Collectors are irate over Favre-endorsed game-worn jerseys that turn out to be fake. The big question is: Where do they come from?

The jersey at right was purported to have been worn by Brett Favre in the Oct. 24, 2004, game between the Packers and Cowboys at Lambeau Field. The photo of Favre from the game (above left) shows noticeable yellow fabric exhibited below the “NFL Equipment” shield patch that is stitched on the collar. The jersey, which was sold to collector Steve Towes by Rick Radtke, exhibits the “NFL Equipment” shield patch in an incorrect position and is one of the multiple red flags the jersey exhibits.
The March 28, 2008, edition of Sports Collectors Digest featured a story about the large number of fake Brett Favre game-worn jerseys circulating in the sports collectibles hobby. The article provided information and advice to collectors about how to avoid purchasing a fake jersey, and also showed actual examples of unknowing collectors who purchased Favre jerseys that were not authentic.

Since the story ran, we received responses from readers voicing their concerns over game-worn Favre jerseys that were endorsed by Favre with his player hologram, "game used" inscription, photograph of Favre with the jersey and signed Brett Favre letter on his official letterhead.

That feedback prompted SCD to investigate the matter further and assemble this follow-up story.

When collector Steve Towes began his quest to purchase a couple Brett Favre game-worn jerseys a few years ago, he had to look no further than a sports memorabilia dealer he had built a hobby relationship with over the years: Rick Radtke of Radtke Sports Inc. Towes first met Radtke in 1998 when he purchased Sammy Sosa autographs from Radtke during the slugger’s historic year. Towes was intrigued when Radtke, also the owner of BrettFavreautographs.com, offered Towes the chance to purchase a game-worn jersey that Favre supposedly wore during the 2000 season, and another jersey that was said to have been worn in the Packers’ 2004 game versus the Dallas Cowboys that took place in October at Lambeau Field.

Towes assumed the authenticity of the jerseys was as solid as possible. Both pieces had Favre’s personal authenticity holograms affixed to the tackle twill numerals, Favre’s signature neatly scribed on each jersey’s back No. 4, and inscriptions written in black felt-tip marker assuring the potential buyer that they were “Game Used” — a hobby term that is music to serious collectors’ ears.

In addition, each jersey was accompanied by a “Letter from the Desk of Brett Favre,” which was also signed by the three-time NFL Most Valuable Player, stating that both were used during game play by the Green Bay quarterback. And, each came with a picture of Favre with the jersey.

After payments to Radtke that totalled $13,000, Towes became the owner of both showpieces, which he displayed in his Wausau, Wis., home.

“I laid them in a proud place of prominence,” said Towes. “My office, or man room, whatever you want to call it. I had them in frames, the kind you can hang the jerseys in and the kind where you can take them out whenever you want to.”

Fast-forward to the spring of 2008, when Towes, a longtime SCD subscriber, began to worry after reading a story that stated some Favre jerseys with his hologram and paperwork were not authentic.

Ironically, Towes says he called Rick before (the SCD) article hit,” said Towes. “I said to Rick, ‘Hey Rick, I want to ask you something quick. Are these jerseys legitimate? Because I’m in a rather complicated trade for them and this guy (I’m dealing with) is asking for absolute sure.’ ‘Of course,’ Rick said. ‘Well, why wouldn’t they be?’

“About four days later, I get to my office, open up Sports Collectors Digest and lo and behold, there’s...
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The article prompted Towes to e-mail Guy Hankel, a private collector who is well known in hobby circles as an authority on Packer jerseys, and one of the experts quoted in the March SCD story. Hankel is a regular contributor to the Packers official media guide, owns an extensive Brett Favre game DVD library consisting of more than 200 games that Favre appeared in, and is a research librarian at the Madison (Wis.) Public Library.

"I sent the jerseys to Guy and he personally inspected them," said Towes. "He e-mailed me, and I will never forget it. He said, 'It's terrible. At first I thought that maybe they were just game-issued and may have gotten mixed up, but when I looked at these in person I found out that these are outright fakes, made to deceive. They were very simple and bad fakes.' So, I asked him if he could give me a list of reasons why they were deemed fake. He gave me multiple reasons, all so elementary that anybody who knows game-worn jerseys would know."

When Hankel first inspected Towes' jerseys in person, he saw some problems right away, starting with the 2004 Dallas jersey.

"The first problem I noticed was it appeared to be bigger than a size 52," said Hankel. "It had a year/size tag indicating '04-52. However, when I measured it, it definitely appeared to be larger than Brett's standard size 52. It probably would be more like a size 54 or a 56. There's no question in my mind that it was bigger than a size 52."

