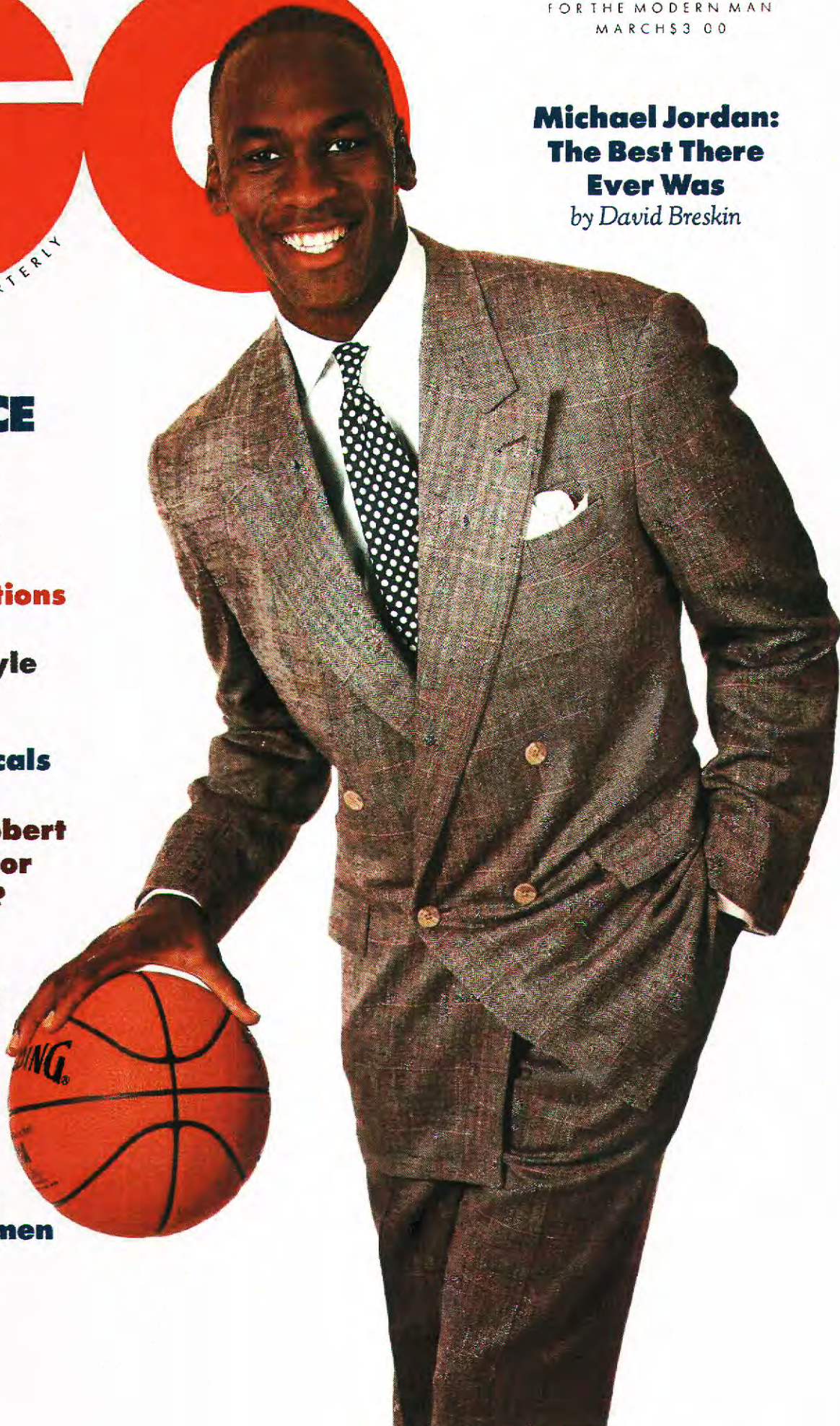




FOR THE MODERN MAN  
MARCH \$3.00

**Michael Jordan:  
The Best There  
Ever Was**  
*by David Breskin*



**EASY  
ELEGANCE**

**Spring's Best  
Suits & Shoes**

**Italian Collections**

**Flushing Quayle**  
*by Edward Sorel*

**Downhill Rascals**

**Telegenius Robert  
Pittman: Savior  
Or Antichrist?**  
*by Ron Powers*

**Three Perfect  
Vacations**

**Great Fiction**  
*by Robert Stone*

**Hairy Men...  
And Why Women  
Love Them**





## FASHION

### 295 EASY ELEGANCE

Menswear's wherefores and wheretos

### 296 THIRTISSOMETHING

Shady hues will come and go, but nothing's continuously as crisp and elegant as navy-and-white

### 308 GQ PREDICTS: THE ELEGANCE OF TONE-ON-TONE

The Charvet way: Put solid shirts together with ties in related shades for a look that's very put-together

### 312 DOG-DAY AFTERNOONS

Sporty spectators, bucks, woven-leather lace-ups—the next best things to bare feet this summer

### 348 DAILY DOUBLES

Sophisticated double-breasted business suits with winning accessories for guys on the fast track

### 354 THE ITALIAN COLLECTIONS

Desert flowers: Sun, sand and stone color the Milanese mood this season, with swarthy (if rocky) Moroccan terrain its backdrop

354  
ITALIAN DRESSING  
MEANS SPICED-UP  
DESERT COLORS



THE CHICAGO BULLS' USUALLY AIRBORNE MICHAEL JORDAN LANDS LONG ENOUGH FOR US TO GET OFF A SHOT—OF HIM, IN HIS OWN FOUR-BUTTON DOUBLE-BREASTED GLEN-PLAID WOOL SUIT AND COTTON SHIRT, CUSTOM-MADE BY BIGSBY & KRUTHERS IN CHICAGO. SILK TIE BY LOUIS, BOSTON, ABOUT \$65. (HAIR AND GROOMING: RODNEY MARTIN FOR PIPINO-BUCCHERI, N.Y.C.) PHOTOGRAPHED EXCLUSIVELY FOR GQ BY AVEDON.

