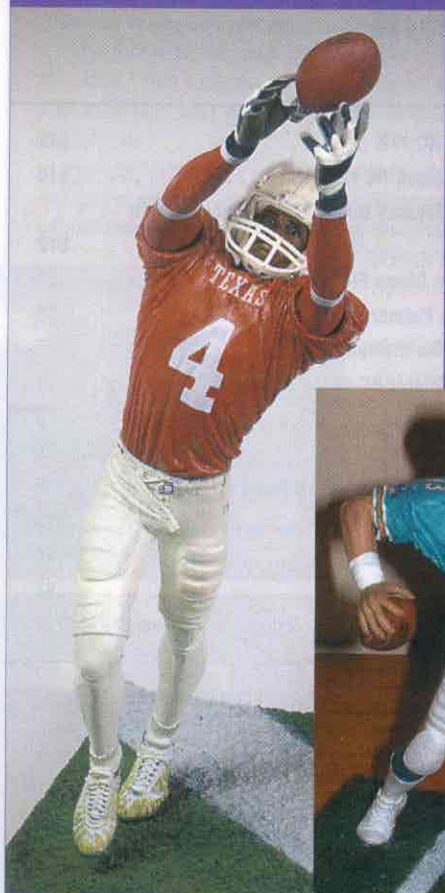


Who Would've Figured?

Grab some paint, a couple of brushes and some decal paper; you're about to get a crash course in customizing your own football figure.

Customizing is taking the sports figure hobby to a new level. Not only can you collect the hot McFarlane Sports Picks toys, but with a little imagination along with the right tools and the proper guidance, you can start adding your own works of art to your collection.



Questions, tips and comments on creating your own figures are an ever-growing presence on the McFarlane message board on spawn.com. There are two expert customizers in particular who are always ready and willing to dish out any helpful advice they can to aid anyone who wants to get involved in the popular hobby. Their names are Joe Ingrassia and Therron Thomas.

"I've been building models for 20 years,"

Ingrassia says. "That's where I got most of the techniques, back from building airplane models and figure models."

The two Yoda's of customizing, who met on the McFarlane message board, have set up a Web site of their own that's full of tips, galleries, logos and links to assist all visitors in their endeavors. The makeshift site had over 10,000 visits in its first three months. The address is, www.chicagos-trat.org/decals by jomo.htm.

"I think I was one of the first to customize a McFarlane sports figure," recalls Thomas. "From there it took off, and Joe was right behind me. He asked me one day if I would be interested in helping with a Web site and the rest is what you see."

Creating your own gridiron hero can be fun and rewarding. I've already made three figures of Texas Longhorns: quarterback Major Applewhite (from Chris Weinke), running back Cedric Benson (from Edgerrin James) and receiver Roy Williams (from Marvin Harrison). All were done with

the help of Ingrassia and Thomas. The figures sit at my desk here at Beckett headquarters.

To start creating your own, you will need to decide what player to make and find a McFarlane figure that closely resembles that player. Being about six inches tall, the McFarlane toys make a great piece to repaint — not too big, not too small.

Speaking of paint, find the appropriate color of acrylic paint

at your local art supply or craft store. Sometimes mixing is necessary to get the desirable color.

Don't forget about brushes. Ingrassia and Thomas recommend using three or four smaller sized brushes in order to accurately paint the different parts of the figure.

Before you begin, gather a few photos of the player to familiarize yourself with the



uniform's details. Make sure your figure is clean. Try painting one color and one section of the figure at a time. After you've painted the uniform, be sure to let the paint dry completely.

You're now ready to make the decals. The customizing Web site has many team logos and numbers already created. You can copy and paste those into a document.

When you're ready to print, you'll need some decal or sticker paper. After you print, let the ink dry and then cut out the logos, numbers and names. Then place them on the figure.

It's a good idea to coat the figure with finishing spray. This will help prevent the paint from chipping as well as harden the decals to your figure.

Ingrassia and Thomas encourage first-time customizers to not be frustrated with their first few attempts.

Detailed steps and tips are readily available on the site mentioned above. Ingrassia and Thomas continue to update the site to accommodate the growing interest in custom figures. So give it a shot. Get into the hobby that's inside the hobby.