

AMERICAN
PHOTO
ONCAMPUS

DECEMBER 1998

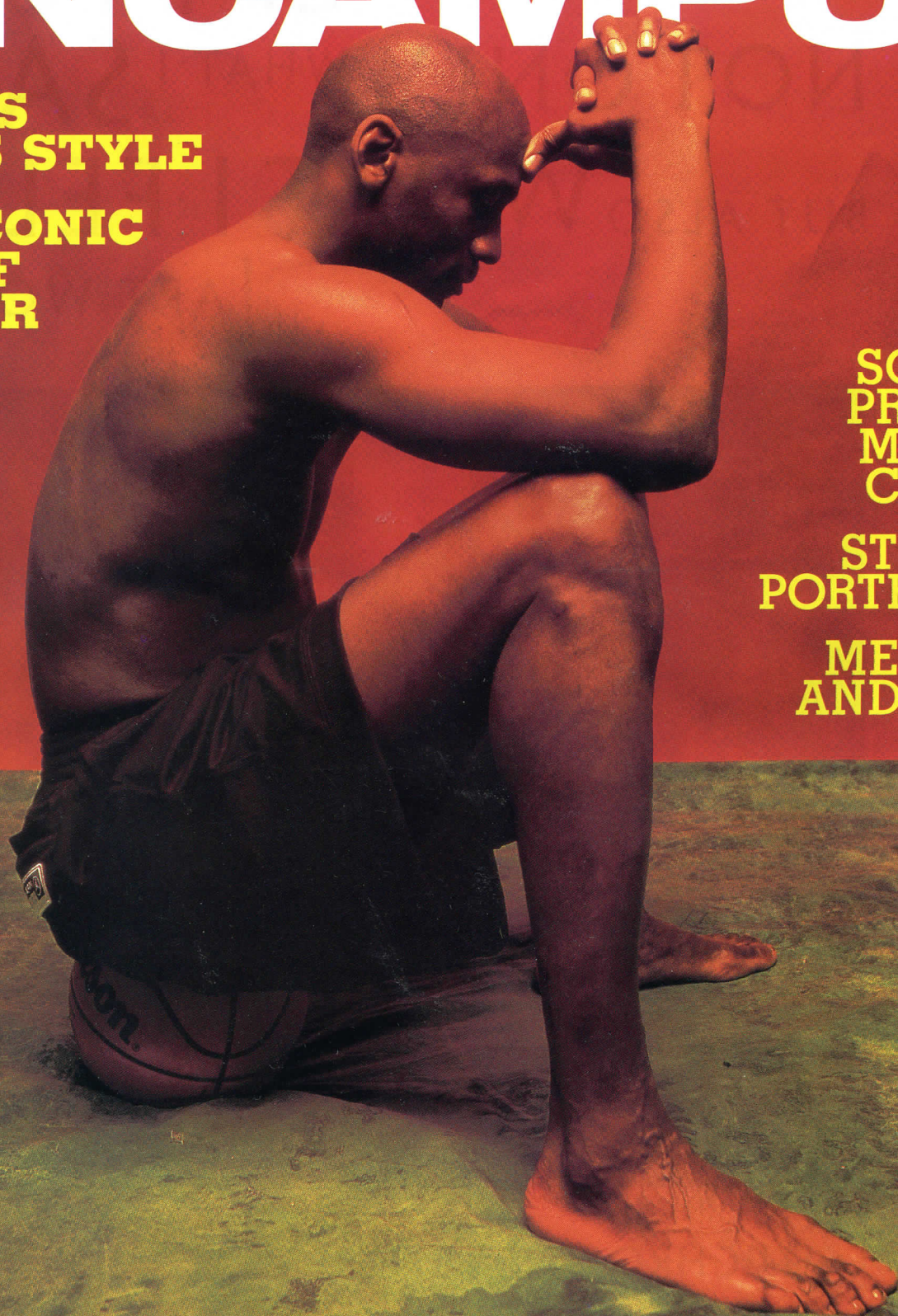
**SPORTS
MEETS STYLE**

**THE ICONIC
ART OF
WALTER
IOOSS**

**SCHOOL
PROFILE:
MARION
CENTER**

**STUDENT
PORTFOLIOS**

**MENTORS
AND MORE**



"Michael Jordan,
Highland
Park, Illinois,
March 1998."

