

Former NBA Athlete and Author Collects African-American Sports Artifacts

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Michael Glenn, former NBA athlete, author and collector, not only celebrates Black History Month in February but every month of the year. His numerous pieces of black historical and authentic artifacts have not just become a hobby but a true passion for the last 10 years. "Collecting has evolved into a mission for me and I have been very aggressive about this pursuit," said Glenn. "I love collecting things that are significant and important in black history because they break down the barriers and crush the stereotypes." This Georgia native's first pieces were primarily on the Harlem Renaissance then moved to slave narratives, and now focuses on sports. His collection boasts such rare books as the 1845 autobiography of Fredrick Douglass titled Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass; and a 1773 book of poetry by Phillis Wheatley titled Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral.

Before he started his journey in collecting, Glenn had a rewarding career in the NBA where he was nicknamed the "Stinger" for his shooting accuracy because of his ability to "sting the nets". Glenn played 10 years as guard on various teams such as the New York Knicks, Milwaukee Bucks and the Atlanta Hawks. During the 1986-87 season, wanting to retire on top of his game, he left the NBA and worked in investments and as a sports broadcaster.

His love for collecting began in 1997 the same year he authored his first book called Lessons in Success: From the NBA's Top Players. This book consisted of interviews from players discussing lessons from life and playing basketball along with quotes from famous historical people. Sparking Glenn's own interest, he began collecting books of the famous historical people he quoted. This growing enthusiasm grew from books to magazines, newspapers, photos and other historical documents. He later went on to write two additional books called Lessons From My Library. In Volume 1 he highlighted stories from his historical books, and last year he released Volume 2: The Integration of Sports History. This book focuses on what has grown into a deeper passion – his African-American sports collection. "Collecting sports artifacts has become a spiritual quest not just a hobby or pass time," he said.

Initially Glenn's collection had few pieces on sports history but that changed after watching a TV program on the comparison of baseball Icons Barry Bonds and Babe Ruth. Glenn was offended by a comment the reporter made that "Ruth played in a white era." "Actually Babe Ruth played on a white team in a white league," he said. "That statement dishonored all the players in the Negro League and when you dishonor my forefathers you dishonor me." As he began this new adventure Glenn noticed that the history of American sports had not been integrated and decided his collection and future exhibits would help to remedy the problem.

His sports collection has an array of artifacts from Muhammad Ali, Hank Aaron, Jessie Owens, Joe Louis and Florence Griffith Joyner. One of his rarest artifacts is a priceless photo of the opening game of the 1st Negro League World Series in 1924 including 160 original signatures from players such as Josh Gibson Jr., Ted "Double Duty" Radcliffe, Don Newcombe and Joe Black. "I wanted to bring recognition to the athletes that have transformed a lot of minds about African American people," said Glenn. "The athletes were able to cross barriers of age, race and religion."

Glenn searches for pieces to his collection at discount bookstores, trade shows and book fairs, particularly in the New York area. The Internet has also become a valuable tool for his searches. He recently networked on-line with a London newspaper collector to acquire a vintage 1810 copy of the London Times. The edition previewed Tom Molineaux, a freed slave who received international acclaim when he fought the World Heavyweight Champion Tom Cribb, which became America's first heavyweight boxing match. "Artifacts like this bring history into the present," Glenn said. "Collecting is fascinating to me and it is unbelievable the things that I have been able to find over the years." Current additions to his sports collection include 1910 newspaper and magazine images of Jack Johnson, first black heavyweight champion of the world, knocking out Jim Jeffries, "the Great White Hope." He also has 1948 original photos of Satchel Page, greatest pitcher of all times and member of the Negro League.

Since 1999, sharing his passion for collecting, Glenn has been taking his pieces on the road as a historical exhibit. They have been previewed in venues such as arenas, schools, museums and libraries. "My passion for collecting became a mission when I started the exhibits and writing the books," he said. "Most of the knowledge of black historical figures has been hidden and we don't talk about it very much." His first exhibit was a collage of historical books, magazines and documents. Pieces were included from Fredrick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Langston Hughes, and Malcolm X, with magazines from Look, Ebony and Life. Last year he launched his sports collection exhibit and is doing it again this year. The kickoff started at the EBENEZER BAPTIST CHURCH, pastoral home of the late Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in Atlanta. The date was toward the end of the year, December 18th, to commemorate the 195th anniversary of Molineaux's fight. His exhibit is slanted for viewing in states such as New York, North Carolina and Illinois.

Glenn, 50, lives in Snellville, a suburb outside of Atlanta, with his wife Rhonda and son Michael Justin, age 12. His family has been extremely supportive and shares his passion for collecting. "They like my collecting and help me arrange the pieces for the exhibits," he said. "They even travel locally with me to auctions and shows." Another major supporter has been his mentor, Charles Blockson, an experienced African American collector for over fifty years. "He motivates me because he understands the joys, frustrations and financial challenges of being a collector," said Glenn. "He gives great advice and would be an excellent role model for anyone who is interested in African-American collecting." For more information on Michael Glenn's collection visit his website at www.mikegleen.com.