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ANDRE!

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STEP UP! BE THE MAN! CARRY THE SIXERS!
NO PRESSURE, **ANDRE IGUODALA**. PHILLY FANS ARE
JUST STARVED FOR A TITLE. CAN YOU HANDLE IT?

BY MOLLY KNIGHT PHOTOGRAPH BY LEGO

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The air hangs heavy like a discarded towel in a sauna.

Two red-faced locals stumble out of a pub to smoke, Flyers jackets wrapped around their waists. A Heineken bottle slips from one guy's palm and shatters on the pavement. His pal curses. The nightly news leads with a day-after deconstruction of another last-possession disaster for the Eagles and follows with a report on the

first full season since Allen Iverson, the face of the franchise for more than a decade, was traded, the kid poised to take his place cradles a purple ball in his off hand. But before he can let it roll he's interrupted by two women. When one asks his name, he extends a massive mitt and deadpans: "I'm Marcus. Nice to meet you."



Iguodala has dodged the boobbirds with a game that brings Philly fans to their feet ...

murder rate, the highest among the country's 10 largest cities last year. It's Philadelphia's warmest October ever, and the city is boiling over.

On the edge of town, Andre Iguodala sizes up the pins in an air-conditioned bowling alley. He's a bounce pass away from the Ben Franklin Bridge, the steel link to Camden, a New Jersey city so blighted a welcome sign invites all who enter to "Experience the Rebirth." Iguodala hangs with a makeshift crew that includes Louis Williams and Herbert Hill, fellow members of a 76ers team hoping for a rebirth of its own. On the brink of the

He can't keep up the joke for long, though. He's too sweet, a self-proclaimed mama's boy. He offers the gals a bite of his grub and tells them his real name (shocker, they already knew). Besides, it's not like peace and quiet is a luxury afforded to jocks in Philly, so he might as well come clean.

Iguodala knows as well as anyone that it's been almost 25 years since Philadelphia last celebrated a major-sport title, a Sixers sweep of the Lakers in 1983. In the past two and a half decades, frustrated fans have booed Donovan McNabb on draft day and been jailed in Veterans Stadium. They've

hurled batteries at J.D. Drew and threatened Mitch Williams' life.

Being The Man in this town is no job for the faint of heart or the tender of ligament. It takes skin thicker than Britney's skull, talent more extraordinary than Peter Petrelli's—and you'd better win, too. Many a superstar has failed. So, is Iguodala ready? Is the job even worth the headache?

As he checks his e-mail from one of the two phones that are constantly attached to his hip, he says, "The hecking doesn't get to me, but I do hear it when they boo. They get on you for missing a layup or for not playing D. When that happens, I turn it up."

Iguodala has another game to turn up now. A rightly, he's been bowling lefty and trails Williams by 10 pins. "Lou's been running his mouth," he says. "I need to get my MJ on." Turning to Williams, he hollers, "I'm gonna beat the sleeves off you!" Then, as his entourage whistles and hoots, he steps up and rolls a strike.



"To win the fans over, you need to show that you understand their frustration. It's not enough to say you care—it has to be in your sweat and body language. This is a blue-collar, lunch-pail city."
-Vince Papale, Eagles special-teams wiz and local hero, 1976-78



"Have you ever thought about the impact the movie Rocky has had on the city?"
-Eric Lindros, oft-injured Flyers captain and uneasy face of the franchise, 1992-2000

FIREWORKS EXPLODE in an otherwise pitch-black Wachovia Center. Ten seconds pass until the spotlight pans to Iguodala, halfway up the aisle behind the visitors' bench. As the smoke begins to clear, he trots to the court, slapping hands and bobbing his head as the last player introduced before the home opener against the Nets. He may be new to the top-dog role, but he sure has a knack for making an entrance.

Always has. He came into the world in January 1984. Linda Shanklin, his mom, had been in labor for four hours when she let out a shriek so piercing doctors feared the worst. As it turned out, she was responding to a pain caused by a breach Andre doing an internal somersault, as if he couldn't wait to demonstrate the moves that would one day light up YouTube and earn him second place in the 2006 slam-dunk contest.