**Today, sports
superstars are
photographed
with all
the style of
supermodels.
That new
level of visual
sophistication
suits **Sports
Illustrated**
veteran
Walter Ioss,
who has done
everything from
portraits
to glamour to
advertising.
By Russell Hart**

michael jordan

as
art

The year was 1992, and Walter Ioss was on his way from New York to Hawaii to do some location scouting. The legendary sports photographer had scheduled a stop in Chicago to make what amounted to a photographic sales call. The object of his pitch: basketball superstar Michael Jordan. After watching a Bulls game at the old Chicago Stadium, Ioss waited for the press hordes to clear the home-team locker room, then approached Jordan. "I have an idea," he said. Having done lots of set-up action shots with Ioss—the same slam dunk over and over again—Jordan rolled his eyes. "Oh, no, Walter," he said. "Your ideas usually mean a lot of work for me." "No, this is different," said Ioss. And Ioss began to describe the book about Jordan that he wanted to do: a behind-the-scenes portrait of the star at the peak of his powers. "It's something you'll be able to show your children and grandchildren," said Ioss.

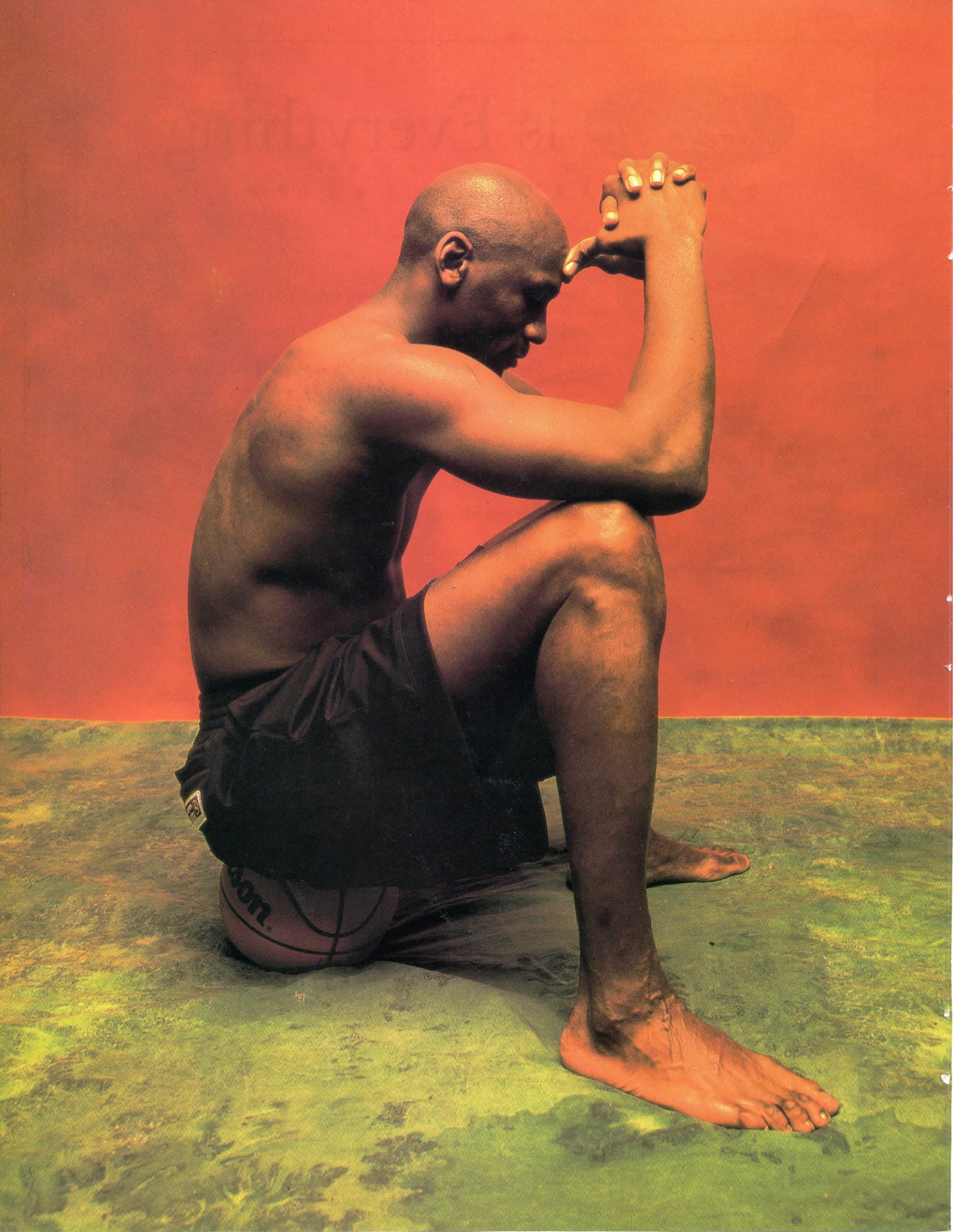
Jordan loved the concept, and it eventually became the book *Rare Air*—a title that was number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list for weeks. "I went in there a little blindly," says Ioss of his approach to Jordan, for whom he has great admiration. "But that's the way I've done things most of my career." In Ioss's four decades of shooting both athletes and fashion models—more often than not for *Sports Illustrated* magazine, which has featured his images on its cover over 200 times—Ioss has never reined in his photographic ambitions. His winning combination of guts and artistry has made him the preeminent sports photographer of his day.

