

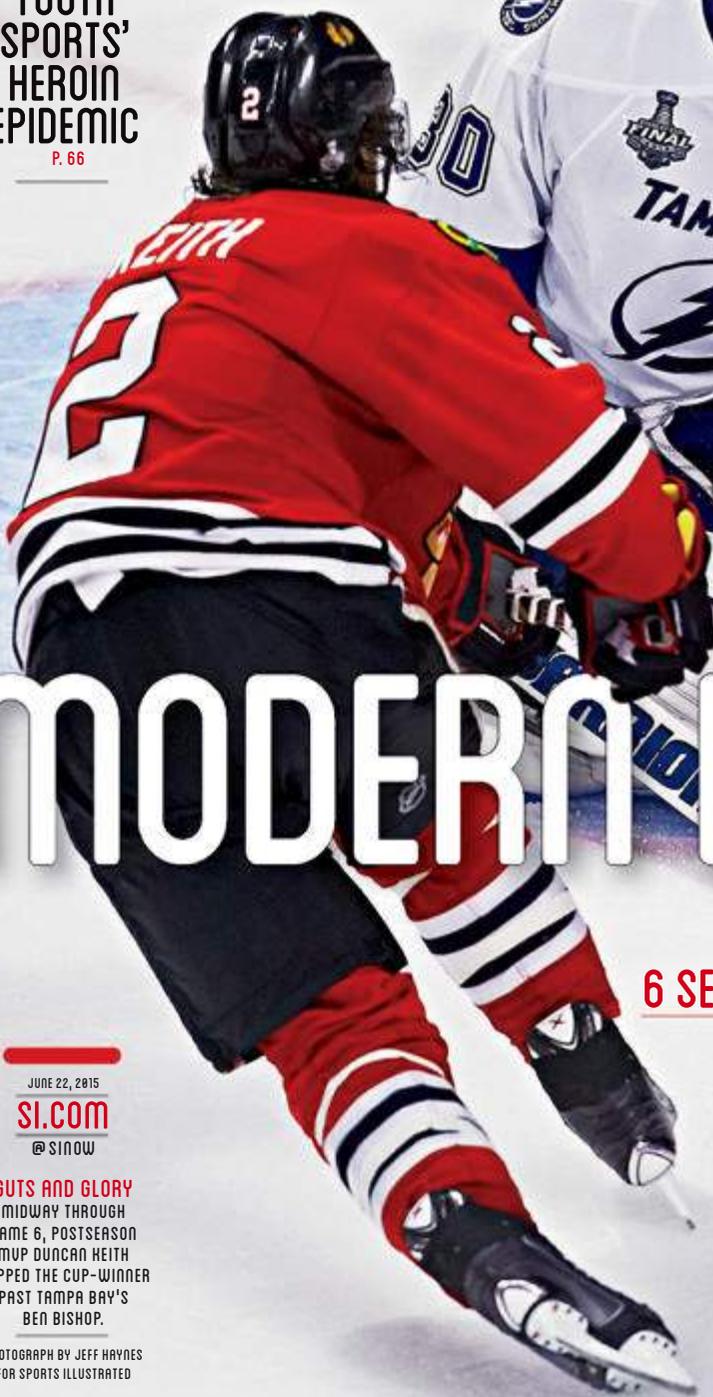
NBA FINALS
LEBRON VS.
ANDRE:
THE MATCHUP
TO MAKE
A CHAMP
P. 36

Sports

Illustrated

SPECIAL REPORT

YOUTH
SPORTS'
HEROIN
EPIDEMIC
P. 66



MODERN DYNASTY

THE BLACKHAWKS

6 SEASONS / 3 CUPS / 1 MODEL FRANCHISE

BY AUSTIN MURPHY / P. 28

JUNE 22, 2015

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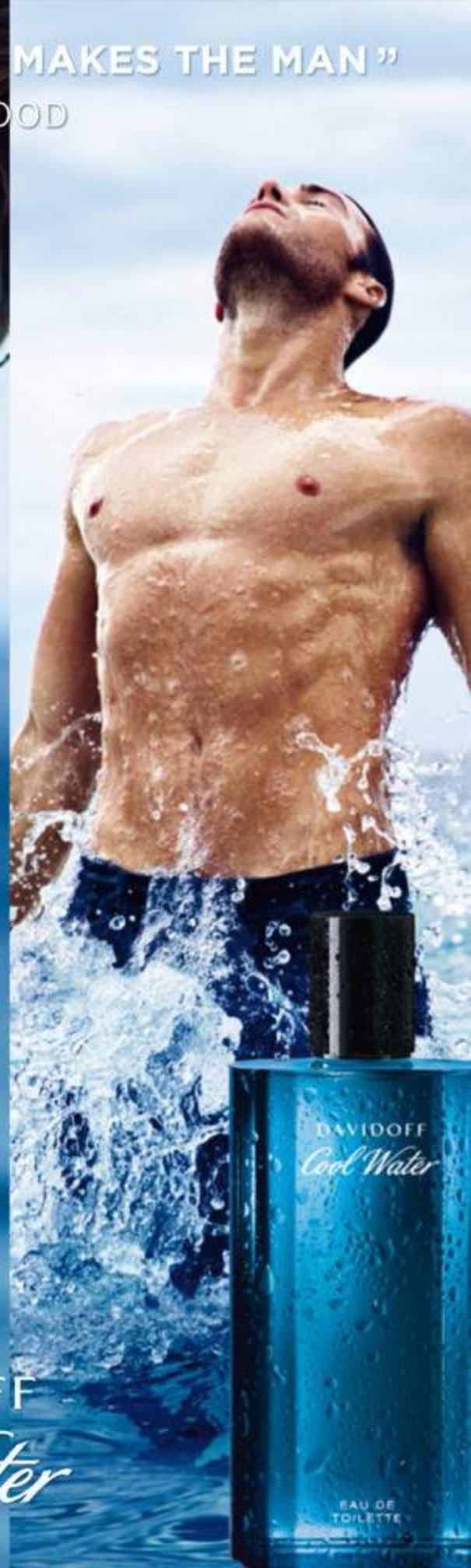
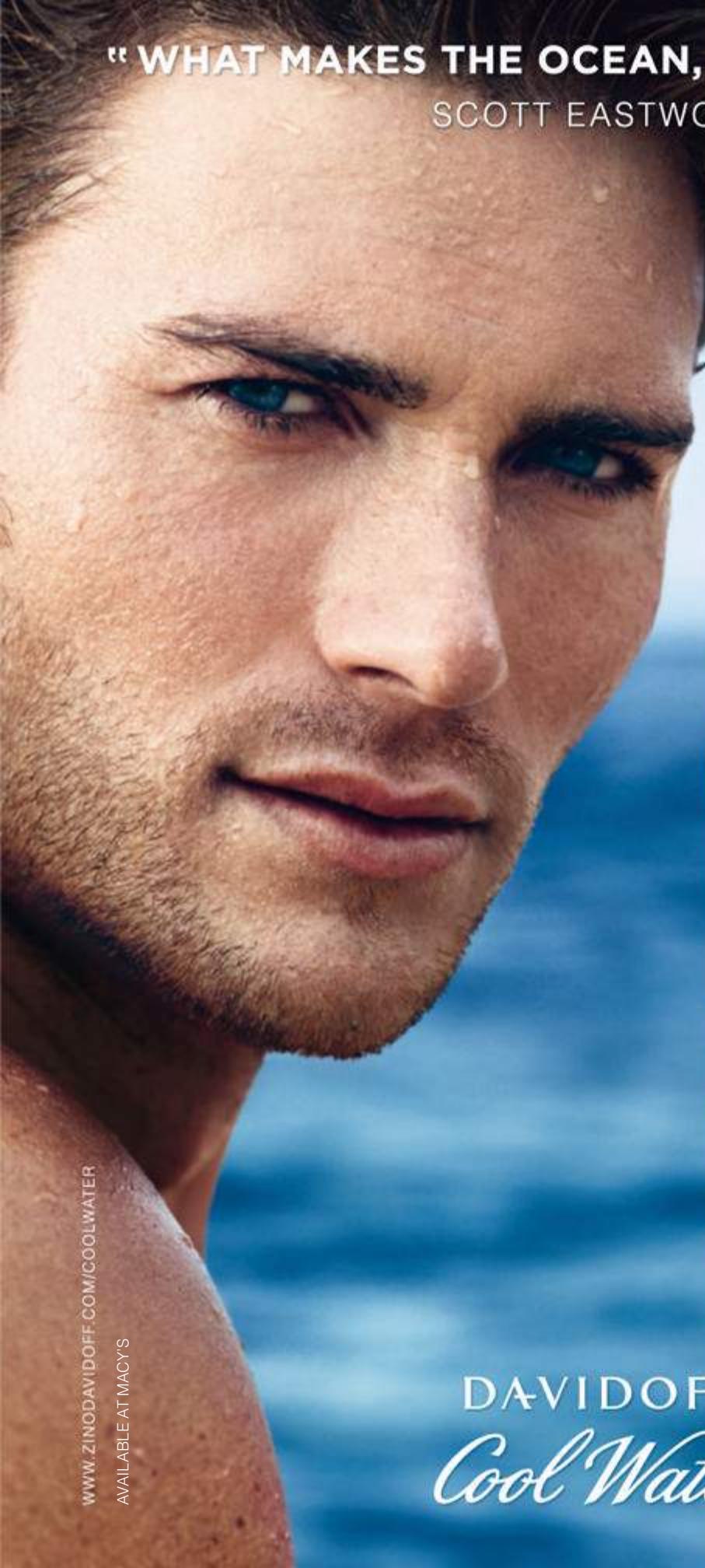
GUTS AND GLORY

MIDWAY THROUGH
GAME 6, POSTSEASON
MVP DUNCAN HEITH
SLIPPED THE CUP-WINNER
PAST TAMPA BAY'S
BEN BISHOP.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFF HAYNES
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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NBA FINALS 36

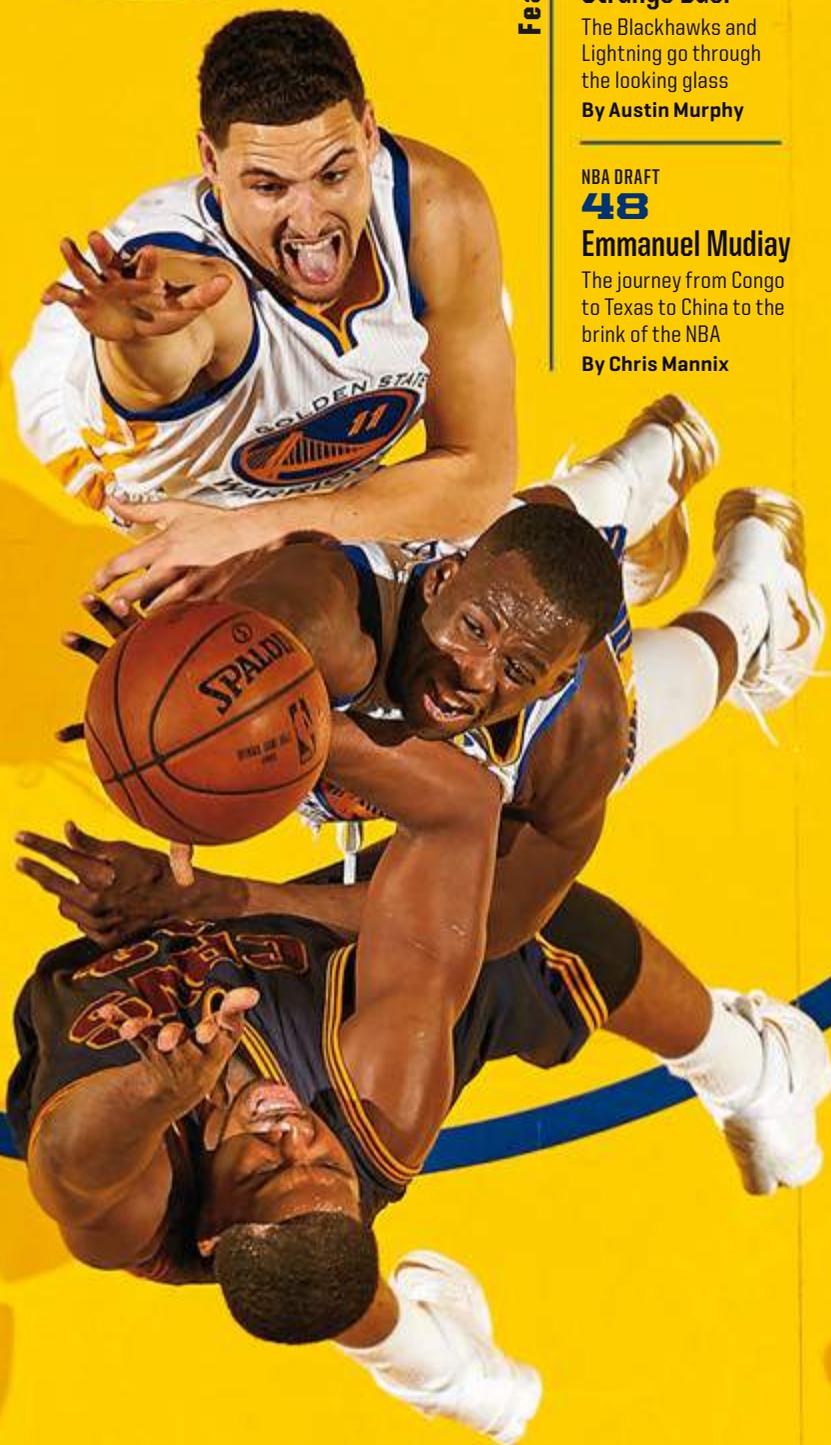
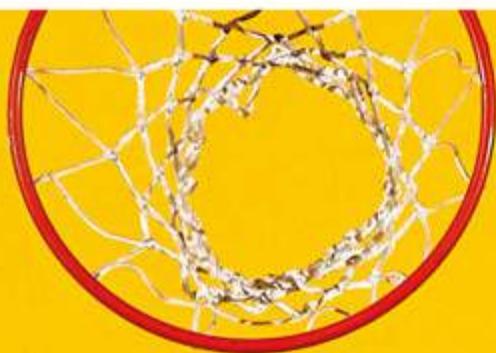
Andre and The Giant

The Warriors turned to a cerebral vet for help, and the showdown between Andre Iguodala and LeBron James uplifted a thrilling Finals
By Lee Jenkins

+ DOUBLE DUBS D

Klay Thompson (top) and Draymond Green of Golden State tried to deny Cavaliers forward Tristan Thompson during Game 5 of the Finals.

Photograph by Greg Nelson
For Sports Illustrated



Features

STANLEY CUP FINALS 28

Strange Duel

The Blackhawks and Lightning go through the looking glass
By Austin Murphy

NBA DRAFT

48

Emmanuel Mudiay

The journey from Congo to Texas to China to the brink of the NBA
By Chris Mannix

PRO FOOTBALL

56

The MMQB 100

Ranking the most influential figures for the 2015 NFL season
By Peter King

BASEBALL

58

Michael Brantley

A Father's Day tale of the making of one perfect swing
By Ben Reiter

SPECIAL REPORT

66

Smack Epidemic

How painkillers are turning young athletes into heroin addicts
By L. Jon Wertheim and Ken Rodriguez

Departments

- 2 **SI Now**
- 4 **Inbox**
- 6 **Leading Off**
- 13 **Scorecard**
- 24 **Faces in The Crowd**
- 26 **Just My Type**
Dan Patrick: C.J. Wilson on Game of Thrones trauma
- 72 **Point After**
Steve Rushin: From horror to hope, through soccer



“He said, ‘You’ve got to be different, but good.’”

—Mr. T

because he was my hero. He came to my high school [in Chicago], where I was a wrestling champion. He taught me a lot. He said, “You’ve got to be different, but good.” A lot of people look different and wear wild things, but they’re not good. Ali told me that’s the main reason he got to fight [Sonny] Liston. Ali was different. He had to break out of the box and say, “Hey, I’m coming after you, fool! I want to fight you!” And basically that’s sort of like how my character in *Rocky III* was. I

wanted [Rocky] Balboa, but he didn’t want to fight me. So you say to yourself, “Be aggressive. You got to be assertive.”

MG: *So did you go after him? Did you hit Sly Stallone?*

MR. T: Yeah, we had gloves on. He took it. He’s a macho guy. □

For more of Mr. T’s interview, plus the SI Now archive, go to SI.com/sinow

MR. T The iconic actor and former wrestler recounts his fleeting NFL “career” and discusses how Muhammad Ali helped him create his brash image.

MAGGIE GRAY: *I don’t think a lot of people realize this about you, but you once tried out for the Green Bay Packers. What do you remember about that experience?*

MR. T: Well, it wasn’t much of an experience. I feel that it was in another lifetime. Last century, as a matter of fact. About 1971, ’72. I didn’t even get to the field. I had a couple buddies, and we left

Chicago and thought we were tough. We said, “Let’s just drive up there and see if we can make the team.” But we didn’t even really get to the gym. **MG:** *Before you got famous as the Mr. T we now know, you were a bouncer and a bodyguard. At one point for Muhammad Ali. What was it like to work for him?*

MR. T: That was my greatest experience

TUNE IN



▶ **EPISODE: JUNE 9**

Duke’s **Quinn Cook**, an NBA prospect, tells whom he would rather face one-on-one, Steph Curry or Kyrie Irving.



▶ **EPISODE: JUNE 10**

Triple Crown winner **Victor Espinoza** explains why he donated his winnings to the City of Hope charity.



▶ **EPISODE: JUNE 11**

Maggie Gray discusses whether **Hope Solo** got a free pass from U.S. Soccer.



▶ **EPISODE: JUNE 12**

Giants catcher **Buster Posey** talks about his thoughts during teammate **Chris Heston**’s no-hitter.

NEBU PHOTO BANK/ABC/GETTY IMAGES (MR. T); GRANT HALVERSON/GETTY IMAGES (COOK); BOB CARV/GETTY IMAGES (ESPINOZA); KEVIN C. COV/GETTY IMAGES (SOLO); AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES (POSEY AND HESTON)

A promotional poster for the TV series BattleBots. The background is a bright, golden-yellow arena with a large crowd. In the foreground, three people—a woman, a man, and a young boy—are cheering with their arms raised. They are standing in a boxing ring. Two large, black, mechanical robot arms with various weapons like claws and saws are positioned around them. The text is centered in the middle of the image.

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#BattleBots

INBOX

SPECIAL EDITION



Last week's cover captured dozens of amateur photographers as they snapped shots of American Pharoah's historic Triple Crown triumph at the 147th Belmont Stakes. After the race, we asked the shutterbugs to send us some of their favorites.

CONTACT
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: JOSHUA GLANN; NIK BANDO (2); JANE DEBIANCO; ERICK W. RASCO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (COVER); COURTESY OF SCOTT CANTOR

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JAMES

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24

WARRIORS
STADIUM



+

1
of
3



**Leading
Off**

Three Enterprise

■ Warriors guard Stephen Curry continued to take the long view in the playoffs, burying a step-back trey over Cavaliers forward Tristan Thompson in Oakland during Game 5 of the NBA Finals. Curry, who at week's end had buried a record 59 threes this postseason, erupted for 37 points—including 17 in the fourth quarter—to lead Golden State to a 104-91 victory and a 3-2 series lead (page 36).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
GREG NELSON
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED





+

2
of
3



**Leading
Off**

Chain Lightning

■ Tampa Bay forward Ryan Callahan (far right) was at the rear end of a four-Lightning, two-Blackhawks pileup in front of Tampa Bay goalie Ben Bishop's net during Game 5 of the Stanley Cup finals in Tampa. After missing Game 4 with an undisclosed injury, Bishop turned back 27 shots, but Chicago center Antoine Vermette beat him early in the third period for a 2-1 win that put the Blackhawks up 3-2 (page 28).

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID E. KLUTHO
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



Leading
Off



3
of
3

Hard Pressed

■ Swedish defender Nilla Fischer gave U.S. forward Christen Press little room to maneuver in their Women's World Cup match last Friday in Winnipeg. After opening with a 3-1 win over Australia—in which midfielder Megan Rapinoe scored twice and Press netted the game-winner—the Americans could muster only two shots on goal against Sweden in a 0-0 draw.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DING XU
XINHUA/LANDOV







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Edited by JIM GORANT + TED KEITH



SCORE RECARD

Father's Way

The author has learned what plenty of athletes' sons have also discovered: It's not always easy following in your dad's footsteps

BY MARK KRAM JR.

CARVING OUT YOUR own identity in the same field of endeavor as a celebrated father is not easy. If you succeed or even surpass his storied achievements, you tend to be looked upon with a skeptical eye as the beneficiary of some very accommodating DNA. Congratulations, you won the genetic sweepstakes! Lucky you! Now go get Dad something special for Father's Day this Sunday to show your appreciation!

