

The Cover Story

Why getting covered by SI is complicated

THE COVER IS THE FACE of any magazine, the first thing readers see, the place where the editors declare their intentions. At SPORTS ILLUSTRATED the cover has inspired keen interest bordering on obsession since late 1953, when Sid James struggled over which images to use on the two issues he was putting together for prospective advertisers and selected sports editors in order to determine whether the country wanted or needed a sports weekly at all. The cover photograph on the first dummy was a shot of the crowd at Oklahoma's rainy November football victory over Nebraska. The absence of football action from the frame underlined the basic SPORTS ILLUSTRATED proposition: that a new leisure class with a

growing interest in recreation was a sports magazine market waiting to happen. (This image eventually became the third of SI's 152 college football covers.) The cover of the second dummy was a golfer, framed by spectators, teeing off at the 16th hole at Cypress Point, and inside the magazine, in addition to the golf piece, was an eclectic mix of stories on hunting, fishing, snorkeling, bowling and Ping-Pong (even a piece on 15th-century jousting art) as well as baseball, motor sports and horse racing. In both cases, the cover images took the spectators' point of view and evoked the pleasure of watching sports.

AS YOU will discover in the following pages, part of SI's ongoing celebration of its 50th anniversary, cover subjects can be subdivided into many categories, both metaphysical and statistical. But rather than wondering how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, try to think about how many times Angels have made the cover (10 times for the L.A./California/Anaheim Angels, two times for jockey Angel Cordero and another four for Elle Macpherson). The best news is that every cover is reprinted here, all 2,548 of them. That covers the waterfront (OCEAN SAILING, 1966), covers more ground than Jim Brown (SECRETS OF A FULLBACK, 1960) and covers a multitude of sins (Dennis Rodman in a stud collar, 1995).

Any way you look at it, an SI cover becomes an almost instant pop icon (often shot with a Nikon) that also means something to



BRIM SHOT This dummy was recycled.

athletes. "When I was on the cover the first time my senior year at Penn State, my first reaction was shock," says Joe Jurevicius, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers' receiver who also appeared on the Super Bowl cover last February. "Since I was old enough to read the words *Sports* and *Illustrated*, it was something I dreamed about. I was the kid who had a subscription at home, but if I was in a doctor's or a dentist's office, I'd steal their copies." Bucs rookie quarterback Chris Simms has a variation on that same theme: "It's thrilling to see yourself on the cover. It always brings a smile to my face when I remind my dad [former New York Giants quarterback Phil Simms] that I've been on the cover [twice], one more time than him."

Being No. 1 is also a recurring cover theme, and that's not counting the infamous 1972 cover when Walter Iooss's photo of Miami Dolphins running backs Jim Kiick and Larry Csonka featured Csonka surrep-

ticiously flashing his middle finger. The editors missed it, but a riot of howling letters filled them in soon enough. In fact, SI receives more comments about its cover choices than any other subject, and write-in campaigns are mounted at least once a year—most recently for Iowa State wrestler Cael Sanderson, who was worthy but overtaken by difficult hockey news (THE DEATH OF A FAN, 2002) the week he won his 159th straight match and his fourth NCAA title.

Of course there are some readers who believe that making the cover is not necessarily a good thing. Not that being on the cover 22 times has adversely affected Jack Nicklaus. Nor did Michael Jor-