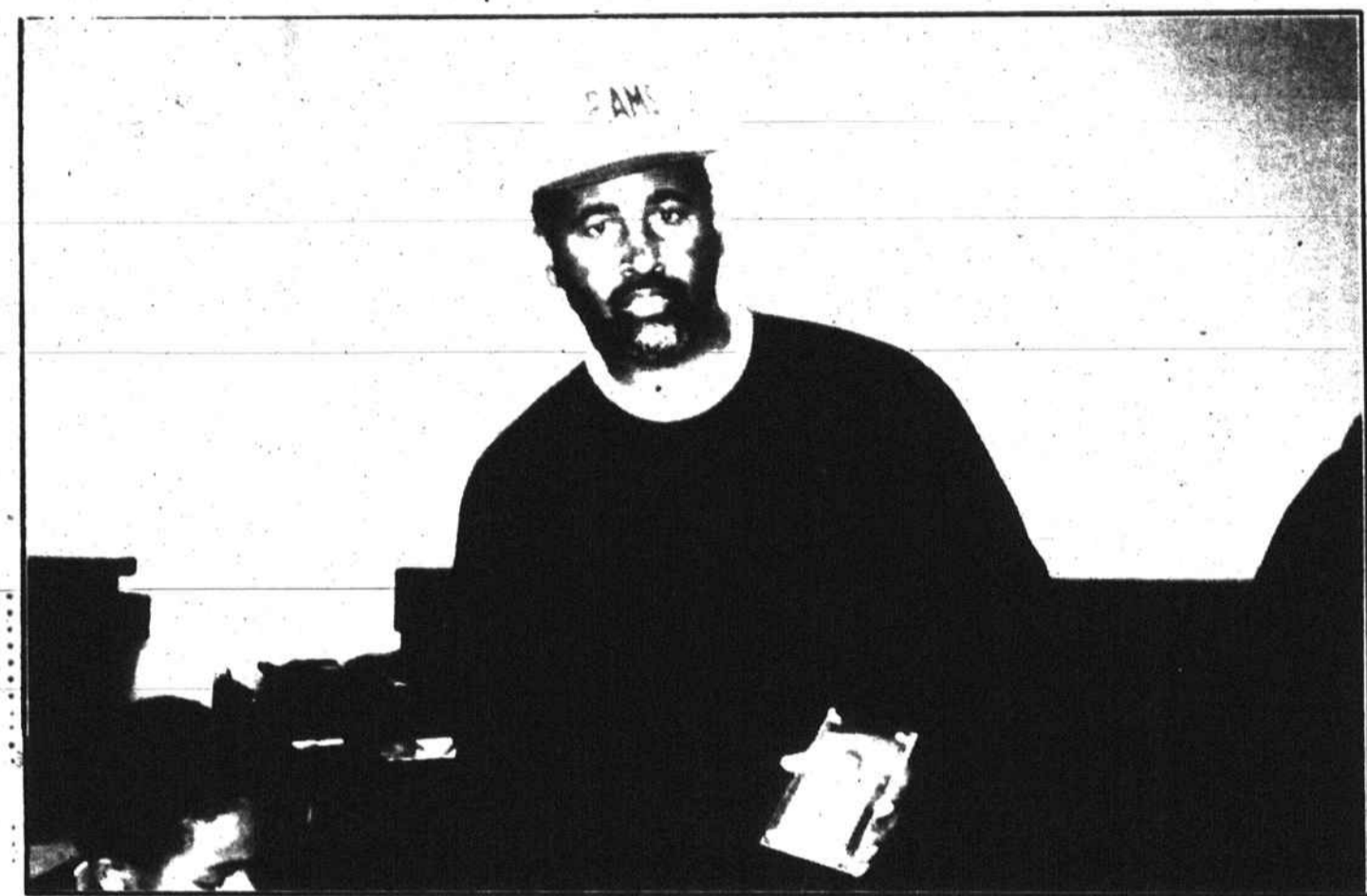


Leon McCorkle proudly displays his expansive card collection at the W. E. Sims Recreation Center's cards and collectible show.



William "Rock" Bitting with a rare treasure — a Lew Alcindor rookie card worth \$1,200. Bitting has a card collection that includes cards close to 25 years old.