Growing up in Springfield, Ill., Iguodala was always running. He pestered Frank—his older,

more reserved brother—with endless challenges. Who could read more books? Who could first master a video game? Who could top the other on the hardwood? Andre, the pup by 16 months, scrapped to prove himself the better brother. Shanklin appreciated that her youngest was in such a hurry to grow up, saying, "As a single mother working two jobs, I needed him to be a man right away."

These days, Philly needs the same thing and is counting on Iguodala. When the Sixers dealt Iverson to Denver last December, they were 5-18. But the team went 30-29 to close the season, and Iguodala's numbers, which had been just 10.9 points and 3.2 assists per game in two-plus years as Iverson's sidekick, rose to 19.6 and 6.2 after the trade. By season's end, he was one of only four players—Kobe, LeBron and T-Mac were the others—to have averaged at least 18 points, five boards and five assists. The Sixers are off to a 5-11 start, but Iguodala, still only 23, on the East's third-youngest team, is doing his best to establish himself as a worthy centerpiece, putting up 18.1 ppg, 6.6 rpg and 5.4 apg.

As captivating as the 6'6", 207-pound swingman's speed, strength, hops and skill can be, he's also got the one intangible that is an aphrodisiac on South Street: grit. Iguodala has missed only six games in his career. Because he spends off-days in the weight room and rarely eats junk food, his body fat is 4%. And though he went to a notorious party school, Arizona, he says he's never been drunk. He doesn't like the taste of alcohol, and besides, he knows the sauce messes with other players' games.



... but he knows they could turn at any point.

His toughness was what caught Lute Olson's eye. "I saw a kid with the potential to be as good a defender as anyone in the NBA," the Zona coach says. Sure enough, Iguodala is flirting with more than a steal (1.9 spg) and a block (0.9 bpg) for the first time. That lockdown D—plus all his

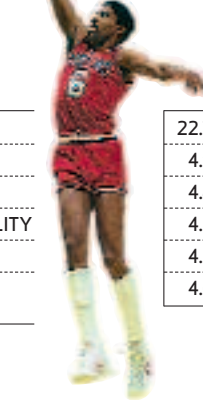
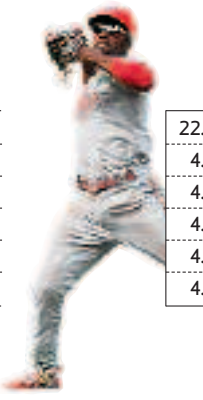
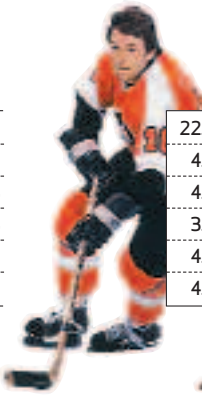
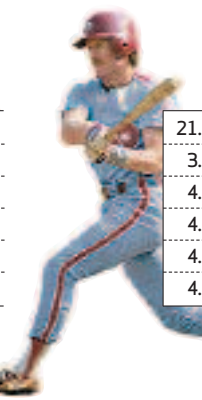
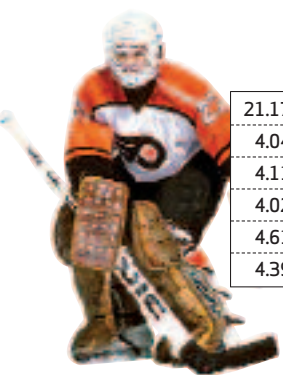
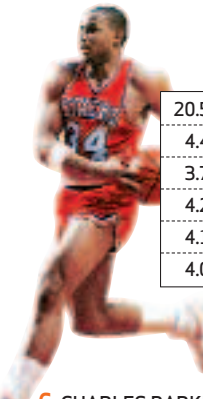
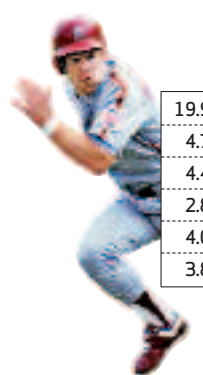
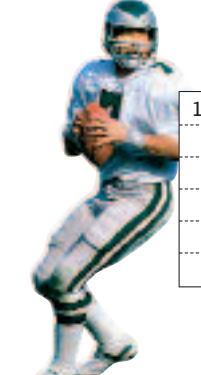
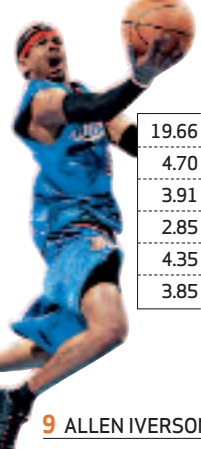
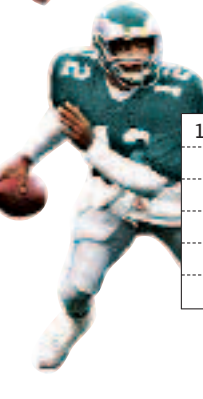
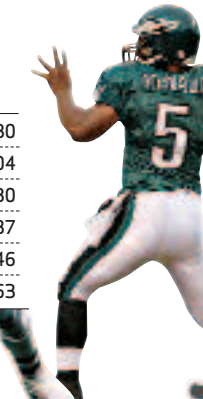
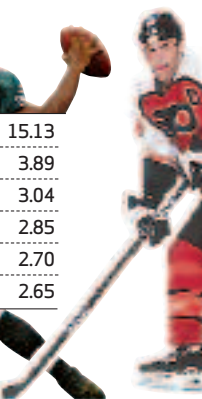
other gifts—was on display on the Saturday after Thanksgiving. The Sixers and Warriors were tied at 90 with 7.4 seconds left when Iguodala curled off a screen, only to miss a 17-footer. No sweat. Late in OT, this time down one, he hollered again for the ball. Driving baseline, he flipped an improbable five-foot runner over Andris Biedrins

