

JUNE 22, 2026

THE 100 MOST INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE IN SPORTS

TIME 100



ATHLETE OF
THE CENTURY

LEBRON JAMES

BY SEAN GREGORY



SHOHEI OHTANI
ROGER GOODELL
LIONEL MESSI
HILARY KNIGHT
BILL SIMMONS
TRINITY RODMAN

& 93 MORE



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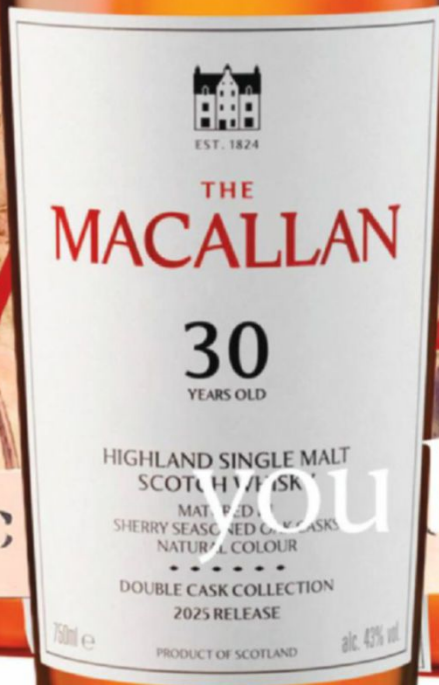
Our inaugural list of the most influential athletes, coaches, advocates, and investors shaping sports today

67
Time Off

^
The set of Danny Go! in Kannapolis, N.C., on April 24
Photograph by Mike Belleme for TIME

American Oak.

double cask double



THE
ALLAN

you know me so well



THE MACALLAN X DAVID GARSON

The age of athletes



Sports dominates the cultural conversation unlike anything else

I FIRST SAW LEBRON JAMES PLAY IN PERSON in July 2003 during a now defunct NBA Summer League. Some 2,500 people showed up each night for one of six games in what felt like a high school basketball gym on the campus of UMass Boston. Tickets were \$15. “I remember the gym, the atmosphere,” James later said. “It was old-school and hot, and the fans, mostly Celtics fans, were right on top of you.” The year before, *Sports Illustrated* put James on the cover with the line **THE CHOSEN ONE**. We were there to see whether he was for real.

We now know the answer. James is still on the cover of magazines, including *TIME*; now, as a member of our inaugural *TIME*100 Sports list, he is making his third appearance there.

We call him the athlete of the century not solely because of his on-court achievements, but also because over his career, he has redefined what it means to be a professional athlete in public life. Through his political engagement and business efforts, James has set a new standard for the generations that follow, and for those who join him on the list, edited by Lori Fradkin, Cate Matthews, and Mark Selig.

That rising influence is why we have now brought the *TIME*100 to sports. In our increasingly fragmented media environment, sports remains one of the last realms in which massive global audiences gather together in real time. As a result, many industries have drawn closer to live sports, and athletes have continued to seize larger and larger platforms. That has never been more evident than this year, as the Olympics and the World Cup have brought the competitions to center stage and events like the Bad Bunny Super Bowl halftime show and the UFC fight at the White House have shown how sports can dominate the cultural conversation unlike anything else.

SPORTS IS PLAYING a greater role at *TIME* too. We have invested in ambitious and award-winning sports journalism across breaking

news, cover stories, and documentaries. Forty-three athletes have been on the cover in the past decade. In 2019, we named our first Athlete of the Year. In 2024, the *TIME* Studios documentary *Under Pressure: The U.S. Women’s World Cup Team* was nominated for an Emmy. Of course such figures have always had a place in *TIME*’s pages. *TIME* put an athlete on the cover twice in its first year: the horseman and polo champion Stephen “Laddie” Sanford and the boxer Jack Dempsey. Golfer Edith Cummings soon followed.

Longevity is a theme that runs through our story on James—and one that defines its author too. This marks the 50th cover written by senior sports correspondent Sean Gregory, who joined *TIME* in 2002 and covered his 10th Olympics for *TIME* in February. He has been a tremendous guide for our readers for nearly a quarter of a century. A former Division I basketball player, Gregory has also provided our audience with many lessons from elite

athletes—sometimes literally, like in a shooting tutorial with a 30-year-old Kobe Bryant that has been watched 11 million times on YouTube.

Since 2024 alone, Gregory has written 15 cover stories about sports figures, including six who are on the *TIME*100 Sports list: Caitlin Clark, Erling Haaland, Lindsey Vonn, A’ja Wilson, Eileen Gu, and Dana

White. A finalist for the Billie Jean King Award for Excellence in Women’s Sports Coverage, Gregory has chronicled female athletes with particular attention, and the rise of women’s sports has been a key storyline in these pages. It is beyond fitting that Gregory’s byline appears more than anyone else’s in this issue.



Horseman Stephen Sanford, left, and boxer Jack Dempsey began a *TIME* tradition

Sam Jacobs,
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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Honoring influential philanthropists

TIME held an Impact Dinner in New York City on May 21 to celebrate this year's TIME100 Philanthropy list of the world's most influential leaders in giving. Among those honored were actor Idris Elba and his wife, activist and businesswoman Sabrina Dhowre Elba (*above left*), who have addressed issues such as food insecurity through their foundation, and (*above right*) Michael and Susan Dell, who announced in December that they would donate \$6.25 billion to seed investment accounts for about 25 million children.