Because of a favorable circumstance of birth, there is the implication that it was smoother sledding for you, that you had a leg up. But even if you had some advantage, there is a downside to taking over the family business. As a son who followed in the footsteps of a supremely talented sportswriter, Mark Kram, whose lyrical prose graced the pages of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* during the 1960s and '70s, I share something with the plethora of sons who have inherited the legacy of athletic prowess from their fathers.

The progeny of pro athletes are ubiquitous across sports. The NBA Finals

teams feature three sons of former players in the league: Golden State guards Stephen Curry (Dell) and Klay Thompson (Mychal), and injured Cleveland forward Kevin Love (Stan)—who is also the nephew of Beach Boys vocalist Mike Love. (Cavs superstar LeBron James appears to have a talented son, too: Word is that 10-year old LeBron Jr.—“Bronny”—is already being recruited by colleges.) In the Major League Baseball draft earlier this month, no fewer than 34 of the 1,215 players selected were the offspring of former major leaguers, including Mariano Rivera III, Cam Gibson (Kirk), Conor Biggio (Craig), Kody Clemens (Roger) and Tate Matheny (Mike).

Though bloodlines alone are not predictors of athletic success, it is easy to see why teams take a longer look at the children of former players. Some have been as good as or better than their fathers, such as Barry Bonds (Bobby), Kobe Bryant (Joe), Ken Griffey Jr. and Peyton and Eli Manning (Archie). Along with any physical attributes that may have been passed down to them, they had professional instruction from a young age. Just growing up within proximity of pro sports is invaluable.

Still, more than a few aspiring players never escaped the shadows cast by their famed fathers. Pete Rose is the all-time hit leader in major league baseball. Pete Jr. plugged away in the bush leagues for 21 seasons. The Reds called him up in September 1997, but Pete Jr. batted just .143 in 13 at bats—and that was the entirety of his big league career. After his colorful father’s downfall, Pete Jr. became a popular stop for journalists.

Whenever Pete Jr. played, the subtext seemed to be: Poor Petey. Still chasing his father after all these years.

I empathize with Pete Jr. and not only because my father had his own public downfall when SI fired him for an ethical breach in 1977. When I was with the *Detroit Free Press* in the ’80s, someone in an alternative weekly wrote that the *Free Press* had hired “the wrong Mark Kram. They should have hired his father.” It wounded me deeply. Whatever feelings of inadequacy I had were only underscored by those cruel words. It was as if I had been exposed: *Give it up. You are not good enough.* Because Dad and I also shared the same name, I pushed myself even harder.

I do not know if Stephen Curry and the others were encouraged to follow their fathers. I was not. I got into sportswriting because it gave me and my father common ground—something to strengthen my bond with him. But he never got involved with my work and never seemed to have an opinion about it. I wondered if he had ever read a word I had written. But the approval I was seeking from him came when I received boxes of his papers upon his death 13 years ago this month. At the bottom of one box I found a file of 60 stories I had written. He had been paying attention.

Mark Kram Jr. won the 2013 PEN/ESPN Award for Literary Sports Writing for his book Like Any Normal Day: A Story of Devotion, and is the editor of the new book Great Men Die Twice: The Collected Works of Mark Kram. This is his first piece for SPORTS ILLUSTRATED.

GO FIGURE

546

14
Cape Fear

Length, in yards, of the par-4 14th hole at Chambers Bay Golf Course in University Place, Wash., site of this week’s U.S. Open—the longest par-4 in Open history. In fact, four of the five longest par-4s will be contested this week: the 537-yard 11th (second-longest), 534-yard 13th (third-longest) and 525-yard 18th (fifth-longest).

\$3,000

Amount paid at auction by a Lions fan for a urinal autographed



by legendary Detroit running back Barry Sanders. The urinal had been in the locker room of the Silverdome, where Sanders played his entire 10-year Hall of Fame career. The stadium was abandoned in 2002.



Miles accrued on the odometer of the Ferrari Enzo that boxing champion Floyd Mayweather is selling for \$3.8 million. He purchased it five months ago for \$3.2 million.

0.0

Score on one individual dive for John David Pahoyo and John Elmeron Fabriga of the Philippines in the three-meter springboard event at the Southeast Asian Games on June 7. Neither diver made it out of his backflip, with Pahoyo breaking the water with his shins and Fabriga with his back.





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For the dad who's hanging on to his glory days...



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/// Thirty years after the original came out, Jordan Brand releases a retro remake in vibrant colors. Old-school goes new age.

For the dad who craves the next big thing...



CURRY 1

/// Under Armour has struggled to break the collector's market, but like his sponsor, reigning MVP Steph Curry was once overlooked and is now rising.

For the dad who's stuck on the couch...



KYRIE 1

/// Kyrie Irving is sidelined, but his shoe has Phylon foam for extra cushioning and breathable mesh to keep the old man cool—and hip.



The Dad Report
Kevin Cook

Fun compendium of famous dad-kid pairs (Griffey, Bonds, etc.) wrapped in a tribute to the author's minor league hot-shot pop. #bonding



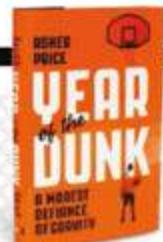
Big Data Baseball
Travis Sawchik

Compelling deep dive into number-crunching that out-moneyballs *Moneyball* through the prism of the Pirates' 2013 season. #trackman



The Game
Jon Pessah

Engaging, nitty-gritty account of the Bud Selig era, including backroom battles with George Steinbrenner, Don Fehr and steroids. #hardball

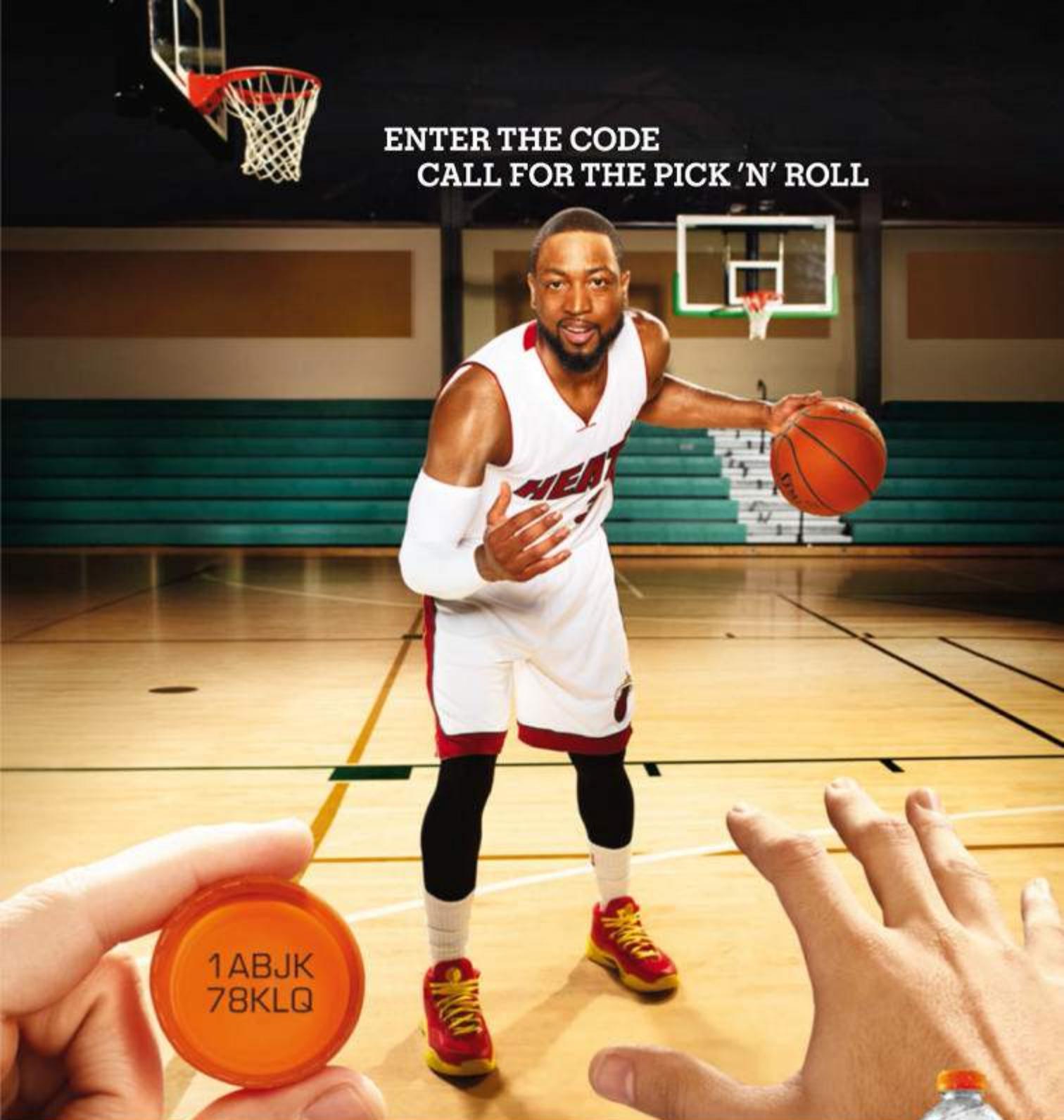


Year of the Dunk
Asher Price

One man's funny and informative jones to quote Dr. J or W.B. Yeats as it is Henneman's size principle. #rimrock

BOOKS
TWEETABLE REVIEWS

NIKE (LEBRON XII, JORDAN 1, KYRIE 1), ADIDAS (D. ROSE), UNDER ARMOUR (CURRY 1)



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TRAINING WITH

Tank Hops

How Frank Kaminsky improved his vertical leap before the draft

WHEN 7-FOOT, 240-pound NBA draft prospect Frank Kaminsky does single-leg Romanian deadlifts eight times on each side, it's not because he has an affinity for central European fitness techniques. Kaminsky, the 22-year-old Wooden Award winner who led Wisconsin to the Final Four in two straight seasons, goes through such exercises because his biomechanical and performance data informed his trainers that the All-America center has room to improve on his vertical leap.

As technologically advanced training centers become more common, players are able to home in on specific aspects of their development like never before. After going through initial testing at P3, a training facility in



Santa Barbara, Calif., that included the use of force plates and a 10-camera 3-D motion analysis system, Kaminsky's trainers determined he was the most mobile big man they'd ever assessed. But he needed to improve his "knee extension acceleration, velocity and peak concentric force," all underlying factors that contribute to jumping ability.

Kaminsky then set out on a specialized plan that included the single-leg deadlifts, split-squat jumps and plenty of core work. And three times per week he executed standing jumps from force plates, which measure push-off and landing. After each session his trainers analyzed his neuromuscular fatigue to determine if the approach needed to be intensified or scaled back. "Everyone has their own individual workout plan, whether they're trying to jump higher, get more explosive or improve lateral quickness and footwork," says Kaminsky. "There's a lot more science behind [the training]."

In his final assessment, Kaminsky improved in his running start vertical (up four inches), squat jump (up three inches) and his agility. And the former Badger is determined to continue getting better. "Nothing's handed to you," says Kaminsky. "That's one thing I proved in college, and I'll continue to do in the NBA."

—Daniel Friedman

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Celebrating Everyday Athletes



THIS WEEK'S ATHLETE

Stephanie Earl

@Waterloo, Ont.

"Aiming for CrossFit regionals, I train about two to four hours a day, six days a week. CrossFit has given me such fulfillment in my life, and I can't wait to achieve my goals!"

Training for something? New workout routine? Share your photo and what you're doing with us on Twitter/Instagram with **#trainingwithSI**, and you could be featured in an upcoming issue.

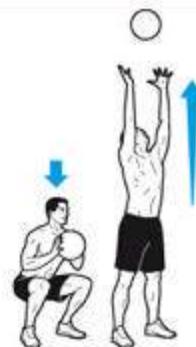
Improving by Leaps and Bounds

A P3 trainer offers an exercise to help you get off the floor

For more athlete training profiles and tips, go to SI.com/trainingwith

Medball Vert Chest Pass

Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, toes slightly turned out and hold a medicine ball at chest level. In a relaxed, fluid motion, squat while flexing through the hips, knees and ankles and keeping the back flat. When your thighs are parallel to the ground, explode up. As you rise, extend your arms straight up and push the ball as high as possible. Do three sets of six.





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Rock On

The Boxing Saga Continues

THE SEVENTH INSTALLMENT

in the *Rocky* canon, *Creed*, comes out in November, but the first trailer drops this week. This exclusive shot from the set, with Sylvester Stallone's Rocky tutoring the son of Apollo Creed, played by Michael B. Jordan, raises the question of where the latest installment will fit among its predecessors. Assuming the original is the undisputed champ, here's how the contenders would stack up.

Rocky vs. Rocky V

The final fight takes place in the street, not the ring. An apt metaphor for a movie that never rose to the level of its predecessors.

Rocky in a first-round KO.

Rocky vs. Rocky III

Mr. T was at his seething best, but that wasn't enough to challenge the champ. Prediction for the fight: plain.

Rocky by knockout in eight.

Rocky vs. Rocky IV

Thanks to Vladimir Putin this one has renewed meaning, but it's still pretty thin gruel. Ivan Drago, we must berate you.

Rocky by TKO in 10.

Rocky vs. Rocky II

Apollo promised no rematch, but this was the fight everyone saw coming with the ending everyone wanted.

Rocky by last-second KO in the 15th.

Rocky vs. Rocky Balboa

The champ comes full circle, now wiser and touched by loss. Stallone once again toggles between punch drunk and profound.

Rocky by split decision.



SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Paris Saint-Germain striker Edinson Cavani thought that Jamaica, Uruguay's first opponent in the Copa América, was in Africa.



THEY SAID IT

"The American health-care system is horrible, so I didn't do anything over there."

Georgia Page

Lindenwood University rugby player whose image went viral after she played with a bloody, broken nose, on why she waited to get the injury treated until returning to her native Australia.



The Finals

Ratings were up 27% for the first four games, with a 10-year high for Game 4. If its commish were less likable, the NBA would suddenly feel like the NFL.



Michael Jordan

The Hornets owner says he's "pretty sure" he could beat the players on his team one-on-one. Which explains why Charlotte has the ninth pick in the draft.



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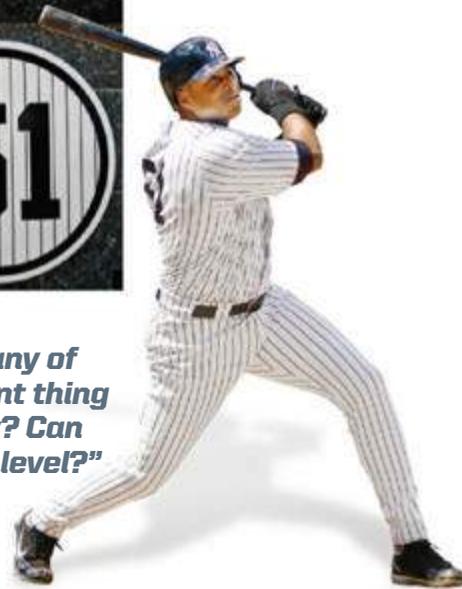
+
Bernie Williams

The former Yankee is still playing with style

IN LATE APRIL, New York sports pages trumpeted a curious bit of news: the retirement of five-time All-Star centerfielder Bernie Williams. Since Williams had not played in the majors since 2006, this was a mere formality. But it was also a prerequisite for the team to retire his number 51 jersey.

It was not as if Williams refused to move on. Instead, he has dived into a second act as a classically trained guitarist—in 2009 his *Moving Forward* was nominated for a Latin Grammy for Best Instrumental Album. It was a natural transition for Williams, who used to spend home rain delays strumming his Fender Stratocaster and goad Derek Jeter into singalongs on team flights. Growing up in Puerto Rico, Williams spent hours on a balcony playing folk songs and attended Escuela Libre de Música, a performing arts high school in San Juan. But his passion became a hobby when the Yankees signed him on his 17th birthday, in 1985.

Even so, his 16 seasons in the majors—including four World Series wins and a batting title—didn't block his musical path. Williams released his first album, *The Journey Within*, while still an everyday player in 2003. Says his manager, Steve Fortunato: “[Baseball] essentially just interrupted his music career.” —Dan Greene



“They don’t care about any of that. The most important thing for them is, Can he play? Can he hang with us at this level?”

✦ On how fellow students at the Manhattan School of Music regard his age and previous career

“I get the opportunity to enjoy the moment a lot more, as opposed to thinking about the next at bat, the next game.”

✦ On the differences between life as a musician and as a baseball player

“Everything was really cool—except that they lost the game.”

✦ On Bernie Williams Day at Yankee Stadium

“I was just holding up the line for the other guys.”

✦ On how his failure to officially retire was preventing the Yankees from retiring not only his number but also those of former teammates Jorge Posada and Andy Pettitte

“There’s not a stat on notes made or notes failed or whatever. You kind of measure your success in the way you relate to people, that you can have the opportunity to perform with top players.”

✦ On his accomplishments as a musician



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- Brandi Chastain, U.S. Professional Soccer Player and Coach

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UPDATE

Milestones

In 1954, Roger Bannister cemented the mile's place in the imagination with the first sub-four-minute time. Today only one U.S. state—Massachusetts—holds a high school championship at that distance, but Grand Blanc (Mich.) High grad Grant Fisher (FACES, Oct. 20, 2014) isn't giving up on the race. On May 30 officials at his state meet set up a second finish line nine meters past the end of the 1,600 event so he could get in a practice run. A week later Fisher became the seventh U.S. high schooler to break four minutes (3:59.38), placing third at the Nike Festival of Miles in St. Louis. And last weekend he defended his boys' Dream Mile title at the Adidas Grand Prix in New York (4:01.73). Fisher, who will run at Stanford next year, says the mile holds a certain magic. "It's cool," he says. "Everyone in the U.S. knows what the mile means." —A.F.

**Ashton Bardzell** | Ramsey, N.J. | Baseball

Ashton, a senior centerfielder at Ramsey High, hit his 18th and final home run of the season in a 5–3 win over Pequannock High in the North Jersey Section 1, Group 2 state semifinals to tie Mike Trout's New Jersey record, set in 2009. Ashton hit .586, tied the school mark with 55 RBIs, had 27 stolen bases and led the nation in homers. He will play at Hartford.

**Madison Wiltrout** | Connellsville, Pa. | Track and Field

Madison, a sophomore at Connellsville Area High, won a repeat 3A javelin title with a throw of 182' 8", to beat the runner-up by 47' 6". At the regional qualifier in May her heave of 185' 8" broke the national mark, set in 2012, and is top-ranked among world juniors this year. Madison, a former baseball pitcher, first picked up the javelin last year.

**Seville Amos Jr.** | Detroit | Lacrosse

Seville, a senior middle and captain at Southeastern High, Detroit's only public school team, led the Jungaleers with seven goals this season. A recipient of a U.S. Lacrosse scholarship and Detroit's first public schooler chosen for the Senior Showcase state all-star game, Seville will play football and lacrosse at Division III Adrian (Mich.) College.

FACES IN THE CROWD

Edited By ALEXANDRA FENWICK

**Kate Smith** | Detroit Lakes, Minn. | Golf

Kate, a junior at Detroit Lakes High, shot a seven-under 137 to win her fourth straight Class 2A championship by two strokes at Ridges at Sand Creek in Jordan, Minn. She is only the second girl in Minnesota history to win four titles; her first came as an eighth-grader. Kate has verbally committed to Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Andre De Grasse** | Markham, Ont. | Track and Field

De Grasse, a junior at USC, became the first sprinter in eight years to win both the men's 100 and 200 meters at the NCAA championships. He took the 100 in a wind-aided 9.75 seconds, the second-fastest college time ever under any conditions, and less than an hour later he won the 200 in 19.58, the best any-conditions time in NCAA history.

**Dakota Wood** | Hazen, N.D. | Track and Field

Dakota, a senior at Hazen High, won her third straight pair of titles in the 100-meter hurdles [14.54] and the 300 hurdles [44.10] at the Class B state meet, breaking her own school records in both. She also placed second in the 100 and 200 to lead the Bison to the state title. The Class B track athlete of the year, Dakota will attend North Dakota State.

Nominate Now ▼

To submit a candidate for Faces in the Crowd, go to SI.com/faces. For more on outstanding amateur athletes, follow @SI_Faces on Twitter.



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JUST MY TYPE

→ Interview by DAN PATRICK

DAN PATRICK: *Do players really pick on guys [in the clubhouse] or haze teammates?*

C.J. WILSON: Yeah, of course. It's part of the clubhouse culture. One of the things we do on the Angels is remit someone to the bottom five—which is a list of the five dumbest guys on the team. If someone makes a mistake, we say, "Oh, man, you're going straight to the bottom five."

