of dozens of baseballs Watson will receive for authentication on this night. And baseballs are only the tip of the iceberg for all the items MLB's authentication program certifies as being officially game-used.

Watson's task near the Phillies dugout is mirrored by authenticator Robert Bonds on the Giants' side. Watson, Bonds and Sam Turner, this game's lead authenticator, comprise the three-man team that will document all Game 2 memorabilia -- from baseballs to the bases to the lineup cards. Some goods are kept by MLB for sale on its online store. Many go to retailers and other third-party entities which sell authenticated MLB memorabilia. Some special items are sent to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

The list of items which can be authenticated has no limit. Every baseball that remains in the field of play is documented. (Foul balls and home runs that go into the stands are kept by fans.) Broken bats, lineup cards,



A Phillies bat boy gives a ball to an MLB authenticator during Game 2 of the NLCS.

Kyle Stack

Authentication in other sports

MLB isn't the only sports league that authenticates its items. Here is how other leagues handle the process.

NHL: The league had an authentication program through 2006 that involved 22 teams. Now, it has a program only for league events, including the All-Star Game. The NHL works with the MeiGray Group for authenticated items for the regular season and Stanley Cup playoffs.

NFL: The NFL has worked with a company called PSA/DNA for 10 years. About 11,000 items per year are authenticated, including helmets, footballs and jerseys.

NBA: The NBA's authentication program is four years old and the league also works with the MeiGray Group on authenticating its game-worn memorabilia. Approximately 1,000 items per year are authenticated from among the teams, NBA Cares and the NBA's global merchandise group.

GMC NEVER SAY NEVER

ENTER FOR A CHANCE TO WIN
**A TRIP TO SUPER BOWL XLV
 AND A 2011 SIERRA DENALI.**

ENTER NOW

More from SI.com

Latest News

Magic acquire Arenas, Turkoglu and Richardson Vonn tops Zenyatta for AP Female Athlete of '10 Rodgers out, Flynn to start for Packers vs. Pats

Video



DP Show: Kelly on Faking Injuries

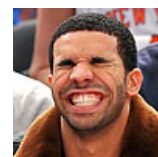


DP Show: Chip Kelly prepares for Auburn

SI Writers

Peter Berlin: Five things we learned from the Premier League
 The Social Network
 Diving trade partners for struggling Bobcats

SI Photos



Celebrities at Knicks-Heat



Bernard Hopkins Through The Years

FanHouse

bases, rosin bags and any other field item is ripe for authentication. Even dirt from the pitcher's mound was collected after Roy Halladay's no-hitter against the Cincinnati Reds in Game 1 of the National League Division Series. "Everything is game," said Howie Shelton, program manager for MLB's authentication program.

How items are authenticated

By the time of Major League Baseball's postseason, the authenticators who are still working have had a season's worth of games to document collectibles.

Each of the 2,430 regular-season games is attended by at least one authenticator. (Each postseason game typically has three.) One never knows when a game will become etched in history, which was made evident during the past regular season when there were five no-hitters or perfect games. It was the most no-hitters since 1991, when there were seven. The unpredictability of a historical game makes the presence of an authenticator so vital.

"Everything we do is based on what happens [in a game]," said program manager Mike Posner, who noted anywhere from 450,000 to 600,000 items from the 2010 season will have been authenticated. "We're not there trying to authenticate something just to authenticate it. We're there to record the history."

WATCH THE AUTHENTICATION PROCESS

And history is recorded by the authenticators, a group of 130 volunteers who live in the cities of the teams they cover. They're hired from an independent entity called Authenticators, Inc. A law enforcement background is required for the job which takes a healthy chunk of discipline.

Most of Sam Turner's work for Game 2 of the NLCS is done beforehand. He'll consult with Shelton, Bonds and Watson to make sure they're on the same page for what items the home team has requested to be authenticated. Twenty-two of MLB's 30 clubs participate in the program, and they'll usually tell Posner and Shelton what they desire. That information is passed to the on-site authenticators. (Only when so-called "jewel" events such as the All-Star Game does MLB dictate what should be authenticated.)

Once Turner has reviewed the items needed for Game 2, he goes to the groundskeeper's room. Three large cases located in the side of the room opposite the entrance hold the three sets of bases to be used in the game. Each set is used for three innings, so all nine bases need to be recorded.

Turner takes out a roll containing 500 holograms and applies a tamper-proof, uniquely-numbered and lettered hologram to the upper-lefthand corner on the bottom of each base. The holograms are protected in such a way that they self-destruct by tearing if someone attempts to peel them off for re-use. Once it's applied, Turner digitally scans the second part of the hologram, which remains on the roll. That scan feeds the hologram's unique letter and number combination into an online database which catalogs all of MLB's authenticated products. This is what makes it possible for consumers to go to MLB.com, enter an item's number on the authentication page and view a description of it.

[CONTINUE STORY](#)

1

2

Sponsored Links

"Six Sigma" Certification

Enroll in Villanova University's prestigious six sigma certification program - 100% Online
VillanovaU.com/

Penny Stock Jumping 2000%

Sign up to the #1 voted penny stock newsletter for free today!
www.AwesomePennyStocks.com

Mom's Dirty Secret EXPOSED

Mom Reveals For The First Time How She Makes \$87/Hr - Get Details Now!
News13JobsReport.com

[Buy a link here](#)

Sponsored Links

2550% Penny Stock Gains?

Our last pick exploded 2550% - Join our newsletter for free picks!

TODAY ONLY: iPads for \$24.55 - 95% off

NEWS: iPads, TV's, Gift Cards and more being auctioned at 95% off retail

[Buy a link here](#)

Featured Stories

LeBron James Glad He's Not a Part of It, New York, New York

Barry Bonds' Lawyers Seek to Bar Testimony From Jason Giambi, Others

FanHouse Live Debut: NFL Previews, MLB Free Agents, Carmelo's Future

Levi LaVallee's Injury Causes Cancellation of Red Bull New Year's Eve Event

UNC-Charlotte Upsets No. 7 Tennessee

SI Vault

Featured Stories

PRICE: Moss is a stud, but attitude a dud (8.25.97)

SMITH: Durocher, Mays have Giants rolling (8.16.54)

MCCALLUM: SI's 1995 NBA Draft Preview (6.26.95)

Covers



10.04.10

▶ READ ALL ARTICLES

▶ BUY COVER REPRINT



10.11.10

▶ READ ALL ARTICLES

▶ BUY COVER REPRINT