On the covers



Photograph by Mark Clennon for TIME



Photograph by Ingmar Björn Nolting for TIME

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LINKED ANSWER: PHONE, CELL, STEM, ROSE, TITANIC, SINK



Creating in the AI age

From left, TIME deputy editor Kelly Conniff moderates a panel featuring Christopher Brearton, partner at independent studio AGBO; Leanne Elliott Young, founder and chief executive officer of the IoDF platform; and King Willonius, an AI storyteller, filmmaker, and comedian, at the inaugural TIME100 AI Leadership Forum in New York City on May 27. The panelists discussed the role they believe the new technology is playing in the arts. The forum also featured panels about AI's impact on the health and business industries.

TIME Games

Play seven different daily puzzles at the new time.com/games, from classics like Sudoku to original concepts like Linked, the word-association game below. (Find the answer on the side of this page.)

Pick one word in each column to create a connection from **Phone to Sink**

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OFFICIAL TIMEPIECE



TIME100 PHILANTHROPY

On May 21, TIME celebrated influential leaders from the 2026 TIME100 Philanthropy list who are shaping the future of giving.

Experience the highlights: ti.me/time100philanthropy2026



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: CO-FOUNDER, MICHAEL & SUSAN DELL FOUNDATION; TIME100 CHAIRMAN & CEO, DELL TECHNOLOGIES AND CO-FOUNDER, MICHAEL & SUSAN DELL FOUNDATION; HENRI HILARY, MUSICIAN, PHILANTHROPIST AND FOUNDER, SOCIALWORKS; DR. FELIX, ACTOR, FILMMAKER, MUSICIAN, AND PHILANTHROPIST; JEFFREY, ACTIVIST AND CEO, S'ABLE LABS SOUTH AFRICA; ELIZABETH, GROUP CHAIR, UNITED BANK FOR AFRICA (UBA) AND FOUNDER, TONY ELUMELU FOUNDATION; DR. TONY ELUMELU, CHAIRPERSON, AVON HEALTHCARE LIMITED AND CO-FOUNDER, TONY ELUMELU FOUNDATION; HILARY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE AUDACIOUS PROJECT

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The Brief

CULTURE SHOCK

BY PHILIP ELLIOTT

In taking on Senate hopeful James Talarico, the GOP reveals a midterms strategy



INSIDE

WHAT THE BLUE ORIGIN EXPLOSION MEANS FOR NASA

UNDERSTANDING THE NEW GREEN-CARD RULES

HOW MUSLIMS ARE EMBRACING AI FOR WORSHIP

TEXAS REPUBLICANS HAVE NOMINATED A Senate candidate with so many scandals to his name that an incumbent GOP Senator said last month that calling him ethically challenged was like saying serial killer cannibal Jeffrey Dahmer had an eating disorder. The GOP counter? The Democratic nominee is actually worse: a vegan.

As he claimed the Republican nomination on May 26, state attorney general Ken Paxton derided Democrat opponent James Talarico as “Tofu Talarico” and “Low-T Talarico”—implying his testosterone levels are low. A Fox News host recently called Talarico a “gay vegan” and President Donald Trump’s top adviser said Talarico is transgender.

For the record: Talarico eats meat and has a girlfriend. But that isn’t stopping this line of attacks, which make clear that the GOP hopes to make one of this year’s marquee midterm races a referendum on what it means to be a man.

The strategy is the most obvious example of something bigger going on. In states like Georgia and New Hampshire where Republicans hope to net seats, efforts are under way to make key races more about the personal traits of younger Democratic candidates than about policy positions or relevant experiences. It’s a sign that despite a year and a half of controlling every lever of the federal government, Republicans find themselves struggling to pitch a compelling narrative for continued dominance. The personal attacks suggest they fear a debate on merits is one they will have a tough time winning.

NOWHERE IS THE EFFORT more evident than in Texas, where culture-war grievance has circled the sharp-witted but mild-mannered Talarico, whose campaign is a fundraising force. The competition to define him has almost nothing to do with the actual job of being a Senator. Instead, it’s rooted in Republicans’ framing of Paxton’s perceived masculinity—and Talarico’s perceived lack thereof, because he supported a local vegan business and likes vegetarian breakfast tacos.

Even though no Democrat has won statewide in Texas in decades, Republicans, in making an appeal to the manosphere, have chosen a national playbook. The Joe Rogan crowd was a crucial voting bloc in Trump’s re-election bid, and within an hour of capturing an upset of a nomination, beating incumbent Republican Senator John Cornyn, Paxton was doing his best to channel Trump’s name-calling bluster. “Six-Gender Jimmy” and “James Tala-freak-o” both came from the podium as the

state attorney general with a thick oppo file pivoted to general-election mode.

But it’s a strategy that risks backfiring against a candidate like Talarico. Yes, he previously said that God is non-binary and that there are, in fact, six genders in terms of chromosomal combinations. He is also a white cisgender man who held his own last year on Rogan’s podcast—so much so that the host urged him to run for President.