## FEATURES

### 318 MICHAEL JORDAN, IN HIS OWN ORBIT

A bona fide hero and basketball's best, he's fiercely opposed to booze, drugs and mistakes—despite bad dreams of being triple-teamed by the same  
By David Breskin

### 324 THE COOL, DARK TELEGENIUS OF ROBERT PITTMAN

Nurtured by the boob tube as a kid, this 35-year-old child may be father to the medium's future—with MTV and Morton Downey Jr. already his eerie offspring  
By Ron Powers

### 328 BEDTIME TORY

A piquant mix of Brit wit and Garboesque mystery, Scandalous behavior Joanne Whalley spies stardom

### 332 J. DANFORTH: MAN OF DESTINY

The first in a monthly glimpse of the man who *(gulp)* could be king/By Edward Sorel

### 336 THE ENDLESS WINTER

For Vail ski instructors, life is a snow job—the chief challenges of which are teaching geeks, pounding brews and satisfying eager female students/By Peter Mehlman

### 340 THE TROUBLE WITH HAIRY

Do you have to shave with a machete? Is your hair shirt permanently donned? Advice from experts to help you cope with that coat/By Amy Tardio

### 346 DOES HIRSUTE SUIT HER?

Splitting hairs: Wherein three modern women discover the roots of passion/By Lucy Kaylin

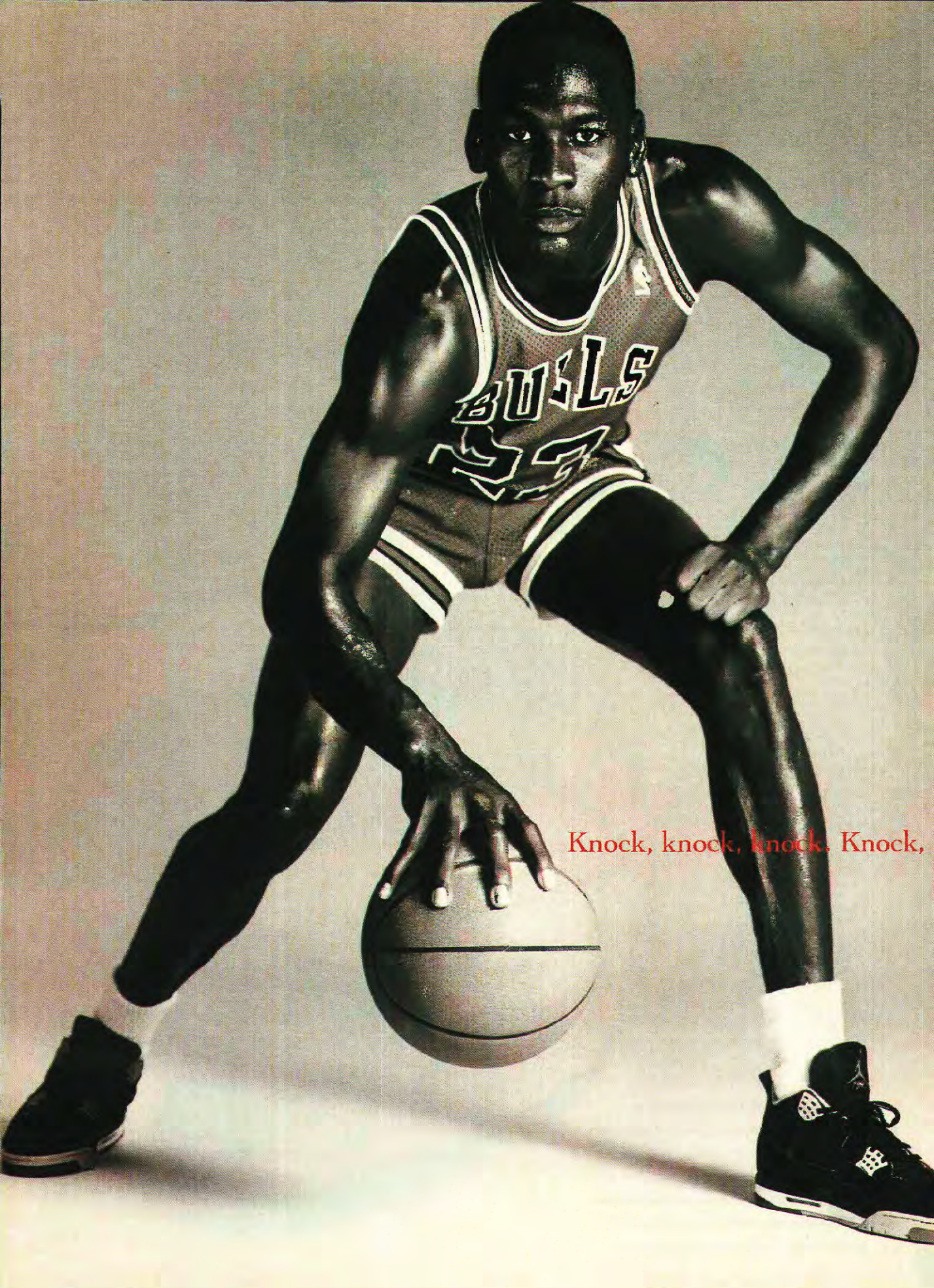


324  
HE'S HAD HIS MTV.  
NOW HE WANTS  
MORE



376  
TURKEY WITH ALL  
THE TRIMMINGS





Knock, knock, knock. Knock,



# Michael Jordan,

## *In His Own Orbit*

C O V E R  
S T O R Y

Moment to moment  
with the greatest, the  
richest, basketball  
player ever cut from  
his high-school team

B y D a v i d  
B r e s k i n

**knock, knock.** Michael Jordan is in a Peoria hotel hallway, during a preseason road trip his rookie year, trying to get into his teammates' party. He comes to the pros having just cocaptained the U.S. basketball team to a gold medal in the 1984 Olympics, and having twice been voted College Player of the Year. He comes with a heavy rep and a big contract, and he wants most of all to fit in, be one of the guys, make friends. *Knock, knock, knock.* There is a secret code, and he doesn't know it. There is a towel under the door. He keeps knocking. Finally, he identifies himself, and the door opens. He walks in. Most of his team is sprawled about the room: drunk, stoned, coked.

