

BAT MASTERS

HOW PHOTOGRAPHER ART STREIBER GOT UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH BASEBALL'S HEAVY HITTERS. BY RUSSELL HART

When Art Streiber shoots a movie poster, which he's asked to do quite often, he has lots of time to set things up. "We really push it," says the L.A.-based celebrity photographer. "We finesse the lighting and redo the shot if I don't like what we get." But when *Sports Illustrated* asked Streiber to shoot a series of portraits of baseball's heaviest hitters posing with their beloved bats, his subjects weren't as willing to be fussed with as the latest Hollywood



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hottie. "They usually wouldn't give us more than ten minutes of their time," he says, "so we had to wing it."

Streiber's idea of winging it isn't as spartan as you might think. Though some of his baseball portraits were done with available light and judiciously placed reflectors—or, for Sammy Sosa (see page 72), a couple of black absorbers on either side to give a more directional quality to the diffused existing light of a dugout—Streiber packed a couple of 1,000 watt-second Dynalite strobes and an Arri Pocket Par, a daylight-balanced, battery-powered hot light. "That way, if we didn't work strictly with existing light, I could say, 'Okay, we've got to strobe this or Pocket Par that,'" Streiber explains. "I like to have a bag of tricks."

Streiber's portrait of the Arizona Diamondbacks' Mark Grace "boning" his bat—rubbing it with a bone ostensibly to condition its surface, though there's an element of baseball voodoo to it—was shot with strobe and a 61-inch Balcar umbrella. But because superstitious Mets slugger Mike Piazza wouldn't even let Streiber near where he stores his bats, a strobe setup was out of the question. "I wanted it to look a little like a grab shot, to capture his protectiveness," says Streiber, who put a green gel on his Pocket Par to match the hallway's fluorescent light, then filtered it all back to daylight with 30 Magenta on his Mamiya RZ67's 90mm lens. "In a quick situation, we can turn on the Pocket Par, put a softbox on it, and just move it in and out until it's visually balanced with the ambient light," says Streiber.

Streiber, his two assistants, and a prop stylist would arrive at the stadium hours before a game so they could prospect for locations, but it also helped that Streiber "knew a little particular something" about each man's relationship with his bat. "I knew that Mark Grace boned his bat, and that Piazza kept his bats under lock and key," says Streiber. "And I'd heard that Sammy Sosa used to sleep with his bat. With all the pre-game activity going on around him, he was just incredibly focused on his bat, looking at it like a much-loved relative. Sammy kissed his bat for me." ■

Below left:
Mark Grace,
Tucson,
Arizona.
Above:
Mike Piazza
Port St.
Lucie, Florida