To be sure, Talarico, a seminarian and state lawmaker, has been walking back some of the comments that have been fodder for Paxton and others, saying that his own past statements were “cringey” in hindsight. That light pivot has not stemmed the hurling of some truly ugly rhetoric. Fox News personality Jesse Watters tried to make a funny when describing Talarico as a “gay vegan.” (Watters later said he was not being serious.) Watters’ co-host Greg Gutfeld also questioned whether Talarico was

fabricating a girlfriend: “Does she live in Canada?” he quipped.

“He’s clearly transitioning into a female,” White House deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller said. “When Talarico goes in for a blood test, when he gets a physical, blood doesn’t come out. Soy milk comes out.” Even the President has gotten in on the action. “He’s a vegan in Texas, and you can’t get elected as a vegan in Texas,” Trump told reporters.

Talarico, a steady and disciplined presence on the trail, is responding to the attacks while staying on message. “I’ve been eating barbecue since before Ken Paxton’s first indictment,” he said, pointing to Paxton’s 2015 indictment on federal securities-fraud charges. Talarico has started selling merchandise with the “Tala-freak-o” brand-

ing. And, just for good measure, his campaign confirmed the identity of Talarico’s girlfriend after Texas outlet Current Revolt published her name despite the campaign’s requests for her privacy.

That’s not to say Talarico is campaigning on white papers. It’s just that his critique of Paxton is one rooted in his opponent’s real record, which includes felony securities-fraud charges and being federally investigated—but never charged—for public corruption. “I have a legislative record. Ken Paxton has a criminal record,” Talarico says.

Thus begins the next six months of competing appeals to the voters of Texas: Republicans say the Democrat is a cultural mismatch; Democrats say the Republican is corrupt to his core. It may be the most revealing race of the midterms. □

‘I’ve been eating barbecue since before Ken Paxton’s first indictment.’

—JAMES TALARICO,
TEXAS’ DEMOCRATIC
NOMINEE FOR SENATE



<
A New Glenn rocket
explodes during
a test of its engines

THE BULLETIN

An explosion sets back NASA's moon program

THINGS GOT UGLY AT 9:00 P.M. EDT on May 28 at launch complex 36 on the grounds of the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station when a New Glenn rocket, built by the Jeff Bezos–owned Blue Origin aerospace company, ate itself in a massive fireball during a test of its seven powerful first-stage engines.

The giant blast hurled flames, gas, and debris hundreds of feet in the air,

utterly destroying the 322-ft. rocket and partly destroying the launch complex itself.

LOSING THE MOON? The blast was a blow to Bezos and his company, but also a potential boon for rival rocket company SpaceX. It is NASA, however, that may be the biggest loser. There is no overstating how much NASA's Artemis moon-exploration program depends on SpaceX and Blue Origin to help get astronauts on the moon by 2028. So far neither company has covered itself in glory.

"This incident certainly throws a

monkey wrench in the Artemis schedule, which was probably not achievable even before the explosion," says John Logsdon, professor emeritus at George Washington University and the founder and longtime director of the school's Space Policy Institute.

SHREDDING THE SCHEDULE In 2021, NASA tapped SpaceX to adapt the towering 150-ft. upper stage of its 407-ft. Starship rocket to serve as the program's lunar landing craft—a vehicle prosaically named the Human Landing System (HLS). The Starship program, however, is far behind schedule, with 12 launches of the rocket in the past three years—some successful, some not, none qualifying the giant machine as anywhere close to operational. The HLS upper stage has not yet been fully designed or built, but NASA expects a working model of the craft by the end of next year for a test in Earth orbit on the mission of Artemis III.

Blue Origin has been developing an HLS of its own that is also supposed to fly on Artemis III—with the HLS that performs the best getting tapped to land on the moon on Artemis IV. But Blue Origin relies on the New Glenn to launch its HLS, and with the rocket grounded until the cause of the accident can be determined and the launchpad heavily damaged by the explosion, the company is not going anywhere for a good while.

MORE FLIGHTS IN QUESTION Launching a crewed HLS is not the only job NASA counted on the New Glenn to perform. The company was scheduled to test a cargo version of the HLS in a lunar landing mission this year and launch a pair of New Glenns to carry rovers to the lunar surface for future astronauts. Those missions now may be in trouble. As the U.S. struggles, China is not standing idle. Beijing has promised to have astronauts on the moon by 2030, sparking a 21st century space race with the U.S. With the New Glenn explosion, America looks to be a good lap behind. —JEFFREY KLUGER

GOOD QUESTION

Do green-card applicants really have to leave?

BY REBECCA SCHNEID

UNDER SWEEPING CHANGES ANNOUNCED BY THE TRUMP Administration, most people inside the U.S. who seek green cards will be required to leave the country to do so. The rule change dramatically complicates the process for hundreds of thousands of people who seek permanent residency from within the U.S. each year, and has sparked a backlash from immigration advocates. “This policy allows our immigration system to function as the law intended instead of incentivizing loopholes,” Zach Kahler, a spokesman for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), said in a statement.

Green-card seekers who are in the U.S. for personal or professional reasons and wish to stay on permanently have long been able to start that process without first returning to their countries of origin; in fact, Congress specifically allowed for applications from within the U.S., in Section 245 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. But USCIS announced in a memo issued May 21 that applicants should go through consulates abroad and that green cards would be issued for those within the U.S. only in “extraordinary circumstances,” and instructed immigration officers to make case-by-case determinations.