Hankel said he measured the horizontal seam that separates the dazzle cloth yoke from the mesh body of the jersey and said that on a size...
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52 jersey you would expect it to be in the range of 19 1/2 inches across. Hankel added that he used legitimate Favre jerseys as exemplars for comparison to be sure of what correct Favre gamers would measure. Hankel said that on this particular jersey the seam was 22-1/2 to 23 inches across.

“That, in and of itself, is a major inconsistency in terms of trying to compare it to something that Brett would actually wear on the field,” said Hankel. “Also, the sleeves were sewn on in a way that was inconsistent compared to how Brett’s sleeves are usually sewn on. I have handled many, many Packer jerseys from this era. I have handled legitimate Favre jerseys, and it was wholly inconsistent with what you would expect to find in terms of how the sleeves were hemmed and how the sleeves were sewn on to the body of the jersey. I thought that was highly unusual.”

According to Hankel, there was too much material between the top of the nameplate and the bottom of the collar striping on the back.

“After noticing this, my next step was to do some sort of photographic comparison and video analysis,” said Hankel. “I found as many photographs as I could from both halves of the game that this was purported to be used in. I also used a complete video from the game.”

Hankel noted that it’s possible Favre may have changed jerseys at halftime, but that wouldn’t explain the inconsistencies with the jersey.

“One thing I noticed was that the Reebok NFL Equipment shield that’s sewn on the front of the neck was at a completely different location compared to the one on the jersey that Brett wore for the entire Dallas game,” said Hankel. “It was quite easy to see and the photographs bear that out. You can clearly see some yellow underneath the NFL Equipment shield from the bottom collar striping, where as on this particular jersey Steve sent me, the NFL crest is sewn lower and I found quite a few clear photos that demonstrate a discrepancy in the location of that. I found no evidence that this shield was taken off and sewn on into a different location. There were no stitch marks to that effect. That was important to me in identifying this and, in my opinion, it was not worn in this game. That was the kicker for me, that this was not the jersey in question.”

As for the 2000 season jersey Towes also sent to Hankel for inspection, it had different problems than the 2004 Dallas jersey.

“The jersey that had the 2000/size 52 tag sewn in the neck, the basic shell of the jersey was fine,” said Hankel. “It was indeed a size 52 as I measured it, and the sleeves were constructed as they should be, compared to other legitimate Favre jerseys. But, for me, the initial problems that I discovered were with the name and numbers that were sewn on.”

According to Hankel, the tackle twill used for the numerals and letters was not of the same quality as other Packer jerseys. He said the material felt more “plasticy,” or cheap, and not as thick as normal regular tackle twill from gamer jerseys.

“In addition, the name and numbers were not cut to precision as they should be,” said Hankel. “Some of the letters in the name ‘FAVRE’ weren’t cut as you would normally expect.” Hankel said he’s studied several hundred Packer jerseys and has never seen that shade of nameplate on any of the others.

“It struck me as highly unusual,” said Hankel. “In addition, the nameplate was not sewn on as you would expect it to be. The thread and the type of stitching was inconsistent from what you’d find from a Packers jersey from that era. That led me to believe that this was numbered and lettered by someone other than the Packers.

“Then came the point of doing some sort of photographic comparison and video analysis of all the games in the 2000 season that Brett would have worn a green jersey in, including preseason. I couldn’t find a single instance where Brett was wearing a green jersey that had the exact alignment of the front No. 4 in conjunction with the NFL Shield in the collar. It really struck me that the front No. 4 was sewn on in a noticeably different location on the front of the jersey.”

Hankel stressed the importance of making sure,
when analyzing a jersey, to cover all the angles, figure out all the possibilities, including the chance that more than one jersey was worn in the game. He also said in addition to using still photos, having video is crucial.

“It’s extremely important because you don’t want to leave anything to chance,” said Hankel. “It can be very easy to miss part of one game. Often, when you’re looking at photos, they may not identify which part of the game it was from. Video also gives you a lot of different angles to look at a jersey and different lighting. It also should be noted that photos that you find, on Getty Images for example, may have an incorrect caption or it may misidentify the game or the season.”

Hankel said that after looking at Towes’ 2000 season jersey in person, he felt it was also made to deceive the buyer.

He said it’s easy to understand how Towes and other collectors and fans get fooled into buying a fraudulent item.

“If you’re not equipped with a healthy dose of skepticism, these could easily slip by a collector,” he said. “You have to try to look for little things in terms of where and how these identifiers are sewn on the jerseys, because they can vary a little bit and they can give you a big clue on to whether or not the jersey may be legitimate or not.”

