

Canvassing Sports A Profitable Career

For Ottawa Native John Martin

RICK PETERSON

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — "It's been a lot of years, really has," said highly accomplished sports illustrator John Martin, whose career, which evolved from a deep interest in sports and art, is right across the street from the University of Kansas. "I'm the President Emeritus A.B. here," he said recently at his office here. "My brothers and I were interested in sports and par-sports," he said about his family, "but I was rivaled only by a love for

art.

"I was into World War II airplanes and I got interested in doing heads off the old magazine covers."

Now 45-years-old, the 1954 Ottawa High School graduate is regarded as one of the giants in his field, having done extensive work for the Kansas City Royals, the Kansas City Chiefs, the University of Kansas, the Milwaukee Brewers, the University of Michigan, the National Basketball Association, the National Football League and Major League Baseball — to name just a few of

his clients.

Martin, who earned a bachelor of fine arts degree from KU in 1959 after attending OU two years, has drawn the program cover art for three World Series including this year's classic, one Major League Baseball All-Star Game, and one NBA All-Star Game, as well as having produced the covers for countless press guides and programs for the Royals, Chiefs, KU and others.

"The best thing you do, or try to do, is the last thing you've done," he replied when asked for a favorite project.

"Hopefully it works out that way."

Martin currently is working on a pair of major projects for the University of Michigan and the University of Kansas athletic departments.

In both cases, he is producing a series of art murals depicting the history of sports at those institutions.

Martin calls the KU project one of his most challenging. "One of the best projects one could do in sports. Probably the most exciting project I've worked on so far."

A good deal of Martin's sports prints are adapted from photographs of the athlete or athletes he is painting.

"I try to find a combination that will best exemplify the action and the traits of that particular athlete," offered Martin. "You're dealing with very monumental dates in history."

Although most of his notoriety has come from sports projects, the Ottawa native also does work in several other areas. "I'm kind of a mixed bag. The main thrust is sports, but it's not totally self-supporting yet," the divorced father of two said.

Martin, who developed the original Worlds of Fun logo trademark while working for an advertising agency prior to becoming a free-lance artist in 1977, also does non-sports portraits, dimensional murals and caricature. He recently developed the Oceans of Fun logo.

He also has done several projects for OU, including a portrait of the late, long-time Braves coach Dick Peters that will be unveiled this fall.

Martin said most of his work had come as a result of word of mouth from client to client. "That's the way it's worked so far."

Success has its drawbacks, even for someone who enjoys his work as much as Martin.

"You'd have to say I'm a sports enthusiast, but I don't have time to follow them enough," lamented the artist with a smile.

For a while anyway, it doesn't look like if demand for Martin's services will decrease.

"I'm already involved in doing work for the all-star game next year," he said wistfully about the 50th anniversary baseball event to be staged in Chicago.



Photo By Rick Peterson

John Martin Sits Amidst Some Of His Works, Including A Just-Completed Portrait Of His Late Mother And An Un-Finished Mural Depicting The History Of KU Football