Daniel Kanstroom, a professor at Boston College Law School and founder of the school’s Immigration and Asylum Clinic, argues that the likely purpose of the memo is to reduce the number of green cards approved. “This Administration is trying to make it as difficult as possible for as many people as possible to attain permanent resident status,” he says.

IT IS UNCLEAR how USCIS will determine how exceptions will be made, and the American Immigration Council has said the move is likely to face legal challenges. But, at its broadest, the policy shift could affect more than 500,000 people each year who are living in the U.S. on temporary visas when they apply to have their immigration status changed to “permanent resident.” Now, they could be forced to leave the country for months or even years while they wait for their applications to be processed, immigration experts say—even if they have jobs, families, and entire lives in the U.S.

“HALF of all green cards go to people ... here in the U.S. who applied for a green card through ‘adjustment of status,’” Aaron Reichlin-Melnick, a senior fellow at the American Immigration Council, said on Bluesky in reaction to

the change. “This group covers everyone from spouses and children of US citizens to skilled professionals getting a green card through an employer.” Reichlin-Melnick said the new policy could “force people to leave their jobs, homes, and families for weeks or months, all at their own expense”; worsen the backlog in green-card applications; and place those looking for legal residence at the mercy of consulates, whose decisions are “virtually unchallengeable.”

Because of the difficulty of applying for a green card from abroad, Kanstroom says he expects most lawyers will advise clients to continue to apply for adjustment of status within the U.S. Even in cases in which green cards are granted abroad, someone could be stuck for years, he says, adding that

“in a marriage case, that could be quite a hardship.” World Relief, a Christian humanitarian organization that provides immigration legal services, said that the policy is “anti-family” and will “force apart husbands from wives and children from their parents.”

Business leaders have also expressed concern that the new policy could prevent them from recruiting skilled workers, since many apply for a green card after obtaining an H-1B visa.

Those are among the work visas specifically designed for “dual intent,” meaning holders are meant to be able to apply for a green card without jeopardizing their current status. Andrew Ng, co-founder of online-learning platform Coursera, said on X that the policy will “leave us with fewer doctors, teachers and scientists, and hurt American competitiveness in AI.”

After a backlash, Kahler, the USCIS spokesman, released a new statement saying that “people who present applications that provide an economic benefit or otherwise are in the national interest will likely be able to continue on their current path while others may be asked to apply abroad depending on individualized circumstances.” □



‘[The policy] will force apart husbands from wives and children from their parents.’

—WORLD RELIEF



Demonstrators at a D.C. news conference about the “antiweaponization fund,” on June 2

HALTED

Plans for ‘slush fund’ By the Trump Administration

THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT DROPPED plans to create an “antiweaponization fund” that critics feared would have gone to loyalists of President Donald Trump.

On June 2, acting Attorney General Todd Blanche testified that the DOJ would not move forward with plans for the \$1.776 billion fund, which was intended to compensate people who claimed to have been targeted by the “weaponization” of President Joe Biden’s government. Although Blanche has declined to put the cancellation into writing, it was the first time an official has publicly confirmed the DOJ would scrap the fund entirely after backlash from both Republicans and Democrats over concerns that it would serve as a “slush fund” for Trump’s allies and supporters, including those who participated in the

Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. Legal experts also said the fund lacked a clear legal basis, with no judicial review or congressional oversight.

The fund was part of a controversial settlement of Trump’s \$10 billion civil lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service over the 2019 leak of his tax returns by a former contractor. The settlement was not made public until after the case was voluntarily dismissed on May 18. A bipartisan group of 35 former federal judges filed a motion in late May asking a federal judge in Miami to reopen the case and review whether the fund was “a product of collusion and is itself a fraud on the court.” The judge announced an inquiry into the matter on May 29; the same day, a judge in Virginia ordered a pause in the creation of the fund.

Pushback against the fund from both Republicans and Democrats grew after Trump officials refused to rule out payments to Jan. 6 rioters who assaulted police officers. —MIRANDA JEYARETNAM

DISCOVERED

Blue octopus A minicritter

An estimated 91% of all ocean creatures have never been seen. That number got a little smaller with the discovery of a tiny blue octopus—small enough to fit in the palm of a hand—in the deep waters of the Galapagos.

The octopus was first spotted in 2015, but it wasn’t until 2022 that Janet Voigt, a curator of invertebrates at Chicago’s Field Museum, got her hands on the preserved remains of the animal and imaged its innards with a CT scan machine.

In a new journal paper, she describes the texture, color, and single tooth of the octopus and places it in the genus *Microeledone*. The significance of the find? Says Voigt: “It represents everything in the deep sea that we don’t even know exists.” —Jeffrey Kluger



TESTIFIED

Former Attorney General **Pam Bondi**, on May 29 in the House’s Jeffrey Epstein probe, that she had delegated oversight of the release of the “Epstein files” to Todd Blanche, now acting AG.



RESCHEDULED

The **White House Correspondents’ Association’s annual dinner**, to July 24, after a gunman opened fire while trying to force his way inside the venue during the original April 25 event.