DP: *Is it a list that's posted anywhere?*

CW: No, it's sort of an ethereal ranking.

DP: *Have you been on that list?*

CW: Absolutely not. I try not to be on any list in the clubhouse other than the lineup.

DP: *Has Mike Trout been on the list?*

CW: Trout's sort of immune to being on the list because he's one of the people always trying to put people on the list.

DP: *Is it true you were emotionally spent before a start last week because of an episode of Game of Thrones?*

CW: Typically on game day I try not to watch any TV. But knowing that the finale was last night, I had to watch the second-to-last episode while we were on the road so I could be caught up. It was the coliseum scene,



C.J. WILSON

INTO THE GAME

The Angels' 34-year-old lefty binge-watches one particular TV show, and he acts as the High Sparrow to his misbehaving teammates.

when Daenerys Targaryen gets surrounded by the Sons of the Harpy and things are looking really bad, where I just got up and walked away. I'm like, I can't handle this. If she goes down here, I'm done with the show. I was on edge. I didn't get totally upset because it turned out O.K.

DP: *Is it cool in the clubhouse to talk about Game of Thrones?*

CW: Totally. I'm [upset] because a bunch of my teammates are behind. I'm like, "Guys, get caught up so we can talk about this." It's like that for a lot of shows. A lot of

guys like *House of Cards*, *Scandal*, *True Detective*, *Bates Motel*. We have these weird blocks of free time where we can watch three or four hours of video at a time when we're on the road in some boring city.

DP: *Would you rather be an All-Star or have a large role in Game of Thrones?*

CW: I'd rather be an All-Star. I've already pitched in the All-Star Game, though I'm probably not going to pitch in it this year. Having a large role in *Game of Thrones* means I gotta be cool with nudity or getting killed or [something else that is] against the team rules. I don't think [Angels owner] Arte Moreno would be into me doing full frontals. □

GUEST SHOTS SAY WHAT?



Film producer
Judd Apatow

discussed LeBron James's performance in Apatow's new movie, *Trainwreck*. "LeBron is funny as hell," Apatow told me. "As a comedy person it annoys me because I went into comedy because I was so bad at sports. I don't like when an athlete is good at what I do." ... Former NBA



player
Brian Scalabrine doesn't

like the term *high basketball IQ*. He told me, "That's what every white guy says to sound smart. I'm just like, Man, you're not high IQ. You play in the UCLA rec league." ... NBC sportscaster

Bob Costas weighed in on ESPN's plan to give Caitlyn Jenner the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the ESPYs in July. "It's just a crass exploitation play," he said. "It's a tabloid play. In the broad world of sports, I'm pretty sure they could've found someone who is much closer to being actively involved in sports."





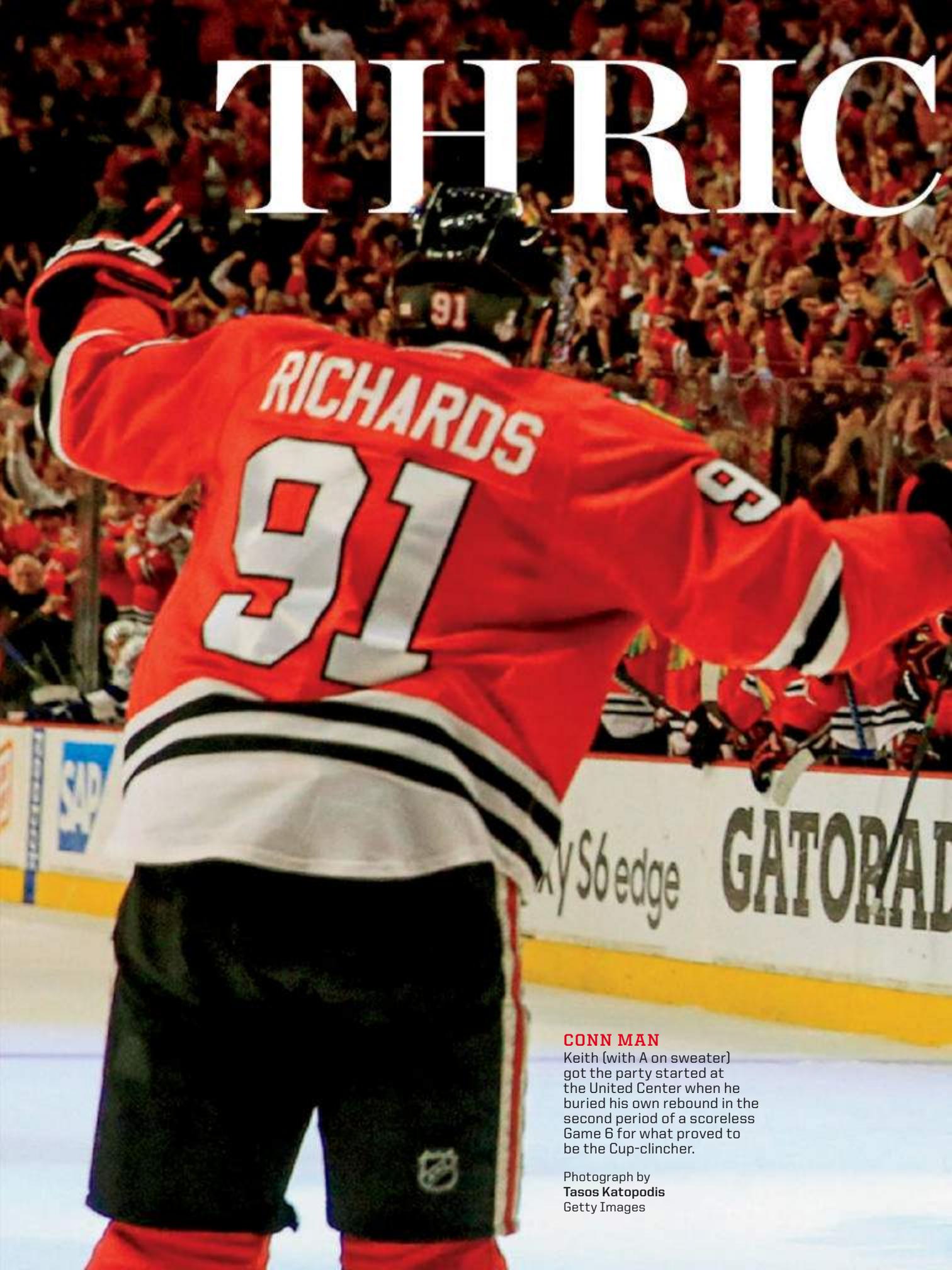
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THRILL



CONN MAN

Keith (with A on sweater) got the party started at the United Center when he buried his own rebound in the second period of a scoreless Game 6 for what proved to be the Cup-clincher.

Photograph by
Tasos Katopodis
Getty Images

E. NICE.

LIGHTNING-BLACKHAWKS WAS A THROUGH-THE-LOOKING-GLASS SERIES, WITH TWO HIGH-POWERED OFFENSES LOCKED IN THE TIGHTEST, TENSEST FINALS IN DECADES. IN THE END, THE RESULT WAS GLEEFULLY FAMILIAR TO CHICAGO FANS: A THIRD STANLEY CUP IN SIX SEASONS
BY AUSTIN MURPHY





THIS IS the kind of strange Stanley Cup finals it was: Extreme weather in the Chicago area before Monday night's Game 6 delayed the delivery of the Cup—the actual trophy—to the United Center. The old bowl finally did arrive, tardy but most welcome, much like the Blackhawks' offense. In this series good things came to those who waited.

The goal that clinched Chicago's third Cup in the last six seasons was superb defenseman Duncan Keith devouring his own second-period rebound and beating Lightning goalie Ben Bishop high to his glove side. In a 2-0 victory, it stood up as the game- and series-winner and made Keith a lock for the Conn Smythe Trophy, bestowed on the MVP of the postseason. It was a heroic goal, a historic goal. But we're here to talk about the pass that set it up.

You're Patrick Kane, a 26-year-old with a reputation for clutch play in big games. But this series has been different. You've scored 10 goals in these playoffs but none against Tampa Bay, and the world had taken notice. For at least a week the hockey cosmos had been carping at you, sniping at a sniper, for that fat doughnut in the goals column.

Most other players would be eager—nay, desperate—to light the lamp. But there was Kane, taking a pass from Brad Richards into the attacking zone, along the right boards with the game tied at zero. He pulled up, scanned the ice and . . . did nothing. He had time to skim the paper, pull out his phone, check his horoscope. Finally, as the tension went from excruciating to unbearable, as two Bolts converged on him, he pulled the trigger on the pass to Keith, who scored the goal that broke the back of a young, scary-good team that once upon a time had led this series two games to one.

Let us pause a moment to salute the grit of Bishop, who needed a little more help from his teammates on Keith's game-winner. That, and a fistful of Advil.

In normal times Bishop is an above-average skater and a deft puckhandler, especially when one considers that he is



Chicago won its third Stanley Cup in six seasons. In today's NHL, with a hard salary cap, that's as close to a dynasty as you're going to see.

a 6' 7" goalie whose nickname in high school was Yao. But these Stanley Cup finals were not normal times, for the NHL in general or Bishop in particular. The Lightning's youthful netminder suffered from a mystery ailment that kept him out of Game 4—he revealed after Game 6 that he had a torn groin muscle—and his occasional forays beyond the crease turned into high drama, the hockey equivalent of Charlie Sheen leaping off the wagon for an evening or Rick Perry deviating from his prepared remarks.

So you could almost hear the theme

from *Jaws* six minutes into Game 5, as Bishop strayed to the top of the left circle. Whiffing on the puck, he succeeded only in setting a hard pick on teammate Victor Hedman, the all-universe defenseman suddenly forced to play Stan Laurel to Bishop's Oliver Hardy. While those two untangled, winger Patrick Sharp pounced on the loose puck, giving the Blackhawks an easy 1-0 lead—they went on to win 2-1, taking a 3-2 series lead—and busting out of his own personal slump: Sharp hadn't found the back of the net since May 5.

It was flat-out discombobulating, in this tight-checking-and-goal-starved series, to see one given up so cheaply. Through the first five games no team led by more than one goal, making this the closest Cup finals in 64 years. A minute before Bishop's blunder his Chicago counterpart, Corey Crawford, committed a similar gaffe, turning the puck over to Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov on his own doorstep. But Crawford's giveaway resulted not in a goal for the Lightning, but with Kucherov sailing headfirst over the goalie's lunging save into the left post.



The right wing, whose 10 playoff goals included three game-winners, staggered to the dressing room with an apparent right-shoulder injury, done for the night.

“He’s a point-per-game guy in these playoffs. He’s a big part of our offense,” lamented Lightning coach Jon Cooper, who then added, “We battled hard. We got that game tied.” Before taking that more optimistic tack, the coach had been in danger of violating Rule No. 76, which he’d drilled into his team, having borrowed it from *Wedding Crashers*: “No excuses, play like a champion.”

Cooper is friends with one of the costars of that movie, Vince Vaughn, who picked up the check for the Lightning’s coaching staff at a Chicago steak house on the eve of Game 4. Vaughn’s generosity provoked some grumbling among Windy City fans, who wondered what part of “home ice advantage” the thespian didn’t understand. Their concerns were groundless. Vaughn (a big Blackhawks fan) picked up the tab; Chicago picked up wins in Games 4 and 5, leaving it on the cusp of a third Stanley Cup in six seasons.

NET NEGATIVES

Sharp (10) got an easy goal in Game 5 when Bishop and Hedman (77) collided, one of several goalie-related spills that included Kucherov (86) and Toews (bottom).

In today’s NHL, with a hard salary cap that makes it all but impossible to keep good teams together, that’s about as close to a dynasty as you’re going to see.

THE DESPONDENT Lightning fans filing glumly out of Amalie Arena after Game 5 mingled oddly with legions of costumed adults, some bewigged, others bristling with plastic armaments. On this weekend the NHL shared Tampa with Metrocon, a huge gathering of anime aficionados.

“You get the mustache at Party City,” said a man dressed as Master Roshi—from the series *Dragon Ball*, of course—standing outside the convention center, responding to a compliment on his faux eyebrows. “Cut it in half, trim it, you got eyebrows.”

A cosplay convention was a fittingly surreal setting for a series that had gone early through the looking glass. In each of the first four games the team with more shots on goal—the team that spent more time possessing the puck—lost. The superior face-off team lost three of those four games. The Lightning, the NHL’s top-scoring team this season, mustered but a single goal in three of their losses and none in their fourth. For each team’s top-shelf sniper—Tampa Bay’s Steven Stamkos and Chicago’s Kane—goals were tougher to come by than, well, dragon balls.

It was a bad time for the NHL’s stars to go AWOL. June 10 brought ill tidings from Arizona, where the Glendale city council had voted to dissolve the 15-year lease agreement with the Coyotes to play at the Gila River Arena. Short on cash, the city appears to be searching for a way to cut millions in losses. While it probably won’t work—Coyotes co-owner Anthony LeBlanc described as “completely ludicrous” the city’s attempt to, in the words



of one team lawyer, “renege on a valid contract”—Glendale’s move clouds the long-term future of a franchise already plagued with a history of instability.

Hard to say which was less welcome for the league: the news from Arizona or the sight of 82-year-old ex-con Alan Eagleson at the Blackhawks’ morning skate before Game 3 at the United Center. Eagleson, a former player agent and the first executive director of the NHL Players’ Association, served six months in prison in 1998 for, among other crimes, skimming money from tournaments and defrauding both the NHLPA and his personal clients. Eagleson’s presence at NHL’s showcase event was stunningly inappropriate. Imagine Bernie Madoff making a cameo at a holiday party thrown by the Securities and Exchange Commission.

League officials were also a bit red-faced after that night’s game, a 3–2 Bolts win

televised on NBCSN, drew lower ratings in 38 markets than Team USA's group-stage victory over Australia in the Women's World Cup. As it happened, NBC Sports Group chairman Mark Lazarus had a suggestion to help broaden the NHL's appeal. In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, Lazarus—clearly unfamiliar with the term *lumbersexual*—advocated for tonsorial reform. “The players won't like this, but I wish they all would stop growing beards in the postseason,” he said. “Let's get their faces out there. Let's talk about how young and attractive they are.”

Lazarus was roundly mocked. As detailed above, the NHL has bigger problems than unruly facial hair. But the fact is that unlike Kane in the first three games of the finals, Lazarus had a point. Come May the dressing rooms of the league's remaining teams resemble a mix between an Amish meetinghouse and a mass audition for a *Teen Wolf* remake. Perhaps a compromise could be struck. While they needn't shear their beards, perhaps players could be more meticulous about *trimming* them—particularly those unfortunately scraggly mustaches that so often accompany them. Jonathan Toews, this means you.

SOME GUYS rock the beards better than others. Take Hedman, the Lightning's 6' 3", 233-pound puck-rushing, playmaking defenseman. “It may or may not have occurred to me,” allowed one staunch Chicago fan, a fortysomething woman, “that [Hedman] looks like a cross between Brad Pitt and Thor.”

Compared with forwards, defensemen require a longer gestation period before they become dominant in the NHL. The gestation period for Hedman, the second pick in the 2009 draft, officially ended this season. A fractured finger cost him 18 games in October and November, and possibly the Norris Trophy, which goes to



THUNDER, BUT NO BOLT

The rugged Hedman was a revelation as the best player in the series, while stars such as Stamkos (91), who had only one assist, struggled mightily.

the league's best blueliner. He was the best player in the finals. The plays he made to set up the Lightning's two goals in their Game 3 win were far more memorable than the goals themselves. From behind his own net in the first period, he saw winger Ryan Callahan near the far blue line. From 120 feet, he cranked a slap-pass that found the tape of the stick of Callahan,

whose rocket shot caromed off the crossbar, and in.

With the game tied 2–2 late in the final period, Hedman entered the offensive zone at full steam. Calling to mind an NFL tight end in the Bolshoi Ballet, he stickhandled his way through retreating Blackhawks, cut left, and then fed center Cedric Paquette, who redirected the puck past Crawford for the game-winner. “It took a few years,” Cooper declared after the game. “But Victor Hedman has arrived.”

The eminently quotable Cooper stood in stark contrast to the gimlet-eyed Quenneville. The Chicago coach is known less for his badinage than his alchemist's knack for mixing up his forward lines. After consecutive losses in Games 2 and 3, Q got busy with his Cuisinart. His best move was to take Sharp, who'd been somnambulating through the postseason on the third line, and—this seemed counterintuitive—promote him to the top unit with Toews and the ageless, dangerous Marian Hossa. Suddenly Sharp looked, well, *sharp* again. After generating numerous quality chances in Game 4, he cashed in Bishop's giveaway to silence Amalie Arena early in Game 5.

But Chicago's best forward in the series was not its best *known* forward. Pittsburgh native Brandon Saad, 22, is a 6' 1", 204-pound bundle of fast-twitch fibers who emerged during the finals as the Blackhawks' most consistent scoring threat—remarkable on a roster featuring future Hall of Famers Toews and Kane. In Game 4, with the home team desperate to avoid falling into a 3–1 series crevasse, Saad saved the day during a third-period goalmouth scramble. His ungainly backhand found the five-hole of Andrei Vasilevskiy, Bishop's greenhorn backup, broke a 1–1 tie and put the Hawks back in the series.

“He's a great player, a powerful player,” praised Kane, who for his part couldn't buy a goal until the deciding game—



WELL ARMED

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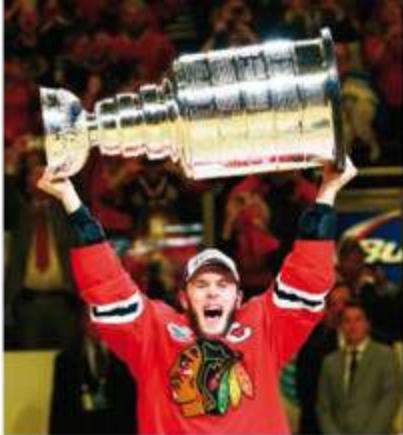
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CAPTAIN CRUNCH

Just 27, Toews became the second-youngest captain in NHL history to win three Stanley Cups.

and Quenneville seemed O.K. with that. Even when Kane wasn't scoring, he was occupying the other team's top defenders (in this case, Hedman) and doing, says the coach, "a lot of other things that are healthy for our team game."

The truth was, the Blackhawks had tamped down their fire-wagon tendencies to better defend the Lightning. Offensive chances were sacrificed for defense. "Joel is very patient," says the legendary Scotty Bowman, who has close ties to Tampa Bay (where he winters), but closer ties to Chicago: his son, Stan, is the team's GM. "There are certain things [the Blackhawks] have to do. They have to be on the right side of the puck. He doesn't want to play a wide-open game against these guys."

As the series wore on, the Lightning, despite their youth, seemed to wear down slightly. Chicago did a better job of disrupting rushes, obstructing opposing forwards as they entered the offensive zone. The Blackhawks clogged shooting lanes and formed a fortress around Crawford, who sparkled down the stretch, yielding two goals in the final three games, all Chicago wins.

Not so Kane, whose drought came to an end with just over five minutes to play. Saad rushed up the left side, pulling the puck back to Richards, who slid it across to number 88, whose one-timer sealed the series. Before commissioner Gary Bettman handed the Cup to Toews, the Blues Brothers belted out over the P.A. system:

Come on

Oh, baby, don't you want to go

Back to that same old place

Sweet home, Chicago. □

OFF-SEASON PREVIEW

A 30-TEAM TO-DO LIST

As hockey melts into the summer, here's a rundown of the top priorities for every NHL team | BY SARAH KWAK

EASTERN CONFERENCE

ATLANTIC

BRUINS Replace fourth line and pay RFA blueliner Dougie Hamilton.

CANADIENS More creative forwards—or figure out how to use ones they have.

LIGHTNING Roster is in great shape—biggest concern will be short off-season.

MAPLE LEAFS Trade Phil Kessel, a bad fit with new coach Mike Babcock.

PANTHERS Must re-sign RFA Jonathan Huberdeau; need another scorer.

RED WINGS Pick a goalie: costly Jimmy Howard or playoff stud Petr Mrázek.

SABRES Presumptive No. 2 pick Jack Eichel will help NHL's worst offense.

SENATORS Pick a goalie (Craig Anderson or Andrew Hammond); trade odd man out

CENTRAL

AVALANCHE Upgrade middling corps of defensemen.

BLACKHAWKS Shed salary by moving Bryan Bickell and Patrick Sharp.

BLUES Need to focus on adding more speed up and down lineup.

JETS Bring in star power to boost average offense and team identity.

PREDATORS Find a No. 1 center who can feed James Neal and Filip Forsberg.

STARS Find goalie: Kari Lehtonen's .903 save % was below NHL average (.915).

