



# NFL Player of the Day: Marvel Smith

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Some offensive linemen pine for their chance at whatever exposure or publicity comes their way. Marvel Smith is not one of them—he most enjoys getting to meet his fans.

To officially kick off the 2008 NFL Player of the Day program, Smith did a nearly two-hour appearance at First & Ten's Sports Cards in West Mifflin, Pa. on the evening of Sept. 23. The Super Bowl champion and Pittsburgh Steelers lineman signed autographs, posed for photos and interacted with fervent fans.

"I don't mind doing the appearances just for the interaction with the fans. I don't really do it for the notoriety," Smith said. "For me, offensive line is the perfect position. I don't really care to be known for notoriety and all that kind of stuff. For us, the only time people know who we are is if we do something wrong on the field. So, I just love the interaction with the fans.

"There's going to come a time when nobody's going to want your autograph anymore once you're done playing," he added, laughing.



The NFL POD, a national program partnership with hobby shops for a 32-day in-store promotion, awards prizes to collectors for uncovering the featured NFL "Player of the Day" or "Hometown Hero" trading card. More than 700 hobby shops across the country are participating in the program, now in its ninth year. First & Ten's location in Century III Mall helped draw a large crowd at Smith's free autograph signing session, he said, where buzz quickly spread amongst shoppers hoping to catch a glimpse of an NFL player in the building.

"It's always cool to get out there and interact with the fans," said Smith, who stayed in the store for about 30 minutes after his appearance to have individual conversations with more fans. "It was a different type of autograph signing—fans didn't have to pay to get the pictures. It was good for the fans because a lot of times out here in Pittsburgh, they're not really able to afford to buy the pictures or come interact with us at the autograph signings."

Smith's hobby shop visit about 15 minutes outside the city of Pittsburgh took place in the early weeks of the 2008 season and coincided with New York Jets wide receiver Brad Smith's visit in Rutherford, N.J. a week earlier as a kickoff for the promotion. The veteran left tackle said he always likes taking pictures with fans who rarely get a chance to stand side-by-side with a larger-than-life NFL player.

"Me being a lineman, they're always amazed at my size," Smith said. "I'm 6-foot-5, 315 (lbs.) so ... whenever I take pictures with fans, I always stand up from where I'm signing autographs just so they can get a good feel for my size. It was like I was dwarfing most of them."

As children's eyes widened while they stared at him in amazement—and got up on their tippy toes because they usually came up to his belly—Smith gladly continued signing autographs. Fans' ages ran the gamut from a 4-year-old boy to an 80-year-old woman, Smith said, but the one thing they all had in common was their steadfast devotion to the Steelers. Some fans even came in wearing Smith's No. 77 Steelers jersey.

“They had all of them from back in the ‘70s,” Smith said of the jersey medley he saw. “All the way from ‘Mean’ Joe Greene to Terry Bradshaw jerseys, and all the way to today. They even had some linemen jerseys. They had some Alan Faneca jerseys, some (Ben) Roethlisberger jerseys. There was a big assortment of jerseys the whole time.”

But he was most surprised by seeing those black and gold “Smith 77” jerseys.

“It’s always cool when you see somebody who has an offensive lineman’s jersey,” Smith said. “Regardless of any city you play in, it’s hard to walk into a store and find an offensive lineman’s jersey. So any fans that have a lineman’s jersey, to me, they’re the true fans. If they’re going to go seek out your jersey and find it, they know who you are—and most of the fans don’t really know offensive linemen.”

Mark Caputo, owner of First & Ten’s Sports Cards, sat next to Smith during his entire appearance at the store. “Signing those ‘Terrible Towels’ is probably the hardest thing to sign,” Smith said, so Caputo made sure he used the proper magic marker for the towels and footballs.

“Marvel Smith was a delight to have in our store,” Caputo said. “He spent quality time with all of our guests and truly seemed to enjoy himself. It was a real treat to offer our loyal customers the chance to get up close and personal with a Steelers player. I have been a participant in the NFL Player of the Day program for many years and have heard about many stores hosting events in the past, so it was a real treat to have the chance to finally have this type of event in my shop.



“We thank NFL PLAYERS and NFL Properties for this great program and for helping hobby shops promote NFL player trading cards,” Caputo continued.

When Smith and Caputo mingled at the store, it wasn’t the first time they had met. Caputo initially learned of Smith’s affable personality and interest in meeting fans six years ago.

“It was actually pretty funny because I had done an autograph signing with them in 2002,” Smith said. “I remembered him from then. It was a pretty cool atmosphere because his shop is family-owned. It was a little more laid-back.”

Along with a complete merchandise kit featuring promotional materials and prizes from licensees such as: Donruss, Topps, Upper Deck, The Licensed Product Company, McFarlane, Riddell, WinCraft, Reebok, Fathead, Pro Specialties Group and Team Beans/Forever Collectibles, each of the more than 700 participating shops received an autographed card to award to its grand-prize store winner. This year, the players contributing autographed cards for the promotion include Dwayne Bowe, Vincent Jackson, Patrick Crayton, John Beck and Garrett Wolfe. Each NFL Authorized Store also received 100 Limited Edition Rookies Collectible Mini-Posters featuring the 2008 rookie class.

For Smith, 30, his hobby shop visit on a Tuesday day off provided a welcomed respite from the rigors of another week in the NFL.

“That’s really the only time I have to do anything like that,” he said through laughter. “Sometimes they try to have us do it on Saturdays before games and my mind isn’t really on signing autographs then.”

Rob Lefko, President of Athlete Marketing for Priority Sports & Entertainment which represents Marvel and Brad Smith, said both players were excited to take part in the hobby shop appearances. Their ability to connect with fans helps their marketability, he said.

“A player’s marketability is determined by a combination of factors, including their performance on the field, the success of the team for which they play, and the size of the city in which they play,” Lefko said. “But, equally

significant factors are the passion of a team's fans and the individual player's efforts to reach out to them. Many of the biggest NFL fans are also football card collectors, and hobby shops have played an important role in bringing players and fans together."

In a post-appearance interview, Smith said he enjoyed the experience so much that he'll "definitely" do another one.



"As long as it works with the schedule we have during the season, I'll always go do autograph signings or help out with the fans any opportunity I get," he said.

The centerpiece of the Player of the Day promotion is a poster featuring the trading card images of 32 NFL players—one per team. Each day a different player is designated as the "Player of the Day." In addition, each shop selects one player as the "Hometown Hero" for the duration of the 31-day promotion. Every time a collector purchases a pack of Officially Licensed NFL player trading cards in a participating hobby shop, he or she can win a prize if the "Player of the Day" or "Hometown Hero" is in the pack.

Each week, stores conduct drawings among the daily winners to award a weekly prize. At the end of the month-long promotion, each store awards the autographed card to its winner—who will then be eligible to be entered into the national sweepstakes to win more than 100 prizes, including the grand prize: the chance to spend a day with an NFL player. The grand prize also includes a \$250 shopping spree, a 90-minute autograph appearance at the winner's favorite hobby shop and a visit by the player to the winner's home for a private party.

This marks the ninth consecutive year that the NFL Player of the Day program offers an NFL card collector the chance to spend the day with an NFL player. Past "grand prize" players have included: A.J. Feeley, Maurice Jones-Drew, Chris Simms, Rudi Johnson, Donald Driver, Ed McCaffrey, Chad Pennington and Frank Wycheck.

For more information on the NFL Player of the Day program, visit [www.nflpod.com](http://www.nflpod.com).