DIED

Marjane Satrapi, an exile whose **best-selling graphic novel *Persepolis*** recounted the rise of Iran’s oppressive regime, at 56, the French government announced on June 4.

ADDED

Israeli and Russian forces to a U.N. report recording **sexual violence committed in conflicts**, on May 29 for the first time. Israeli and Russian officials denied the allegations.

TIME

Future Proof with Justin Worland

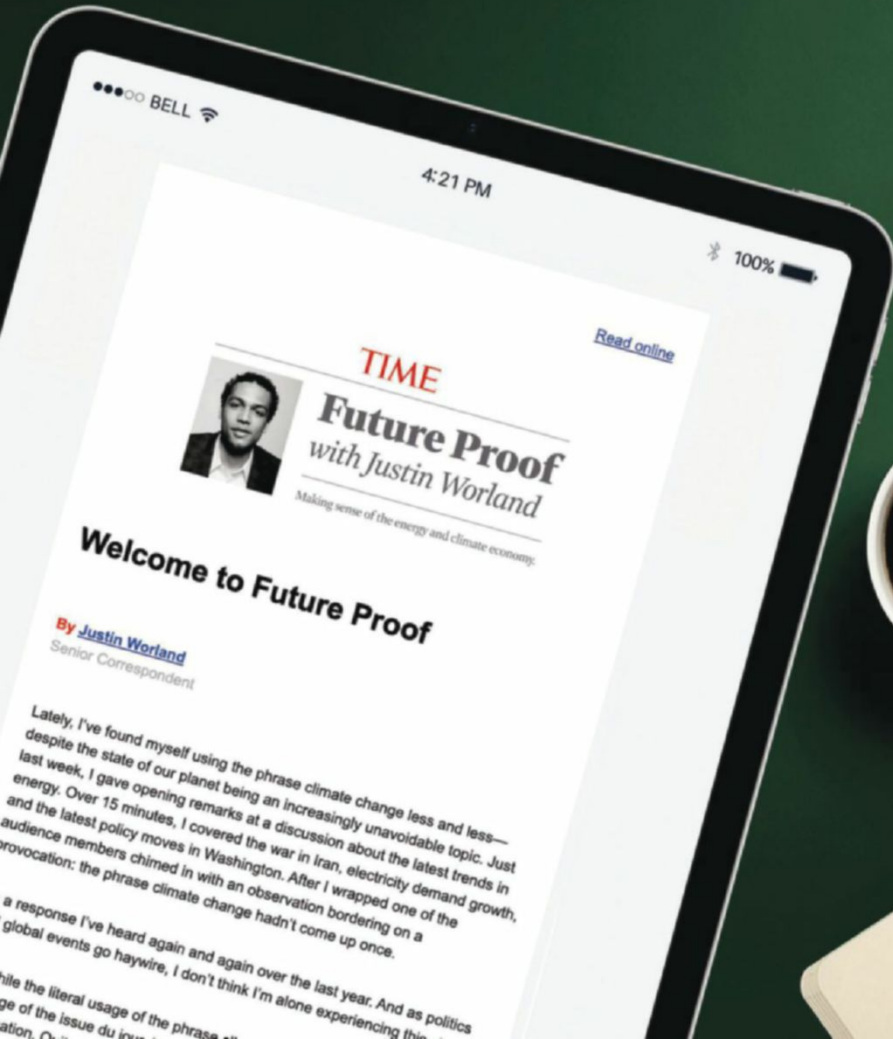
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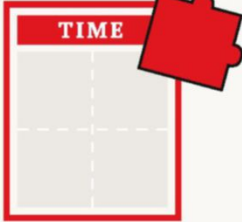


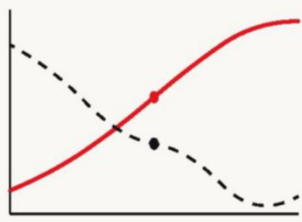
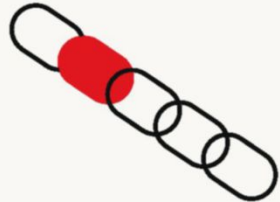
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FAITH

The AI tools transforming Muslim worship

BY ANDREW R. CHOW AND JUWAYRIAH WRIGHT

TARIQUE KAZI USED TO RECITE THE QURAN TO HIS mother. Kazi is a 32-year-old Houston-based Muslim and teacher of *hifdh*—the Islamic practice of memorizing the Quran in order to deepen faith. The hours he spent with his mother studying the sacred text were among his most cherished. But in 2022, his mother died of stomach cancer. The following Ramadan, Kazi found himself without someone reliable to check his recitation during *taraweeh*—the voluntary nighttime prayers performed during that month—for mistakes. So he turned to AI.

Every year since, Kazi has recited the Quran to Tarteel, an AI app trained on Islam’s holy book. The app provides instant feedback and catches pronunciation mistakes. “When I mess up, it actually does a good job of making sure, ‘This is the exact *harakah* [vowel sound] you missed,’” says Kazi. “It’s helped me personally because I don’t have someone to recite to and prepare with anymore.”

