

# Sports Illustrated

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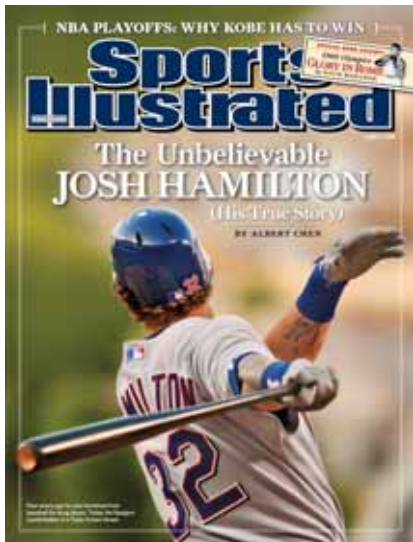
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**ON THE COVER:**  
**THE UNBELIEVEABLE JOSH HAMILTON**  
**(His True Story)**

**NBA PLAYOFFS: WHY KOBE HAS TO WIN**

**THE IDEAL STANLEY CUP MATCHUP: RED WINGS VS.  
PENGUINS**

(New York, May 27, 2008)—After drugs and alcohol nearly destroyed his career before it got started, a repentant Josh Hamilton has miraculously restored the skills that now make him a Triple Crown threat, writes Albert Chen in this week's cover story, *The Super Natural*. Hamilton is at peace now, at peace even when he sleeps. "I used to have dreams all the time," he says. "They were so real; I'd wake up and take a real deep breath in, like I was hitting a crack pipe." Even last year, when he played his first major league season, with the Reds after being banished from baseball in 2004, Hamilton says, "I had these dreams where I'm still going to get or use drugs, but then the pee-test guy starts showing up out of nowhere." Hamilton looks down, shakes his head and laughs. "He just stands there, haunting my dreams."

These days the Rangers centerfielder is already a fan favorite. "It's the support group that I have here that makes staying clean easy," he says. "And I always refer back to the media too. If I did something stupid, something I shouldn't be doing, it would be all over the nation. I would be such a hypocrite, I'd let everyone down. That's why I go to the ballpark, and I go home. Park. Home. Park. Home." The most surprising stat of the season may be this one: Hamilton played all but three innings of the Rangers' first 32 games. "After four years of putting my body through hell," he says. "I'm amazed how well it's held up. I was amazed last year that I even played 90 games" (page 30).

**POINT AFTER-SEAFOOD FOR THOUGHT-S.L. PRICE**

NHL fans fixate on action with unwavering intensity; they are demanding loyal zealots who have their own ideas about showing devotion—the best being the hurling of an octopi, such as the one thrown by Red Wings Zamboni driver Al Sobotka. No overcaffeinated P.A. announcer is needed to prompt hockey crowds, unlike the NBA, which is an example of a league whose fan base has lost its way. At Game 2 of the Eastern Conference finals, the Celtics took on the Pistons Boston's new Bank Garden there was the command to chant "Dee-fense" on every Detroit possession; fans mugged happily for the JumboTron cameras as their team lost 103–97 (page 76).

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### **THE ESCAPE ARTIST—PHIL TAYLOR**

Charles Barkley, the former NBA star turned TNT broadcaster, is like a superhero who strolls out of the rubble of a collapsed building, calmly brushing dust off his shoulders as if nothing ever happened. Even though all around him broadcasters are taking career hits for the wrong thing—just ask Rush Limbaugh, Don Imus and the Golf Channel's Kelly Tilghman—Barkley continues to thrive. This is not so much a double standard as it is a Charles standard, reserved for public figures who have the courage to say what they think, the integrity to stand behind in, the humility to freely admit their mistakes, and the sense of humor to make it palatable to the public. At the moment, that club appears to have only one member (*page 16*).

### **KOBE'S KILLER INSTINCT - CHRIS BALLARD**

Nobody wants to win as much as Kobe Bryant because nobody needs to win as much as he does. From childhood to the Western Conference finals, the Lakers' star has been obsessed with dominating the court. **"He can't turn it off, even if he tried," says Devean George**, one of a handful of NBA players relatively close to Bryant. And for that Kobe has often been pilloried. But is this really fair? **"Kobe wants it so badly that he rubs an awful lot of people the wrong way," says Lakers consultant Tex Winter, the guru of the triangle offense, who has known Bryant since 1999. "But they're not willing to understand what's inside the guy"** (*page 38*).

### **CONTROL FREAKS—MICHAEL FARBER**

Possession is nine tenths of the battle between the Red Wings and the Penguins. Three years after the NHL rejiggered its rules for more offense, the league has its ideal championship matchup. **"We're a different team than what they've played," Red Wings goalie Chris Osgood said after Detroit had won the opener of the most anticipated finals in more than a decade 4–0. "The Rangers would have been closest to [us]. Ottawa dumps [the puck] quite a bit. Philly definitely does. We possess the puck the majority of the time, if we can. . . . That's what we believe in, and I just think they hadn't seen it before. We do it better than any other team in the league."** For the NHL, the best thing to come out of this series is a Game 7. Even a casual sports fan might be disposed to watch a storied franchise such as Detroit play a winner-takes-all game against Pittsburgh's Sidney "Sid-the-Kid" Crosby (*page 44*).

### **ALL EYES ON INDY—LARS ANDERSON**

Knocked out of the race, Danica Patrick was fuming while Scott Dixon was cruising to victory in a rejuvenated 500. On Sunday a new era dawned at Indy and for the first time since 1995 all the top open-wheel drivers were at the Brickyard. **"There's more excitement now in our sport than I can ever remember," Scott Dixon said before the race. "This is going to be special."** Open-wheel racing has made many strides this year; yet, in order to continue its growth IndyCar must do four things: Aggressively market its drivers; improve competition, top to bottom; retain top drivers; and develop new teams and young talent. For an open-wheel driver these days, winning the Indianapolis 500 is once again a heady feeling. A great spectacle, indeed (*page 48*).

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