According to Guy Hankel, who examined video and photographs from each game in the 1997 season, Brett Favre never wore a jersey that featured the V-neck and NFL shield that dipped below the front horizontal seam, such as the suspect example below that was purchased by a prominent East Coast collector.
After hearing Hankel’s findings, Towes immediately contacted Radtke.

“I will never forget my first conversation with Rick after the article came out and after I talked to some authenticators,” said Towes. “I asked him if he still stands behind his story on those Favre gamers, and he said, ‘Yes, why would they not be?’ I told him my jerseys were bad. I told him I was in a bind and needed some help. With my potential trade, this could be a potential $22,000 swing. At this point, I’m thinking, ‘My reputation is shot with the guys I traded the jerseys to.’ ”

Towes told Radtke he talked to Hankel “I held nothing back from Rick,” said Towes. “I was thinking that maybe Rick has got an answer for this. Well, he didn’t. Rick automatically said that Guy is full of ‘expletive.’ (Radtke said) These jerseys are real.’ ”

According to Towes, he ended up sending Radtke all the information Hankel provided him as proof that the jerseys were fake.

“I could tell Rick knew (that Hankel was right),” said Towes. “He changed his tone. That’s when he decided to give me my money back. I kick myself for sending them back because I have no clue where the jerseys are. ... I don’t want some other collector to pay $10,000 or $12,000 for them, because that’s wrong.”

Radtke told SCD that he still has the jerseys in his office and said he was surprised when Towes originally claimed they weren’t authentic.

“I’m getting a letter from Favre, a picture of him holding it,” said Radtke. “I just sell it. That’s what I go with. I don’t know what else to do. When Steve brought this to me, I almost fell over. I said, ‘Well, I feel bad, I’ll give you your money back and I’m not going to put them back out there.’ ”

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Where did such poor fakes originate and how many made it into the market? Towes believes he is one of many collectors who have ponied up big dollars for the bad No. 4 jerseys.

“I was very specific with Rick,” said Towes. “I said, ‘Rick, I want your honest answer. How many people besides me did you have bad jerseys sold that you had to refund the money?’ And he said, ‘Steve, you’re the only one.’ ”

“I thought about that and remembered talking to another collector, Anthony Miller,” he added. “I talked to him a couple days prior to that and he had told me that he had bought a jersey from Radtke and his authenticator deemed it bad, and according to Anthony, his (Miller’s) authenticator was bargaining back and forth with Rick, and Rick finally issued Anthony a refund.”

Radtke said he doesn’t know Miller and hadn’t sold him a jersey.

Favre’s agent, Bus Cook, told SCD he also was contacted by Miller. Cook also said that every Favre-endorsed game-worn jersey was sourced from the same person: David Thomason, a friend and business associate of Favre.

“All I can tell you is there were some game-worn jerseys that Brett signed for the fella, David Thomason, who arranges Brett’s flights,” said Cook. “Most times he signed two (jerseys) per game. He’ll (Brett) change out at halftime. The only thing I know is Brett has signed game-worn jerseys for David Thomason. I wasn’t even there when he signed them. I do Brett’s endorsement stuff, but he and David, they got their own little deal. But where he signed them, when he signed them, where they are, I have no clue.”

“I’ve already called him (Thomason) once and I said, ‘Look, these folks are upset, now, they paid money for this jersey. All I’m telling you is they’re doing their homework now and something’s not kosher.’ ”

Hankel agreed.

“After I analyzed the jerseys that Steve sent me, I had a sinking feeling that the problem was larger than what I thought,” said Hankel. “I’ve been telling people for some years now that you have to exercise due diligence, and just because a jersey comes with paperwork and a Letter of Authenticity (LOA), that doesn’t necessarily prove anything. You still have to do your own research. I’ve known for some years now that a few of these Favre jerseys that came with Brett’s paperwork weren’t as advertised, even though it fell on deaf ears.

“It appears to be a huge problem. I’ve encountered more jerseys that, in my opinion, have not been legitimate that are accompanied with that paperwork compared to real Favre game-worn jerseys.

“Certainly, there are a number of great game-worn Favre jerseys that come with the hologram and the inscription and the paperwork, but I’ve noticed in

According to Hankel, he believes the 1997 away jersey pictured above that was accompanied by a “Letter from the Desk of Brett Favre” was a ’Nike Authentic’ jersey doctored to appear as a game-used jersey. Hankel said that the ’Nike Authentic’ jerseys could have been purchased from the Packers Pro Shop at the time.
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Statement from David Thomason:

When I was made aware of questions involving the authenticity of game-worn jerseys, I immediately assembled a team to investigate. This team includes private investigators, attorneys and forensic specialists. The suggestion that the authenticity of game-worn jerseys connected to me might be called into question was very troubling, as I have implemented practices and procedures designed to ensure the authenticity of items I provide to my customers.