Tarteel is now commonplace in many mosques across the world. During this year’s Ramadan alone, it facilitated over 6 million hours of Quran engagement in over 180 countries, the company says. And the app is a prime example of how AI tools have become increasingly incorporated into Muslim religious practice. Imams use them to help write sermons, students use them to memorize the Quran, and everyday practitioners turn to chatbots for religious or spiritual advice. “If it’s done correctly, it can really lead to people developing a better understanding of their faith,” says Waleed Kadous, a technologist and founder of the Muslim AI ethics organization IASER.

But the technology has also sparked concerns about AI’s effects on the religion and its followers.

“It’s very Western focused, it’s very individually focused,

<
A woman reads
the Quran in
Kuala Lumpur

it doesn’t talk about community at all,” Kadous says, arguing that popular chatbots like ChatGPT and Claude tend to reflect the Western, individualistic values of their builders. “If we’re not careful, AI will move us toward a more insular world where each of us is inside our own bubble.” (OpenAI’s technical guidelines stipulate its models should provide “proper cultural context.”)

Sheikh Kashiff Khan, an Islamic lecturer based in Maryland, worries that AI systems designed for Islamic knowledge are being developed without sufficient involvement from qualified Islamic scholars.

“There’s a very famous *hadith* [narration] of the Prophet Muhammad,” he says, “and the essence of the *hadith* is that, toward the end of time, true scholarship will be taken away, and the only thing that will remain is ignorance. And ignorance will actually be taken as true knowledge.” Some Muslims are choosing to renounce AI altogether. In January, Egyptian religious leaders issued a ban on using AI to interpret the Quran.

BUT MUSLIM TECHNOLOGISTS believe that the only way forward is to be part of the process—to improve mainstream AI tools while crafting their own.

That adoption was on full display this February in Houston, where alerts from Tarteel chimed through a packed mosque as the imam recited, identifying verses in real time for worshippers following along on their phones.

A house of God smattered with people staring at their phones, trusting AI to speak to them, might feel sacrilegious. But Kazi, for one, believes tech can deepen devotion—as long as users continue to center humanity in their faith. “We should adapt with the technology,” Kazi says. “But if you really, really want to learn the Quran, then having the human element there will help you progress higher in that journey.” □

‘If we’re not careful, AI will move us toward a more insular world.’

—WALEED KADOUS,
IASER FOUNDER

Ebola's toll

Red Cross aid workers lower the coffin of a person who died of Ebola in Rwampara, Democratic Republic of Congo, on May 23. The country's northeast is in the midst of one of its deadliest outbreaks of the virus; 344 cases had been confirmed as of June 3, including 60 that resulted in death. But health officials say many more have gone uncounted in an outbreak that apparently began in January and went unreported until mid-May.

Photograph by Moses Sawasawa—AP







The sleep trick that actually quiets a racing mind

BY ANGELA HAUPT

WHEN YOU CAN'T FALL ASLEEP because you're too stressed, counting sheep might not be enough. Instead, experts suggest a simple mental trick that can quiet even the busiest thoughts.

The technique is called cognitive shuffling, and it's a mental exercise that gives your brain something neutral and mildly engaging to focus on, so it can drift toward sleep instead of churning. Here's what to know—and how to tell if it might work for you.

HOW TO DO COGNITIVE SHUFFLING

Once you go to bed, pick a word that doesn't carry much meaning to you and is five to 12 letters long. "The word should be emotionally neutral, so not something tied to stress or strong feelings," says Patricia B. Pedreira, a health psychologist and postdoctoral associate at Duke University Medical Center who specializes in behavioral sleep medicine. "We want to avoid words like *money* or *deadline* or anything that might trigger worry chains." Some of her favorites: *blanket*, *garden*, *bedtime*, and *kitchen*.

With your word in mind, work through it letter by letter, generating as many unrelated words as you can think of for each one. For example, if you chose *bedtime*, your shuffling might look like this: *B*: butterfly,

basket, bagel. *E*: envelope, Egypt, emerald. (In practice, you'd keep going until you ran out of ideas.) "The key is keeping them unrelated," Pedreira says. "If your brain starts making connections or building a story, it defeats the purpose."

Each time you name a new word, spend a few moments visualizing it. If you landed on the word *goat* for *G*, for example, "you'd briefly visualize the goat," Pedreira says. Hold the image for a few seconds, and then move on to the next letter.

Ideally, you won't finish the whole word—you'll have drifted off to dreamland. If you do make it to the end of your word still wide awake, just pick another one and start again.

WHY IT WORKS

When your brain is busy reliving or processing what happened during the day, those thoughts can keep you stuck in an alert, problem-solving mode. "Your job is to change the channel and refocus on something that's more likely to help you fall asleep," says Nina Kaiser, a psychologist in San Francisco who teaches cognitive shuffling to the kids and adults she treats.

The technique also gives you something to do besides tossing and turning. "It provides an alternative to lying in bed ruminating," Pedreira says.

There's a neurological reason it works too. Your waking brain is dominated by faster brain waves associated with focused, attentive thinking; as you fall asleep, those give way to slower, more meandering ones. "It's a gentle shifting into a more loose, gentle, kind of random-flowing state,"

says Sarah Gray, a psychologist and instructor at Harvard Medical School who specializes in cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia. Cognitive shuffling helps your brain make that downshift.

