



EDITORS' NOTE Steiner is a regular on ESPN Radio 1050 on Sunday mornings, along with his co-hosting duties on the YES Network. In 2003, he published his first book, *The Business Playbook: Leadership Lessons from the World of Sports*. He has guest lectured at Harvard Business School, the Kellogg School of Management, Columbia, and Yale. In 2004, Steiner announced the launch of *Yankees-Steiner Collectibles* to provide fans with access to Yankees memorabilia and experiences at Yankee Stadium. He has since cultivated team partnerships with the Dallas Cowboys, the Boston Red Sox, the Chicago Cubs, the University of Notre Dame, The University of Alabama, and Syracuse University. He earned an undergraduate degree in accounting at the Martin J. Whitman School of Management from Syracuse in 1981. He also helped cultivate *Syracuse-Steiner*, a program where Syracuse students play a part in actually running the company. He sits on the boards of Syracuse University Athletics, David Falk Sports Management, Family Services of Westchester, and the Yogi Berra Museum. Steiner's latest book is titled, *You Gotta Have Balls*.

COMPANY BRIEF Established in 1987, Steiner Sports (www.steinersports.com) has been a leader in sports memorabilia and sports marketing for over two decades. The company has evolved from procuring athletes for endorsements and speaking engagements to the world's foremost provider of authenticated, hand-signed, and game-used sports collectibles. Steiner Sports is owned by Omnicom Group Inc.

Did you have a vision early on for what this company could become? How has it evolved?

I didn't invent the hiring of an athlete to support a brand, but the smaller stuff I was doing was original – shooting videos of coaches and quarterbacks and sending them to sales staffs for motivation, as well as PR blitzes where a media tour was created around a player. I thought the collectible thing would be a support for the corporate business.

I was always a collector and I had a vision. You'd send a puck to someone you did business with around Stanley Cup time and say, "We all

Brandon Steiner at his New Rochelle, New York facility

have the same goal in common. Good luck with the Stanley Cup." It was about customer loyalty and getting yourself a meeting.

I only had my name and an ability to be a brokerage of talent, and it seemed natural to extend the brand.

When you book players, you only earn a small percentage, but when you start bringing products in with the players, there is more room to expand the mark-up.

Is it frustrating today to try to promote the value of being authentic in this space?

There are an increasing number of educated customers when it comes to authentication.

My legacy will be that I was able to get the teams and leagues involved – I was able to make that sale.

Probably the best sale I ever made was our partnership with the Yankees. We set an example. Their priorities have always been in order, which are always to look at what their activities mean to the fans and the brand.

Were you surprised by the success of the memorabilia or did you know it would catch on?

I'm surprised it has not gone further but there are some who still don't understand how the collectible game works. People develop their feelings based on how things were introduced to them and the fraudulent stuff leaves a bad taste. Many people also think of collecting as a monetary activity – that what they collect will go up in value. I look at it more for the gifting value and as a fun hobby.

The people who have made the most from their collecting have never been those who were buying just to make money.

You've even sold stadium dirt. What was the thinking behind that?

My thinking is always sideways. Jerseys and bats are worth so much, but a lot of people cannot get those, so I'd watch as they'd go on the field and grab some dirt and put it in their pockets. My thinking was just that – to get dirt and package it and sell it.

Creating an Industry

An Interview with Brandon Steiner, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Steiner Sports Memorabilia

I never thought we'd have over 600 SKUs. My goal is now to sell up to \$100 million of dirt from the different stadiums.

It ended up being more complicated than I had originally envisioned, but I felt it was a simple way for people to collect and have fun.

I also took two containers of rubble from the old Yankee stadium. There's nothing like having rubble on your shelf.

There is something sexy about the dirt – about how we have marketed and packaged it. We're somewhere in the \$35-million range now with the sales of it, because we have come up with a new line of products.

How did your blog come about?

Whenever I'm with major sports stars, I try to get their secrets to success. I have this journal of notes from those meetings and I felt it was a good time to start sharing it. I also have credibility so people can respect it.

Besides keeping Steiner Sports going and making sure I'm getting the customers the best possible products, my other two big initiatives are to help as many charities, particularly kid's charities, as I can. Speaking and writing my books allows me to do that, as well as providing a medium to share the wisdom.

When you look back at your achievements, do you feel they were due more to smarts or guts?

The hardest work one can do is to think. I'm not the smartest guy but I will think about things and determine how else I can spin something. I have always been a strategist and strategy is underestimated in business today. It's also about utilizing your resources to get to your common goal.

Was that desire to give back instilled in you early on?

Growing up, I watched my mother write checks to charity when she had nothing. She said, when someone asks you for help, you help them.

If you wait until you make a lot of money to give, you're missing out on years of enjoyment that comes from giving. So even those starting out should work something into their weekly budgets that they can afford.

Did you have aspirations to become a pro athlete?

I never had that aptitude. I created this profession and company, and I have had a hand in creating the industry and I'm happy with that. The players look sideways at me but they will thank me one day when they realize I put a system in place that will keep their legacy alive. ●