WILD Priority No. 1: Sign goalie Devan Dubnyk, a pending UFA.

WESTERN CONFERENCE

METROPOLITAN

BLUE JACKETS Finished 15-1-1; just need time to recover after injury-marred season.

CAPITALS Import more skilled support players for Alex Ovechkin.

DEVILS Find offense. Only one player scored more than 20 goals last year.

FLYERS Off-load unfriendly contracts to clear salary-cap room.

HURRICANES Must draft wisely—a problem in recent years—with No. 5 pick.

ISLANDERS Power-play pop: They went 0 for 14 with man-advantage in playoffs.

PENGUINS Find younger, quicker, more skilled wingers for center Sidney Crosby.

RANGERS Get depth at center—for a solid trade chip, backup goalie Cam Talbot.

PACIFIC

CANUCKS Find scoring depth—either in system or by trading a backup goalie.

COYOTES First and foremost, need a home city that wants them.

DUCKS Re-sign winger Jakob Silfverberg, maintain enviable depth.

FLAMES Find veteran support to solidify a rising young team.

KINGS Need a defenseman in case they lose Slava Voynov to legal troubles.

SHARKS New coach Pete DeBoer must inspire group that was lethargic last year.

OILERS With imminent arrival of top pick Connor McDavid, find defensemen—now.

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ANDRE AND THE GIANT

► BY LEE JENKINS

Photograph by Greg Nelson for Sports Illustrated

To contain the Cavaliers' one-man gang, Golden State turned to a cerebral vet who hadn't started a game in 13 months, and the showdown between LeBron James and Andre Iguodala uplifted a thrilling series

IMMEDIATE DIVIDENDS

With Iguodala in the lineup James still made plays, but the Warriors won two straight to seize control of the series.



ANDRE IGUODALA lay in bed after Game 2 of the NBA Finals and his fiancée, Christina Gutierrez, placed a hand on his stomach. “Your skin,” she said, “feels hot.” Several hours had passed since Iguodala left Oakland’s Oracle Arena, but he was still burning up, as if he had just sprinted off the court. He wasn’t sick, but he popped a Tylenol and set the thermostat in his house to a frosty 60°. When the Warriors forward returned home five days later from Cleveland, he found that his air-conditioning unit had broken, maddening because his Finals fever had not. He joked that he shaved his head in hopes of cooling down. Iguodala’s condition may sound implausible, but one league trainer claims it is common for stress hormones to rise in demanding situations, causing spikes in body temperature. “It’s like you’re a car,” Iguodala says, “and your engine is overheating.” Such is the strain required to survive 48-minute collisions with the turbo-powered tank known as LeBron James.

Iguodala is 11 months older, two inches shorter and 35 pounds lighter than the most punishing player in the world. He entered the NBA out of Arizona a year after James, drafted ninth by the 76ers in 2004, and immediately began composing a mental manual on how to halt him. The

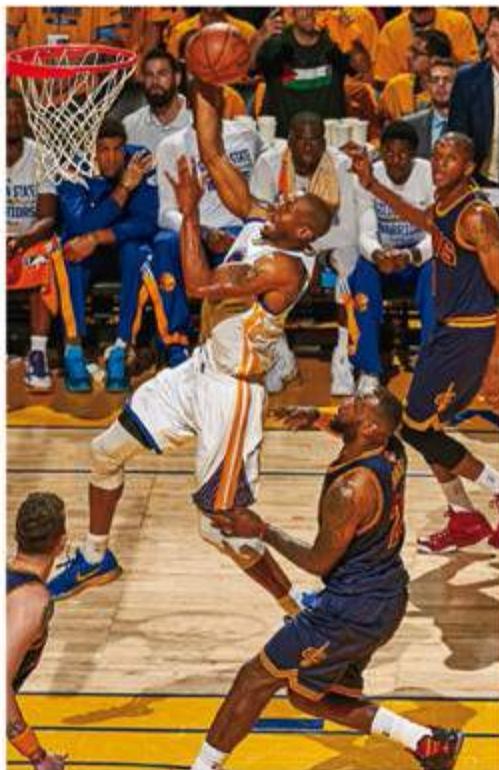
6' 6", 215-pound Iguodala developed a similar guide for every small forward, but James was a particularly compelling subject, and they faced off regularly in the Eastern Conference. With each matchup Iguodala added another page, until he knew James's tendencies as well as his own. "That book is crazy big now," says Iguodala, 31. "What he does in the post, what he does when he goes left, what he does when he comes at me like *this*." Iguodala wiggles his shoulders, miming James's open-floor shimmy. He has spent more than a decade preparing for the assignment that will define his career.

SUNDAY NIGHT, Game 5, and old adversaries meet again on the left wing at Oracle, halfway between the arc and the block. They look like punch-drunk boxers, leaning against each other in the 12th round, until James plants a shoulder into Iguodala, who staggers backward then steels himself for another blow. James surveys the court, waiting for a second defender, hoping for a second defender, so he can zip one of his four-seam fastballs to a three-point sniper left open. But the Warriors prefer he shoot rather than pass. So the double team doesn't come. It's still just James and Iguodala, alone on that left wing.

Every possession is different, except for these undermanned Cavaliers, who have been making every possession essentially the same. James either dribbles the ball up the left side or catches it there. He either faces Iguodala or backs him down. He studies the shot clock, bleeding it to a single red digit, and finally he either rises or bull-rushes. If he fires, Iguodala contests, and if he charges, Iguodala braces. James dips his head when he drives, a signal that he has abandoned the pass and is headed to the hoop. That's the cue for a second Warrior to slide over and help. If the help comes too early, James will hit a big man diving to the rim. If it comes too late, James will make a layup. And if it repeatedly comes from the same person, or the same place, James will diagnose and dissect the coverage. "The timing is critical," Golden State assistant coach Ron Adams says. "You have to respect the genius of what he's doing."

Only three players in the last 30 years have completed a Finals game with at least 36 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists. That's the line James was *averaging* through the first five games of the 2015 Finals. Three times he reached 40 points, twice he had triple doubles and once he did both. "Don't overreact," Iguodala kept reminding himself, the lesson on page 1 of his King James bible. Failure is inevitable. Success is relative. At week's end James was on pace for the best Finals performance in the history of the league, yet his primary defender was being serenaded with MVP chants. The crowd

JAMES WAS ON PACE FOR THE BEST FINALS PERFORMANCE IN THE HISTORY OF THE NBA, YET HIS PRIMARY DEFENDER WAS BEING SERENADED WITH MVP CHANTS.



END-TO-END EXCELLENCE

In addition to his defense, Iguodala was surprisingly strong offensively, averaging 18.0 points in his first two Finals starts.

recognized that no one could have done better than Iguodala and most would have fared far worse.

Besides, the Warriors were prevailing in the only ledger that mattered. They led 3-2, one win from their first title in 40 years. As Iguodala left Oracle after Game 5, steaming under a dark green sweater, an attendant offered him a cup of water. Iguodala eyed the liquid suspiciously. "Did you do something to it?" he asked. Guarding James can make a person paranoid. Iguodala turned it down. "I can't take any chances," he said. "We've come too far."

KRISTEN MYERS wanted to spend the July 4 weekend at her parents' vacation house on Zephyr Cove in Lake Tahoe. "We can go," said her husband, Warriors general manager Bob Myers. "But I'm going to be on the phone the whole time." It was the summer of 2013, Iguodala was a free agent, and one of his

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The Case For

KEVIN LOVE STAYING PUT

As has been made clear this spring, Cleveland doesn't need power forward Kevin Love to rule the East. But Love, 26, who this summer can opt out of the final season of his contract, does need the Cavs if he wants his best chance at a ring. As long as LeBron James makes all around him better, Cleveland will be favored to play into June every season.

While that prospect no doubt appeals to Love, the Cavs' success in his absence must also give him pause. He's a multifaceted All-Star worthy of a go-to role on a winning team. Yet Cleveland big men Tristan Thompson and Timofey Mozgov have been so effective that Love could have reasonable doubts about his role.

The best solution for Love may be the simplest: Pick up his \$16.7 million player option. After undergoing surgery on his dislocated left shoulder in April, he would accept some risk by forgoing a guaranteed, long-term deal, but he would be in position for a bigger maximum contract next summer, when the NBA's salary cap will increase by as much as 32%. Love can demonstrate his value to a winning team in 2015-16, then reap an even more substantial payday after the season.

—Rob Mahoney



The Case For

MAXING OUT DRAYMOND GREEN

The words *max contract* usually call to mind a certain kind of player: a volume scorer who can create his own shot. Draymond Green is not that. Yet this summer, during the restricted free agency period, when the Warriors calculate Green's contributions, they're likely to max him out. For Golden State—which already has reigning MVP Stephen Curry and a second All-Star scoring threat in Klay Thompson—the 6' 7", 230-pound Green will be worth every penny of what's likely to be a multiyear deal starting at around \$16 million.

Only a few players are as effective as Green, 25, on defense: A starter at power forward, he also serves as a small-ball center and switches to perimeter players, guarding all five positions in most games. That has made him the fulcrum of the top-ranked defense in the league.

Replacing such versatility on D would alone prove difficult. Then consider that Green can also handle the ball, provide secondary playmaking and make shots from range. Players are paid the max because they have a talent that's in short supply. Green deserves the max because he supplies so many talents.

—R.M.



first meetings was with Golden State. Myers did not have enough salary-cap space to sign Iguodala, but he was flattered that such a prominent player was so interested in the Warriors, who were coming off their first playoff series victory in six years. The team they beat was Iguodala's Nuggets. He saw how Andrew Bogut and David Lee passed, how Steph Curry and Klay Thompson shot, how Oracle throbbed. "I really want to be here," Iguodala told Myers, "and I'll give you the time to clear the space."

Myers had three days to unload \$24 million. "The hardest three days of work I've ever done," he recalls. "There were so many twists, so many machinations." He kept telling Kristen, "We're not getting this guy," but he couldn't bring himself to hang up the phone and hit the beach. On July 5, Myers found a place to dump the money, agreeing to send three expiring contracts and two future first-round picks to the Jazz. He still hadn't shaved when the Warriors held a press conference to unveil their missing piece, a playmaking wing with a reputation for deep thought and fierce defense.

As a rookie in Philadelphia, Iguodala sidled up to veteran Aaron McKie. "He told me what it was like guarding Tracy McGrady and Vince Carter," Iguodala recalls. "He said, 'They are going to get their shots. They are going to get their points. But learn their tendencies, what they don't like, and make it as tough on them as you can.'" Iguodala memorized where opponents held the ball, so he could slap down on it, and kept track of moves they added over the summer. He heard coaches holler, "Get to the hole!" and developed a strategy ahead of its time: baiting stars into midrange shots and contesting with his endless arms. Against lesser players, he cheated off, gambling for steals and chasing rebounds.

"He has always valued the little things: the rotations, the reads, the footwork," says Warriors assistant Luke Walton, Iguodala's teammate at Arizona. "When you care about all that, plus you have crazy length and athleti-

MITCHELL LEFF/GETTY IMAGES (LOVE); JOHN W. McDONOUGH FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (GREEN)

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The Case For

KEEPING HACKING LEGAL

You hate it. Players hate it. The NBA hates it. Hack-a-Shaq—shorthand for off-the-ball fouling of any sub-60% free throw shooter—brings a flowing game to a screeching halt. During the Western Conference semifinals, Clippers center DeAndre Jordan (*right*) and Rockets center Dwight Howard attempted a combined 169 foul shots; they made 72, or 42.6%.

Make a rule change? That's been done. In 1978 the league began awarding two free throws and possession for fouls off the ball in the last two minutes of a game. That worked until Don Nelson and his Mavericks started hacking Dennis Rodman, and later Shaq, well before the last two minutes. A further change would reaffirm misplaced priorities that pose an even larger threat to the game: the emphasis, from AAU on up, on highlight-worthy plays over fundamental basketball.

The good news: There's no plan for a new rule, at least not soon. The NBA says 90% of Hack-a-Whoever in the playoffs involved two teams (Houston, Los Angeles), and 75% involved two players (Jordan, Howard). For now, the only way they can avoid embarrassing trips to the line is to score when they get there.

—Chris Mannix



The Case For

EARLY CBA NEGOTIATIONS

At the annual State of the NBA press conference, commissioner Adam Silver (*right*) declared his desire to begin labor negotiations this summer, two years before the current collective bargaining agreement expires. Michele Roberts, the executive director of the National Basketball Players Association, has concurred. "There's going to be a deal," said Roberts. "Let's get it done."

Empty rhetoric? Let's hope not. The league is just four years removed from an ugly labor dispute that cut 16 games from the 2011-12 season. The pie has since grown bigger—revenue from the new \$24.9 billion television deal begins flowing next year—and significant issues loom. Players want more money; their share of basketball-related income was cut from 57% to roughly 50% in the last deal. Owners want to increase the age minimum to 20 and install a hard salary cap. Roberts has sharply criticized the previous deal, leading league officials to believe the two sides are headed for another fight.

But not if they can find common ground now. The NBA, as Silver says, "is doing incredibly well." Some stalemates are only broken by hard deadlines, but resolving some of the smaller issues will afford both parties more time to hammer out the bigger ones.

—C.M.



cism, you're dangerous." Iguodala grew up in Springfield, Ill., idolizing Bulls stopper Scottie Pippen. Like Pippen, Iguodala could score, but defense was his specialty. The complex schemes and detailed scouting reports appealed to his cerebral nature. This is a player who has been reading *The Nat Turner Insurrection Trials*—written by a legal scholar about slave trials in the 1800s—during the Finals. His mind wanders, though, to sequences with James that he should have handled differently.

When Iguodala arrived at Golden State, coaches were initially startled by his unorthodox defensive technique. Instead of crowding his man, Iguodala often allows space, enabling him to deflect passes, strip steals and close out hard on the midrange jumpers. After two weeks of training camp the staff understood and appreciated his approach. "You have to let special players use special talents," says Pelicans assistant Darren Erman, the defensive mastermind who was with the Warriors last season. "Andre is probably the most instinctual defender in the last 10 years."

Steve Kerr succeeded Mark Jackson as coach this season and sent Iguodala to the bench, a move more psychological than tactical. Kerr wanted to boost the confidence of Harrison Barnes, 23, even if it meant bruising a former All-Star's ego. An endearing curmudgeon, Iguodala grew surly enough in camp that one assistant said, "He's pouting. Put him in the corner." Bruce Fraser, the Warriors' player-development coach and de facto spiritual adviser, offered empathy instead. "I'm fine," Iguodala kept telling Fraser, who was not convinced. "How could he be fine?" Fraser wonders. "It's like when your wife tells you she's fine. You can't just let it pass. We couldn't just lose him."

The Warriors started 21-2, and Iguodala gradually reengaged, taking ownership of the second unit. He averaged 26.9 minutes, a career low, in part because Kerr wanted him fresh for the playoffs. Golden State, stacked with versatile defenders, had no shortage of candidates



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to throw in front of James: Barnes, Thompson, Draymond Green and Shaun Livingston all took turns, but when the Cavs went up 2-1, it became clear that only Iguodala was up to the task.

The night before Game 4, 28-year-old Nick U'Ren watched video of last year's Finals in his room at the Ritz-Carlton in Cleveland. U'Ren, Kerr's special assistant who is usually rebounding for Curry or putting together iPod playlists for practice, noticed that the Spurs swung their series against the Heat by plugging small forward Boris Diaw into the starting lineup. U'Ren called Walton and suggested doing the same with Iguodala. At 3 a.m., they texted Kerr, and the staff reached a consensus over breakfast.

Iguodala, stationed across from James, had come full circle. When he broke into the NBA, the league was bogged down with isolation offenses, none more stilted than the one-man band in Philly that featured Allen Iverson. "I'd laugh, catch some lobs, and watch him score 50," Iguodala once said. As Iguodala entered his prime, coaches discovered more efficient methods, emphasizing space and movement. Iso-ball was a relic, never to return, until Iguodala looked up two weeks ago and saw James thundering down that left sideline.

FROM THE front office to the floor, 11 former members of the Suns are in the Finals. They are coaches (like Golden State's Alvin Gentry and Jarron Collins), executives (like Cleveland's GM, David Griffin, and director of player administration, Raja Bell) and players (like Warriors guard Leandro Barbosa and Cavaliers swingman James Jones). All are disciples of Mike D'Antoni and the fast-breaking, ball-hopping, paint-clearing, seven-seconds-or-

READY TO ROLL

After an uneven start to the series, Curry feathered in 14 points in the second half of Game 4, as Golden State romped.

less offense that has spread from Phoenix to every corner of the NBA. "Mike was a visionary," says Kerr, who used to be D'Antoni's GM. "He changed the league." The last three champions—San Antonio, Miami and Dallas—took hints from the Suns with their small lineups and incessant pick-

and-rolls. "That's what everyone is moving toward," says Bell. "And then here we come going straight grind-it-out iso with one guy."

The Cavaliers wanted to play like the Warriors, which is to say, they wanted to play like the Suns. They surrounded James with one rim protector, Timofey Mozgov, and a cadre of shooters. Then power forward Kevin Love dislocated his left shoulder in the first round of the playoffs and point guard Kyrie Irving fractured his left kneecap during Game 1 in Oakland. James, sans two All-Stars, was down to four guys from the fringes. "We had to reinvent ourselves," says

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Cleveland assistant Jim Boylan.

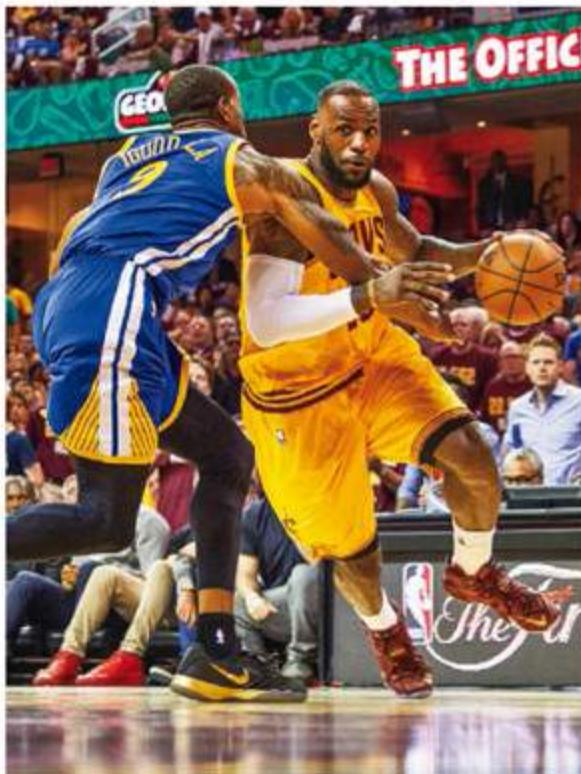
They traveled back in time, to an era when the team's best player held the ball for 20 seconds and only then decided what to do with it. "Even 15 years ago, in the muck of the Eastern Conference, you never saw this," says ESPN analyst Jeff Van Gundy, who steered the Knicks through that muck to the 1999 Finals. "You'd have to go to Charles Barkley maybe—back, back, backing in." The approach, while antiquated, was inspired. The Cavaliers stalled the Warriors' breakneck pace. They reduced possessions against a more talented opponent. And they increased opportunities for offensive rebounds, starting the cycle all over again. It was the basketball equivalent of a triple option keeping a spread offense off the field.

The slow-motion system allowed the Cavaliers to steal breathers—except James, of course. At week's end he had logged 228 of 250 possible minutes, and his usage rate dwarfed any in Finals history. Rest was elusive. Last Saturday night James took teammates to an IMAX theatre in San Francisco for a 3D showing of *Jurassic World*, sneaking in once the lights had dimmed and out before the credits rolled. The following afternoon he lay on a massage table behind a grease board in the visiting locker room at Oracle, four hands kneading his back and legs. His response was astounding—in Game 5, Cleveland made 32 field goals, and James scored or assisted 26 of them—but still not enough. "What he's doing is superhuman," Van Gundy says. "Even if he just wins two games, I think it's his greatest accomplishment."

James, who prizes playmaking and efficiency, found the experience uncomfortable. His disdain for solo acts led him to Miami, with Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh, and back to Cleveland, with Irving and others. "I'm so outside the box right now," he said after Game 3. "I'm not O.K. with it. But this is a different challenge." James seeks talented colleagues, and yet he does some of his best work with scraps. His vaunted team at St. Mary–St. Vincent High in Akron, Ohio, was not loaded with Division I prospects. His 66-victory Cavaliers of team 2008–09 depended on Booby Gibson and Delonte West. Even the Heat, when they won 27 games in a row two seasons ago, often flourished with Wade and Bosh on the bench. "It's the LeBron effect," says Cavs forward Tristan Thompson, who averaged 5.6 offensive boards in the first five games of the Finals. "He takes guys to places they've never been."