That's also why the technique tends to work better than counting sheep, Gray says. Counting is so monotonous that the mind quickly loses interest, leaving room for the day's stressors to come rushing back. Cognitive shuffling, by contrast, gives the brain just enough to do without revving it up.

WHO WILL BENEFIT MOST

Cognitive shuffling works best for people who are having trouble falling asleep because of rumination and racing thoughts. "I see this a lot in people who are otherwise healthy sleepers, but they bring stress to bed with them," Pedreira says.

It's not a fix for everything that disrupts sleep. Cognitive shuffling won't address underlying sleep disorders, which need medical management. It also tends not to work as well for people who find visualization more alerting rather than relaxing, Pedreira says.

If you don't drift off in the first few minutes, don't panic or start watching the clock. "It's actually very normal to be awake and have a bit of an active brain for 10 to 15 minutes," Gray says. The trouble starts when people fixate on not falling asleep instantly, because the worry itself keeps them up. That's exactly the window cognitive shuffling is built for: something low-key to do while your brain settles, instead of one more thing to stress about. □

The View

SOCIETY

THE JAPANESE CLEAN UP

BY BOBBY GHOSH

At World Cup matches going all the way back to their country's debut in France in 1998, Japanese supporters have stayed behind after the final whistle, pulled out blue plastic bags, and worked the rows, picking up cups, wrappers, and discarded flags until their section looked the way they found it. Viral videos mean tens of millions of people who could not name a Japanese player can describe the scene. ▶

INSIDE

TURKEY'S STRONGMAN
MUSCLES THE OPPOSITION

A FUTURE OF
GRAZING ON PROTEIN

THE MAN WHO LITERALLY
RAN AROUND THE COUNTRY

The players have joined in. After Japan's stunning 2-1 win over Germany at Khalifa International Stadium in 2022, FIFA tweeted out a photo of the Japanese dressing room: towels folded, water bottles lined up, floor swept. On the table sat 11 origami cranes, one for each player on the pitch, and a handwritten note reading "Thank you" in Japanese and Arabic.

Some folks cite the Japanese proverb "*Tatsu tori ato wo nigosazu*" (The departing bird does not leave the water muddy) to argue that this form of civility is a national trait. I am not an expert in Japanese culture. What I can tell you is that the cleanup routine is one of the most efficient soft-power campaigns of the 21st century, without a single yen of government spending or a single strategy memo from the Japanese Foreign Ministry.

Can something as abstract as civility be an instrument of soft power? Joseph Nye, the Harvard scholar who popularized the term, defined it precisely: the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or payment. The Japanese tidying ritual is doing exactly that, and it is influencing others to follow suit. In Russia in 2018, Senegalese fans at the Spartak Stadium in Moscow stayed behind after their team's 2-1 win over Poland and performed the Japanese cleanup. The Argentine sports network TyC Sports posted the video, and it was viewed more than 4 million times. Four years later in Qatar, the Moroccans joined in the ritual after their team's 2-0 upset of Belgium. They had done the same after the team's opening draw with Croatia.

"We grew up with the teaching that we should leave a place cleaner than when we arrived," Toshi Yoshizawa, a Japan fan, told the Associated Press after cleaning up in Wembley Stadium after an under-20 friendly with England. Japanese children sweep their own classrooms, mop their own hallways, and serve their own lunches. The *o-soji*, or cleaning time, is built into the school day, every day, from the age of 6.

Until the smartphone era, this was a localized phenomenon, a factoid in a guidebook to Japan. But these



Japan fans flourish their trash bags before a 2022 World Cup match in Qatar

days civility, much like rudeness, can ride a stream of shares and retweets to the far corners of the world. If a President's threat to annihilate a civilization can instantaneously go global, so too can videos of fans on their hands and knees, filling trash bags.

Saad Abid, a Moroccan environmentalist and social media influencer, did not need to import *o-soji* into his country's schools to organize a stadium cleanup in Doha; he needed only a phone, a stack of trash bags, and the example of others who had done it before him. Neither Senegal nor Morocco shares Japan's specific civic infrastructure. They share, instead, the willingness to watch what others do and decide to do it too.

WHICH BRINGS US to the World Cup. Japan is in Group F, opening against the Netherlands at Dallas Stadium on June 14 before heading to Monterrey, Mexico, to face Tunisia. Senegal is in Group I, drawn against France at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey on June 16. Morocco opens against Brazil, also at MetLife, on June 13.

The question for the next six weeks is not whether their example can spread, but how far. Will Tunisian supporters in Monterrey reach for trash

bags alongside the Japanese? Will the French follow the Senegalese, and the Brazilians copy the Moroccans? Will American supporters do likewise in the 11 cities hosting games? I fervently hope so. The global public square has been getting coarser for years, and social media has played a big part in the deterioration. If you watch enough of it, you can begin to believe that decency is in retreat everywhere, that the floor is giving way.

The evidence from the stadiums says otherwise. It says that civility can be contagious, that it does not require a particular kind of upbringing or culture to take root in a new place, and that it can be picked up by people at a stadium on a Saturday afternoon because they watched others do it on Instagram.

That is, in a small way, a hopeful sign for the species in 2026. If even a handful of the 48 nations competing for the World Cup join the practice, the Japanese cleanup will have completed its long migration into the universal grammar of the sport, alongside the Mexican wave. And whichever nation takes home the trophy, we will all be winners.