Ioss was shooting for *Sports Illustrated* when he was still in high school, his first assignment coming in 1960. It was a time when sports photographers still made action shots from the pressbox using cumbersome 4x5 Graflex cameras. Ioss was part of a new breed who worked the sidelines with 35mm SLRs, bringing more creative freedom—and a new look—to sports photography. Throughout the 1960s and '70s Ioss helped redefine sports imagery, taking it far beyond its once strictly documentary role with his exceptional eye for form and color. And in the early 1970s, Ioss began to

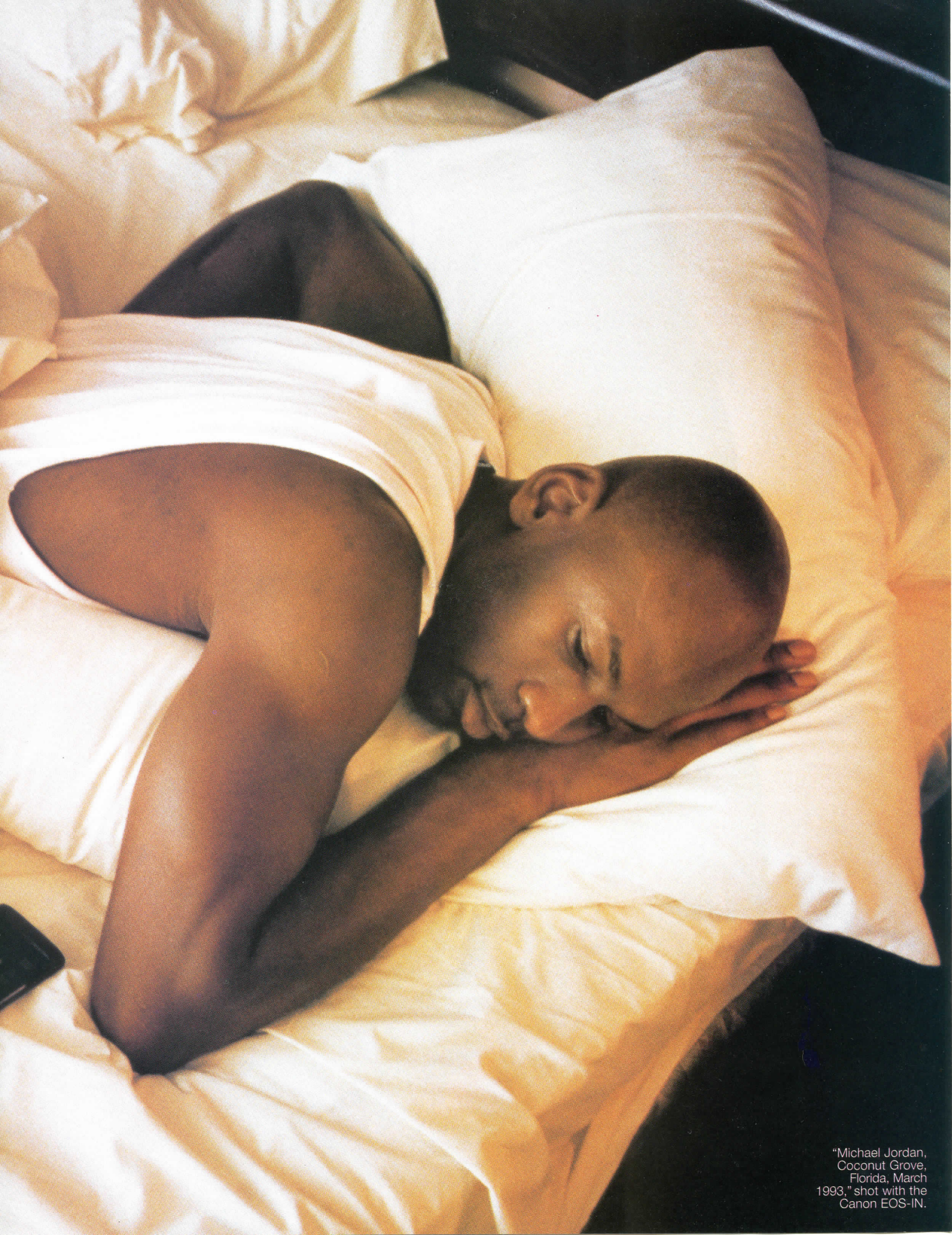
shoot for *Sports Illustrated's* swimsuit issue, adding beauty photography to his growing résumé. He