James led Cleveland to its first Finals win and then its first home Finals

**"WHAT HE'S DOING IS SUPERHUMAN,"
VAN GUNDY SAYS OF JAMES. "EVEN IF HE
JUST WINS TWO GAMES, I THINK IT'S
HIS GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENT."**



**MR.
DO-IT-ALL**

Through the first five games James scored or assisted on two thirds of Cleveland's 164 field goals, while grabbing the second-most boards of any player on either team.

win. But the plan was to deliver the city's first championship in a half-century, and as he headed home for Game 6, Iguodala was perched in his path. The lineup change altered the series in a few fundamental ways. It made the Warriors smaller, pressuring the Cavaliers to downsize, and faster, raising the tempo. It also forced James to see more of Iguodala. Despite his outlandish totals James did not hit half his shots in any of the first five games, and twice he shot below 32%. He was doing what his team needed, but so was Iguodala.

On the way out of Oracle Arena and back to Cleveland, Iguodala paused to pass along the name of the next book in his queue. It is about starting a business in the current economy, not stopping a tank in the NBA Finals, but the title works for either topic: *The Hard Thing About Hard Things*. □

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first of
many

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Glycerin 13



NEW YORK CITY is home to thousands of restaurants, delis and food trucks, a veritable buffet for a hungry 19-year-old. What'll it be, Emmanuel Mudiay? "There's a Subway down the street," he says. Well, O.K. It's mid-May, and the 6' 5", 200-pound Mudiay is stuffed into a second-row seat in a silver van crawling through Midtown traffic. He doesn't mind the congestion—in Guangdong, the province in southern China where he played last season, it's far worse. There, he rarely traveled by car. He biked for a while, until he saw the body of another rider who had been killed in a hit-and-run. "After that," he says, "I was walking." Mudiay is in Manhattan for the NBA's draft lottery, a drawing of Ping-Pong balls that has turned into a widely watched and irresistibly suspenseful event.

Behind Emmanuel sits his oldest brother, Stephane, 26, the family patriarch. Their father, Jean-Paul, died in 1998, in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaire). One afternoon, before he headed to a barbecue, he told Stephane, then eight, to mind his mother and two brothers. "Same thing he said every time he went out," says Stephane. Only this time he wouldn't come back. Hours later Jean-Paul collapsed, and his head struck a table. He died on the way to the hospital. The official cause of death, the family says, was a heart attack. Suddenly Stephane was the man of the house. "I don't think it's something he tried to be," says Emmanuel, "but he was who we looked up to."

Up front in the van is Jean-Michel, 23, the middle child. Basketball runs in the Mudiay family. Stephane was a 6' 7" small forward at Trinity Valley Community College in Athens, Texas, then at Texas Wesleyan in Fort Worth. Jean-Michel played two years at Western Texas College in Snyder before transferring to SMU in 2013. He knew why the Mustangs wanted him: for an edge in recruiting Emmanuel. Jean-Michel didn't care. A 6' 3" guard, he rode the bench for two years and, last month, graduated with a degree in sports management.

Emmanuel's brothers are his team. His posse. Where Emmanuel goes, they go, including on his first official trip as a potential NBA draftee. The league loves parading its top prospects around New York City during lottery week. Players willingly pay for their flights and hotels; it's a cool experience, and hey, you don't want GMs thinking you're a diva.

NONE AND DONE

Mudiay was ready to attend SMU, but a fear of NCAA sanctions led him to abandon college before he began.

NBA DRAFT

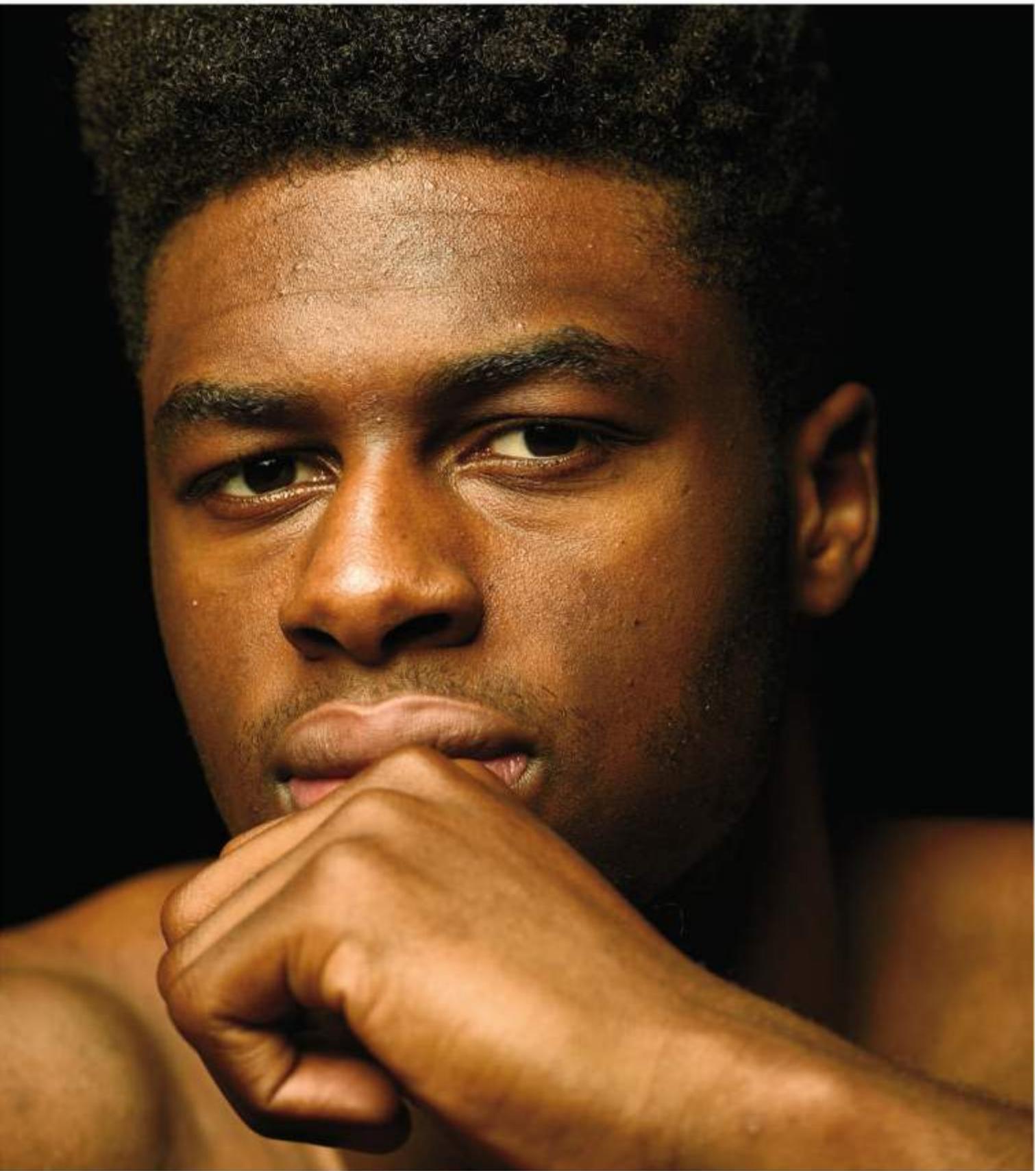


*To get to the brink of an NBA career, point guard **EMMANUEL MUDIAY** took the most circuitous route imaginable: from childhood in Congo to high school in Texas to a year of pro ball in China. Is this a new paradigm for lottery picks?*

THE LONG MARCH

BY CHRIS MANNIX

Photograph by **Robert Beck**
For Sports Illustrated



Mudiay especially. A year ago he was a hot prospect, a powerful playmaker who recalled the young Baron Davis. He was headed to SMU to play for Larry Brown, the point guard whisperer. Mudiay (MOO-dee-ay) is still a top talent—he is projected as a high lottery pick on June 25—but one with questions that many league executives are scrambling to answer. He left for China as the potential No. 1 pick; now he's battling 6' 5" D'Angelo Russell of Ohio State to be the first guard drafted. So, after ducking into the Subway on 54th Street, he folds his frame into a back table, takes a bite out of his sandwich and begins a complicated story.

IN THE LATE 1990s, the Mudiays' homeland was a battleground in a bloody African war. Rwanda, a small country on its eastern border, invaded Zaire in '97, sparking a conflagration that would involve 10 nations. The country's rich natural resources—minerals and timber—were looted. Reports of rape, dismemberment and murder were widespread. Over the next nine years an estimated 5.4 million people died in the conflict and its fallout, according to the International Rescue Committee.

Kinshasa, Congo's capital and largest city, was a flashpoint. Stephane and Jean-Michel remember the charred, rotting corpses of people who had been girded by tires and burned alive. They remember the bullet-riddled bodies. They remember the pop of rifles and the rat-a-tat-tat of automatic weapons at night. Once a stray bullet tore through one of their windows, clipping a relative in the shoulder. "I try not to think about it," says Jean-Michel, his voice trailing off. "Those images are hard to forget."

Therese Kabeya was born in Kinshasa. She met Jean-Paul Mudiay in Canada while he was at the University of Montreal and she was attending a



FAR EASTERN DIVISION

In Guangdong, Mudiay went up against Chinese players and fellow U.S. transplants such as Marbury (above left).



nursing school nearby. In 1987 they moved back to Zaire, married and started a family. Jean-Paul worked as director of marketing at a publicly owned transportation company; Therese stayed home and raised their three boys.

After Jean-Paul's death Therese faced big decisions. Kinshasa was not safe. Because of the violence, schools were closed for days, even weeks, at a time. In 2001 she decided they would move to America. "We couldn't go on like that," Therese says. "We needed a better life."

The logistics were tricky. Therese could go to the U.S. and request asylum; her sister Christine lived in the Dallas area. Therese's sons, though, would have to stay behind. Once in the U.S. she could petition to bring them over, but the process could take two years. "I talked to [the kids]," she says. "They understood a little. I told them I am going to America. I am going to make a better life."

ANOTHER KENTUCKY FRIED DRAFT

Once again the Wildcats have yielded a bumper crop of prospects, with four of SI's top 14 projected picks—including the No. 1 choice. —C.M.

- | | | | | | |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|
| <p>1</p> <p>T-WOLVES
KARL-ANTHONY TOWNS</p> <p>7-FOOT CENTER
KENTUCKY</p> <p>GM Flip Saunders says he'll take the best player available. That's Towns.</p> | <p>2</p> <p>LAKERS
JAHLIL OKAFOR</p> <p>6' 11" CENTER
DUKE</p> <p>L.A. is vetting other prospects but has its sights set on the potential franchise big man.</p> | <p>3</p> <p>76ERS
D'ANGELO RUSSELL</p> <p>6' 5" GUARD
OHIO STATE</p> <p>Philly needs a point guard, and Russell is superior to Mudiay as both a shooter and a playmaker.</p> | <p>4</p> <p>KNICKS
KRISTAPS PORZINGIS</p> <p>7-FOOT FORWARD
LATVIA</p> <p>The 19-year-old stretch four is a project, but long-term he could be the class of this class.</p> | <p>5</p> <p>MAGIC
JUSTISE WINSLOW</p> <p>6' 7" FORWARD
DUKE</p> <p>This would create a logjam at the wing, but rebuilding Orlando can't pass on the best talent.</p> | <p>6</p> <p>KINGS
EMMANUEL MUDIAY</p> <p>6' 5" GUARD
GUANGDONG, CBA</p> <p>Coach George Karl is thrilled to get the big, athletic point guard to run his up-tempo system.</p> |
|--|--|--|---|--|---|

CHINA/PHOTO PRESS/GETTY IMAGES (2)



**After all the practices
The two-a-days
The waking up early
The shootarounds after dark
The shuttle runs
The layup lines
The bus rides
The car rides
And the homework that always needed to get done
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The boys moved in with their paternal grandparents. Therese, unable to get a nursing license in the U.S.—“I didn’t speak English,” she says—took a job as a nurse’s aide at an assisted living center in Arlington, Texas. Later she took a similar position at a hospital. She called Kinshasa every day. Some days she got through. A little over a year after she immigrated, the paperwork came through: Her sons could join her in the U.S.

CONGO’S NATIONAL sport is soccer, but Stephane gravitated toward basketball—and his brothers followed suit. In the U.S., Stephane and Jean-Michel played daily. Stephane was strong and physical in the mold of a power forward; Jean-Michel was smoother, more athletic. Emmanuel desperately wanted to join them. He believed he could excel; in second grade he wrote a letter to his mother in which every line read, *I am going to play in the NBA*. “He would cry when we wouldn’t let him play,” says Stephane. When they did, they were merciless. In the back of the family’s apartment building was a half-court surrounded by a chain-link fence. The Cage, the boys called it, where basketball mixed with MMA. Elbows flew. Every foul bordered on flagrant. Many times Emmanuel would chase a loose ball only to be body-checked into the fence. “You know how in wrestling they have Hell in the Cell?” he says. “This was kind of like that.”

Those beatings didn’t last. As a teenager Emmanuel matured quickly. He blended Stephane’s strength with Jean-Michel’s athleticism, and his natural skills were superior to theirs. By the eighth grade Emmanuel was attending camps with Russell and Jahlil Okafor and dominating. As a freshman he played for Grace Prep in Arlington and in the

MUDIAY IS STILL A TOP TALENT, BUT ONE WITH QUESTIONS THAT MANY NBA EXECUTIVES ARE SCRAMBLING TO ANSWER.



TAPPS Class 4A final he scored 16 points—14 in the second half—to help defeat Houston Westbury Christian. As a junior he followed his coach, Ray Forsett, to Prime Prep Academy, a group of charter schools in Dallas, Fort Worth and Oak Cliff founded by NFL Hall of Famer Deion (Prime Time) Sanders. Emmanuel led Prime to a 37–2 record and the semifinals of the National High School Invitational.

Every college wanted him—Kentucky, Kansas, Oklahoma State, Baylor. Stephane fielded most of the coaches’ calls. One came from Larry Brown. “He said, ‘I know we are probably not going to get him, but I want you to know we want him,’” says Stephane. (“He blew me away with his size, his athleticism and an unbelievable feel for the game,” says Brown. “He reminded me of John Wall. He defends, he rebounds, he can handle a press. He could have played for some NBA teams in high school.”) Emmanuel wanted SMU, too. It was close to home. Jean-Michel was there. In the summer of 2013, Emmanuel committed to the Mustangs.

Problems surfaced in 2014, toward the end of Emmanuel’s senior year. Since opening in ’12, Prime Prep had been plagued by allegations of academic misconduct, underfunding and poor living conditions. In July ’14 the Texas Education Agency, after an eight-month investigation, announced it would move to revoke Prime Prep’s charter, and in January the academy closed.

Eligibility issues followed Prime Prep’s athletes. In 2013 the NCAA ruled LSU forward Jordan Mickey and TCU center Karviar Shepherd ineligible due to academic problems at Prime; the two appealed and were reinstated. There was never a formal accusation against Mudiay, but he feared that the NCAA would declare him ineligible, too, jeopardizing what would likely be his only college season.

RIK SCUTER/AP

7

NUGGETS
MARIO HEZONJA

6' 8" GUARD
CROATIA

For a European, the 20-year-old is a fearless attacker. Not surprisingly, he’s a strong shooter.

8

PISTONS
DEVIN BOOKER

6' 6" GUARD
KENTUCKY

At 18 he’s the youngest player in the draft, but the three-point marksman looked like a seasoned pro in workouts.

9

HORNETS
FRANK KAMINSKY

7' 1" FORWARD
WISCONSIN

Charlotte would prefer a shooter, but Kaminsky and his inside-out skills complement Al Jefferson.

10

HEAT
STANLEY JOHNSON

6' 7" FORWARD
ARIZONA

A potential stopper (above) once projected higher, he’s “kind of a mess” on D, one exec says.

11

PACERS
CAMERON PAYNE

6' 2" GUARD
MURRAY STATE

Indiana snags the draft’s fastest riser, a dynamic point guard savvy in the pick-and-roll.

12

JAZZ
WILLIE CAULEY-STEIN

7' 1" CENTER
KENTUCKY

He’ll never be more than a dunker and an O.K. baseline/elbow shooter, but he’s a force on D.

13

SUNS
MYLES TURNER

7-FOOT CENTER
TEXAS

It might take two years, but he can be a big-time scorer for a team that lacks punch up front.

14

THUNDER
TREY LYLES

6' 10" FORWARD
KENTUCKY

Just the type of long, skilled, undervalued player GM Sam Presti likes. OKC can afford to let him develop.

In July 2014, days before he was scheduled to enroll at SMU, Mudiay told Brown he wasn't coming. His college career was over before it started.

THE PLANE descended from the pitch-black sky toward Emmanuel Mudiay's new life. It was a cool late September night in Guangdong, the province Mudiay would call home for the next six months. The Guangdong Southern Tigers, one of the premier teams in the Chinese Basketball Association, had signed him to a one-year, \$1.2 million deal. CBA teams rarely pursue U.S. high school players, but months earlier Tigers coach Du Feng had flown to Texas to watch Mudiay work out. He liked what he saw. "I needed a tall point guard," says Du. "His upside [was] good." When Mudiay landed in Guangdong, there was a message on his phone. "It was around 10 p.m.," says Mudiay. "They wanted to know if I wanted to practice tomorrow."

Mudiay had resisted playing in China. "Hell no was my first response," he says. But Guangdong offered him a chance to support his family. For years Mudiay had watched his mother work 10-hour days. He wanted her to stop, so he took the best offer he had. Therese quit her job and moved to China with him. Stephane, too. The Tigers rented the family an apartment in a high rise five minutes from their arena.

China, predictably, required adjustments. Two-a-days every day. Weights in the morning, skill work in the afternoon. The game there was more physical. Mudiay competed mostly against grown men—Yi Jianlian, an NBA lottery pick in 2007, was one of his teammates—and referees were more reticent with their calls. Once, early in the season, Mudiay was clotheslined. No whistle. "Totally different level of physical play," he says.

24

Points Mudiay scored in his first game back from injury, coming off the bench against Beijing in the CBA playoffs.

\$1.2M

Salary the teenager collected for a rookie season in China in which he played a total of 12 games.



Off the court Mudiay became a homebody. There was an English pub nearby, but no other place served Western food. In Guangdong "the food was like the Chinese food we have [in the U.S.]," says Stephane, "without the taste." His mother cooked lots of chicken and steak. Friends sent care packages filled with snack bars. On weekends Emmanuel would binge-watch NCAA games and NBA documentaries, absorbing everything: from Michael Jordan, how practices should be harder than games; from Charles Barkley, how to be indifferent to public opinion.

Mostly he worked. He went to the gym, he says, "all day, every day." When he wasn't practicing with his team, he was playing one-on-one with his cousin Daniel Ehambe, who had also accompanied him to China. "He had a good work ethic

CHINA: GETTY IMAGES (MUDIAY); DAVID E. KLUTHO FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (GRANT)

15

HAWKS
BOBBY PORTIS

6' 11" FORWARD
ARKANSAS

Portis's forte: He competes like crazy. He's also good in transition and can space the floor.

16

CELTICS
KEVON LOONEY

6' 9" FORWARD
UCLA

Don't count on much next season, but he could blossom into a steal. Great hands serve him well in the post.

17

BUCKS
R.J. HUNTER

6' 6" GUARD
GEORGIA STATE

With no center worth taking, Milwaukee snags the best shooter, who has been accurate in workouts.

18

ROCKETS
JERIAN GRANT

6' 5" GUARD
NOTRE DAME

At 22, Grant (above) is an older prospect, but he's a combo guard for a team thin in the backcourt.

19

WIZARDS
MONTREZL HARRELL

6' 8" FORWARD
LOUISVILLE

Small for a four, he has defensive instincts and a high motor reminiscent of Draymond Green's.

20

RAPTORS
KELLY OUBRE

6' 7" FORWARD
KANSAS

Despite a nice touch and superior skills on D, he was wildly inconsistent in his one college season.

21

MAVERICKS
TYUS JONES

6' 2" GUARD
DUKE

Jones isn't big or athletic, but coach Rick Carlisle would love to exploit his high IQ as a playmaker.

22

BULLS
DELON WRIGHT

6' 5" GUARD
UTAH

While Chicago has to get younger up front, a replacement for Kirk Hinrich would also be useful.

and attitude,” Du says of Emmanuel. “I spent a lot of time coaching him one-on-one. He worked very hard to gain experience. He worked hard to meet his expectations and improve. I really cared about him. The team really cared about him, too.”