for the lead with 13.4 ticks left. Even the popcorn vendors knew Baron Davis would try to answer, so picking up the point guard for the first time all night, Iguodala draped him so thoroughly that BD could barely shovel the ball to Kelenna Azubuikie in the corner before stumbling. Of course, Azubuikie nailed a three. Hey, Iguodala can't be

PHAN PHAVES

The City of Brotherly Love doesn't dole out its affection without a fight. And while many players have been called—or drafted or traded for—only a (very) few have been chosen. To discover who has best filled

Philly's needs, we took to its streets. We got a bunch of fans to rank 12 all-time sportsmen on a scale of 1 to 5 in five categories: talent, winning, personality, grit and the nebulous but crucial Philly Phactor—that intangible porce that puts Rocky on his pedestal. "We either adopt a guy," says Tom, a 55-year-old cop, "or we don't." Got a problem with that? -EDDIE MATZ

			
1 JULIUS ERVING	2 JIMMY ROLLINS	3 BOBBY CLARKE	4 MIKE SCHMIDT
			
5 RON HEXTALL	6 CHARLES BARKLEY	7 LENNY DYKSTRA	8 RON JAWORSKI
			
9 ALLEN IVERSON	10 RANDALL CUNNINGHAM	11 DONOVAN McNABB	12 ERIC LINDROS

everywhere. Then again, with six seconds left, he could still be the hero ...



"Philly fans will walk up and call you out. They'll say, 'I need you to hit 60 home runs.' To be successful you've got to stick to your own expectations and not let what anybody else says get into your head."
-Ryan Howard, Phillies slugger and 2006 NL MVP



"There are certain players, like Jimmy Rollins, who fans really like. He's got a flash, a swagger. Not everybody has that. It's key for someone here. The fans like it."
-Pat Burrell, Phillies outfielder and local whipping boy

... DOWN TWO, the Sixers had one more chance. And the inbound pass went to—Williams? The guard lost the ball and the Sixers lost another game. A stunned Iguodala could only stare at the scoreboard. After the game, coach Maurice Cheeks said the final play was designed for "either Andre or Lou."

It's Iguodala's reaction to being one of the options, rather than *the* option, that will define him in Philly. Will he become a legend like Dr. J or a scapegoat like Lindros? (See *Phan Phaves* at left.)

In the home opener, it looked like the latter.

