

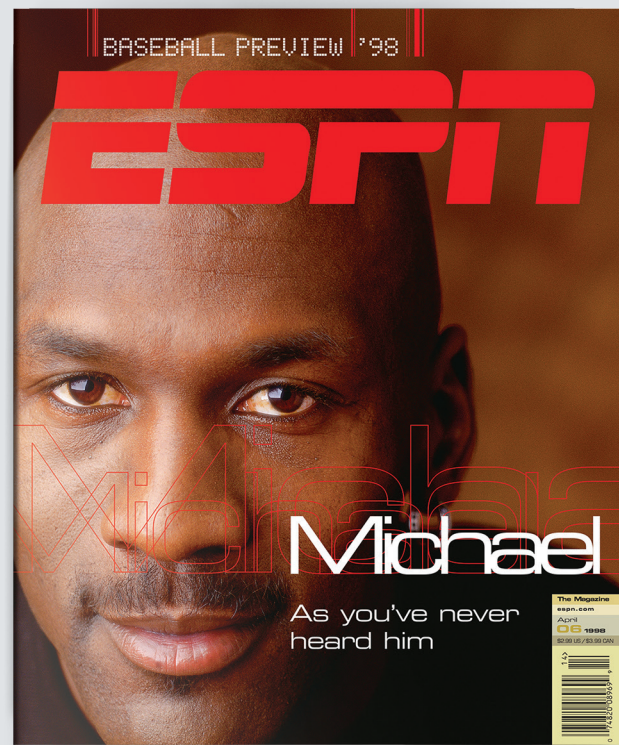
FROM NEXT TO NOW ...

"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 were 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.

H HIT M MISS

4/6/98

MICHAEL JORDAN
APPEARED ON THE MOST COVERS (8) IN THE FIRST DECADE OF THE MAG (THREE COVERS IN '98, TWO IN '99, TWO IN '01, ONE IN '08)



4/20/98

TIGER WOODS



HIT 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, we're still asking the same damn question? Have we truly not advanced as a species?!

4/20/98

PEYTON MANNING
MISS "In 2018, Ryan Leaf, not Peyton Manning, will be ... in Canton." Yes, we actually wrote that!



5/4/98

PHIL JACKSON
FIRST COACH ON THE COVER



JACKSON REMEMBERS ...
"It must have been one of my favorite photographers that talked me into this shot. Yes, I meditate, but really, a photo shoot?"

11/30/98

ELTON BRAND
FIRST COLLEGIATE ATHLETE ON THE COVER



BRAND REMEMBERS ...
"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."

7/27/98

GABRIELLE REECE AND MIKE O'MALLEY
FIRST WOMAN AND FIRST ACTOR ON THE COVER



REECE REMEMBERS ...
"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 Harper's Bazaar."

O'MALLEY REMEMBERS ...
"Being on the cover was awesome. I put it in a frame to hang up. Right now it's in the garage. No offense. I don't have that big of an office."

5/18/98

TIM DUNCAN



HIT Post-MJ, *The Mag* hyped Tim as the NBA's next star. We = smart! Five titles, 15 All-Defensive Teams later, he's the top power forward of all time.

3/8/99

JEFF GORDON
FIRST RACE CAR DRIVER ON THE COVER



GORDON REMEMBERS ...
"They definitely had a vision for this cover. And it was a vision that took a lot of effort on their part before it convinced me!"

11/15/99

KEVIN GARNETT



HIT We wrote that KG "speaks only when spoken to." OK, so we sure got that wrong. But his skill set changed the NBA forever.

8/9/99

RICKY WILLIAMS



HIT Few trades resonated like the Saints shipping eight picks for Williams. The union fizzled three years later, but Ricky ... sizzled: 10,009 yards and 66 TDs.

11/13/00

DESTINY'S CHILD
FIRST MUSIC GROUP ON THE COVER



9/18/00

MAURICE GREENE
FASTEST PERSON ON THE COVER



GREENE REMEMBERS ...
"There was no petting. I was told not to make any sudden moves. Just be there, get the shots and then get out."

12/25/00

YAO MING
TALLEST PERSON ON THE COVER



ESPN THE MAG BY THE NUMBERS
TALLEST AND SHORTEST COVER STARS



6/11/01

VENUS WILLIAMS



HIT How much court has Venus crushed since her first *Mag* feature? Five singles majors and 10 doubles trophies alongside sister Serena.

11/12/01

DIRK NOWITZKI



HIT By 2001, Dirk—14-time All-Star and surefire Hall of Famer—was a poster child for why NBA teams needed bigger scouting departments.

12/24/01

TOM BRADY



HIT "Who knows what Brady will do for an encore," we wrote after Brady replaced Drew Bledsoe. Well, we come from the future! And we know! Six rings, 70,514 passing yards, 517 TDs.