Collectors Show Off Rare Sports Cards and Novelties at Sims Center

By MICHAEL JOHNSON
Chronicle Sports Writer

When a child comes up to card collector William "Rock" Bitting and asks him for the price of a card, Bitting doesn't give them an answer except one.

"There's no price for it because it's not for sale," Bitting tells the youngster. Shaking his head, the young man goes to another vendor, hoping for another buy.

The reason Bitting is so adamant and protective of his collection is because of the amount of time he has put into finding and purchasing his cards. It goes into his philosophy of having a connection with the ideas in his life.

"The reason I'm into collecting is because I can relate to those things," Bitting said during a card and collection show at the W.E. Sims Recreational Center. Holding up a rare Lew Alcindor rookie card valued at \$1,200, Bitting says, "Most kids ask me as soon as they see it, 'How much is that worth?' That shows me that they're thinking about the monetary value and not what the card means to me."

Collectors from various parts of Winston-Salem were showing off samples of the inventory they have stored and preserved over time. Each collector looks at his cards as a look into the inner sanctum of their passions, which ranged from comic books to rare record recordings. But the majority of the collectors on hand showed off vintage basketball and football cards.

Bitting began his card collection 25 years ago, growing up as an avid sports fan. When National Football League and Minnesota Viking great and former Happy Hills resident Carl Eller reached the NFL, Bitting felt a connection and wanted to grab a piece of Eller's fame. That's when the collection bug bit him.

"I credit my father for getting me interesting into sports, so that's how my collecting cards evolved into a hobby," Bitting said. "When (former Winston-Salem natives) Herb Gilliam and Billy McCoy went to the San Francisco 49ers and Harold Hairston to the Los Angeles Lakers, that just added to my interest."

Another collector who spoke on supply and demand is Craig Johnson, who became interested in collecting when Sprague Street Recreational Director Brain Manns told him to keep some of his cards. Now Johnson is a collector on his own, specializing in rookie cards.

"I try to get those things that are and going to be rare," Johnson said. "When Michael Jordan retired, I ran out and bought a *Sports Illustrated* magazine that named him 'Sportsman of the Year' a couple of years ago. Now the price went up to more than twice its worth."

While the potential value of a certain card is an enticing aspect of collecting, each collector agrees that their item has a certain intrinsic value that can not be bought nor sold. Bitting said that if he knows that a child is a collector and will take care of his collection, he will give them a card.

"The most important thing is to take care of them: if not, you don't have a collection, you have an accumulation," Manns said. "I bought this rare Shaquille O'Neal card from a kid that he just bent up. The card is worth \$15 already in mint condition. But he bent it up and now it's practically worthless."

Manns said the most important thing about starting a collection is to buy what is valuable to the consumer. Manns is an avid Julius Erving fan, and has cards ranging from his days in the American Basketball Association with the New Jersey Nets to his days with the Philadelphia 76ers in the NBA to

his specially-made retirement cards. Manns' personal favorite is a 24-karat card made in honor of Erving before his retirement.

Not all the cards deal directly with sports. Greg Goode showed off the fruits of collection, a row of card sprinted last year on famous murders Charles Manson, Wayne Williams, Jeffrey Dahmer, Richard Ramirez and the obscure Kevin Christianson, the "Hot Sauce" killer in Texas.

"When people look at these cards, they think I'm crazy," Goode said. "But when I look at them, I'm looking at the information. A lot of people look at the cards and don't read about that person, what makes them tick. I look at it as a chance to learn something."

Probably the most impressive showing belonged to Leon McCorkle, a 13-year-old who has nearly one thousand basketball cards. McCorkle started two years ago and has bought cards through sales or at Season Ticket Sport Collectibles, located at the Parkway Plaza. McCorkle became interested in cards because he followed former NBA great Michael Jordan and nearly one-half of his collection is of Jordan.

But Bitting warns future collectors of trying to follow trends.

"Every kid wants a Shaquille or Jordan card because they're hot. But because of so many are being made of these players, it's flooding the market," Bitting said. "The few that are in real demand will have a sky-rocket price."

"I try to tell kids not to collect what's hot but what do you like. If you're only in it for the investment, you'll want to quit after a few years," Bitting said. "I bought my Alcindor card for only 25 cents. Now it's worth over \$1,200 dollars. But it means even more to me than that because of what I get out of it."

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