Michael Jordan is nervous. He's not sure what to do. On impulse, he says, "Enjoy yourselves," turns and walks right out. As he walks down the hallway, he figures these guys are talking behind his back, saying he's a nerd.



Back in his room, proud but alone, he wonders, "God, is this what the NBA is about?" Is he afraid his teammates will scorn him for his superior attitude? "No," he says. "Because I was taught that a hurt dog'll holler, always. If they are going to be mad at me because I'm trying to lead a positive life, then I must be steppin' on some very soft toes there."

**M**ICHAEL JORDAN LIKES TO TELL THE WON'T-PLAY-IN-Peoria story when he speaks out against drug use. Today, in August '88, he speaks at two Chicago hospitals with John Lucas, a twelve-year NBA veteran who's been at a lot of parties Jordan would have walked out of. Lucas, a three-time loser to cocaine addiction, now runs his own antidrug program in a number of cities. He speaks from the pain of experience, and he's recruited Jordan to sing the song of innocence. Jordan talks of self-control, of knowing right from wrong, of never being tempted by drugs or alcohol—not even beer. He talks of leaning on family and friends in the down times. As he speaks, his eyes shine, his lovely smile shines, even his fingernails shine. He's six feet six, happy, rich and squeaky-clean: To a roomful of troubled kids, he's the brother from another planet.

Jordan leaves the hospital with Lucas in his slate-gray Corvette convertible. The license plate says "FLITE 23." Tiny "Baby Jordan" sneaks hang from the rearview mirror (\$29.95 at a store near you, and your toddler won't go through them any faster than Michael goes through his \$110 models—one pair a game). Michael drives to a local barbershop. He doesn't seem to have any hair to cut, just a thin layer of curlicue cilia floating on his head. But he wants a haircut. Maybe two.

There's a picture of Michael on the wall of the barbershop, and when he arrives, a pride of kids begins to gather and stalk the shop. Such havoc is being raised that the barber has to close his doors. The kids press their faces to the window. And there Jordan sits, under the whirring blade, still proud but no longer alone. And in a way, in his fishbowl, more alone than ever. When it's time to go—after a day of signing autographs, patting heads, speaking out, being inspirational, being *Michael Jordan*—he escapes out the back door.

**M**ICHAEL JORDAN GREW UP GOING TO CHURCH IN Wilmington, North Carolina. He continued going to church regularly when he was in college. He still prays by himself and believes in the Almighty, but he has pretty much stopped going to church. Not that he doesn't want to. With children constantly gazing at him as if he were a deity and adults reaching out to touch him as if—several close to him have observed—he were Jesus Christ, a morning in church would surely soothe his soul. But there's a problem.

"When I go to church," Michael says, "any church I go to, it doesn't *seem* like church to me, because every-

body stares. I went back to my own church in Wilmington a few times since I've been in the pros, and it really hasn't been the same old church. It's more or less 'Well, Michael is here today, let's have him speak for us.' "

Jordan doesn't quite understand this. Actually, it sort of spooks him. Can't he be the best in the world at what he does without people taking it so *personally*?

**A**RTIFICIAL SUNLIGHT IS POURING THROUGH THE WINDOWED panes of a gym in Chicago. Fog is swirling about, cranes are hovering, cameras are ready to roll. It's another day at the office for Michael Jordan.

Practice is this afternoon, but first he has a little business to do. (Michael Jordan always has a little business to do.) Today, he is required to dribble past a number of cereal boxes on the polished hardwood floor, put the ball down, pick up the last box, hold it up, gaze at it intently, look at the camera and *smile*. Occasionally, he is required to wink during the smile. This is no problem.

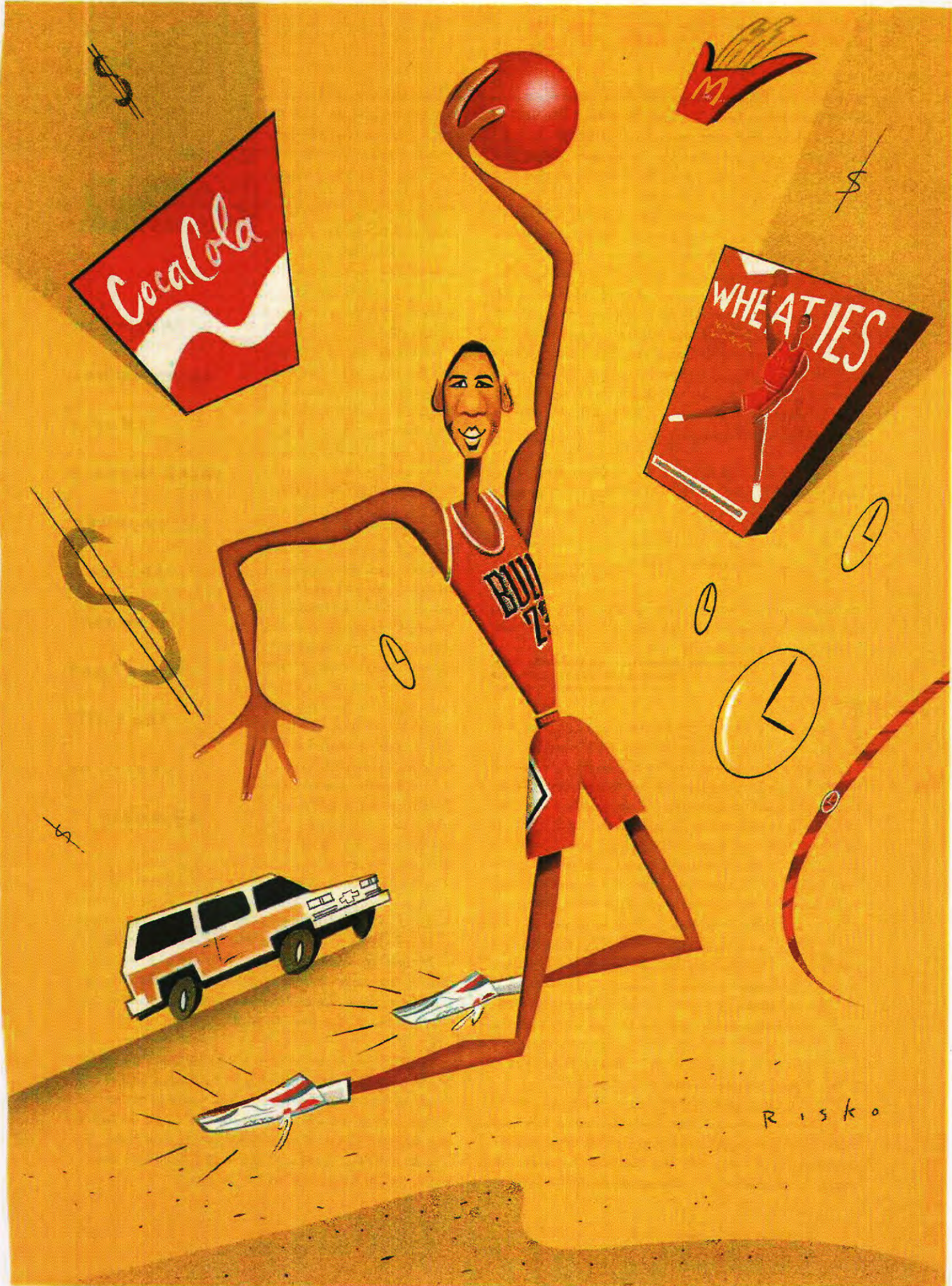
After he has dribbled, gazed and smiled for a number of hours, the video crew taping *The Making of the Michael Jordan Commercial* for the folks back at corporate headquarters politely requests that he dunk a cereal box. This is no problem, either. Jordan knows his dunking ability has become an object of fetishistic worship. If they want to see a cereal box jammed through the hoop—a rather kinky variation, don't you think?—he's only too happy to comply.