The atmosphere was less inviting. Smoking is permitted in arenas in China. The thin cloud before games thickened by halftime, so Mudiay held his breath from the locker room to the floor. Some teammates, he says, smoked in the bathroom before games. One of them played drunk. “It was crazy,” says Mudiay. “He was one of our best players.” (Du claims smoking was “totally prohibited” by teams and drinking was not allowed during the season.)

Then, disaster: In the Tigers’ 10th game Mudiay sprained his right ankle. He missed the next three months. Du offered to let him go home; Mudiay declined, wanting to play. In March, as Guangdong trailed archrival Beijing (led by former NBA All-Star Stephon Marbury) 2–0 in the best-of-five playoff semifinals, Du asked Mudiay if he was ready. “I was at about 90%,” Mudiay says. Though rusty, he had 24 points, eight rebounds and four assists in a Tigers win. The series—and Mudiay’s season—ended two nights later, but he had deepened his teammates’ respect.

So: If Du had a do-over, would he still take the young American? “I would,” he says. “His gifts are rare. If he doesn’t play in the NBA and wants to play in the CBA, I will be the first to sign him.”

THE FOG rolls off the hills in California’s San Fernando Valley, creating a soupy chill on the sprawling campus of Chaminade College Preparatory School in West Hills. It’s late May, and Mudiay sits against a wall outside the gym, legs splayed, head buried in an

**IN CHINA
MUDIAY WENT
TO THE GYM
“ALL DAY,
EVERY DAY.”
WHEN NOT
PRACTICING,
HE PLAYED
ONE-ON-ONE.**

**BROTHERS
IN ARMS**

Wherever Emmanuel (far right) goes, Jean-Michel (center) and Stephane are sure to follow.



ROBERT BECK FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (MUDIAY); GREG NELSON FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (EMKER)

iPhone. He shuttles between Chaminade and Pro-active Sports Performance in Westlake Village, running through basketball drills with noted trainer Joe Abunassar at Chaminade and strength training at PSP. Abunassar says the injured ankle has healed—Mudiay gets therapy on it three days a week as a precaution—and his drills are aimed at maximizing the player’s superior size. Pick-and-rolls. Dribble handoffs. Post moves. In fewer than three months Mudiay has packed on 11 pounds of muscle, and his single-leg explosion has improved by 31%. “When he gets past a defender, his body becomes an asset,” says Abunassar. “Look at Chris Paul. He gets a defender on his butt, and he can steer him. He shortens the distance to the basket. Emmanuel has that potential.”

Mudiay skipped the draft combine last month; individual workouts are most teams’ only opportunity to get a look at him. The clubs with the top four picks—the Timberwolves, Lakers, 76ers and Knicks—are all interested. After an injury-riddled year in China, executives are eager to see the once-heralded prospect in action. “His body of work there was too small to make a bold prediction on what



23

**BLAZERS
SAM DEKKER**

6' 9" FORWARD
WISCONSIN

If Dekker (left) can shoot, he’s a steal. If he can’t, his limits on D might restrict his minutes.

24

**CAVALIERS
JUSTIN
ANDERSON**

6' 6" GUARD
VIRGINIA

Anderson is an NBA-ready defender; if he can hit the corner three, he can be the Cavs’ Kawhi Leonard.

25

**GRIZZLIES
RASHAD
VAUGHN**

6' 5" GUARD
UNLV

Memphis lands a multifaceted scorer who can be groomed as a replacement for Tony Allen.

26

**SPURS
CLIFF
ALEXANDER**

6' 9" FORWARD
KANSAS

A shot blocker who plays well off the ball, he’s a talent who is low risk, high reward at No. 26.

27

**LAKERS
RONDAE
HOLLIS-
JEFFERSON**

6' 7" FORWARD
ARIZONA

With no jump shot or off-the-dribble game, he has value only on D, where he could be elite.

28

**CELTICS
CHRIS
MCCULLOUGH**

6' 9" FORWARD
SYRACUSE

At 220 pounds, he must bulk up to bang inside. A right knee injury cut short his season.

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he is going to be,” says Ryan Blake, senior scouting consultant to the NBA. “He’s high risk, high reward.”

To most teams, the games Mudiay did play in China mean little. “It’s terrible competition,” an Eastern Conference GM says of the CBA. “Everyone’s stats are inflated. Look at what Andray Blatche is doing. [During the 2014–15 season Blatche averaged 31.1 points, 14.6 rebounds, 5.1 assists and 2.8 steals for the Xinjiang Flying Tigers.] Summer-league games are better. [Mudiay] is a great talent, but that year was almost a wasted year.”

Such questions don’t bother Mudiay. Why would they? His future is much brighter than his past. He thinks about Stephane. “He has sacrificed so much,” says Emmanuel. He thinks about Jean-Michel, who spent the holidays last year alone, at SMU, his family a world away. He thinks about his mother, who came to the U.S. with nothing and has seen two sons graduate from college and soon will watch another play in the NBA. He thinks about his father.

Recently Emmanuel asked his mother for a picture of Jean-Paul that he can take to his next stop. He never had one before. “Thinking about him is tough,” says Emmanuel, “but he would be happy for us. He would be proud.” □

29

NETS
TERRY ROZIER

6' 2" GUARD
LOUISVILLE

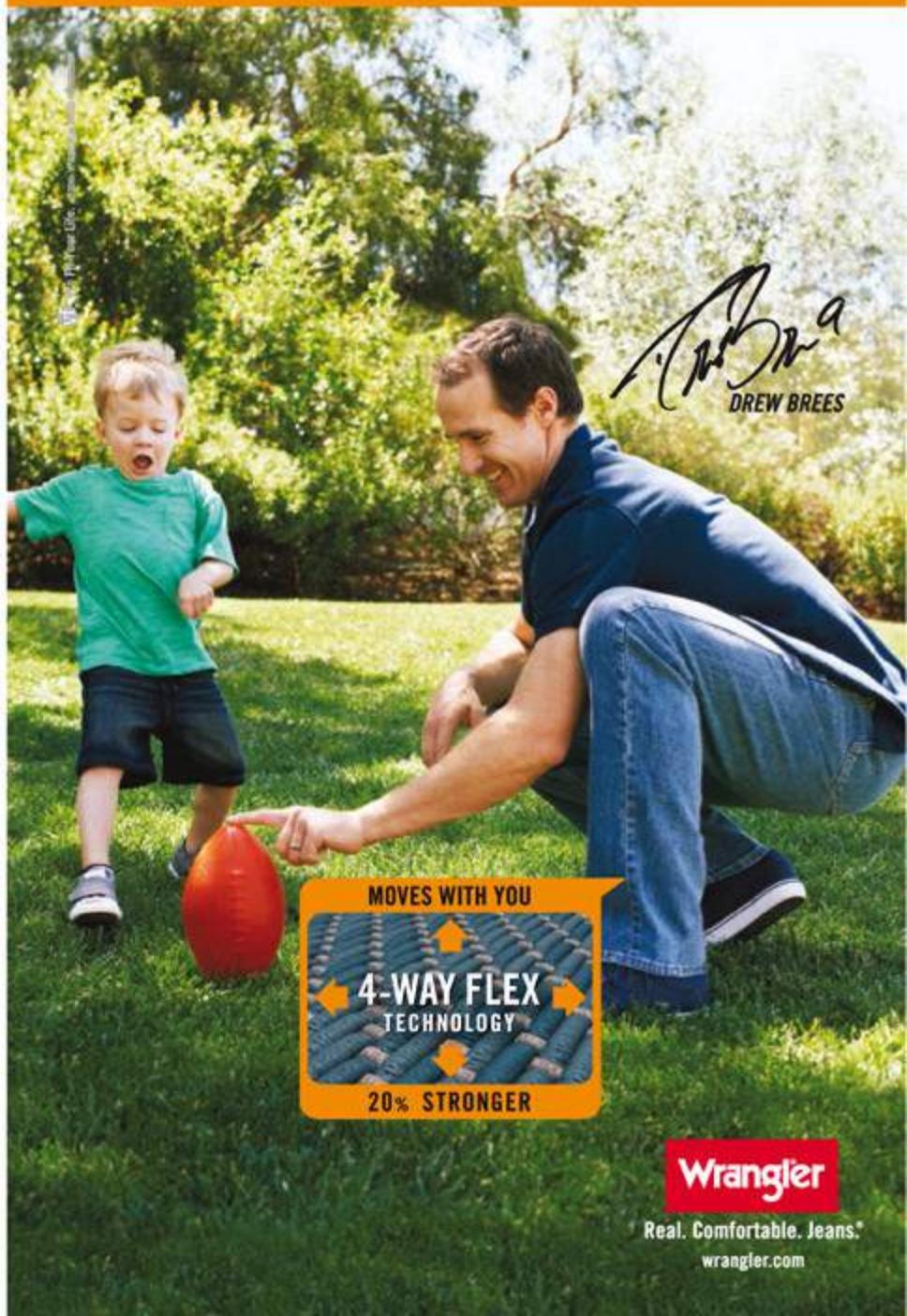
More of a scorer than a distributor, he is physically gifted and could provide instant offense off the bench.

30

WARRIORS
JORDAN MICKEY

6' 8" FORWARD
LSU

A standout during the combine, he has a 7' 3" wingspan and potential as a low-post scorer.



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INTRODUCING THE MMQB 100

When the staff of The MMQB-SI's dedicated NFL site—bounced around ideas for a ranking of the most influential people in pro football, we spent a good chunk of time arguing not just about who should be on such a list, but about what it means to be “influential” in the NFL. Wouldn't Roger Goodell, as commissioner, always top such a ranking? That would be dull. To differentiate our list, we focused on the 2015 season, weighting qualification heavily toward what happens on the field. So players and coaches predominate on The MMQB 100. And each year this list will change, maybe dramatically; people who wouldn't normally be thought of as influential make the cut in 2015 because of their significance to the upcoming season.

For instance, you wouldn't typically consider an NFL line judge a critical figure, but Sarah Thomas will be this year. She's the first full-time female official in the league's 96-year history. Nor would you have the GM of the league's worst team on the list, but the Bucs' Jason Licht is risking his franchise's future on a promising QB with a pockmarked background. And you generally wouldn't include a college football coach, but Jim Harbaugh makes the cut because every time Michigan wins and the 49ers lose, Niner Nation will be up in arms.

As we unveil The MMQB 100 between now and July 17, we'll have spots for a U.K. native named Nigel, a retired linebacker, a backup QB and the fifth receiver on a Super Bowl contender . . . and that last one's our little surprise. So here's a preview of The MMQB 100, which debuts this week on the TheMMQB.com with our countdown from 100 to 71. Check the site each week for another installment. And let the arguments fly.

—Peter King



100

RACHEL NICHOLS

CNN REPORTER

Since grilling commissioner Roger Goodell over the NFL's domestic violence crisis and a possible conflict of interest in the Deflategate investigation, Nichols has gotten tremendous support from football fans and her viewers. “The league has worked very hard over the years to weave itself into the fabric of American life,” she says, “but when you take on that public trust, we're all going to hold you to a higher standard.”



98

BLAKE BORTLES

JAGUARS QUARTERBACK

When the Jags took Bortles with the No. 3 pick in 2014, they knew he was a raw talent; as a rookie he had a few brilliant moments but mostly looked overwhelmed. For a fan base wearing the scars of four straight double-digit-loss seasons, Bortles doesn't have to be Mark Brunell. He doesn't even have to be David Garrard. He just has to make enough progress to show that he won't be the next Blaine Gabbert. He has to become proof positive of hope in Jacksonville.



85

KHALIL MACK

RAIDERS LINEBACKER

No player had a greater discrepancy between stats and performance in 2014 than Khalil Mack. That's a good thing. Mack's four sacks represented a small fraction of the damage he inflicted as a pass rusher. Mack consistently ate offensive tackles alive with his lateral burst and redirect ability. He also shined against the run. Oakland, consistently weak on defense during its 12-year playoff drought, finally has a game-changing talent.



31

ODELL BECKHAM JR.

GIANTS RECEIVER



71

TODD GURLEY

RAMS RUNNING BACK

It's hard to believe the two-year drought without a back drafted in the first round ended with a player five months removed from ACL surgery. But that's the kind of talent Gurley is. The combination of power and speed he showed in three seasons at Georgia led some NFL evaluators to proclaim him the best thing to come out of the backfield since Adrian Peterson—and convinced the Rams to rank him No. 1 on their draft board. "You can't teach the things he was doing," former Bulldogs teammate Malcolm Mitchell says. "Watching tape won't even help you prepare for playing against him. His power, his speed; he was jumping over people." The Rams eagerly made Gurley the No. 10 pick on draft night, believing they can build an offense around him. Now the question is, Will he and his knee be able to live up to the lofty expectations, and how soon?

He sat next to Anna Wintour during New York Fashion Week, texts with Michael Jordan, dines with LeBron James, fields appearance requests from every network talk show, can't count his endorsement offers, has one of the NFL's top-selling jerseys and, at age 22, will appear on this year's cover of *Madden*. Beckham is possibly the most popular nonquarterback in the NFL—and he has yet to play a full 16-game season. Ever since his spectacular one-handed grab against the Cowboys in Week 12, the 2014 first-rounder has been pegged as New York's next great sports celebrity. Can he live up to the hype—fair or unfair—or will he flatline as a one-catch wonder?

25

JAMEIS WINSTON

BUCS QUARTERBACK

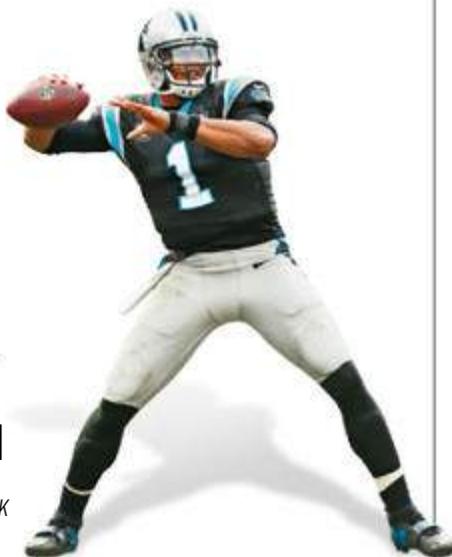
No player will face more scrutiny in 2015 than Winston, whose exceptional talent may be outweighed only by the baggage that accompanied his arrival in Tampa Bay as the first pick in the draft. By now America is well-versed in Winston's tumultuous college career, both on and off the field. Winston could demonstrate poise and maturity, show flashes of on-field greatness and lift a desperate team to respectability. But another off-the-field incident might doom Winston as a franchise quarterback, and his coach (Lovie Smith), general manager (Jason Licht) and offensive coordinator (Dirk Koetter) could be collateral damage. So, Famous Jameis, which is it going to be?



51

CAM NEWTON

PANTHERS QUARTERBACK



Carolina paid big to keep the dynamic (and inconsistent) Newton in Panthers blue. The steep price, \$103.8 million over five years, was as much a testament to the state of the QB market—one of this year's biggest targets was Josh McCown; enough said—as to Newton's accomplishments over his first four seasons. He has already demonstrated he can develop as a passer and win—even with a shoddy offensive line and mediocre supporting cast, Carolina has won two straight NFC South titles—but the stakes are higher when you're a \$100 million man. Newton seems to have no problem in the spotlight, recently telling WCCB-TV in Charlotte, "Nobody has the size, nobody has the speed, nobody has the arm strength, nobody had the intangibles that I've had." Maybe so, but he'll have to back up his words this season and elevate those around him to prove Carolina made the right choice.



17

JIM TOMSULA

49ERS COACH

After a toxic 2014 season, the 49ers desperately need less drama. Hence the unsexy pick of Tomsula, the longtime defensive line coach, to replace Jim Harbaugh. Tomsula didn't exactly wow NFL nation in his first public appearances, but his players know him as congenial, intelligent and a relentless optimist. As San Francisco copes with significant losses as well as a quarterback reinventing himself, Tomsula hopes to smooth things over with his positivity. We'll quickly learn if the franchise is turning the corner to stability or if it spoils even further.



For the complete MMQB 100 list—beginning this week with Nos. 100 to 71—go to TheMMQB.com



FOR THE two days before Christmas of 1997, Michael Brantley and his younger sister, BriAnna, could not see through the windows of the back of their family’s house in Port St. Lucie, Fla. Their parents, Mickey and Nina, had taped them up, though the children could hear their father and a few of his friends banging around back there. Finally, Christmas morning arrived, and they were permitted to run out to their yard. There was a trampoline for BriAnna. For Michael, who was 10, there was a batting cage.

“I went in there and hit forever,” Michael says. “I loved it.”

Christmases were never so extravagant for Mickey when he was young. He grew up the sixth of eleven children—seven boys, four girls—in the blue-collar town of Catskill, N.Y. His father was a foundry worker, and his mother had the even more difficult job of keeping everyone clothed and fed. Even so, there was always extra room at the Brantley table, including, for a time in the early 1980s, for a teenage boxer named Mike Tyson, whose trainer had brought him to upstate New York to keep him out of the trouble he kept getting into back home in Brooklyn.

When he was nine, Mickey took on a paper route, rising at five each morning before school to trudge up and down snowy hills to deliver the Catskill Daily Mail. “We needed money,” he says, 44 years later. “Everyone chipped in. You weren’t going to outwork us.”

Mickey had more than a willingness to work. He also had superior athletic skill and the desire to see where that combination might take him. At 5’ 10”, he could do everything there was to do on a baseball field—hit for average, hit for power, run, catch, throw—and he earned a scholarship to Coastal Carolina, near Myrtle Beach, S.C. In 1983 the Mariners made him their second-round pick in the draft.

Mickey’s work ethic persisted, but his abilities did not. Over the years his body broke down, his tools carved out of him by time and fate. He snapped his right ankle rounding third base in college; his speed was never quite the same. He broke



**THIS FATHER’S
DAY, MICHAEL
BRANTLEY AND HIS
DAD, MICKEY,
HAVE MUCH TO
CELEBRATE.
TOGETHER THEY
HAVE BUILT AN
MVP-CALIBER
SWING AND A
CAREER THAT IS
SURPASSING
MICKEY’S OWN**

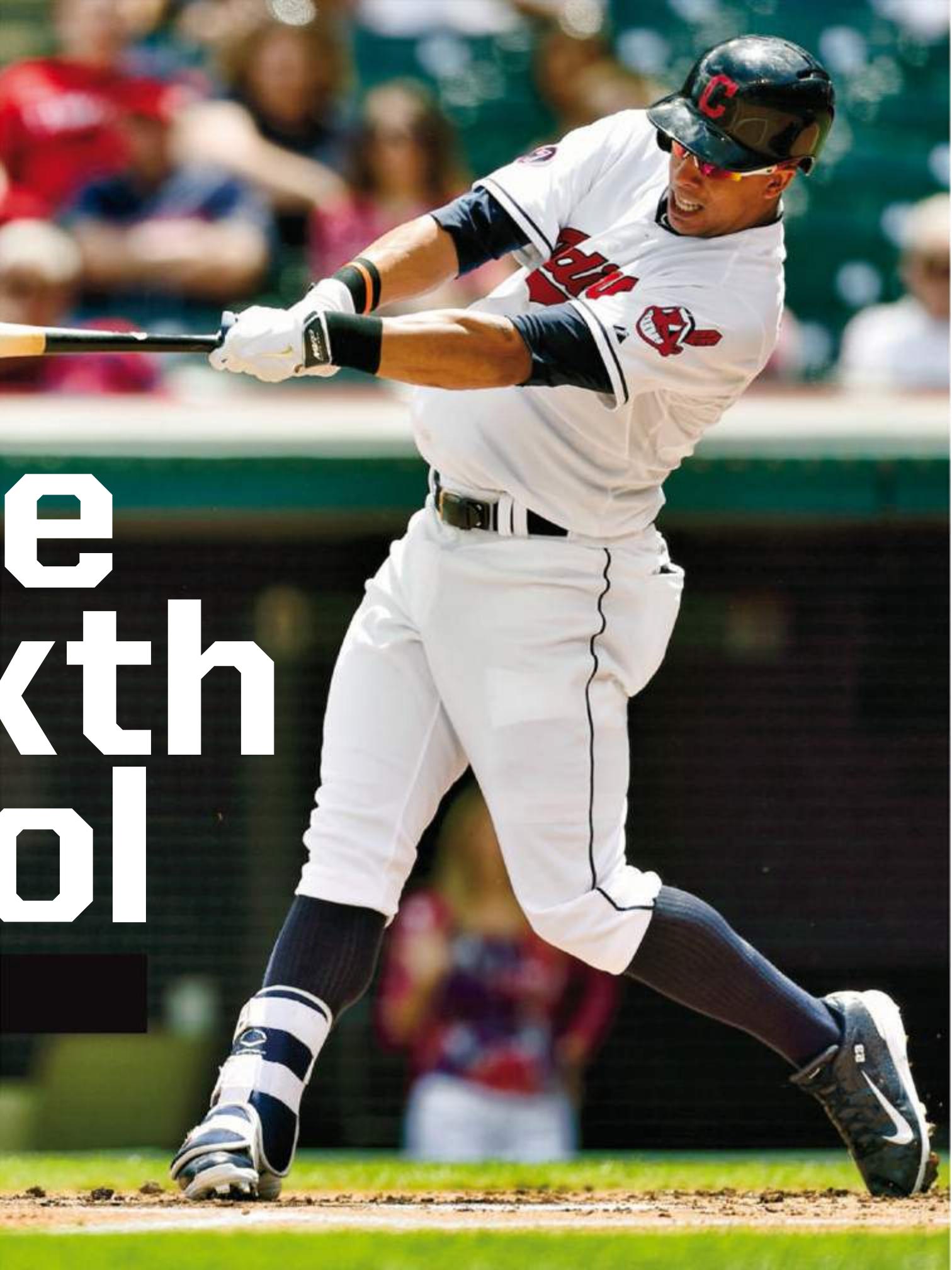
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MICHAEL BRANTLEY

his right wrist in the minors; his swing was never quite the same. He shattered his collarbone running headfirst into a wooden outfield wall at Triple A Calgary; his arm was never quite the same. Though he made the big leagues and batted .302 with 14 homers and 13 steals in 1987, his first full season, by the time he was 28, his centerfield job was gone, taken by a 19-year-old named Ken Griffey Jr. Mickey's last appearance with the Mariners was in 1989. He would spend time in the minor league systems of five other clubs, and a few months in Japan, but he never played in the majors again.