I take a strong stance to prevent fraudulent items from entering the marketplace. As you may recall, in October 2005 I hired API Services to investigate the sale of items with forged Brett Favre signatures where Brett and I were the victims. This investigation led to the criminal prosecution of Michael Van Lanen, Cynthia Van Lanen and Paul J. Vidani by the Wisconsin Department of Justice. Moreover, a federal civil action was filed against the perpetrators and a significant settlement was reached outside of court. While I may disagree as to the number of fraudulent items in the marketplace, we all agree that one fraudulent item is one too many.

Additionally, authentication and quality assurance procedures are being implemented by my investigative team. Any collector who has a question as to the authenticity of a Brett Favre game-worn jersey purchased from one of my customers or who knows of any fraudulent activities in connection with memorabilia should contact API Services, Inc. The contact information is Leah Olson at 1-800-236-5202 ext. 300 or productintegrity@api-inc.com or they may visit their website at API-Inc.com.

While my investigators have made tremendous progress in getting to the bottom of this matter, there is work to be done. It is my hope that this investigation can be concluded in the near future with full restitution being made to my customers, collectors and my company.

I want to thank my customers as they have been incredibly cooperative with this investigation. Moreover, they have remained patient, loyal, and understanding as the investigation continues.

Recently Sold Game-Worn Football Jerseys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Jersey Type</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Philip Rivers game-worn</td>
<td>$1,807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Dan Marino game-worn</td>
<td>$2,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Joe Montana game-worn</td>
<td>$10,585</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Tom Brady game-worn</td>
<td>$4,991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>John Elway game-worn</td>
<td>$2,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Barry Sanders game-worn</td>
<td>$11,109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983-84</td>
<td>Eric Dickerson game-worn</td>
<td>$4,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Michael Strahan game-worn</td>
<td>$2,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Torry Holt game-worn</td>
<td>$2,622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Peyton Manning game-worn</td>
<td>$2,301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCD sent questions about some of the jerseys in question to Thomason, and asked other detailed questions about his relationship with Favre and where he obtained the jerseys that were sourced through him.

“I received your e-mail with the questions that you want to ask me,” said Thomason through e-mail. “Given the information that you’ve provided, I’ve decided to initiate an investigation into the allegations, and I have started the process.”

Thomason said that in 2005 he became aware of people in the Green Bay area who were producing fake autographs and that he conducted his own investigation, using a Madison law firm, private investigators and forensic examiners. According to Thomason, the lawyers have connections to the Wisconsin Department of Justice, and the DOJ started a criminal investigation.

“I’m putting together the same team to investigate the allegations that you’ve noted in your e-mails,” said Thomason. “... I’ve already asked Rick Radtke to forward one of the Favre jerseys directly to the forensic examiners.”

SCD made multiple attempts to interview Thoma-
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son in person for this story, but each attempt proved unsuccessful. On one occasion, SCD had a meeting set up with Thomason in downtown Green Bay, only to be met instead by three private investigators. Thomason did not appear.

“Obviously, it would be premature for me to respond to your questions until this investigation is under way,” Thomason said via e-mail. “I know that all game-worn jerseys that I obtained were obtained from either Brett or Red Batty (the Packers equipment manager). Beyond that, I’m trusting that my team of investigators will get to the bottom of this, and that the results of the investigation will provide answers to your questions.”

When images and concerns of the jerseys in question were forwarded to the Green Bay Packers, the club issued a statement.

“The Packers looked into this matter and found that no employee of the organization participated in improper conduct regarding the jerseys in question,” said a team spokesperson.

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So where do NFL jerseys come from and could somebody outside the league actually get their hands on some and mock them up themselves?

Former coordinator of NFL Auction from March 2001 to June 2005, Dan Schmidt, said Ripon Athletic, out of Berlin, Wis., was the jersey supplier for 28 of the 32 NFL clubs, including the Packers during his tenure with the league.

“In the case of NFL trademarked materials, only the league office and the club itself have access to the official game-issued jerseys for game play in the NFL,” said Schmidt.

At press time, Thomason’s legal team and its private investigators were still in the process of their investigation.

Check out Chris Nerat’s blog at: gavelchat.sportscollectorsdigest.com. Readers may reach him at Chris.Nerat@fwpubs.com or call him at (800) 726-9966.