Of course, the reason Michael Jordan is in this foggy, antique gym informing us that he thinks eating Wheaties would be in general a good idea is the same reason he's told us over the past few years to drink Coke, wolf Big Macs, drive Chevrolets, wear Nikes, apply Johnson products, sport Guy Laroche watches, bounce Wilson balls, don Bigsby & Kruthers suits, not drive drunk, stay off drugs, work hard, be happy and listen to our parents. And the reason is, people are not only awed by Michael Jordan, they *like* him. They believe him.

Amid all the hard-core cynicism and ethical pollution in professional sports, Jordan's a gulp of clean air. He's the straightest arrow ever shot out of the South, and he plays his sport with a joyful, almost innocent, enthusiasm untainted by his new eight-year, \$26-million con-

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Risko



tract with the Chicago Bulls. Off the court—where he makes even bigger bucks, roughly \$5 million this year—Jordan's funny and warm and smart; childlike yet mature, high-spirited yet sober. And somehow, almost impossibly, he manages to be both the downest brother and the whitest bread at the same time.

That Jordan, 26, reconciles the opposites within his own character so smoothly has made him the most admired, idolized and moneyed team-sport hero in the entire American-hero business. In fact, for some folks he has come to *represent* America—as in, we may not make cars or televisions too well, but we turn out a helluva Michael Jordan. Witness the rap of a Cincinnati DJ, who, during the '88 Olympics, responded to a caller's question about professionalism by saying, "In the next Olympics, Michael Jordan will be playing basketball for us. Let's see those dirty, rotten, yellow-bellied Commies try to outdunk Michael Jordan."

*All the attention is well deserved. We're talking about a guy who's playing basketball over the last two years like I've never seen played.*

— ISIAH THOMAS

*Everybody talks about how it's me and Larry [Bird]—really, there's Michael, and then there's everybody else.*

— MAGIC JOHNSON

*Michael Jordan has overcome the acceleration of gravity by the application of his muscle power in the vertical plane, thus producing a low-altitude earth orbit.*

— LIEUTENANT COLONEL DOUGLAS KIRKPATRICK  
DEPARTMENT OF ASTRONAUTICS  
U.S. AIR FORCE ACADEMY

**T**HERE IS NO WAY TO ACCURATELY DESCRIBE THE WAY Michael Jordan plays basketball. Now I will try.

The truly revolutionary aspect of Jordan's brilliance is that although he possesses the most *extravagant*, high-cholesterol game in the history of the sport, it's as controlled as it is wild and as thoughtful as it is free. There has never been such a spectacular player who was also so disciplined, so fundamentally sound. There has never been such a gifted offensive player who worked so hard, and so well, on the defensive end of the court. Two years ago, while Jordan was busy scoring more points in a season (37 a game, more than 3,000 total) than anyone besides Wilt Chamberlain, he also became the first player in NBA history to combine more than 200 steals and 100 blocked shots. Last year, he did it again—this time leading the league in steals (more than three a game) as well as scoring (thirty-five a game, ho-hum), and being voted not just the league's Most Valuable Player but its best defensive player. All with his tongue out.

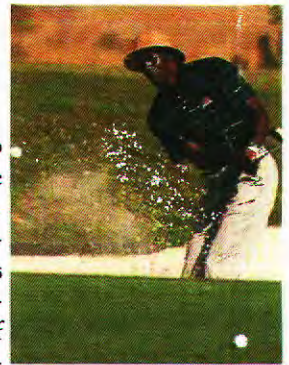
This was an unprecedented accomplishment, and for good reason: To be simultaneously the league's best offensive and best defensive player not only takes extraordinary physical versatility and ferocious heart but requires the individual to continuously modulate between

warring impulses, to keep two different mental maps of the game in his head at all times. (Imagine a rich, rapacious industrialist who also manages to be a vigilant environmentalist and you get some idea of the trick.) But Jordan is nothing if not mentally agile. One aspect of his greatness is that he thinks faster than his opponents. He's got a bad brain for basketball.

But until last year it was easy for the casual fan to be blinded by the iridescence of his game. Some thought Jordan—because his game is so showy—was somehow less an all-around player than the workmanlike, meticulous Bird, or the great orchestrator, Magic. But those close to the game know that despite Jordan's outrageousness on the court, he is never self-aggrandizing. His game may be downright pixilated at times, but it's never bumptious, never meretricious in the manner of so many other great talents. For this reason, the players themselves, by a wide, wide margin, consider Jordan the game's greatest player.

