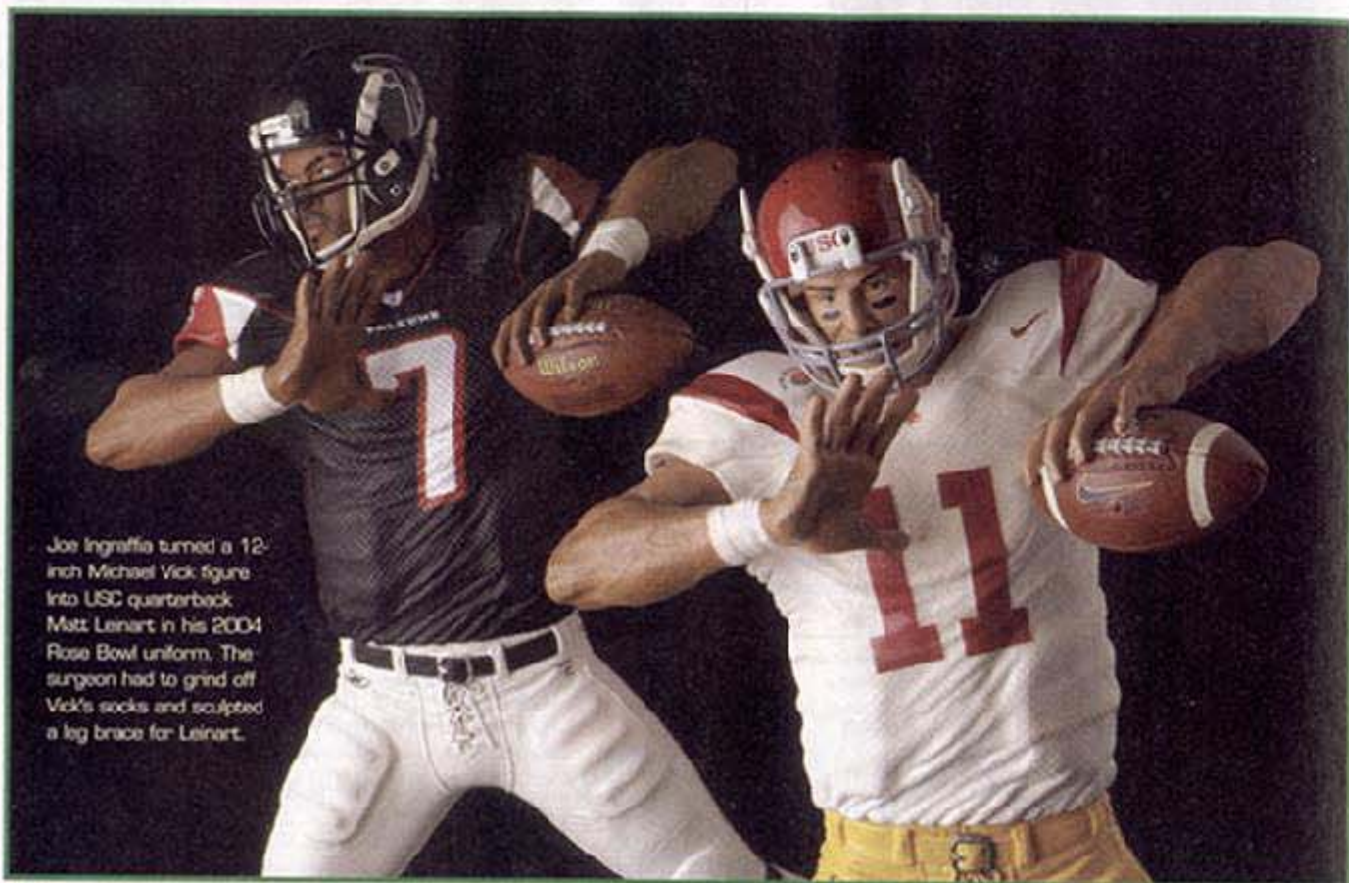


PLASTIC SURGERY

By Jan Hubbard

McFarlanes go under the knife as Dr. Jomo will turn your Michael Vick figure into, well, just about anything you want.



Joe Ingraffia turned a 12-inch Michael Vick figure into USC quarterback Matt Leinart in his 2004 Rose Bowl uniform. The surgeon had to grind off Vick's socks and sculpted a leg brace for Leinart.



should be noted that collectors are willing to pay decent money for his, uhm, creations.

How about \$250 for a 12-inch action figure? Or \$100 for a 6-inch figure?

Yes, in the world of high-end collectibles, it may not seem like much. But as a part-time enterprise, it provides disposable income while allowing Ingraffia, who's known as "Jomo" in action figure collecting circles (yes, they do exist), to do something he loves. You've no doubt read his "It Figures" columns that appear every month in *Beckett Football*.

In short, Jomo is a sports figure plastic surgeon. He's created just about every type of football figure you can imagine, even old-school figures of Jim Brown and Joe Namath.

A few years ago, Ingraffia looked at sports figures made by McFarlane Toys, and while he enjoyed them, he felt something was missing.

"When McFarlane issued the first set of baseball and hockey figures," says

Ingraffia, a 49-year-old procurement manager for a Chicago research institute, "they didn't have the license to use logos. So the figures had generic-type uniforms. The Sammy Sosa figure didn't have the Cubs logo, but had an 'S' for Sosa on the cap and 'Sosa' on the jersey instead of 'Chicago.'"

