

## Not A Mickey Mouse Operation: Archiving Professional Sports in the Sunshine State

by Edward S. Krajewski, Manager of Archives Florida Marlins, Florida Panthers, & Miami Dolphins

As one of the most vibrant entertainment regions in the United States, the Mini-Ft Lauderdale area offers a wide variety of attractions. The Florida Marlins baseball team, the Florida Panthers hockey club, and the Miami Dolphins football team are three of the area's most successful competitors for South Florida's entertainment dollar.

Owned by H. Wayne Huizenga, the architect of the Blockbuster Video business empire (which he recently sold), these three sports organizations have created a single archives to preserve the history of their organizations and to capture their most memorable moments. This atypical tripartite department reports to the Vice President of Broadcasting, who incidentally works for all three teams as well.

### Catching the Big Ones

One of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of serving as the tri-team's archivist is the acquisition of sports documents and paraphernalia. Currently the primary function of this department is to preserve significant artifacts and records relating to the three teams, and to devise mini-museums and halls of fame for use at special events.

I have been working since 1994 to create an archival program to successfully oversee these tasks. Initially, in order to reach an harmonious understanding with everyone in the tri-team realm about the archives goals I met with each department director, getting them to consciously think about saving pertinent records and items for the archives collection. Each organization's equipment staff and media/public relations department

plays a direct role in obtaining items for the archival collection. These units maintain a watchful eye for any significant occurrences - particularly in game situations - that need to be documented for future reference.

Naturally one can expect a certain degree of variance from organization to organization and from item-type to item-type in the transferal of materials to the archives. Some departments, like the Marlins promotions staff, prefer to send items on a monthly basis. Others, such as the Panthers equipment staff, wait until the end of the season to turn over their artifacts.

With both the Marlins and the Panthers being relative young (four and three years old respectively), it has been easier to identify and save significant documentation from those organizations' origins and development. During the off-season each department from the teams will launder and reorganize their files in preparation for the upcoming season. The records which they no longer require in their files will be sent to the archives for preservation.

The Dolphins, on the other hand, have been a different story altogether. More than 30 years old, the organization had never made it a priority to document its past. As a result, I have been forced to retrieve pieces of their storied past through an alumni program. Until recently the Dolphins had an informal alumni group, but now the team's community relations department has formed an official alumni association. This exclusive group assists the archives by loaning artifacts relating to their careers for display in our

permanent exhibit at the Dolphin Training Facility and for showcase at special events.

Some of the more significant items preserved thus far include: documentation of the Marlins quest to obtain a Major League Baseball franchise; artifacts from the Marlins first no-hitter, tossed by Al Leiter on May 11, 1996; Panthers goalie John Vanbiesbrouck's mask from their inaugural season; Dolphins jerseys and awards from 1966, their first season in the NFL; and the prestigious Super Bowl VII and Super Bowl VIII championship trophies.

### Managing Sports History

Since the tri-teams place such importance on their histories, the archives is relatively well-supported. The archives has two staff members working in a 1200 sq.ft. area, as well as maintaining displays at different office locales. Given their value to collectors, the records and artifacts are stored securely in a single storage space.

All items are classified relative to the organization they pertain to. The grouping of artifacts by organization makes it easy for us to regulate the records, establish control over storage, and retrieve them when need be.

All information on our newly acquired files and artifacts is catalogued on SNAP! for Windows to facilitate collections management. Information on items already in the collection are currently in the process of being transferred. Ultimately, this approach will allow us to save time and make consistent entries within each division when categorizing an item.

Additional documents, mostly periodicals, are scanned in an Electronic Filing System for easy access and retrieval. As of now, there are two PCs connected to this system; ultimately, I would like to have the media relations departments hooked up to the system in order to utilize its capabilities to the fullest

#### **Getting Their Money Back**

Use of the tri-team collection is varied. Each of the three tens' offices currently features a sampling of distinctive items on display for visitors and guests to enjoy. Each organization also conducts their own special events and fan celebrations - Marlins

Fanfest, Dolphins Draft Day Party, and Panthers Hockeyfest. My role has been to create vehicles (mini-museums, halls of fame) for showcasing various artifacts relevant to each club's history. In order to bring a breadth of material to these projects, I generally locate and borrow objects from such external sources as collectors, museums, coaches/players, and professional sports halls of fame.

On occasion, I received special requests from various organizational personnel who need to access files or artifacts in the collection for business reasons. Additionally, fans contact the archives for team or artifact

information. And recently, I have begun fielding requests from area museums who are interested in borrowing items for special exhibits of their own.

#### **A Day Without Sports is Like a Day Without Sunshine**

Virtually every day our sports franchises continue to make history and build tradition, and we will continue to capture that tale as it unfolds in the hopes of one day creating a museum which will tell the story of our organizations to the tens of millions of residents and visitors that make South Florida so dynamic.