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Area family's Heisman model up for bid

*Glenn Miller
Staff*

Piece will be auctioned as trophy is awarded

By GLENN MILLER

gmiller@news-press.com

University of Southern California running back Reggie Bush likely will win the 2005 Heisman Trophy today.

He'll be awarded, assuming he wins, a sculpture of a running back clutching a football in the crook of his left arm and stiff-arming a would-be tackler with his right arm.

The Heisman is awarded annually by sportswriters and former Heisman winners to the best college football player in the country.

The original 1935 Heisman Trophy plaster sculpture, the one used as the model for the award for 70 years, will be auctioned today at Sotheby's in New York City.

The plaster sculpture belongs to a Southwest Florida family related to the artist who created the trophy. The family has remained anonymous and is represented by Fort Myers attorney Kevin Jursinski.

He is scheduled to be at the auction where he hopes the plaster cast created by artist Frank Eliscu could fetch from \$200,000 to \$300,000.

Eliscu was paid a commission of \$200 to create the model.

"We got the real deal," Jursinski said.

Lee Dunbar, Sotheby's director of the collectibles department, believes a winning bid between \$200,000 and \$300,000 is a reasonable expectation.

"At the end of the day, you just never know," Dunbar said.

Joe Walsh, a New York businessman, has purchased two Heismans. The 1936 Heisman won by Yale end Larry Kelley was purchased for \$328,000. Walsh paid a reported \$250,000 for Notre Dame quarterback Paul Hornung's 1956 Heisman.

Walsh, though, isn't interested in the plaster sculpture that started it all.

"Well, the trophy is unique because it was held by the winner," said Walsh, who owns an extensive collection of sports collectibles he displays in a Garrison, N.Y. restaurant named The Stadium.

The 1935 Heisman, the one that began it all, was won by University of Chicago running back Jay Berwanger. He was awarded the first Heisman, not the plaster cast that will be in Sotheby's today.

Walsh, who is also the chairman and CEO of Curtis Circulation Co., a \$2 billion per year company, owns numerous collectibles, including Mickey Mantle's Triple Crown award, six Gold Gloves and two Cy Young Awards. He conceded that an item's worth is in the eye of the beholder.

"You don't know what it is that somebody sees in it that others don't," Walsh said.

The Heisman Trophy sculpture is being auctioned today with other collectibles such as baseball Hall of Famer Joe DiMaggio's 1936 rookie uniform with the New York Yankees, baseball legend Shoeless Joe Jackson's Black Betsy bat and pitcher Christy Mathewson's 1900 rookie contract with the New York Giants.

Jursinski and the anonymous family who owns the trophy clearly hope bidders will desire the 70-year-old model that has become an endearing and enduring sports symbol. Running backs sometimes strike the Heisman pose after scoring touchdowns.

Dunbar, who will be the auctioneer today, predicts DiMaggio's uniform could sell for \$600,000.

The uniform has top billing in a news release about the auction. The No. 2 item listed on the release is the Heisman plaster cast.

The trophy's image was conceived in 1935, a year before DiMaggio began playing center field for the Yankees. Eliscu was a 23-year-old New York artist in 1935. He was commissioned to create a trophy to be awarded to the nation's top college football player. A friend of Eliscu's, Ed Smith, posed for the trophy's original plaster model. Eliscu enhanced Smith's muscles in the sculpture. Eliscu later resided on Siesta Key in Sarasota County. He died in 1996.

"They paid him the princely sum of \$200," Dunbar said. "Who would have ever expected that the Heisman Trophy would become the most recognized trophy in sports?"
Now, the trophy that Eliscu created for \$200 in 1935 could sell for more than 1,000 times that amount.

"The family is hoping to get a very nice bid," Jursinski said. "I don't know what that is. I would like to see it higher than some of the Heisman copies have gone."

O.J. Simpson's 1968 Heisman, awarded when he was, like Reggie Bush, a USC running back, sold for \$382,000 in 1999.

The family selling the sculpture has denied interview requests.

"They just want to be low-key," Jursinski said.

THE FIRST HEISMAN WINNER

*Year: 1935

*Name: Jay Berwanger

*College: Chicago

*Position: Running back

*Notes: Berwanger called plays, ran, passed, punted, blocked, tackled and kicked off. ... One of his nicknames was the One-Man Team. ... He was the first player selected in the NFL's first draft, in 1936. Berwanger didn't play in the NFL. Instead, according to a University of Chicago account, he became a foam-rubber salesman. ... His aunt Gussie used the Heisman as a doorstop for a while. He died at the age of 88 in 2002. ... Chicago dropped its big-time football program in 1939.

1935 voting

1. Jay Berwanger, Chicago, 84 points
2. Monk Meyer, Army, 29 points
3. William Shakespeare, Notre Dame, 23 points
4. Pepper Constable, Princeton, 20 points