damn question? Have we truly not advanced as a species?! Now, 22 years later, we’re still asking the same.

In 1997, Tiger claimed his first green jacket. A year later, all we could talk about was whether he’d claim another. Now, 22 years later, all we could talk about was whether he’d claim another. Now, 22 years later, we’re still asking the same.

“Being on the cover was awesome. I got a lot of calls on that one. It was all my guy friends calling. ‘I saw you!’ I knew what magazine they saw me on. They’re not looking at Horrper’s Buzzer.”

“I remember doing pushups to try to get my muscles to pop out. I was 18 or 19 and it was said I still had baby fat.”

“OK, so we sure got... in Canton,” Peyton Manning, Ryan Leaf, not Miss Manning, peyton Manning, with... in Canton. Yes, we actually wrote that!

“The NBA forever. His skill set changed that. When spoken to.”

“Who knows what Brady will do for an encore,” we wrote after Brady replaced Drew Bledsoe. Well, we come from the future! And we definitely had a vision for this cover.

There is no path or recipe to greatness,” we wrote in our debut issue. “We simply know it when we see it.” Yeah, about that: We indeed saw a lot of greats coming the past two decades, from LeBron and Serena to Chloe Kim and Baker Mayfield. Scored a few notable firsts while we at it, like making Ninja the first gamer on a national magazine cover. (We’ll say it: Kind of genius!) But regrets, we have a few of those too. Kaz Matsui: Really? Ryan Leaf: Seriously? Quadtrine Hill: Like, who? Here’s the thing, though: Even when we were whiffing wildly, we were having wild fun doing it. We hope you had fun along with us. So join us as we take one last ride through our 21-year history, one big swing at a time.
“I have one framed in my house. It’s one of those iconic things where 20 years from now it’ll be cool to be on that cover with those three women.”

ESPN THE MAG BY THE NUMBERS

WHO AND WHAT HAVE BEEN ON OUR COVERS

ATLANTIC ON THE MOST COVERS

1. MICHAEL JORDAN

2. LEBRON JAMES

3. DREW BARRYMORE

8. KIM KARDASHIAN

7. BARACK OBAMA

LEBRON JAMES

SERENA WILLIAMS

MICHAEL PHelps

KARL MALONE

LAURA DERN

BRADLEY COOPER

JOINING THE MOST COVERS

CHRIS PAUL

ADRIAN PETERSON

DANICA PATRICK

DARKO MILICIC

MICHELLE WIE

DIANA TAURASI

PLAYOFFS FIRST TEAM

LEBRON JAMES

KOBE BRYANT

MICHAEL JORDAN

BARRY BONDS

12

9

9

8

7

LEBRON JAMES

DWARF MILICIC

OK, so Milicic compared himself to a young KG in our feature. While it’s not the best comp, Darko did win a ring in 2004.

TAURASI REMEMBERS …

“Boy, did we get this one right! We declared Serena Next after she won her third major, and all she’s done since is win more! In majors won and prize money ($32.3M) no woman athlete has graced our cover more. G-O-A-T.”

PHelps REMEMBERS …

“As a kid who dreamt of winning a gold medal or being on the cover of a magazine, to see it actually come true, it’s just such a neat thing to look back on and appreciate now.”

TAURASI REMEMBERS ...

“Away from all that, he’s just a great person, too. He’s funny, he’s smart, he’s got a lot of heart. He really cares about the game.”

PHelps REMEMBERS ...

“Hey, I was about to say ‘whether’ but I’ve got a ring to jam!”. No kid was about to say ‘whether’ with a ring to jam!

FROM THE STORY …

“I told him, ‘You’ve got hands like Jerry Rice.’

Larry said, ‘What? I got better hands than Jerry Rice.'”

HIT

We boarded the Fitz train early, while there were still seats. Now he’s third in catches—and rising.

HIT

A gift from God?

We stand by it. Sixteen years later, the three-time MVP is the sixth man to amass 500 homers and 3,000 hits.

HIT

Named Next as an OU frosh, AP has made seven Pro Bowls and won the 2012 MVP after rushing for 2,097 yards.

HIT

Named Next as an OU frosh, AP has made seven Pro Bowls and won the 2012 MVP after rushing for 2,097 yards.

HIT

In Melo’s rookie year, we paired him with Jay-Z. Clever! One makes music. The other, buckets.
FROM NEXT TO NOW ...

8/1/05
STEWIE AND PETER, FAMILY GUY
FIRST CARTOON ON THE COVER

11/20/06
JOHN JOHN FLORENCE
HIT Who knew this Oahu native would, less than 13 years after this story, become one of the world’s best Pipe surfers, with back-to-back world titles. Oh right, we knew! So braggy!

H
FROM THE STORY ...
“John John gets his own waves. When the surf is good, nobody gets a break at Pipe.” — FORMER PRO SURFER KAI GARCIA

5/23/07
JAMARCUS RUSSELL
MISS An impulse buy, we said, off a stunning Sugar Bowl. But his absurd physical tools lasted all of three NFL seasons in a career born of a holdout.

ESPN THE MAG
CAN YOU BELIEVE WE DID THIS ?

8/1/05
MAT HOFFMAN
FIRST X-GAMES ATHLETE ON THE COVER

11/20/06
JOHN JOHN FLORENCE
HIT “I don’t think any of us in action sports thought we would be on the cover of ESPN The Magazine. So everyone who saw it was like, ‘What the hell?’”

FROM THE STORY ...
“Kevin is the best recruit we have ever had.”
— THEN-LONGHORNS COACH RICK BARNES

From the story...
“John John gets his own waves. When the surf is good, nobody gets a break at Pipe.” — Former Pro Surfer Kai Garcia
The Nadal we met was resistant to change. He’d dominated on clay, winning four straight French Opens. Since then: 14 majors, pan-surface. See, change is good!

An unsanctioned street fighter before his runs in boxing and MMA, Slice was a marginal talent. His star power? Few could touch him.

Griffin’s rookie billing? Deliverer of cover-your-head dunks. And though he hurt his knee and missed the 2009-10 season, he became the 2010-11 rookie of the year and a six-time All-Star. Now he even shoots!

We were hatin’ just a bit in 2007 with this headline. And, of course, Fed showed us, winning the 2009 French to complete the grand slam.

Joba allowed just one earned run in 19 games his first season. He was a sensation. But after those midges on the mound in Game 2 of the ALDS, he was never the same.

It was a big sign for our sport of how far we’d come and where we were heading.”

From the story …
“...It’s important to understand this is only a game. I am lucky: My job is one of my hobbies.”

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