Iguodala, stuck at power forward when Philly went small in the second half, turned passive. As Frank screamed at his little bro from his third-row seat to "shoot the damn ball!" Andre instead passed to Rodney Carney. A man in a crew cut and high-tops seated behind the basket yelled, "When you grow up, you've got to make that play!" and high-fived his friend. To be fair, Iguodala did hit every shot he took after halftime—all three of them. But the Sixers still lost. "I don't know what it was," he said, shaking his head. "The playcalling in the half-court set was not as good as it should be."

But would the guy he grew up idolizing have worried about sets? Of course not. Michael Jordan would have taken over, period. At times like these, Iguodala looks more like

Jordan's sidekick, Scottie Pippen. And, in his words, it seems to be a role he'd accept. "Here, I feel I have to be the go-to guy," Iguodala says. "But put me with Kobe or LeBron, and it'd be a different story." The comparison, and the inference that being 1A isn't good enough, sits with him. A day later he sends this text message: *When Pippen played without Jordan he led the team in points, assists, steals and a bunch of other categories. And he was the All-Star MVP, too.*

Iguodala isn't the only one confused about his ultimate role. "If you're going to make him your franchise player, that's high-risk," says an East exec. "He's like Tracy McGrady. Does a lot of things, can wow you at times, but, hey, T-Mac still hasn't gotten out of the first round. Iguodala has risen to the level of a phenomenal No. 2. He has a lot of Pippen in him. Not a lot of people would agree with that because they don't think he's that kind of passer, but that's how I see him."

Certainly, it seems, the Sixers are still figuring it out. The two sides couldn't work out a contract extension before the Oct. 31 deadline. Rumor has it that Iguodala wanted \$60 million and the Sixers offered \$57 million. If true, GM Billy King sounds almost disingenuous when he says, "I told him re-signing him is our No. 1 goal come July 1."

King swears he won't let Iguodala bolt as a restricted free agent. One Philly great, Charles Barkley, agrees Philly has to hold on to the kid.



Before getting shipped to Denver, Iverson took Iguodala under his wing, never letting the kid pay for anything.

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"I told them three years ago to trade AI and start building around Andre," he says.

The downside of such high praise is that hardly a game goes by without some reporter asking Iguodala if he can be the next Iverson in a town that calls him AI2—a nickname he hates. Iverson's posttrade trashing of the Sixers didn't help matters: It caused Iguodala to worry that AI was lumping him in among that general disgust.

Quite the contrary, Iverson is one of Iguodala's biggest fans. "Dre can do so many things on the court," AI says. "I think he's gonna make it."

When Iguodala learns about Iverson's praise, he lights up. "He was like a big brother to me. He always made sure I was taken care of," he says, before pausing. "I really didn't want him to go."



How high can Iguodala fly? Even scouts aren't sure.



"The fans are with him now, but you've got to wonder how patient they're gonna be because they're probably three years away from making the playoffs."

-Charles Barkley, often-loved, sometimes-loathed Sixers forward, 1984-92



"He has to worry only about the response he gets from teammates and coaches, and not about what fans or writers say. It can get tough, but you can't react."

-Allen Iverson, controversial Sixers solo act, 1996-2006

AS THE clock approaches midnight, Iguodala cruises through Center City in a black Mercedes CL600, a tricked-out ride that rivals the Batmobile for gadgetry (a V-12 engine, built-in GPS, seats that move to cushion turns). "There's something going on in this city I can't explain," he says. "We're the murder capital of the U.S." He shakes his head and sighs. When asked if he thinks a championship would help relieve the tension, he says, "Definitely. But it's been so long since we've won anything. We might be cursed." He tries to keep a straight face, but a goofy grin betrays him. He doesn't believe in curses.


Michael Jackson's "Rock With You" whips through the speakers. "They say it can get rough in Philly," he says. "But things have been cool for me so far." Iguodala and the city are still in their

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IGUODALA SAYS.

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courtship. But soon someone is going to demand a ring. In the meantime, the million-dollar question looms as large as the crack in the Liberty Bell. Even 3,000 miles away in the Staples Center, someone is pondering Iguodala's fate. Allen Iverson has just dropped a game to the Clippers, but his thoughts shift easily to his old team. "Can he be The Man in Philly?" Iverson asks, before pausing to scratch his head.

"He doesn't have a choice." 

Should the Sixers build around Iguodala?
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