has contributed more pictures to the famed annual than any other photographer in the business. In fact, the title of his new retrospective book, *Walter Ioss: A Lifetime Shooting Sports & Beauty* (Graphis), sums up the dual nature—and the unexpected synergy—of the photographer's career.

In the early 1980s, things began to change for Ioss. Fuji Photo Film asked Ioss to create a massive documentary of the 1984 summer Olympics in Los Angeles, which the company was sponsoring. (See Ioss's Field Test of his favorite film, Fujichrome Velvia, on page 34.) For a year and a half leading up to the games Ioss photographed athletes in training, then photographed the event itself. Much of this remarkable body of work was published in Ioss's 1984 book, *Shooting for the Gold*. Because Ioss's Olympian task demanded every ounce of his energy, he had to stop working for *Sports Illustrated*. And when the project was done, Ioss found himself in great demand in the rapidly exploding world of sports advertising. Ad agency art directors called on Ioss to incorporate their clients' products into images



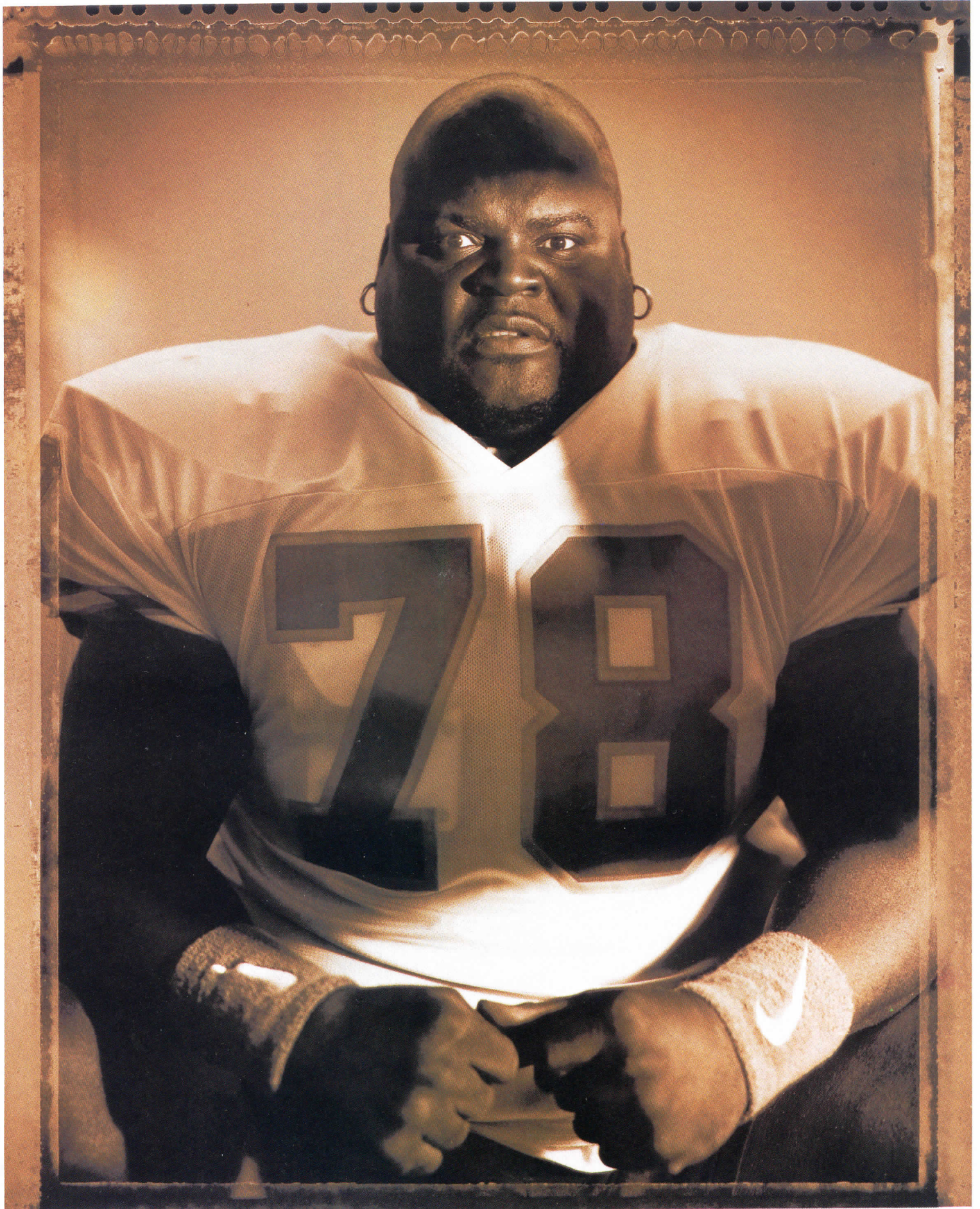


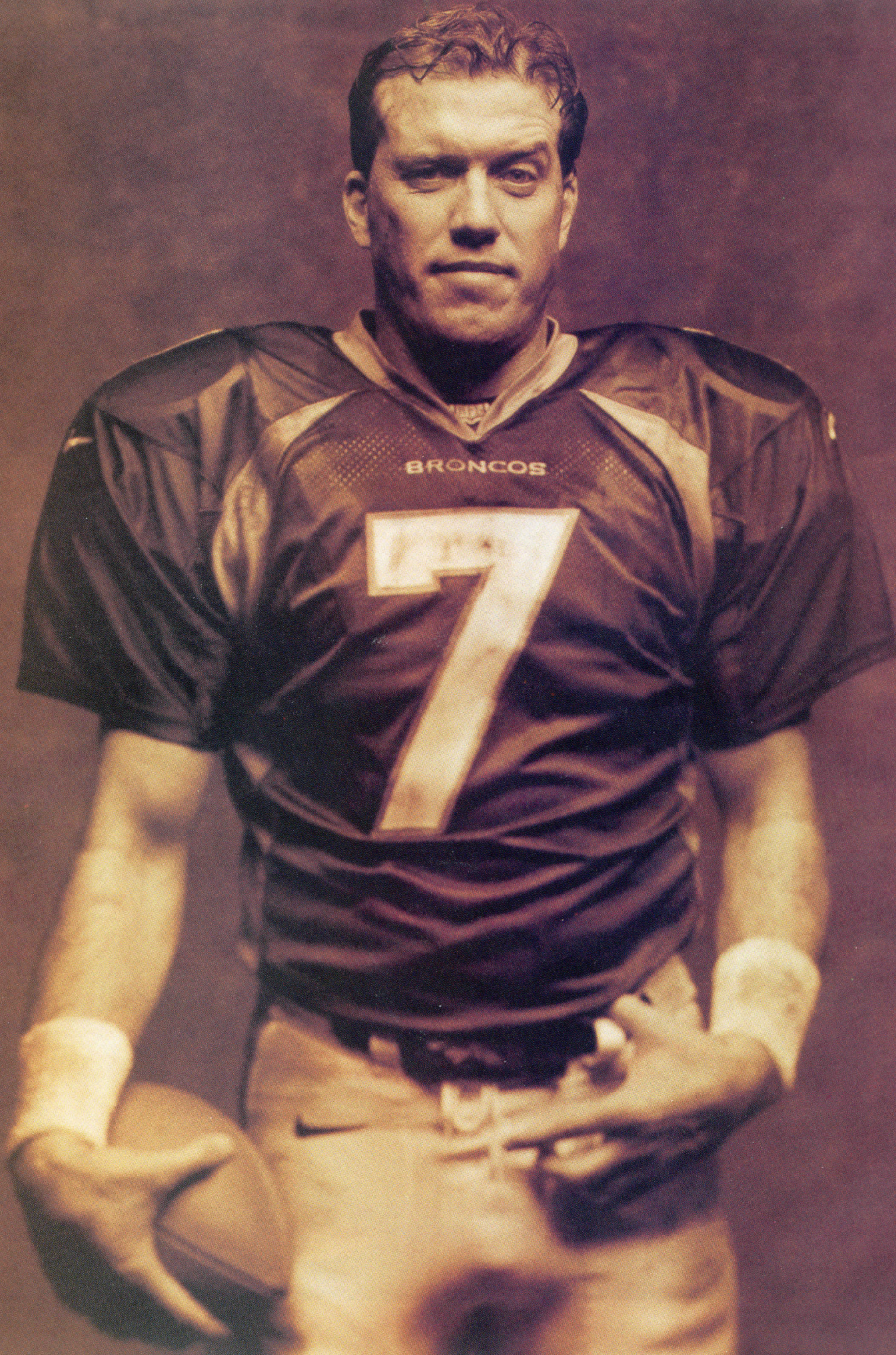


"Michael Jordan,
Coconut Grove,
Florida, March
1993," shot with the
Canon EOS-IN.



This page: "Elle Macpherson, Malibu, California, December 1993," shot on Fujichrome Velvia. Opposite: "Mike 'The Bear' Taliferro, Los Angeles, May 1995."





Opposite: "John Elway, Denver, Colorado, January 1998." Right: "Sam Matate, Auburn, Alabama, March 1992." Below: "Ken Griffey Jr., Seattle, Washington, April 1996."

Most of Iooss's assignments are portraits rather than athletes in motion.

of active and athletic lifestyles—products like Coke, Sprite, and Camel cigarettes. "For a while, I almost had a monopoly on sports advertising," says Iooss. "I was completely immersed in it."