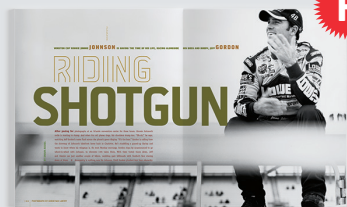
2002



8/19/02
SERENA WILLIAMS
HIT 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 another 20. The leader in majors won and prize money [\$90M], no woman athlete has graced our cover more. G-O-A-T.



12/23/02
LEBRON JAMES
HIT Even though you could watch him as a high schooler on PPV, LeBron still surpassed all the hype we could hurl his way: 4 MVPs, 3 Finals MVPs, 9 Finals appearances, 3 NBA titles. Still, we ask ... whether the headband?



11/11/02
JIMMIE JOHNSON
HIT Back in 2002, Johnson just wanted to keep up with his mentor, Jeff Gordon. Then he passed him: Seven championships and 83 races. Boom, confetti!



7/21/03
ALBERT PUJOLS
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.



7/21/03
KAZ MATSUI
MISS We named him "one of the top five shortstops on the planet." Twenty-three errors in '04 later, he was moved to second.



1/5/04
CARMELO ANTHONY
HIT In Melo's rookie year, we paired him with Jay-Z. Clever! One makes music. The other, buckets.



6/7/04
DARKO MILICIC
MISS 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.



3/1/04
MICHAEL PHELPS
 MOST DECORATED MALE OLYMPIAN ON THE COVER

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."

6/7/04
SMARTY JONES
 FIRST (AND ONLY) SOLO ANIMAL ON THE COVER



4/26/04
LARRY FITZGERALD
HIT We boarded the Fitz train early, while there were still seats. Now he's third in catches—and rising.

FROM THE STORY ...
 "I told him, 'You've got hands like Jerry Rice.' Larry said, 'What? I got better hands than Jerry Rice.'"
THEN—PITT DB REGGIE CARTER

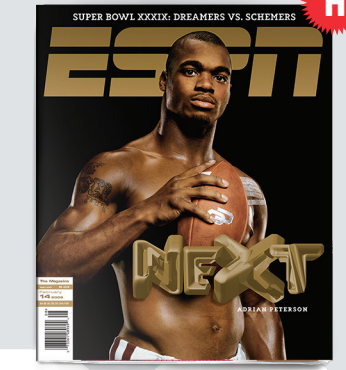


2004

FROM NEXT TO NOW ...



11/22/04
CHRIS PAUL
HIT After the first of his nine Mag covers, the point guard would be an All-American his sophomore year at Wake Forest. Now he's naked in our last issue. Circle of life, people!



2/14/05
ADRIAN PETERSON
HIT Named Next as an OU frosh, AP has made seven Pro Bowls and won the 2012 MVP after rushing for 2,097 yards.



10/10/05
DANICA PATRICK
 FIRST WOMAN RACE CAR DRIVER ON THE COVER

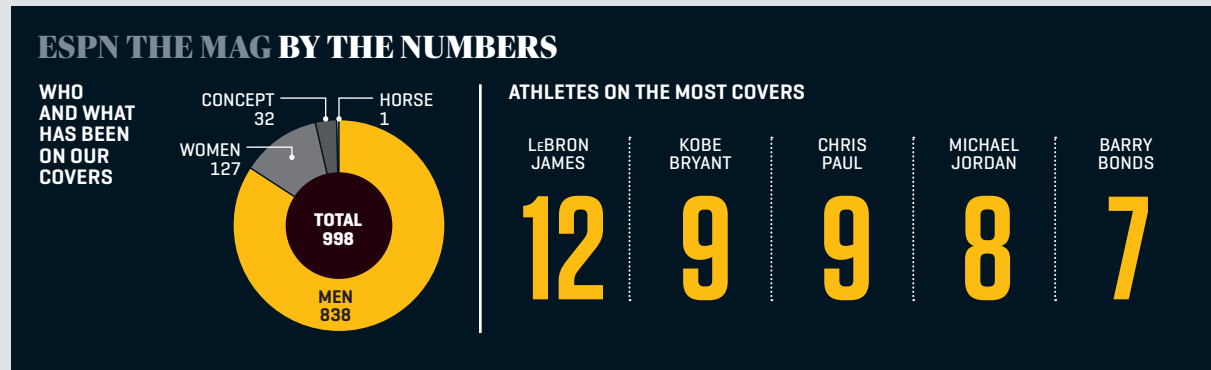


11/21/05
ALEXANDER OVECHKIN
HIT This one took a while. We watched the Caps lose in the playoffs year after year. But fear not! They won their first Cup in '18, and a joyous Ovi imbibed ... for weeks.



3/31/03
MICHELLE WIE AND DIANA TAURASI
 YOUNGEST (WIE) AND FIRST WOMEN'S HOOPS STAR (TAURASI) ON THE COVER

TAURASI REMEMBERS ...
 "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."





FROM NEXT TO NOW ...