To get some measure of his achievements, it helps to go outside sport: Jordan in the late Eighties is a bit like Ellington in the Forties or Miles in the Sixties—that level of accomplishment. True, you can see stylistic links in his game to Connie Hawkins, David Thompson (his boyhood idol) and Julius Erving. But the syntax of his game is too rich to draw parallels. He's got recombinant skills. And to simply catalogue the variety of things he does on the court—not to mention the ineffable way he goes about them—does little justice to the genius of his own invention. You have to watch.

**W**HEN I'M ON MY GAME, I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANYBODY that can stop me. It's a strong feeling, and it has strong implications: Once I get the ball, you're at my mercy. There's nothing you can say or do about it. I own the ball, I own the game, I own the guy guarding me: I can actually play him like a puppet. I don't do that in life, I don't do that in society. But in a game—when I'm on—yes.



HE CURRENTLY SPORTS A FIVE HANDICAP ON THE LINKS AND WOULD EVENTUALLY LIKE HIS NEXT PROFESSIONAL CAREER TO BE GOLF.

**“When I’m  
on my game,  
I don’t  
think there’s  
anybody  
that can  
stop me.  
Once I get  
the ball,  
you’re at  
my mercy.”**



**M**ICHAEL JORDAN IS IN THE BACKYARD, SHIRTLESS AND shoeless, having a good time, cutting wood. Everyone in his family wishes he wouldn't swing the ax around the way he does. He can't help it, he likes goofing off and having fun. With one last swing—not much different from previous ones—he brings the ax down squarely on his big toe. Blood spouts all over, and Michael screams. It looks as if he's cut his toe almost completely off. As he madly hops about, the toe flaps back and forth, like a door coming unhinged. A neighborhood woman is summoned—she's known as someone skilled in medical emergencies—but she mistakes kerosene for alcohol and pours that on the toe. Jordan howls in pain.

He's told to lie in bed. He's told everything will be okay. He just lies there, in shock, sort of whimpering to himself, waiting for the doctor. Michael is 5 years old. It's the first thing he can remember of life on the planet: that ax, that blood, that kerosene, that pain. That toe he almost chopped off. It's the thing that could have grounded him forever.

**I**N HIS FAMILY'S JOURNEY FROM LOWER CLASS TO MIDDLE class, Michael Jordan's brothers cropped tobacco. Michael Jordan's sisters cropped tobacco. Michael Jordan did not crop tobacco. "I went out there one day," he says, "and I swore I wouldn't do it again. It hurt my back too bad."

Michael Jordan's brothers had jobs—they drove buses. His sisters had jobs—they worked at McDonald's and local department stores. Michael Jordan did not have a job. "One summer, my mom said, 'You just got to work,' and she got me a job as a maintenance man in a hotel," Michael remembers. "Man, I quit that job so quick! I just *couldn't* do it, I could not keep regular hours. It just wasn't me. From then on, I never, *ever* had another job."

Content to throw the football and play baseball and laze around the house doing nothing, he didn't care that he lacked money for new sneakers, clothes, bicycles. That was fine with him. Besides, he'd already figured out that being paid to play sports was the sure way never to have to sweat for a living. He knew the big money was in entertainment: Why, his grandpa would fork over a dollar just to see his little James Brown imitation to "Get on the Goodfoot."

**W**HACK, WHACK, WHACK! THAT IS THE SOUND OF Deloris Jordan applying a belt to Michael's butt on the first day of ninth grade. Michael has just been suspended for leaving the school grounds. Deloris and James Jordan, conscientious and deeply loving parents, are raising all five of their children to be religious, responsible, hardworking young people, but Michael here, hmmm, he's having problems. A bit later in the year, a girl who doesn't go for Michael's teasing calls him "nigger" in the school hallway. He drips his melting Popsicle

on her head and "smashes it in." Another suspension. *Whack, whack, WHACK!*

Later that same year, Michael is out chalking baseball field lines for his coach, "just trying to stay out of trouble," when a smug little sucker ("one of these white kids who just like to initiate trouble") decides to erase the lines behind him as he's marking them. Soon, the two stage a dramatic reenactment of the Battle of Shiloh right on the field. *Whack, whack, WHACK!*

Of course, when Michael goes to the detention center to serve out his suspension, Mr. Eraserhead is there as well. Michael says, "If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here!" and the two tango again. This time, Michael gets suspended *from* the detention center. There is no place left to put him. "So," he says, "my mother takes me to her job and has me sit in the car, that hot car, all day doing my homework. If there is a most likely to succeed, I was the *least*."

His dreams of being a pro-baseball player are looking pretty slim, and at five feet nine, he's an unlikely candidate for basketball as well. Unless he gets his act together, he'll never get to college. And he's got to get to college. If he doesn't go to college, he'll have to *go to work*. He ends up a B+ student. And his body ends up going through a hormonal fast break between his sophomore and junior years. There's no man in his family over six feet. "I often ask my mother," Michael says, "How tall was the milkman? How tall was the mailman?"

**E**VERYBODY IN WILMINGTON EXPECTED ME TO GO TO North Carolina, sit on the bench for four years, then go back to Wilmington and work at the local gas station." It doesn't exactly work out that way. Jordan finishes his freshman year in front of 61,612 people in New Orleans, and millions at home, nailing a jump shot in the last seconds to win a national championship for North Carolina. He stays and plays for two more years—increasingly a man among boys—then goes pro, against his mother's wishes. No spankings this time, but she insists he return to school to complete his B.A. in geography. In coming summers, he complies. When people ask him what he's going to do with his degree, he says, "Travel."

**M**ICHAEL JORDAN IS SITTING ON THE bench, and he can't stand it. He started the game by scoring nineteen points in the first quarter and giving his team the lead, but since then he's been on the bench more than usual. It's the second-to-last game of Jordan's rookie season, and it's the night he learns a bitter lesson. It turns out that by *losing* this game—and finishing with a poorer record—the Bulls can get a more favorable matchup for themselves in the play-offs.

Jordan says, "Here I am, trying to *win*, and he [then coach Kevin Loughery] is giving the game away. The fans started booing. They knew (continued on page 394)



## ROBERT PITTMAN

In the 57-year-old Lois—an aggressive and often profane Madison Avenue warrior—Pittman feels he has the consummate ally. Lois has created campaign ads for many politicians over the years, including Robert Kennedy in the Sixties, and he has a long history with Pittman and MTV.