But Iooss had mixed feelings about doing advertising photography and missed the freedom and constancy of working for *Sports Illustrated*. "Advertising is a very difficult business," he says. "If you get a good art director who trusts you and lets you do what you do best, it can be great. But a lot of times the ad agency has sold its client on an exact layout, and you have to make the shot fit those specifications." That lack of creative freedom, along with advertising's instability and early '90s economic slump, eventually led Iooss back to *Sports Illustrated*, which is locked in an intense battle with rival *ESPN* magazine for the hearts and minds of a visually sophisticated, younger audience. As much as 60 percent of Iooss's current work is for the magazine. "I've got the best arrangement with them now," he says. "It's almost entirely feature work, and I get to do cover shots of athletes. I'm doing what I've always loved." Iooss says most of his assignments are to do portraits of athletes rather than athletes in motion, a reflection of the modern social status of sports stars. "People think of action as my strength," says Iooss. "But I think I'm probably underrated as a portrait photographer." The pictures on these pages, all from Iooss's new book, are proof of that.

The book may be a retrospective of a long career, but it's also a first step—into the very different world of photography as fine art. Iooss is having his favorite images printed as both Iris digital prints and black-and-white silver prints for an opening this month at Los Angeles' Fahey/Klein Gallery. The book and show are cramping his hectic shooting schedule a bit, but Iooss won't let them interfere with his trip to the

