



## Phi Footnotes: When Hollywood is in need of vintage sporting goods, Ashland Phi gets the call

BY JON SPENCER

**M**arv Lubinsky's greatest claim to fame would have had most women trading places with him in a heartbeat. A rapid heartbeat.

The 1968 Ashland University (Ohio Mu) graduate and former high school teacher got to dress George Clooney in leather — from the ears up.

Lubinsky, owner of Past Time Sports outside Dallas, is considered one of the nation's leading authorities on vintage sports equipment. He provided the leather helmets and old-time watermelon-shaped footballs for Clooney's football-inspired movie "Leatherheads."

Although the 60-year-old Lubinsky didn't get to walk the red carpet during the film's premier, his equipment did. Feeding off the nostalgic theme of the movie, Clooney and co-star Renee Zellweger toured the country by train to promote the comedy, set in the 1920s. Waiting for them at each whistlestop were some of Lubinsky's footballs and helmets.

The movie has been panned by the critics, but Lubinsky doesn't care.

"I thought it was incredible," he said.

Why wouldn't he? He was essentially the movie's costume designer, co-producer and "casting" director.

Lubinsky's clones of vintage equipment have been used in several movies, television programs and Broadway shows, including a musical — yes, a musical — about legendary Notre Dame football coach Knute Rockne.

And to think Lubinsky's link to Hollywood came about because of a visit to a back alley store in Ashland more than 40 years ago.

One of the founding members of Ohio Mu, Lubinsky and his buddies were in Al Biggs' Used and Good Junk store when he discovered a leather football helmet.

"We were just in there looking for goofy gifts for the sorority girls," Lubinsky said.

What he found was a veritable gold mine.

That helmet spawned a business that had sales last year of just under \$500,000. Operating from his home in the bedroom community of Richardson, Texas, Lubinsky sells reproductions of vintage gear mostly through the Internet ([www.pasttimesports.biz](http://www.pasttimesports.biz)) to individual enthusiasts and collectors from as far away as Australia and Europe.

The replica headgear, which Lubinsky calls "Glory Helmets," are handcrafted of saddle-quality leather and modeled after that dusty artifact he bought for \$3. He has no interest in selling the original, even though it would probably fetch between \$500 and \$700.

"My father (Marvin) played quarterback for Lima Senior in the depression," said Lubinsky, a Lima native, "and there's a picture of him in his leather helmet. So when I saw that one in Ashland I had to buy it. I didn't know then I was way ahead of my time."

While working as an antique dealer, Lubinsky always kept his eyes open for more leather helmets.

“I recognized people were buying them for \$500 and \$600 because they were so rare,” Lubinsky said. “You couldn’t find them because back in the ‘50s and ‘60s, they started stinking up the locker rooms. So coaches had them hauled to the dump and burned.”

After nearly 25 years as a creative director at various advertising agencies, including his own, Lubinsky started Past Time Sports in 1996. His mainstay Glory Helmet retails for \$130 for the standard model and up to \$225 for custom-made. Miniature versions cost \$34 to \$70, depending on detailing. Last year he sold about 4,000 large helmets and nearly as many minis.

Lubinsky is far from just a helmet haberdasher, though. He’s also a historian.

For instance, there’s a story behind the 60 bloated footballs Lubinsky sold to “Leatherheads” producers. Knute Rockne used a ball like that when he helped introduce passing to college football. Rockne, an end, and teammate Gus Dorias, Notre Dame’s quarterback, worked at Cedar Point and spent an entire summer throwing a football on the beach. When it came time for the Fighting Irish to play Army on Nov. 1, 1913, ND stunned the Cadets 35-13 by throwing the ball.

Dorias completed 14-of-17 passes for 243 yards to destroy heavily-favored Army. That upset changed the game forever.

Lubinsky will tell you football started in 1869 and that right up to the turn of the century, players didn’t wear helmets. President Teddy Roosevelt nearly outlawed the game because there were so many deaths from the crunching of heads.

Lubinsky points out Doak Walker wore the “Glory” style helmet, which never had an official name. Rockne donned the foldable BeeHive that had very little padding and could be stuffed in a pocket.

The Executioner face mask helmet, which covers the entire head like a leather jack-o-lantern, can bring as much as \$10,000.

“I left the advertising business because I got tired of coming up with ideas for other people,” Lubinsky said. “I knew from being in the antique business that this sports stuff had possibilities.

“People who couldn’t find leather helmets were coming to me from all over the Southwest, trying to find helmets for an old coach or player. I knew if I did this right, and made helmets of super quality, I’d have something here.”

In addition to appearing on stage and screen, the helmets are displayed and sold at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton and the College Football Hall of Fame in South Bend, Ind.

Lubinsky is even prouder that his dad’s World War II fighter pilot jacket hangs in the U.S. Air Force Museum in Dayton. The elder Lubinsky, 87, flew B-17 bombers. Toymaker Hasbro used his jacket as a model for one of its GI Joe dolls.



Marv Lubinsky with his handcrafted vintage sports equipment.

Achieving his own measure of fame has been part ingenuity, luck and perfect timing for the younger Lubinsky. His business came along just as many colleges are celebrating their 100th year of football and looking for ways to commemorate the centennial anniversary.

Lubinsky has worked with the Rose Bowl and the presenters of the Doak Walker Award, given annually to the nation’s top collegiate running back. At the Doak Walker Legends Award Banquet earlier this year, 80 Glory Helmets were used as table centerpieces.

Lubinsky recently signed a deal with a national distributor for a cheaper fabric helmet, the Old Timer, targeted at the tailgater who shows up for games in crazy garb and face paint. In the process, he discovered he could cash in just by

selling to guys — more than 50 so far — who attend Halloween parties dressed as the Heisman Trophy.

In recent years, Past Time Sports has also developed reproductions of equipment used in other sports, including leather hockey helmets, old-time baseball mitts, basketballs and soccer balls. Macy’s will soon be displaying some of the vintage items in its department stores.

Lubinsky knows the day might be coming when demand for his products outgrows what he and his three employees can supply.

“I’ve had people offer to buy the company; I’ll let them worry about it,” he said. “I’m a creative person. Coming up with concepts is something I love, but I end up getting caught up in the manufacturing and shipping and administrative work. I will not feel bad if I give it up and become an antique dealer again.” ■

*Spencer is a sports reporter for the News Journal in Mansfield, Ohio.*

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