"We understand how to communicate in this day and age, using the options available," says Pittman. "Look at George Bush. Here's a man who used the tools. George Lois and I have worked together a long time. I used him for almost everything. He'll come up with a great ad for you."

Just all sorts of things are cooking at Quantum Media. Children—real children, B-sized ones—are to be the next beneficiaries of its special vision. The company has produced two episodes of a kids' game show "with a high-tech new look," says Pittman. A pilot is also in the works with Fox Television. There is a series commitment with CBS, which has also bought a special from Quantum.

Pittman is silent on the details of every project that has not yet aired—with one exception: a home-video feature that he mentions in the context of what he calls "social trends." The subject of the home video is golf.

"Golf is a major growth sport," he says, his voice taking on some animation. "We've come across a man with a plan. He's looked at the physiology of the body as it relates to golf. The body doesn't produce power in the ways that have been traditionally assumed. [I half-expect him to add "by my parents."] He's developed a new system for teaching golf, and we're producing a home video on that."

A home video on golf. It seems a peculiar passion for the man who has built an empire reshaping American culture in the image of the unleashed, anti-authoritarian child. (Pittman himself does not play golf.) But when you begin to add it up, so did country-western music. So did rock and roll. So—for a softspoken son of a southern minister—did Morton Downey Jr. So did the candidacy of Albert Gore. So does the partnership with George Lois.

One of the most consistent and noticeable features about Bob Pittman (aside from his extraordinary intelligence) happens also to be an overarching characteristic of television itself: an utter absence of a consciousness of paradox.

The video consciousness is a consciousness of *the moment*—isolated from past and future, disconnected from cause and effect. And absolved, therefore, from such tedious linear considerations as paradox. Or irony.

Or consistency, logic, coherence, memory. Or moral accountability.

It's just ebb and flow.

These are among the traits that behaviorists and social critics are beginning to identify as central to the personality being shaped by the onrushing environment of a video culture. These are the traits of that creature of the right-brain hemisphere, Analogic Man: intuitive, nonlinguistic, image-sensitive, but disinclined from sequential reasoning, linear logic, context, narrative—artifacts, all, of downcast Digital Man, the debased and dustbinned creature of the left-brain hemisphere. Of typography.

"I've never lost anyone any money," says the Child of Television in his office, beneath the portrait of the man with a TV set for a head.

Not the most ringing of epitaphs, perhaps. But this is an age of logos, not epitaphs. Barely anyone remembers epitaphs anymore. Or axioms, or proverbs—such as the one relating to who shall rule, in the land of the blind. ■

Pulitzer Prize-winner Ron Powers writes a TV column for GQ every month. He is currently writing a book about two small American towns for Random House.

## MICHAEL JORDAN

(continued from page 323) what was going on. And we lost. I got so pissed off. That's when I first found out that basketball was a business. I just knew it. Man, I was so pissed off, tears come from my eyes I was so pissed off!"

Michael Jordan is fighting with the owner of his team. He is fighting for his right to play. He's in pain, because they're not letting him play. He lives to play. It is the spring of '86, and he has missed all but three games of his second season because of a fractured bone in his foot.

The owner—as well as Jordan's agent—would prefer he rest the foot and sit out the remainder of the year. He knows they are saying it's for his own good, but he also knows that without him the team will surely finish with a poorer record, miss the play-offs and gain a lottery pick in next year's draft. He's never felt so much like a commodity before, an asset, a steak; it's easily the worst time in his life.

He tells Jerry Reinsdorf, the owner, that the doctors say he has only a 15 percent chance of reinjuring the foot. Taking note of the particular gravy train Reinsdorf has ridden, he says, "If I had an opportunity to make an investment in real estate that had an 85 percent chance of showing a profit, I'd take it." Reinsdorf retorts, "If you had a

headache and I gave you a bottle with ten Tylenols and one was coated with cyanide, would you take it?" Michael thinks, then says, "I probably would, according to how bad my headache was!"

His headache, as it turns out, is very, very bad. He comes back to lead the Bulls out of the draft lottery and into the play-offs. There, against the Boston Celtics, in Boston Garden, in losing causes, he scores forty-nine in the first game and an NBA-record sixty-three in the second, prompting Bird to chirp, "He's God disguised as Michael Jordan."

Michael Jordan is riding out to Brooklyn in a limousine. On his pants, on his shorts, on his shirt, on his sweats and on his shoes, there are little leaping icons of himself. How must it feel to wear a logo of yourself on your body on a daily basis? Somewhere, there's a polo player who understands.

Jordan is headed to Brooklyn to film three new spots with director Spike Lee for Nike's Air Jordan line. In the first spot, Spike once again plays superwimp Mars Blackman, and this time, Mars's sultry ex-lover Nola Darling shows up. Mars and Nola come from the film *She's Gotta Have It*, in which Mars makes love to her in his Air Jordans. When I ask Jordan how he feels about this, he deadpans, "I never said

they were strictly for basketball. They are for all uses." In the ad to be filmed today, Nola betrays Mars for Michael.

Two days ago, back in the real world, Michael was "supposed to be married"—as he puts it. But he had broken off the long-term engagement many months ago. Now, in the limo, Michael reads the latest about Mike Tyson and Robin Givens in *USA Today*, while his current girlfriend asks him questions about the horror movie they watched last night. But Jordan can't be bothered with questions about the movie. He's unreeling a horror show in his own head: He could have been in Mike Tyson's shoes right now. On her way from Eddie Murphy to Mike Tyson, Ms. Givens had stopped off at Michael's address for a spell. "It got tired in five, six days," says Michael. "I could see it." He could see she wasn't dating men—she was dating growth industries.

The fact is, women are never going to be a problem for Michael, and women are always going to be a problem for Michael. He's afraid of them, and his defenses are up. "Right now," he says, "I don't trust no one except my mother." You might say he's the defensive player of the year.

