

# Valuable, rare sports memorabilia found abandoned in storage locker



By Kate Santich Sentinel Staff Writer

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Faisal Ansari has seen a lot of junk in his day — obsolete computer equipment, moldy furniture, toys outgrown by the children who once loved them.

As a professional junk hauler, it's his job to sort through the junk and weed out the hazardous waste from the recyclable from the reusable.

"You know what they say," he said. "One man's junk is another man's treasure."

But once in a rare while, one man's junk is an opportunity to do something good for charity.

One day recently, Ansari, the 27-year-old owner of the College Hunks Hauling Junk Orlando franchise, stumbled across something that really caught his eye. In an abandoned storage unit — locked for the past decade — amid dust-covered files and 15-year-old computers, were three boxes of what turned out to be autographed sports equipment.

Some of the signatures were hard to read. But most came in plastic cases with plaques, and Ansari — a sports fan — recognized all the names.

There was an autographed baseball from [Mike Schmidt](#) — the Hall of Fame third baseman for the [Philadelphia Phillies](#). There were basketballs from Dominique Wilkins and [Dikembe Mutombo](#) — one of the [NBA](#)'s greatest dunkers and one of its best shot-blockers, respectively. There were two hockey sticks autographed by Grant Fuhr, perhaps the top goaltender in [NHL](#) history.

And there were baseballs signed by the game's royalty, [Willie Mays](#) and [Hank Aaron](#).

"That's when I really got excited," said Ansari, whose first love is baseball.

But he also wondered whether the stuff was real. After all, these days fake sports memorabilia is about as rare as reality-TV "stars."

Fortunately, within the boxes the men also found certificates of authenticity. And both Ansari and Maria Storto, spokeswoman for the College Hunks Hauling Junk corporate office, said

further research convinced them the memorabilia is real.

In all, there were 35 salvageable items.

"Some of the stuff was ruined," Storto said. The storage unit had no air-conditioning, so moisture and mildew had left stains.

The question then became what to do with the find.

The marketing company that had been renting the storage unit told the Hunks to donate the items to charity, which seemed like a tidy solution to Ansari and Storto. By their calculations, the haul is worth \$5,000 to \$7,000, although they admit neither of them is an expert.

"The more I think about it," Ansari said, "the more I'd like to see it go to some underprivileged kid that likes baseball or basketball or hockey but would otherwise never have something like this, you know?"

Or, he offers, a charity could auction off the lot of it and use the proceeds.

"I'm open to suggestions," he said.

Ansari wants charities to write to him with proposals on what they would do with either the money or the memorabilia. He'll choose the proposal he likes best.

It's not the first time the company has turned up hidden treasure. Other franchises have found an original [Grant Wood](#) painting worth \$20,000, a mint-condition set of 1960 *Playboy* magazines and a Gibson guitar worth \$1,500.

But unless you count a barely used elliptical machine that brought in \$800 from Play It Again Sports, this is Ansari's big find.

"I have to admit I'm hoping to keep one of the Hank Aaron baseballs," he said. "There were two of them, and I'm really a baseball fan. But if somebody needs it more than I do, I'll let it go."

If you work for a registered Central Florida charity and are interested in the memorabilia, post your e-mail address and proposal at [blogs.orlandosentinel.com/changetheworld/2009/07/ what-would-you-do-with-this-treasure.html](http://blogs.orlandosentinel.com/changetheworld/2009/07/what-would-you-do-with-this-treasure.html). Kate Santich can be reached at 407-420-5503 or [ksantich@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:ksantich@orlandosentinel.com).

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