Caribbean to shoot for *Sports Illustrated's* upcoming swimsuit issue.

"It's the greatest shoot in the world," he says. How does the photographer shift gears so smoothly from sports to beauty? "It's still about making the best picture you can make," he says. "And like a good athlete, a good model makes things happen wherever you put her. Both know what to do with their bodies." Iooss even compares Michael Jordan to supermodel Elle Macpherson, whom he has photographed many times. "Both are totally comfortable in front of the camera. Both have a beautiful body shape—big shoulders, long arms and legs. They look good in every shot."

Knowing the natural talents of his models, Iooss is debating doing his swimsuit shots strictly in 35mm—working with his Canon EOS-1N and Canon EF zooms. "Especially since I started doing advertising, I've shot more medium and large format," he says. "But I still think the 35mm SLR is the best

camera for me. I get an unbelievable creative freedom with it, and it helps keep things spontaneous—35mm is my roots."

and speaking of roots, *Sports Illustrated* has just published a Iooss photograph that was never used before—though he took it on assignment back in 1961. "I'd just turned 18, it was one of my first jobs for the magazine, and I was as nervous as a human being could be," Iooss recalls. The picture? Baseball great Roger Maris hitting his 61st home run of the season, the hit that broke Babe Ruth's longstanding single-season home run record. The magazine dug up the picture after St. Louis slugger Mark McGwire conquered Maris's mark this past season.

Looking back at the photograph, Iooss can only be amazed by the range of work he's done in the years since. He's been setting records of his own, and then breaking them, over and over again. ■

© WALTER IOOSS JR. (3)

