

Sports Illustrated

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THE MASTERS
Trevor Immelman
Beats the Pressure
by Damon Hack
P. 30



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Playoff Dreams

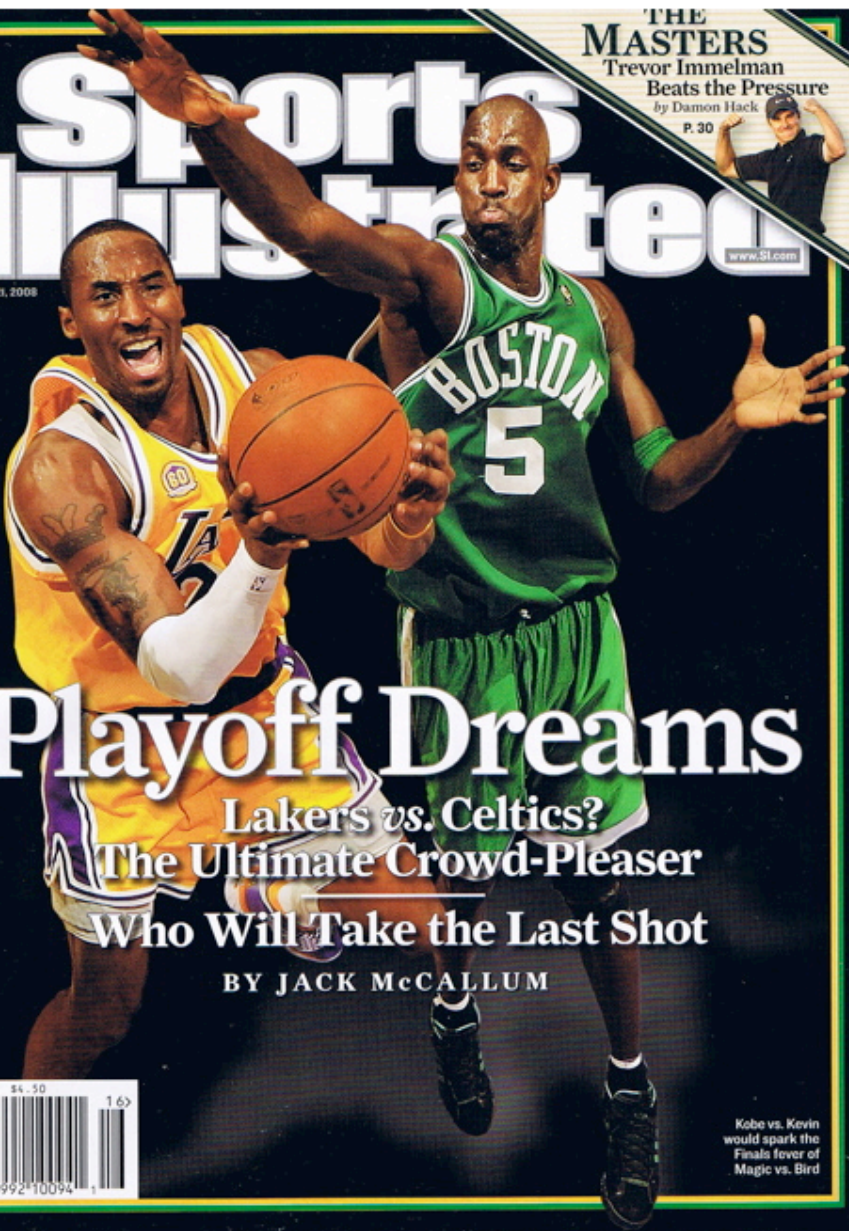
Lakers vs. Celtics?
The Ultimate Crowd-Pleaser

Who Will Take the Last Shot

BY JACK McCALLUM



Kobe vs. Kevin
would spark the
Finals fever of
Magic vs. Bird



Animal Magnetism

Many favorites emerge in a new Derby film



YOU NEVER saw a more winsome thoroughbred than Barbaro, peering over his paddock fence, eyes aglitter, ears pricked, nostrils round as hay bales, eager and engaged. That's how the then 3-year-old colt appears 15 minutes into the documentary *The First Saturday in May*, and if Barbaro is irresistible so, in their own ways, are the six trainers upon whom the film focuses. *Saturday* follows the devoted horsemen, each from a different racing hotbed (Barbaro and the even-keeled Michael Matz race in Florida) in their against-the-odds attempts to qualify for (and win) the 2006 Kentucky Derby.

The trainers seem at once in control and in awe of the animals they have been entrusted with, and the movie's intimate in-the-barn moments (Dan Hendricks, the wheelchair-bound trainer of Brother Derek, feeds the horse carrots from his own mouth) reveal the peculiar pleasures of their lives. Hardscrabble New York trainer Frank Amonte Jr., who we see hauling a heap of dung-soiled straw from his barn and then battling to keep warm on a predawn visit

to the barn of his Achilles of Troy, announces, "This is the greatest job in the world."

It is a testament to these grounded men that the viewer roots for all of them. *Saturday*, a 2007 film festival hit that opens this weekend, is without a villain—save reality. Each horse's chances are next to nil (40,000 thoroughbreds are born in the U.S. each year; 20 get to the Derby), and fate is cruel. One contender tears a tendon in a prep race, knocking him off the Derby trail. And Barbaro, you will remember, meets his awful end.

The film, directed with a taste for salient, often humorous detail by brothers John and Brad Hennegan maintains a subtle tension. Simple scenes are rich—in the mist

of daybreak Matz's young son meets Barbaro for the first time, tentatively pressing his hand against the neck of the snuffling horse. The Derby shimmers constantly in the background yet its outcome, we see, is not make or break for the trainers. Their joy comes from the doing. In *Saturday*, spending time with a few majestic horses, and the people who have committed their lives to them, is reward enough.

—K.K.



FIELD OF DREAMERS Just making the Derby is a feat for teams like Barbaro and Matz (top).