

The Wagner

The T206 Honus Wagner was the 192nd lot in the auction and when the bidding reached into the \$300,000's I turned around for the first time since the auction started. I was completely unaware of the World Series atmosphere that existed as there was a crowd completely surrounding the seated bidders, perhaps three or four deep. When the bidding stopped at \$410,000 a large percentage of that crowd quickly dispersed leaving what, in comparison, was an empty room. The bidding for the Wagner was over, but the story for that card was only starting.

It was not until late that evening that the news starting filtering out that the winning bidder was the

team of Wayne Gretzky and Los Angeles King owner Bruce McNall. McNall, is also majority owner of the Superior Stamp & Coin Company in Beverly Hills. Almost immediately, the following day, reports circulated that the Wagner card was being returned because it was trimmed and/or restored. If it was a rumor it was remarkably well circulated. An inquiry to the Kings' office brought denials but the story persisted that the card was returned but possibly a deal was being worked out. It wasn't until a week later that a reliable source told me that the card was not returned but, and it was a big but, that a representative of the buyers indicated he knew the card was altered.

It was the impression of several advanced collectors who viewed the card at Sothebys that the Wagner card was altered. If it were accepted by someone who shared that view at a cost of \$451,000 it says a great deal about the value of publicity in this era.

Note: We're told that a top grade paper conservator should be able to tell if a 100 year old card has been trimmed or recut by magnifying the edge and comparing the aging process to either another side of the card or a similar card. It was also indicated to us that an eighty year old card, even if perfectly preserved, had to go through an aging process.