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Operation Bullpen: The Inside Story Of The Biggest Forgery Scam In American History



Synopsis

The amazing true story of the high-flying national forgery ring that forged the autographs of sports stars and celebrities and ripped off the American public for more than \$100 million, before being busted by a dramatic three-year FBI undercover investigation. As seen on ESPN, Tru-TV, and now being developed into a feature film.

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Customer Reviews

Operation Bullpen illustrates in riveting detail just how a bunch of average schmoes stepped onto the slippery slope of crime, got hooked hard, and were never able to get out of it until the FBI managed to push them out. The portrayal of the FBI operation is facinating in its depiction of the agents as just regular working guys with the liabilities and weaknesses that most of us are prone to. One of the great episode sequences in the book is when the FBI agents begin to meet and interact with the forgery ring members. It's better than watching a nature show -- you get a perspective of human nature at work in the contest between good vs. bad, or at least in society's struggle between doing the right thing and doing the wrong thing, and it makes for an highly engrossing study.

Operation Bullpen is the true story of the high-flying national crime ring that forged the autographs of sports stars and celebrities and ripped off American consumers for more than \$100 million, before being busted by a dramatic three-year FBI undercover investigation. Nelson conducted exclusive interviews with forgers, counterfeit dealers, and the FBI to piece together both sides of the drama. This is an often unbelievable, sometimes funny, and always interesting book about autographs and forgery. I was particularly fascinated by the story of Greg Marino, master forger. In order to get into the signing zone he'd smoke pot and often sit in front of the TV to work. Marino would consult real exemplar autographs that he and his cohorts had collected and carefully cataloged in a series of binders. After many years and hundreds of thousands of autographs, I was amazed that Marino could forge any sig just by looking once at the exemplar. The stories of Marino sitting in a comfortable chair with his signing arm propped up on pillows, stoned to the bone, and polishing off 400 sigs while watching a Yankees game on TV made my jaw drop. The inside account of the three year undercover FBI sting operation brought the book together, making it feel like a thriller. We experience the ups and downs of individual agents assigned to the case, learn about wiretaps and hidden recording devices, and sit at the edge of our seat as the busts come down. Every serious autograph collector and dealer needs to read and understand the story of how the biggest forgery scam in American history.

I had seen Operation Bullpen referenced many times on various card and memorabilia sites, so I was familiar with the basics of the case. I am mostly into cards, but if you are into any type of memorabilia, especially autographs, this book will open your eyes to how rampant the fraud is in the industry. Until I read Operation Bullpen, I didn't realize just how massive the Marino forgery network was or that it reached all over the country. The damage done to the hobby by the Marinos and others like them is permanent. The book really drives home just how dirty a business selling autographs is. How can a collector ever buy an autograph of Babe Ruth or Mickey Mantle or Ted Williams and really feel secure in what they bought? The book is a fast read, and Nelson does a wonderful job talking to numerous sources involved in the investigation, as well as the forgers and dishonest dealers themselves. Read this book and you will think twice about ever paying for an autograph sold by a dealer. For me, the guy that really comes off like a scumbag in the book is boxer Chuck Wepner. People like Wayne Bray and Greg Marino are largely anonymous to the general public, but Wepner used his fame from the Muhammad Ali fight to outright rip fans off with fake Ali autographs. At one point in the book, Wepner goes out to his car in the parking lot of an autograph signing and is prepared to forge Ali's name to some pictures before being advised that the

signatures would not match the phony Ali autographs on pictures he had been hawking inside the building. The author also does a great job driving home the point of no matter how many forgers or dishonest dealers are arrested, the problem will never be stopped. The sad reality for collectors is that there is just too much easy money to be made by peddling phony autographs.

I have been collecting sports memorabilia and working autograph shows since I was 14. I learned a lot from this book, specifically how the criminals actually fake autographs. We would always know which dealer at a show had fake items, etc, but this book really shows you just how widespread fakes were and still are in the market. This book is well researched and quite frankly shocking and eye opening, you really never know if an autograph is real unless you get it personally. I always thought the "Authentication" companies were a lot of hype and this book proves that. A master forger such as Marino is too good to be caught by a run of the mill employee of an Authentication Company. Again, bottom line, if you have, collect, or are thinking about starting an autograph collection or even just sports memorabilis collection read this book. You have no idea how many baseball cards, etc are fakes too.

As someone who assisted the FBI in 1999 with Operation Bullpen, I know nearly all of this story first-hand and read the original FBI Operation Bullpen report in early 2000 soon after it was released. This book was exceptionally well written and was definitely a page turner that I didn't want to put down. No matter how much I learn about the Autograph hobby, there's always more to learn and this book did just that for me. The FBI's Report is a real yawner to be perfectly frank. Kevin Nelson puts the story in a much more enjoyable context. Any autograph collector of any age must read this book or you are simply wasting your hard earned money. There's so much truth in this book that you NEED TO KNOW if you collect autographs. Please do yourself a HUGE FAVOR and read this book. It's not too long, it doesn't over explain things (something I tend to do), but it gets all the important facts on the table from both sides of the story which is the only FAIR WAY to write a non-fiction book!

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