Mickey understood everything it took to excel in baseball, even if his body would no longer allow him to do so. So he became a hitting coach, in the minors for the Giants and the Mets between 1994 and 2004, and then for the Blue Jays between 2005 and '07. His greatest pupil, though, was Michael, born to him and Nina in 1987.

Mickey knew he would be delighted if his son followed in his footsteps. "It's the greatest experience you can possibly have," says Mickey, who speaks as quickly as he used to run. "You get a chance to live the dream." Unlike many sports-minded fathers, however, he refused to push his son toward it, even as Michael began to show the same five tools that his father once had. The desire had to come from Michael himself.

Michael had the desire. In 2005, when he was as an 18-year-old Florida high schooler, the Brewers made him a seventh-round draft pick. Three years later, in 2008, he was the player to be named later in the blockbuster midsummer trade that sent CC Sabathia from the Indians to the Brewers. A young slugger named Matt LaPorta was supposed to



be the Indians' prize in that deal—he had recently been ranked as the game's 23rd best prospect on *Baseball America's* Top 100 list, a list Michael never made—but it did not turn out that way. LaPorta batted .238 with 31 home runs in parts of four major league seasons; he retired from baseball in April at the age of 30. Last season, at 27, Michael batted .327, with 20 home runs, 97 RBIs and 23 steals as the Indians' everyday left-fielder, and finished third in the voting for American League MVP.

Rival scouts will claim they saw Michael Brantley coming. "It's no sur-



LIKE FATHER

Michael (with Mickey last month, above) still draws on his dad's expertise, just as he did when he was little (left).

prise to us in the scouting profession that he had a year like that," one says. "He doesn't hit 500-foot home runs, but he might hit more line drives than any hitter in baseball. To me he seems to slow the game down when it's a big situation; he knows he has good mechanics and knows what he needs to do."

But even the Indians couldn't have confidently predicted that Brantley would become a near-MVP, especially not when they traded for him. "There were a lot of things our scouts and analysts liked: his body, his athleticism, the way he controlled the strike zone," general manager Chris Antonetti says. "But anyone who says they know what a player's going to become—it's not true."

Michael Brantley, as it turned out, had more than the desire to maximize his five tools. He had a sixth tool too, one whose impact on his career was more difficult

**"I HELPED," SAYS
MICHAEL. "BUT
THIS IS A
SWING THAT
WE DEVELOPED
TOGETHER."**

for the Indians and their rivals to project than his foot speed and his throwing arm. His sixth tool was Mickey.

MICKEY'S RULES for working with his son in their backyard cage were simple. "Michael," he told him, "we can do this all day if you're serious about it. If you want to go out and start fooling around, your dad doesn't have time for that." Michael never fooled around. "My dad never forced me one time to go hit," says Michael. "He always told me to enjoy it. Whenever I come off the field, the first thing he asks is if I had fun. He never embarrassed me on the field, never yelled to me from the stands, not once."

The cage was equipped with a pitching machine. It was not just the same *kind* that Keith Hernandez and Darryl Strawberry had once used just up the road at the Mets' spring training complex, but the very same one. It was a decade old, and when the Mets were throwing it away in favor of a newer model, Mickey, then the club's minor league hitting coordinator, asked if he might have it. It was a metal box, the size of a large refrigerator, and on its right side was a spindly, rotating metal arm that could hurl baseballs upward of 65 miles an hour. It vibrated and clanged and whirred, but Mickey believed it was preferable to the modern three-wheeled variety of machine because the pitches

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MICHAEL BRANTLEY

it delivered were unpredictable—some in, some out, some up, some down—and its swinging arm better allowed hitters to develop their rhythm. “The one with the wheels will mess up your timing,” says Michael. Adds Mickey, “Timing is everything.”

Scouts today gush over Michael’s simple, compact lefthanded swing, the one that produces so many line drives, but he does not take even most of the credit for it. “He kind of built it,” says Michael of his father. “I helped, because of all the work I put in. But this is a swing that we developed together.”

In the backyard cage Mickey set about imbuing in Michael’s swing attributes he had picked up from all of the great hitters he had coached during his career. He taught him Barry Bonds’s extreme head turn, which allowed him to track pitches with both eyes (“Most guys are peekers,” says Mickey), and John Olerud’s ability to start to swing at every pitch, only to step out of it with his back foot at the last moment if it wasn’t a good one. The ideal result, to Mickey, was always clear: to hit the back of the cage’s net every time and never the top of it. “I wanted to hit home runs, and he told me no,” Michael says. “Learn to hit, and the power will come.”

When Michael was 15, his idyllic routine of family, school (he had a GPA of 3.85 at Fort Pierce’s Central High) and baseball was shattered when Mickey and Nina got divorced after 17 years of marriage. “It was a very difficult time,” says Michael, who is more deliberate in his speech than his father. (His nickname in Cleveland is Dr. Smooth, and not just for his playing style.) “You love both your parents, but splitting up the household, Dad’s house one day, Mom’s the next? It

was very tough, very challenging. I know a lot of kids go through it.”

Mickey tried to balance his newly tricky fatherhood with the grueling travel his coaching required, but once the Blue Jays let him go in ’07, he decided he’d had enough. He established a private hitting instruction business in Port St. Lucie, largely so he could focus on his now adult children. “I knew they needed me,” he says.

Michael rose steadily up the minor league ladder, hitting as Mickey had taught him. He debuted for the Indians in 2009, at 22, and by 2013 his progress seemed to have plateaued: He batted



HAVING A BALL

Mickey learned hitting not only by playing, but by coaching pros like Bonds and Olerud.

.284, to the previous season’s .288; he hit 10 home runs, to the previous season’s six; and his OPS was .728, to the previous season’s .750. Before last season he finally agreed to do something that Mickey had been encouraging him to do for at least two years: get aggressive.

In the minors and during his first few seasons with Cleveland, Michael had been a leadoff hitter and felt obligated to carry a leadoff hitter’s mind-set. “Working the count, getting on base, walking, making sure I see enough pitches,” he says. “I was a defensive hitter.”

Mickey thought Michael was ready to become a middle-of-the-order force. “He was like, ‘Son, I promise you, if you go to a more aggressive approach,

**“I CAN’T BEAT HIM
IN ANYTHING
ANYMORE,” SAYS
MICKEY. “THE ONLY
THING I’VE GOT
IS FISHING.”**

your umbers will only go up.’ I tried it.”

Over his first five big league seasons Brantley had just 62 first-pitch hits. Last year he had 40, more than all but five other players. He also had 45 doubles in addition to his 20 homers, and no one had more extra-base hits than his 67 while also striking out fewer than his 56 times. “You don’t have to swing at the first pitch,” Mickey had told him, “but you have to be ready to hit it.”

METALLIC PINGS cut through the quiet of a residential neighborhood in Port St. Lucie one afternoon this spring, reverberating off the roofs of ranch-style houses. Mickey spends his days running travel ball teams with a nonprofit called All American Prospects and conducting private lessons, though not in the cage he once built for Michael. That house was sold after the divorce; Mickey and Nina moved into separate abodes, neither of them far from the home where Michael lives during the off-season with his wife and three children. Mickey now gives his lessons in a cage located in the yard of friends of his, Debbie and Steve Douthitt. The Mets’ old pitching machine, called an Iron Mike, sits covered under a tarp; on this day Mickey’s student, an eight-year-old named Boden, was too young for its unpredictable fastballs.



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MICHAEL BRANTLEY

"I'll tell you this," Mickey said, as he flipped underhanded pitches to Boden. "Boden's tenacious."

"What's that mean?" Boden asked.

In the two months after Michael's breakout season, he and his father did what they always do, which is fish for flounder. "Best tasting fish in the ocean," Mickey says. Though they now cast their lines from the deck of Michael's 24-foot Everglades boat, purchased after he signed a four-year, \$25 million contract with the Indians in February 2014, Mickey remains as much a technician about flounder fishing as he is about hitting. "They eat from the tail up, so sometimes it takes two or three minutes before they swallow the whole bait," he says. "Some people can't catch flounder, because they feel the initial hit and they pull up, and the flounder's got only half the bait. You have to wait."

As usual, Mickey reeled in more fish than Michael, though that is one of the only activities in which he retains an advantage over his son. "I can't beat him in anything anymore," says Mickey, proudly. "The only thing I've got is fishing. And pool, maybe. Golf, he kills me. We shoot hoops, play H-O-R-S-E, he kills me."

By last Thanksgiving it was time to get back into the cage in the Douthitts' backyard—first two times a week, then three and then, by January, five. They started with bottom hand drills, in which Michael would grip a short, heavy bat they've nicknamed Fat Albert with only his right hand and hit off a tee, in order to train his path to the ball. Then he would take two-handed swings at the tee, which was sometimes elevated to encourage barrel control. Then they would fire up the Iron Mike. The goal was the same as it had ever been: to strike the ball to the cage's back net, never its top or sides.

For the 2015 season Mickey presented Michael with a new goal: to hit the ball the opposite way with power. "I got very comfortable, on fastballs away, hitting a single to left, because I can," Michael



FIELD DAY

Brantley is known as Dr. Smooth in Cleveland, as much for his demeanor as for his style of play.

says. "We were talking about staying over the ball and driving it to left center, over the leftfielder's head."

It wouldn't prove to be easy. If Michael was once overlooked by opposing pitchers, he isn't anymore. "They're doing a lot more careful job of pitching to me this year," Michael says. "I'm getting 3-and-0 breaking balls, unintentional intentional walks." Through Sunday, Michael was on pace to draw over 35% more bases on balls—73—than he ever had before. He was also, however, batting .301, and was second on the Indians with 33 RBIs and in the AL with 19 doubles.

After every game, Michael calls or texts Mickey, who he knows has broken down each of Michael's at bats frame-by-frame on his DVR, for tips that can now be communicated in shorthand: "hand path," "feet." Michael knows that Mickey is willing to hop on the first flight to wherever he is playing to work with him directly, as he has a few times already this season. "I don't show up to his games, I don't go out to Cleveland, I'm not part of that system," Mickey says. "Only time I ever go to see my son is when he calls for his pops."

**"THE ONLY TIME I
EVER GO TO SEE
MY SON IS WHEN
HE CALLS FOR
HIS POPS," SAYS
MICKEY.**

Mickey usually has to watch no more than five of Michael's swings to see what has gone wrong.

While clubs have been known to take issue with such parental involvement, the Indians do not object to Mickey's. "His dad knows his swing better than anybody," says manager Terry Francona. "That he is a former player and hitting coach certainly helps."

Mickey will work with Michael's children—an eight-year-old stepson, who so far has shown more of a passion for football, as well as a 21-month-old daughter and an infant son—but only if they want him to. "Kids love him—they absolutely love him," says Michael. "It's a gift he has." On this afternoon in Port St. Lucie, Mickey was focused on Boden, who swung as his mother and sister watched.

"How you holding up?" Mickey asked, as he sat on an overturned bucket and lobbed pitches in the boy's direction.

"Good!" Boden said.

"You tired?"

"No!"

"Oh, boy," Mickey said, grinning. "That means I have to throw more."

More often than not, Boden's swings produced line drives that screamed past Mickey's head and over the tarp-covered Iron Mike, and struck the very back of the batting cage's net. □

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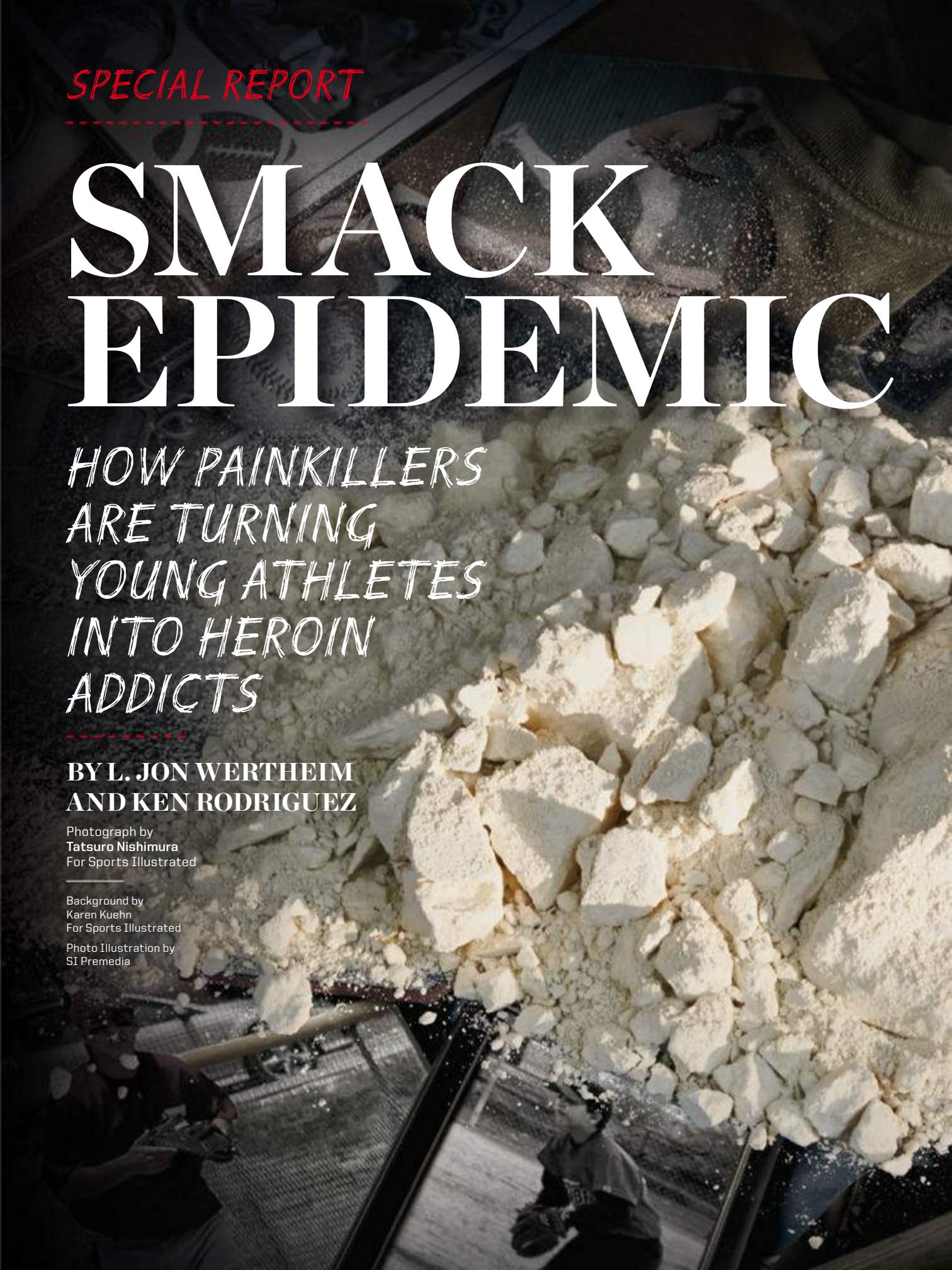
*HOW PAINKILLERS
ARE TURNING
YOUNG ATHLETES
INTO HEROIN
ADDICTS*

**BY L. JON WERTHEIM
AND KEN RODRIGUEZ**

Photograph by
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For Sports Illustrated

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For Sports Illustrated

Photo Illustration by
SI Premedia





ROMAN MONTANO had barely learned cursive when he was asked to sign his first baseball. Parents of teammates had watched him dominate game after game in Albuquerque's Little League during the summer of 2000,

mowing down batters and belting home runs. The autograph requests were mostly facetious, but what they signified was clear: The kid was going somewhere.

The next few years only confirmed that notion. Roman grew to 6' 6" and 250 pounds. He made a mockery of the weight room at Eldorado High and ran the 40-yard dash in 4.9. As a sophomore defensive lineman he was honorable mention all-state in Class 5A. He also joined the basketball team his senior year, giving in to the pleadings of the coach, and was instantly the Eagles' best player. And after high school, when he trained with the legion of MMA fighters based in Albuquerque, they encouraged him to compete as a heavyweight.

Baseball, though, was always his favorite sport—"the most funnest," as he had put it to the *Albuquerque Tribune* when he was 12. He once struck out all 18 batters in a Thunderbird League game. The towering righty was Eldorado High's ace, his fastball reaching the 90s. The second starter? Ken Giles, now a flame-throwing Phillies reliever. "You're talking about a guy with a ton of potential: size, natural ability, attitude," Giles says. "Everyone wanted to be him, but everyone wanted to be around him, too. The first word I would use to describe Roman is *lovable*."

A foot injury his junior year didn't derail Roman. He needed minor surgery on a small bone, but he popped some OxyContin and after a few weeks was back on the mound. His senior year Roman planned to lead Eldorado to a state title and then declare for the 2008 major league draft (the Braves had expressed the most interest in him), spurning about 20 Division I scholarship offers. Before the season, though, Roman committed one of those judgment-deprived acts for which teenagers are known. He and some friends used a stolen credit card at a mall. They got caught. The school found out. Though it was Roman's first offense, he was kicked off the team.

Humiliated, angry and depressed, Roman thought back to the numbing effect of the OxyContin. His prescription had run out, but that wasn't much of an impediment. In the upscale Northeast Heights—more *High School Musical* Albuquerque than *Breaking Bad* Albuquerque—painkillers were competing with marijuana and alcohol as the party drug of choice. "There are pill parties," says Roman's younger brother, Beau. "[Pills are] so easy to get. They're everywhere."

Roman was soon in the grip of Oxy. He lost interest in baseball. He showed up high for graduation. JoAnn Montano and her husband, Bo, who owns a wheel-alignment and body-shop business, figured their son was just floundering—until JoAnn caught him using. She took him to an addiction center, and he was prescribed Suboxone to treat his opioid dependency.

Roman, though, couldn't fully kick his habit. Before graduation he had switched to a cheaper substance that offered the same high at a lower price: heroin.

IN SPORTS,
HEROIN IS LIKE
“A WEAPON
OF MASS
DESTRUCTION,”
RILEY SAYS.
“IT IS THAT
PERVERSIVE NOW.”

At first Roman smoked “black” (black-tar heroin), a relatively crude version of the drug that was easy to obtain. Then he began using intravenously. But he hid his addiction well. He stayed on Suboxone, took up competitive bodybuilding and started training at an MMA gym. He had a job selling phones for Verizon. “He looked so healthy, a big, strapping guy, not like a junkie,” says Bo. “He was back doing his athletics. We thought the addiction was behind us. We didn’t know how cunning and how manipulative this drug is.”

On May 2, 2012, Roman was supposed to lift weights with his father in the morning. Roman didn’t show up, and texts to him went unanswered. His fiancée, Mikaila Lovato, couldn’t find him either.

In the evening two chaplains went to the Montanos’ house, asking for Roman’s next of kin. They said that Roman had been found slumped in the driver’s seat of his car behind a FedEx store, a syringe in his arm, the motor running. He was 22 and dead from a heroin overdose.

IT IS, by any measure, an epidemic. Heroin is not new or chic, but its use and abuse are spiking. According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Center for Health Statistics, heroin-overdose deaths rose gradually from 2000 to ’10 but then almost tripled in the following three years to 2.7 deaths per 100,000 people. Heroin use cuts across demographics. Young, old. Male, female. Wealthy, indigent. Urban, rural and, most of all, suburban. But public authorities devoted to prevention and law enforcement, from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), have been struck by a growing concentration in an unlikely subset of users: young athletes.