8/1/05

STEWIE AND PETER, FAMILY GUY
FIRST CARTOON ON THE COVER



8/1/05

MAT HOFFMAN
FIRST X-GAMES ATHLETE ON THE COVER

HOFFMAN REMEMBERS ...

“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?’”

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!



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**

4/23/07

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.



11/20/06

KEVIN DURANT

HIT “Think T-Mac with midterms,” we wrote of the “6-foot-9 jumping-jack.” Astonishingly, that *undersold* KD. The only NBA players in history to match Durant’s career stat line of 27/7/4? Elgin Baylor, LeBron and Wilt.

FROM THE STORY ...

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



ESPN THE MAG
CAN YOU BELIEVE WE DID THIS 🤔 ?

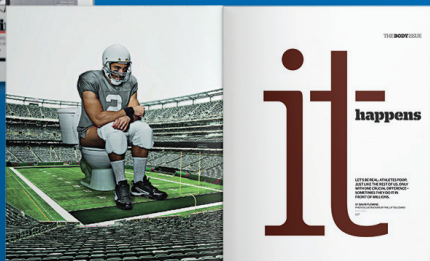


07/17/07

To pee or not to pee? That was the question.

10/18/10

Poo waits for no player. So in the 2010 Body Issue, we went there.



2007

FROM NEXT TO NOW ...

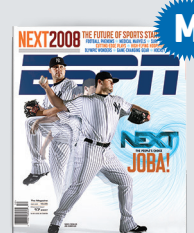
7/2/07
GREG ODEN



MISS Not one, not two ... but 15 titles. That's what Oden said he wanted. But with injuries ravaging his career, he appeared in all of 105 NBA games.

FROM THE STORY ...
"I wish I could say who is going to have the better career, me or Kevin Durant."

12/17/07
JOBA CHAMBERLAIN



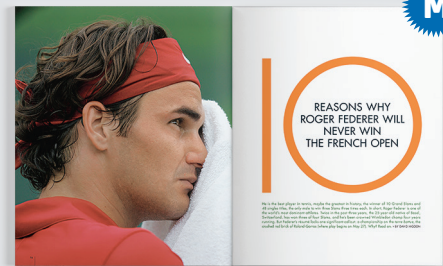
MISS Joba allowed just one earned run in 19 games his first season. He was a sensation. But after those midges on the mound in Game 2 of the ALDS, he was never the same.

12/3/07
STEPH CURRY



HIT We knew he'd be good—the skinny guard shot 41 percent from 3 at Davidson. But two MVPs and three titles good? Not sure anyone saw that!

6/4/2007
ROGER FEDERER



MISS 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.

06/16/08
AARON RODGERS



HIT Thus began Rodgers' reign as the best QB in the world: best passer rating in history, 338 TDs and just 80 INTs. Damn you, Brett Favre!

02/25/08
KEVIN LOVE



HIT We tabbed the UCLA big as a future '08 rook to watch. And since '08-09? Love is one of three players with 10,000 points and 7,000 boards.

5/21/07
CHUCK LIDDELL



LIDDELL REMEMBERS ...
"It was a big sign for our sport of how far we'd come and where we were heading."



5/5/08
JERRROD FIELDS (ABOVE) AND ANTHONY BORRUTO
FIRST AMPUTEES ON THE COVER

FROM THE STORY ...
"If we can adjust rules of sports to the time, why not for prosthetics? Create a panel of scientists and athletes, able-bodied and disabled, and ask them to determine what's fair."
WRITER ERIC ADELSON

6/2/08
KIMBO SLICE



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



6/1/09
RAFAEL NADAL



HIT 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!

FROM THE STORY ...
"It's important to understand this is only a game. I am lucky: My job is one of my hobbies."

11/30/09
USAIN BOLT



HIT The golden shoes, 9.69 euphoric seconds. It had been one year since Bolt's Beijing takeover. At the 2016 Olympics in Rio, Bolt bid farewell to the Games, hanging up eight golds, world records in all three distances and 11 world titles.

11/30/09
BLAKE GRIFFIN



HIT 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!

6/1/09
LIONEL MESSI



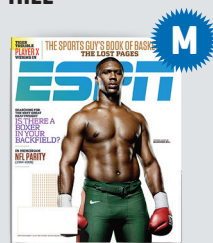
HIT We called 2009 the Year of Lionel Messi a full six months before his first of five Ballon d'Or trophies. Who are we, Nostradamus?!

11/2/09
PHIL IVEY



FIRST (AND ONLY) POKER PLAYER ON THE COVER

12/28/09
QUADRINE HILL



MISS Hill's [brief] football career led to ... a boxing career? We were excited! The results? Less so: just five wins.

ESPN THE MAG BY THE NUMBERS

TOTAL NUMBER OF ISSUES
514

TOTAL NUMBER OF PAGES PRINTED
61,618

TOTAL AMOUNT OF PAPER USED, IN POUNDS
662,512,295