Richie Weaver is wearing his Air Jordans, a T-shirt with a Michael Jordan caricature,



## MICHAEL JORDAN

a homemade bracelet that says "MICHAEL JORDAN," and a smile. He is smiling because he is in the presence of the man himself. He's at Kenny Rogers's farm in Georgia, watching Michael Jordan participate in a celebrity-sports-star tournament. It's far from home, and it's costing him almost two weeks' pay to be here, but Richie wouldn't be anywhere else: His dedication to Michael Jordan knows no bounds.

Richie Weaver is a paperboy and a high-school hoopster from a small town outside Atlanta. At home, he has five other pairs of Air Jordans (different models and colors, you know), seven posters showing Mr. Jordan continuing his ongoing dialectic with Isaac Newton and several do-it-yourself highlight films taped off the TV. Last year, on February 17, he brought a cake to school for Jordan's twenty-fifth birthday and threw a party with some of his hoop-crazed friends. He would love to tell Michael Jordan all this, but fans are being kept away from the stars, at this televised event. He would love to have Michael Jordan sign his shoes or the old *Sports Illustrated* he's been lugging around all weekend, but there's an official injunction against autograph-seeking—the better for the stars to enjoy themselves.

So Richie contents himself with shadowing Jordan from a distance. He's too reverent to violate that space. He troops behind Jordan in the rain during the golf tournament—hoping Michael's game is improving, knowing Jordan wants to be a pro golfer someday; he laughs as Jordan proves the clown prince of the tennis court, his racquet grip like a toothbrush in his huge hand; and he cheers when Jordan hits it big in the long-distance basketball shoot-out, pocketing \$20,000 for making a single shot. He even walks along the shoreline, following Jordan as he fishes for bass.

Here, he's clearly hoping for a miracle. He knows Jordan has never fished before, that he's nervous in the boat without a life jacket (he can't swim) and that worms give him the willies—but he has faith in his man. He knows that Michael Jordan is out there going after bass because Dominique Wilkins, Isiah Thomas and Larry Bird are out there, too, and damn if Michael is about to be outfished by those guys! Of course, Michael Jordan, who, as we know, can't fish, ends up catching not only the biggest bass but as many bass as his twelve opponents combined, thereby winning the bass-fishing bonus of \$17,000. This confirms Richie Weaver's sense of what Michael Jordan is all about.

As does the signature he receives, illegally and discreetly, so as not to provoke a feeding frenzy of other autograph hounds. I should point out that Richie Weaver, a generation or two ago, being who he is and being from where he comes,



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## MICHAEL JORDAN

might have expected Michael Jordan to shine, not sign, his shoes.

*I think sometimes I'm looked upon as not just a black person but as a person. And I think that's totally new ground for us—and for society. I'm happy to be a pioneer. When I say, "Don't think of me as white or black," all I'm saying is: View me as a person. I know my race, and I know you know what my race is—but don't magnify it to let me know what my race is when I already know that. You got all these white kids who look up to me. They aren't old enough to see color yet. If they see me not as a black man but as a person they wish they could be like, they enjoy watching, enjoy meeting and being around, that's fine, I'm accomplishing a goal. But it's dangerous, because if I so happen to fall publicly, the first thing I'm going to get discomfort from is their parents. Who knows what their parents might say? And they can be the biggest influence in changing me from Michael Jordan the person to Michael Jordan the black guy.*

*As far as being on a pedestal, it's a compliment, yet it's somewhat painful to me that one person can be viewed so high above other people. For example, if I go to a restaurant, I am very likely to get that meal free. But poor people who go to the same restaurant got to wash dishes to eat. And I'm the one that can afford it. If you can explain that, then you can ex-*

*plain society, and you can explain Richie Weaver looking up to me.*

On those days when the pedestal proves too painful, or just plain too irritating, when Michael has simply had it with product reps and lawyers, assistant producers and assistant directors, jock sniffs and journalists, girlfriends and guys who met him once five years ago at that place behind that other place—remember, it was raining?—when all this gets a tad too stressful, Michael simply disappears. "I go into hiding," he says. "I just stay in. There's many days I don't want to be around people and I'm a nasty person, an evil person. I stay in till I'm back in the mood to deal with people again."

He stays in at his new suburban Chicago home. He loves the house, loves to be there alone. Putting green and Jacuzzi downstairs, plus tables for Ping-Pong and pool and cards. Five bedrooms upstairs. Decor by Ma Jordan. Tasty. Computer in the den. Can't forget that. Got to keep track of the incoming and outgoing bread.

Unplug the phone. Michael. Blast them jazz tunes. Blast 'em all over the house. Cook and clean and wash, like *60 Minutes* said. Diane Sawyer sure had a Jones for you! Okay. Now fire up some def jams. Luther, maybe Guy. Go on, dance. Go on now, get in the mirror! Your steps were sad in college. Had only one little move. Even your running buddies doubted your rhythm. Shit, but now you go out—everybody watches you! You had better know all the dances. The latest dances. In the mirror now, work on it. Get prepped. You had better know what you're doing. You're Michael Jordan when you go out.

"He's got Jordanitis!" Michael is teasing a former North Carolina star who's sitting out the pickup game in which Jordan is playing. Ten days before training camp, Michael's getting in shape for his fifth season. Twenty thousand empty powder-blue seats surreally circle the little game of shirts 'n' skins. He's down home in Chapel Hill, and he's happy.

"Hey!" he screams at an opposing jump shooter. "Watch the jump switch," he calls to a teammate, helping out on defense. Michael, Charlotte rookie-to-be Rex Chapman and three scrubs are taking on the cream of UNC's current team, and holding the court, game after game. Michael does not go in for losing, even in—especially in—pickup games on his old turf. When a North Carolina star contests a monstrous game-winning rebound jam by Jordan, complaining, "Ball was on the rim!" Jordan snaps back, "Don't even think about it, and y'all get off the court!" When Jordan wins another game by shaking, baking and faking his way through three de-

fenders, he strides away beaming and says—loud enough for everyone to hear—"One on three!" A Carolina player disgustingly counters, "Hell, one on frigging five!"

Michael enjoys ritualistically returning to kick butt, but more than that, he loves being down in Carolina with his three funkateers. Fred Kearns is a mortician, Fred Whitfield a lawyer, and main-man Adolph Shiver is in real estate: They are his three best friends in the world. Michael says, "They are my heart and my eyes."