About a decade ago Jack Riley, the DEA’s chief of operations, recognized that high school athletes were becoming “unwitting customers of the cartels,” which target people susceptible to prescription-drug abuse. The number of addicts and overdose victims has grown substantially since then. “In the athletic arena, if anything can be likened to a weapon of mass destruction, it’s heroin,” Riley says. “It is that pervasive now.”

While hard data for heroin use among young athletes are difficult to come by, the anecdotal evidence is abundant and alarming. A seven-month SI investigation found overdose victims in baseball, basketball, football, golf, gymnastics, hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, swimming, tennis, volleyball and wrestling—from coast to coast. Riley saw this as a volunteer in a youth basketball



ROMAN MONTANO

The former multisport high school star died of an overdose after hiding his relapse from his parents, Bo and JoAnn.



league in St. Louis. He coached a player who, years after suffering an injury, succumbed to a heroin overdose. The cartels, Riley says, “have developed a strategy, with the help of street gangs, to put heroin in every walk of life. They recognize how vulnerable young athletes are.”

To understand the increasingly busy intersection of heroin and sports, it’s essential first to understand the general path to the drug. According to the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, a full 80% of all users arrive at heroin after abusing opioid painkillers such as OxyContin, Percocet and Vicodin. And according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, one in 15 people who take nonmedical prescription painkillers will try

heroin within the next 10 years. While opioid painkillers can cost up to \$30 per pill on the black market, heroin, which is molecularly similar, can be purchased for \$5 a bag and provides a more potent high. "It's an easy jump," says Harris Stratyner, a New York City addiction specialist.

Studies have shown that while cumulative pain levels remained constant among Americans, prescriptions for pain medications more than quadrupled between 1999 and 2010. As the sports industry expands each year—and the stakes on rinks, fields and courts grow higher—young athletes face enormous pressure to manage their pain and play through injuries.

A University of Michigan researcher uncovered a startling number in a 2013 national study: By the time high school athletes become seniors, approximately 11% will have used a narcotic pain reliever such as OxyContin or Vicodin—for nonmedical purposes. What's more, UM researcher Philip Todd Veliz, who conducted a 2013 longitudinal study of 743 male and 751 female adolescents in southeast Michigan that was published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*, told SI that "male adolescent athletes who participated in competitive sports across the three-year study period had two times greater odds of being prescribed painkillers during the past year and had four times greater odds of medically misusing painkillers (i.e., using them to get high and using them too much) when compared to males who did not participate in competitive sports."

Moreover, "sports that involve high levels of contact (e.g., football) tend to socialize youth to view pain, violence and risk as normative features," Veliz said, and these "may influence risky behavior both on and off the playing field. In other words, participants in contact sports learn to view their body as an instrument that can be easily gambled with, even if it would involve permanent damage."

Consider Patrick Trevor. In the spring of 2009, Patrick was a sophomore lacrosse goalie at Rumson-Fair Haven, a well-regarded New Jersey high school with many students whose parents take ferries to jobs on Wall Street. A teammate's fluke shot in practice shattered Patrick's right thumb. He had two immediate concerns: easing the pain and getting back on the field. A future college scholarship, after all, was on the line. The doctor who examined Patrick prescribed Roxycodone (Roxy in the vernacular), a cousin of OxyContin.

Patrick quickly became addicted to the medication and even took to crushing and snorting his pills. But he reckoned that playing high was better than playing in pain—which was better than not playing at all. "Us athletes," he says, "we'll do anything in order to keep playing." Within a few years Patrick had made the transition to heroin. His Roxy prescription had lapsed; his fondness for the high had not. At first he illegally purchased pills from friends; then he ventured into the worst pockets of Newark to get his heroin fix. College lacrosse had become the least of his concerns.

Patrick was arrested and spent a short time in jail. He went to several rehab facilities before finding success at the Dynamite Youth Center in Brooklyn. He proudly says his clean



CAMERON WEISS

By the time of his fatal overdose at 18, he was a shadow of the boy in the photo held by his mom, Jennifer.

date is Oct. 2, 2012. He was struck by how many athletes he saw at such a small facility. "Hockey, football, lacrosse," he says. "[Heroin is] a big thing in sports."

How big is difficult to say. "This should be on people's research agenda," Veliz says, lamenting the lack of reliable statistics. "Because this is actually happening."

MORE THAN a decade ago Amber Masters played soccer for Esperanza High in Anaheim despite a hyperextended right knee. "I had to," she says. "We had college scouts there.") Colliding with another player, she tore tissue in the same knee. Surgery ended her season, and she became dependent on the opiate-based painkiller Norco.

When the prescription expired, she wanted to keep experiencing the feeling Norco gave her. A friend introduced her to Oxy. As Amber, once a gifted forward, chased a painkiller high, her soccer career imploded. Academic probation kept her off the team as a junior, and by the time she returned as a senior, she was not the same player. College recruiters disappeared. "I didn't really care," she says. "I had the party scene."

She first took heroin the summer before she enrolled at Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa, Calif. "I was addicted from the first hit I took," she says. Within a year she had dropped out of school, become a dealer ("I was my best customer," she says) and introduced her younger brother, Adam, to the drug. Amber became a mother. She eluded the law, but Adam was less fortunate. He went to jail for possession of narcotics. Then, on April 13, 2012, he died from an overdose. "That sent my addiction into a hard-core downward spiral," Amber says.

More trauma followed. Amber says her parents, Jerry and Ginger, sent her to rehab, kicked her out of the house

when she relapsed, and refused to let her visit her daughter. (Ginger contends that she and Jerry set ground rules that Amber refused to obey. “She chose to leave,” Ginger says.)

The separation was a sobering jolt to Amber. “I had a waking-up moment,” she says. “I knew it was only a matter of time before I would die and leave my daughter behind.” She entered rehab. Today she works in the billing department of an addiction recovery center in Irvine, Calif. She says she’s been clean since Oct. 19, 2012.

It’s disturbing enough that athletes such as Masters come to heroin through painkillers prescribed after an injury. But SI’s reporting revealed a shocking contributing factor: Families consistently said that they received no warning from physicians about the addictive power of the opioid painkillers they prescribed. Patrick Trevor recalls that the doctor who prescribed Roxy for him jokingly said, “You got the good stuff.” Trevor adds, “I didn’t really put two and two together until later . . . when I was a full-blown heroin addict. I knew painkillers were not good, but I didn’t know how crazy addictive they were.”

In 2014 the CDC issued a report headlined PHYSICIANS ARE FUELING PRESCRIPTION PAINKILLER OVERDOSES. The study found that doctors were engaging in “dangerous” and “inappropriate” prescription practices. “Anyone who is giving a kid an opioid prescription without serious oversight and supervision is out of their mind,” says Joe Schrank, a New York City-based drug counselor and former USC offensive lineman. “That stuff is like kryptonite.”

IF THERE is an epicenter for the heroin-in-sports crisis, it’s Albuquerque (pop. 550,000), a high-altitude city less than 300 miles from the Mexican border. A report by the New Mexico health department found that the drug-overdose death rate in the state jumped by more than 60% between 2001 and ’10, and in New Mexico’s Youth Risk and Resiliency survey one in 10 youths admitted to using opiate-based prescription drugs to get high. In Albuquerque at least eight athletes have died from heroin or painkiller overdoses since ’11. (The very week in April that SPORTS ILLUSTRATED visited the city to report this story, a former local baseball

PATRICK TREVOR

The former lacrosse player kicked his heroin addiction in rehab and has been clean for more than two years.



star, James Diz, died of an apparent heroin overdose at 23.)

Cameron Weiss was a strapping wrestler and football special-teams player at La Cueva High. In 2010, his sophomore year, he broke his left collarbone making a tackle in practice and required surgery; months later he fractured his right collarbone while wrestling. He went on pain medication (Percocet and hydrocodone) and was soon ditching school and failing the AP classes he had been mastering. He confessed to his mother that he was addicted to heroin. Because of a federal law that prevents doctors from prescribing buprenorphine, a component of Suboxone, to more than 100 patients at a time, Jennifer Weiss-Burke had to call 80 physicians before she could get her son an appointment for a Suboxone prescription. On the drive to the doctor’s, Cameron went into severe withdrawal. He was “combative, sweating, in a ton of pain,” Jennifer says. “He was throwing up. He looked horrible.”

Cameron’s body had come to need the sustained opioid intake. Once he received the Suboxone, his withdrawal symptoms vanished. “After 15 minutes it was like he was normal again—laughing and happy,” says his mother. But then she learned the reality of addiction: Sobriety can be fleeting. Soon her son was using again. “It was a living hell,” she says. He died of a heroin overdose at 18.

Lou Duran can relate. She watched her son, Michael, make the varsity baseball team at Sandia Prep as an eighth-grader and, two years later, become addicted to OxyContin after he strained his knee playing soccer. Michael hardly fit the profile of an addict: He spent hours hitting balls in a batting cage with teammates. He excelled academically. Owing to his blend of intelligence and athleticism, Lou called him her “Einstein jock.”

Because of his addiction, though, his baseball career unraveled. He was kicked out of private school, went to public school and then dropped out. After earning his GED, he went to San Diego City College, but he quickly transferred to New Mexico State in Las Cruces. Then he began using heroin. He went to rehab and attended therapy, only to relapse five times. Lou and her husband, Michael Sr., rode waves of terror followed by temporary relief. They witnessed their son’s excruciating withdrawals and fleeting stretches of sobriety. Finally, in early 2011, Michael seemed to have broken free of the drug.

On Feb. 1, the evening of a historic winter snowstorm, a white Audi TT pulled up to the Durans’ house in subzero temperatures. Michael, 19, gave the driver cash he had stolen from his mother’s purse. The driver handed him a bag of heroin. From a distance Michael Sr. recognized trouble. “Get in the house now,” he barked to his son. Turning to the driver, he said, “Get out of here while you still can.” The Audi sped away.

Michael had been scheduled to deliver an antidrug speech

FAMILIES SAID
THEY RECEIVED
NO WARNING
FROM PHYSICIANS
ABOUT THE
ADDICTIVE
POWER OF
PAINKILLERS.



that evening at Eldorado High. He was going to address a seminar for concerned family members and students organized by Healing Addiction in Our Community, telling them about his struggle with painkillers and heroin: how he had been a standout baseball player who took his first drug at 15; how he revived two friends who had overdosed; how he wound up in jail. The winter blast, though, closed roads and postponed the speech. When Michael went inside his house, he gave his parents a persuasive story: The guy in the car was a friend who had stopped by to check up on him. Michael went upstairs to his bedroom.

Lou remembers the silence when she knocked on Michael's door the next afternoon. She remembers kicking it open and

**MICHAEL
DURAN**
*Since his death
his mother, Lou
(with Michael Sr.
and their
daughter, Nikkie),
has worked in
rehab centers.*

scanning the room. Her eyes flashed across an unmade bed, an empty couch, a television turned on, and she was relieved. Then, as she turned to leave, she found Michael's body.

Later Michael Sr. discovered notes from the antidrug speech his son was supposed to have given. One of the bullet points: *Lucky to be here today at all because I've cheated death more times than I can count.*

WHEN HER son became an addict in 2010, Jennifer Weiss-Burke began an awareness and advocacy group for relatives and friends of drug-dependent children. The group—Healing Addiction in Our Community, which Michael Duran was to have addressed the night he died—has grown to 50 members. It includes several families of young athletes who have overdosed on opioids. Weiss-Burke is also cofounder and executive director of Serenity Mesa, a long-term treatment center for young people in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, which opened on May 26.

Nearby, the Durans continue to grieve. After her son died, Lou went through his text messages, found his dealer's phone number and tracked down his address. She gave the information to the DEA and FBI. "A week later," she says, "he was arrested." Lou now works at Turning Point Recovery Center, a local treatment facility.

On Albuquerque's northeast side, the Montanos' business, the Wheel Align It II body shop, doubles as a shrine to Roman. The office walls are covered with photos of him on the mound, standing next to UFC fighters, alongside Ken Giles. Giles learned of Roman's death while in the minors—"I lost it for a good week," he says—and now has the letters RM written with permanent marker on each of his major league gloves.

Bo Montano, a former wrestler who still carries himself like an athlete, has an elaborate tattoo on his right forearm in which Roman's initials are framed by the words SO OTHERS MAY LIVE. Like the Durans and Jennifer Weiss-Burke, Bo and JoAnn Montano honor their deceased son by involving themselves in drug treatment and prevention. Through churches and schools around Albuquerque, they lead a 12-step recovery program for addicts and alcoholics and introduce them to sponsors. The Montanos also make a point of hiring recovering addicts at the body shop. "It helps us more than it helps them," says Bo. "It gives us some peace."

Sitting on stools inside the shop this spring, the Montanos recounted these successes. But they stopped short of telling a story that's too tidy. Their saga, finally, is a contemporary tragedy. They replayed the final few years of their son's life, wondering what subtle signs or symptoms they missed. "[Roman] was fighting the best he could, but the drug had control," said Bo. "If things are going great, you use [heroin] to celebrate. If things are going bad, you use it to numb."

JoAnn, blinking back tears, said, "You know what really breaks my heart? My son knew he was meant to be an athlete. Sports was his first addiction. He just ran into another addiction that was so much more powerful." □



From Horror To Hope

→ BY STEVE RUSHIN

IN THE FIRST summer in our house in Connecticut we put up a basketball hoop whose bright orange rim shone like a beacon. Almost immediately the kid across the street appeared in our driveway and without a word began to shoot.

His jump shot was awkward, but his tank top on that July afternoon in 2005 revealed the body of a professional athlete: all rippling muscles, overlaid with scars.

In the days that followed, in halting English, he said his name was David Quenah, that he preferred soccer, and his favorite player was George Weah, who had played for AC Milan by way of Liberia. It was from Liberia that 16-year-old David had emigrated in 2004 to live with his aunt Bendu, and her husband, Michael, in the house across from ours.

As a small boy on his father's sugarcane plantation, David collected rubber-tree sap, dried it in the sun, "folded it like a croissant," sealed it with more rubber and inflated it with his lungs to make a misshapen soccer ball. "I was six years old," he later wrote in a journal, "and one bright day followed another."

On one such Saturday in 1994, while David played in a neighbor's hut, he heard a chilling thunder: Masked rebels with guns and machetes were overrunning his village. The Liberian civil war had arrived on his doorstep, and David fled through sugarcane fields, the razor-sharp leaves slicing him until his shirt was soaked crimson. Then, for five hours he quietly crawled back to the edge of his neighbor's hut.

There, from behind a log, he spied his "honorable, kind, powerful" father, Joseph, on the ground, stripped to his boxers, hands tied. "I felt a cold rifle pipe at the back of my neck," recalls David. The gunman forced the six-year-old boy to stand and watch as his father's throat was cut. Blood pooled around the boy's flip-flops.

His eldest brother, Lincoln, was also butchered. "I don't want to die like this," Lincoln had told his brother, who ran for help to their uncle's village two hours away. But it was also overtaken, and the boy fled into the woods. "This went on for weeks," David says, "then months, and it turned to years."

A native speaker of Kpelle, David eventually found himself living with a family friend in Monrovia, where he learned his first bits of English: "I'm hungry" and "Where is the food?"

My neighbor looks back at his war-torn childhood in Liberia and says, "Playing soccer was the one time I could feel calm."



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"Playing soccer," he says of those years, "was the one time I could feel calm." From across our Connecticut street I'd see him juggling a soccer ball in his yard when he wasn't working countless jobs—pizza joint, grocery stores, apple orchard—to send money to family in Liberia.

David was a sophomore forward when his Granby Memorial High soccer team won the Class S state championship in 2005. When he appeared on the front page of *The Hartford Courant* in his graduation cap and gown a few years later, I saw him in the Stop & Shop parking lot clutching a copy. He liked to read—"I've read your articles and books," he told me—and had begun to write his life story.

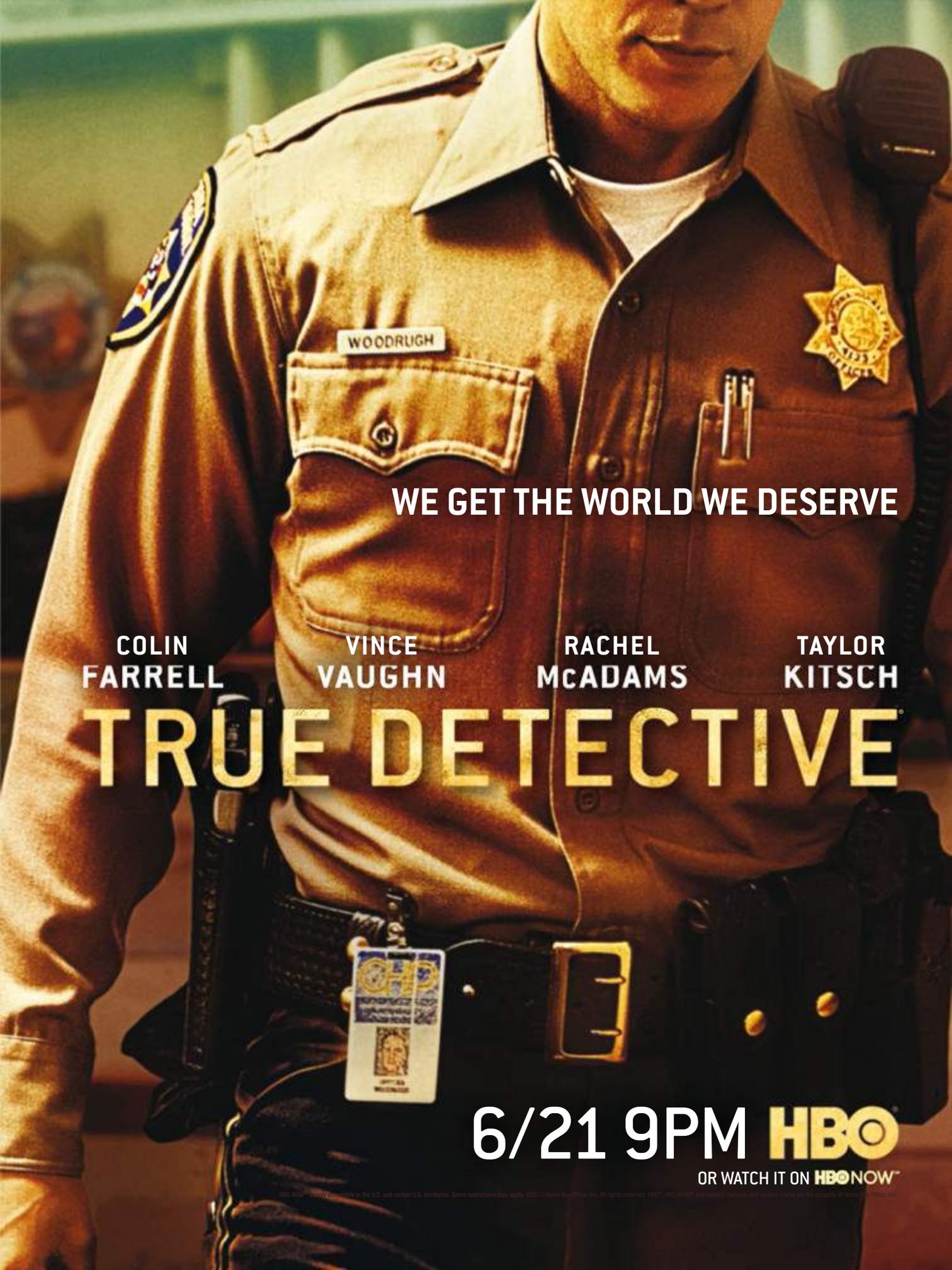
He was finding, as his English improved, that writing imposed order on chaos. He had witnessed the relative might of pen and sword, and decided which would prevail. "The most powerful people on earth are not presidents," he says. "They are teachers and writers."

Ten years after his first appearance, David is back in my driveway, beneath a weathered hoop, laughing at my four screaming kids who greet him. David is 27 now, a junior at Western Connecticut State, and he hopes to become a soccer coach after graduate school. He has already started the nonprofit Liberian-American International Soccer Exchange Program, or FC LASEP (ispwal.com), on which he's spent \$7,000 of his own money to buy the equipment and uniforms he shipped to Liberia. In July he will fly to his homeland to help train impoverished kids—"Kids like I was"—in the hope of getting them U.S. college scholarships in the sport that is his refuge.

"A test from God," he calls his unfathomable childhood, and all those Biblical trials are now fuel. "It's like a stone in a slingshot," he says of his life. "You get pulled back, but that's what moves you forward." □



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