"I had done a lot of model and figure painting and decided that I wanted the Sammy Sosa figure to be in a Cubs uniform. So I stripped it and painted it myself."

Ingraffia worked on a few more figures and decided to post pictures of them online. The reaction was immediate and significant. He began getting e-mails asking about the process. The more figures he posted, the more the e-mails increased. Finally, he was so overwhelmed with inquiries that he created a website (www.customsbyjomo.com) with instructions and customizing tips.

So how does the process work? It starts with a request of, say, someone

sending Ingraffia a Jamal Lewis figure and asking him to turn it into a Jim Brown.

"I start by digging up a bunch of pictures," Ingraffia says. "I make sure I get all the uniform markings. I find the artwork to create the numbers, nameplate and logos. I probably spend a couple of hours getting that done."

"Then, I take the original figure, clean it and take it apart. I prime it with all-white spray paint and then paint the uniform colors, including all the stripping on the pants legs and [jersey]. Then I go through the process of adding decals. You can buy decal paper and print decals on a color printer, so that's what I do."

"I apply the decals then paint around them to cover the edges. Then I add several coats of sealer so the decals won't come off."

Nothing to it ... at least if your brain operates in a way similar to a Swiss watchmaker. The average klutz is far better off letting Ingraffia do the work and forking over the cash.

He says that football figures can get difficult, especially when dealing with the little intricacies that come with the game.

"Clean or dirty uniforms is a major choice for football players. Most old-school players look better dirty. Getting the equipment correct can take some work. By that I mean matching the correct facemask, or making one from scratch [as with old-school players], adding or removing elbow pads, leg braces, long or short sleeves, gloves or no gloves."

Ingraffia estimates several hundred people are actively involved in recasting McFarlane figures. Although there may be licensing issues involved with some designers, Ingraffia avoids the issue by not offering anything for sale. If someone sends him a figure and asks him to redo it, he charges for his services but does not offer the figures for re-sale.

"If you send me a pair of shoes and ask me to paint the Nike swoosh on it, I can do it," Ingraffia says. "But I wouldn't post them for sale and claim they are Nikes."

Ingraffia's work is unique because of the incredible detail. There is an entire section on his website about doing the eyes for the figures and it's almost haunting. You can click on the Barry Sanders figure and it seems that he is looking right through you.

The quality of Ingraffia's work has led to other opportunities. Lately he has been getting requests from families to make figures of their sons playing high school basketball. He also has dabbled in sci-fi figures, such as Star Trek characters.



"MEAN" JOE GREENE #75

LAWRENCE TAYLOR #56

WALTER PAYTON #34

ERIC DICKERSON #29

DICK BUTKUS #51



Ingraffia's workshop is at home, and with various body parts and heads scattered all over the place, it sometimes resembles a house of voodoo more than sports action figures. But Ingraffia said when people see the finished product, they never accuse him of being freaky or geeky.

"Most of the time, people are just fascinated," he says. "I keep a couple of figures in my office at my regular job, and people are always coming in and looking."

Beckett Football editor David Lee has learned some tricks from Ingraffia and has customized several McFarlane figures.

"The coolest thing about customizing the McFarlanes is that it allows collectors to get creative," Lee says. "It's sort of like designing your own sports cards. Some people, like Joe, are so into it that they will exchange body parts, sand down areas, buy numerous tools, etc. Customizing has really grown. With a little guidance and some creativity, anyone can get into it."

No doubt it is tremendously appealing to fanatic sports fans. And why not? In real life, plastic surgery is a booming business. It may only be sports figures, but you have a chance to turn Brian Urlacher into Dick Butkus. How cool is that?

Shopping List

What you'll need to customize your figures:

- A few good brushes, a good cleaner (like a white wall tire cleaner)
- Krylon or Testors Spray Primer (white, black or gray)
- Acrylic paints
- Masking tape
- Decal Paper, Exacto knives, sandpaper, scissors and assorted tools

CUSTOM BUILT

Want a customized figure of your own?

Joe Ingraffia will customize a 12-inch McFarlane football figure (reader's choice) for one lucky winner. To enter, just fill out the Report Card survey on page 25. *Beckett Football* will provide the original figure.

9 Steps To Customizing

1. Decide whom you want to make.
2. Determine which base figure will work the best - take into consideration size of player (height, weight), right or left handed, skin color.
3. Locate many good pictures of the look you are trying to accomplish and many good pictures of the player you are making and other players in the same uniform.
4. Clean the figure and soak it in very hot water. This will soften the plastic and allow you to easily disassemble the figure.
5. Spray a very light coat of primer over all parts to be painted. Repeat until you have a nice primer coat.



6. Start painting the jersey, pants, legs, equipment. The key here is planning and to work from light to dark.
7. Put the figure back together. Trimming the ball/socket joint with an Exacto blade or Dremel tool will help the parts slip back together.
8. Apply the decals. Wet the area with Micro-Set. Slide the decals in place. Brush the decals with Micro-Sol especially on areas that are irregular. Let the Sol soak in for about 30 seconds, then gently press the decal into the folds. Use a soft brush, tissue or make-up sponge.
9. Spray with Testors Flat/Dull on the jersey, pants, etc.

