

# MSG signs Steiner Sports for memorabilia

BY TERRY LEFTON

STAFF WRITER

Madison Square Garden has signed Steiner Sports to an all-inclusive memorabilia and marketing deal through which it will sell game-used apparel and equipment, including rarities like the hardwood floor on which the New York Knicks won their championships and the goal nets used in the New York Rangers' 1994 Stanley Cup victory.

The hybrid licensing/sponsorship agreement creating MSG Steiner Collectibles is Steiner's first to include NHL and NBA teams, and is the latest all-encompassing deal for the memorabilia pioneer, which has similar arrangements with other big-market teams that play in celebrated venues: the New York Yankees, Boston Red Sox, Chicago Cubs and Los Angeles Dodgers.

The merchandise will be on the Steiner Sports.com website. Steiner also is opening a 700-square-foot store at MSG with a few hundred different items, and will package MSG experiences under the deal — everything from a night as the Knicks ball boy to the opportunity to hold meetings in the Knicks' and Rangers' locker rooms.

Already for sale online is a 72-by-27.5-inch piece of the MSG floor bearing the word "Garden" and used by the Knicks during their 1970 and 1973 championships, for \$1,499. There's also a smaller piece of the same hardwood floor signed by Willis Reed, Bill Bradley, Walt Frazier and Dave Debusschere for \$799.

Under the deal, MSG/Steiner Col-



**Steiner Sports is opening a store at MSG and offers rarities, including this signed piece of the Knicks' championship court.**

lectibles will appear on MSG-controlled media, including dashboards and the MSG Network. The deal replaces MSG's earlier agreement with game-used equipment specialist MeiGray.

"This is really an expanded marketing approach to what has been a gritty, roll-up-your-sleeves category [memorabilia and collectibles]," said MSG Sports President Scott O'Neil.

While the deal is for one year, with MSG beginning an \$850 million renovation, this gives Steiner a chance to show MSG what it can do. "I'd describe it as a 'toe-in-the-water' approach with an opportunity for something bigger, like a seat program," O'Neil said. Steiner is selling seats from the original Yankee Stadium, starting at \$699 for two bleacher seats.

As Steiner closes more comprehen-

sive building/team deals like this one, the question is how widespread they will become. Deals for stripping and selling remnants of sports venues before they are razed are commonplace. Could comprehensive memorabilia/collectibles deals become as commonplace as a soda and beer sponsorship?

"No one has cracked the code on that yet, but I'd say we're getting close," O'Neil said.

"Generally, you want to be in places where there are memories. The Orange Bowl had 16 collegiate champions crowned there," said Jeff Rabinowitz, national sales manager at Mounted Memories, which recently liquidated the Orange Bowl, including urinals that sold for \$400 to \$500. "Even in new places there are opportunities, because you can do event pieces, and commemoratives, where you can add your ticket or sponsor gifts."

Even Steiner Sports' CEO, Brandon Steiner, acknowledges that these kinds of deals aren't appropriate for every team facility.

"Short-term thinking is cashing in on game-used equipment," he said. "Long term, it has to be about building brands and serving sponsors and premium-seat holders with products that really add value."

While Steiner has similar deals with Notre Dame, Alabama and Syracuse, he sees colleges as the biggest untapped market.

"There's only so many iconic pro teams and buildings, but there are dozens of colleges with great histories and stadiums or arenas that are real time capsules," he said.

REBECCA DAVILLO / MSG PHOTOS

STEINER SPORTS