Each goes to visit him in Chicago whenever he can, and Michael calls them from the road all the time. They cool him out when he's hot, pump him up when he's down. They inspire him on the court and keep his attitude square off it. Michael loves these guys, and he knows they love him for reasons other than his ability to throw a silly leather sphere through a silly metal hoop. He can let go with them.

He can razz and tease and talk trash. He can run a contest on naming state capitals—in the first-class section of the plane while flying cross-country—without them thinking he's a nerd. He can bet them about whose bags are going to come off first at the baggage claim. He can lose a lot of money playing blackjack and still laugh. He can get their goats on the golf course, and his goat can be got. He can get the 911 Turbo up to 150 miles per hour and not take heat. (At least you don't have to worry about rehabilitation after that crash.)

He needs these guys because he can just be himself with them. They're not famous, they're not sycophantic—they're just good people. "Without these guys," he says, "I could easily go crazy. I try to be with them at all times. They make me feel more at home, more human, more down to earth."

And that's where he is tonight—and for the whole next week—curled up sleeping on Adolph Shiver's green couch in a bare-bones apartment in a nondescript apartment building in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. It suits him fine.

Michael Jordan doesn't sleep a lot. Five, six hours a night, max. When he can't get to sleep, he often finds himself counting dunks instead of sheep—he stays up late watching game tapes and falls asleep with the TV on. Sometimes when he sleeps, he dreams of basketball.

You'd think he'd dream of infinite slams in infinite space, of weightless excursions over the lead-booted bodies of Kareem and Akeem. But no. His "work ethic" is so strong it even infects his sleep: After losses, he always dreams about what he could have done to change the game's outcome. Last spring, dog-tired during a play-off series against Detroit, he actually dreamed about the various ways he could beat the triple-teaming defense of the Pistons.

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## MICHAEL JORDAN

But sometimes, Michael is awakened in the middle of the night by bad dreams. "It's always something I have done," he says. "I have robbed a bank. Or I have done cocaine. I have succumbed to the pressures of drugs. I felt the pressure to drink. These are all nightmares."

He goes on: "They're nightmares of something terrible happening to me that would destroy a lot of people's dreams or conceptions of me—that's the biggest nightmare I live every day. What if I make a mistake? How might that be viewed? Everybody feels it's easy to be Michael Jordan with all the good things happening to me, but the things that most scare me are the bad things—the things that would tear down Michael Jordan's image. That's the biggest fear I face."

*He worries about what people might think of him. Which is good—because it keeps him in check. But it does add to the pressure. He wants people to think highly of him, because he thinks highly of himself.* —Fred Kearns

*Michael has a different burden than any other player in the NBA, and personally, I do not know how he can keep up his energy and his night-in, night-out performance, with all the things he's had thrown at him. I mean, the guy is a phenomenal athlete, but he's also a phenomenal person to deal with—he's a very sensitive, caring young man, very, very loyal to his friends. And I always ask myself: If I were 25 right now and had what Michael Jordan has, could I deal with it? And I'm not sure that I could. That's the thing about him I respect so much.* —Chicago coach Doug Collins

*I wouldn't want to be in his shoes. I admire the way he handles himself, but I couldn't do it. Right now he's on cloud nine, but someday he'll have to face the reality that there'll be another Michael Jordan coming along.*

—Adolph Shiver

When Michael Jordan's in public places, he frequently finds himself thinking of a

guy named Leroy Smith. Leroy was a friend of his in high school; a quiet, low-key, religious guy. In ninth grade, they both went out for the varsity team. Leroy made it, and Michael—as every basketball fan knows—did not.

Angry about being cut, he turned bitter at year's end when the coach did not call him up to the varsity for a state play-off game, despite his having had a tremendous JV season. As a further humiliation, at the game, Michael was forced to carry another player's uniform into the gym and sit on the end of the bench handing out towels like a team manager—because he had no ticket. His parents were in the stands. Michael remembers "how depressed they looked." They had expected him to play when they saw him carrying the uniform. His pride was hurt so badly he rooted (secretly) for the other team, and that summer began working on his game—with a vengeance.

So these days, when people come up to him and say quizzically, "Aren't you...?" or when they stare at him oddly, not sure who he is, he throws out his palm and says, "Leroy Smith!" and smiles and walks on. He always remembers Leroy Smith at those moments, and he always silently thanks him. Because it brings him back to a time when, as Michael says, "I was a nobody. And he was better than me. People knew him before they knew me." It was a time he learned a little bit about humility, and how arbitrary fame is. He learned how you're really the same person—whether you're somebody or you're nobody.

And so all across the country, in hotel lobbies and airports and shopping centers, Michael finds a little comfort in the name of Leroy Smith. It's his way of keeping in touch with himself: who he was, who he is, who he will be. ■

*David Breskin is a New York City writer who loves going to the hoop but can't stand being rejected.*

## THE ENDLESS WINTER

(continued from page 339) been doing two things: working at the Vail Ski School and rehabilitating his knee. Flashback to the first day of the ski season: Stanley was training new instructors on a relatively easy, smooth run when "a ski just caught. I felt something but skied for two more hours."

In the hospital, Stanley screamed at the doctors and nurses, could barely look at his friends and then sank as low as a ski instructor can get: "I said, 'That's it. I'm gonna take a desk job, sell insurance and get fat.' That's the worst thing I could think of. I thought I was invincible, and that knee was my brush with mortality.

Look, on days off, Randy and I always skied for maximum thrill potential...out of bounds, off cliffs—one move the wrong way and you're fucked. Then I blow out my knee on a groomed intermediate run. Reconstructive surgery. It taught me two things: One, never ski slow or on a flat run. And two, shit happens."

Stanley fully intends to be back in full force. "I'm an instructor because I fuckin' love skiing and love teaching it. The day I wake up and say, 'Oh, fuck, I gotta ski with these assholes again,' that's when I quit."

In the summer, Stanley, who graduated from Southern Oregon State College, runs a business building log houses in Bend. He

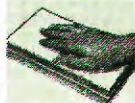
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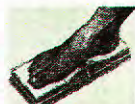
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