Ghosh, a commentator on geopolitics, is a former TIME editor



The Risk Report By Ian Bremmer

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

THE ELECTORAL DEFEAT OF PRIME Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary in April reminded the world that despite having rewritten the rules of the political game in his own favor, a strongman can lose, even in an un-free and unfair election.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has defied political gravity for even longer than Orban, with a heavy-handed resourcefulness few other political leaders can match. After 23 years in power, he still has tricks up his sleeve: last month a Turkish court weakened the main opposition party by replacing its effective and charismatic leader with a former chairman famous for losing elections against Erdogan. Will it be enough to further extend his tenure?

For decades, Turkey's leaders, both civilian and military, adhered to the secular model of politics championed by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who forged the Turkish republic from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire. Power rested with nationalist, militantly secular elites in Turkey's largest cities. But in 2002 Erdogan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP), supported by socio-economically marginalized and observant Turkish Muslims, brought the country's Anatolian heartland to the center of Turkey's politics.

Erdogan served as Prime Minister for 11 years before becoming the country's first popularly elected President in 2014. He then used a 2017 constitutional referendum to shift power from parliament to the presidency. His new powers allowed Erdogan to write new laws, rewrite old ones, appoint other senior

public officials, ratify treaties, and control the country's armed forces. Watchdogs accused him of trying to control Turkey's political process, media, and courts, and the talented Mr. Erdogan won re-election as President in 2018 and 2023.

In recent years, as he mismanaged the economy, failed to control inflation, and turned increasingly autocratic, voters have rebuked Erdogan and his party. In 2024, the opposition Republican People's Party



Turkey's President Erdogan in Ankara on June 1

(CHP), founded by Ataturk and led at the time by Ozgur Ozel, scored big wins in local elections. Ekrem Imamoglu, a young, charismatic CHP politician, won the mayoral election in Istanbul, where Erdogan had served as mayor in the 1990s.

Erdogan historically answers setbacks for his party by making life difficult for challengers. Criminal investigations have led to the arrests of hundreds of opposition politicians, charges that rights groups and the CHP claim were politically motivated. Imamoglu, who was positioning himself as a challenger to Erdogan in the next presidential election,

was arrested in 2025 on corruption charges that carry a combined sentence of more than 2,300 years. He has been behind bars awaiting trial for more than a year.

THE LATEST JUDICIAL ATTACK on the opposition came on May 21, when an appeals court canceled the results of an internal election for the leadership of CHP that had made the increasingly popular Ozel leader of the party. The court unseated him and reinstated his predecessor, Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

Kilicdaroglu, 77, is best known for leading the CHP to five consecutive parliamentary election defeats from 2011 to 2023, and for losing the presidential election to Erdogan in the last election. The court's decision set off another round of political turmoil, sending the country's stock market sharply lower and protests into the streets of Turkish cities.

Once again, Erdogan appears to have sidelined his most dangerous challenger and divided the opposition. But this time may be different, as his options are narrowing. Turkey's current constitution forbids a President from serving more than two five-year terms,

leaving Erdogan ineligible to seek re-election in the vote scheduled for 2028. Two loopholes exist. He could try to amend the constitution. Or he might use a provision in the constitution to call an early election that shortens his second term but allows him a third. However, Erdogan and the AKP currently lack the parliamentary supermajorities required to bring about either option.

Still, Erdogan's latest maneuvers signal that he has no plans to quietly exit the political stage. For now, the opposition must regroup, unify around a single candidate, and wait for his next move. □



Future Proof
By Justin Worland
 SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

For several years, the Indian conglomerate Mahindra Group has been transitioning kitchens at its resorts away from liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) toward electrified cooking. What started as an environmental play now looks like a wise business continuity move. As I learned during a conversation with the group's head of sustainability, as parts of Asia struggle to source LPG, the company's electrified kitchens are going strong, and it is accelerating plans to electrify the ones that remain.

I was thinking about that when I read the International Energy Agency's world energy investment report. It shows that **countries that prioritized transitioning to clean energy alongside electrification and efficiency saved some \$260 billion in fossil-fuel import costs last year.** It also shows 15% year-over-year investment growth in electrification technologies like heat pumps and electric vehicles. Electrification cuts energy costs, avoids the volatility of fuel prices, and builds more resilient operations. It addresses climate and regulatory demands. The energy crisis has only amplified that business case. But headwinds remain. The simple reality is that doing things differently comes with up-front costs. And electrification benefits face off against affordability.

Still, many trends are encouraging. EVs accounted for a quarter of global car sales last year, and the IEA projects continued growth. A report from the We Mean Business Coalition found that investors are increasingly considering "electrification readiness." In other words, the direction of travel remains clear, even if the path is complicated.



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Protein in the form of romaine lettuce in California's San Joaquin Valley



Health Matters
By Alana Semuels
 SENIOR CORRESPONDENT

IF YOU WANT TO GORGE YOURSELF on protein, as many people do these days, your options include beef and chicken, soy and legumes, protein powders, and, of course, leaves. **The protein found in every green leaf, called rubisco, happens to be the most abundant on the planet.**

"Today, no one knows about it. But over the next 10 years, we're going to see rubisco be one of the main proteins," argues Ross Milne, CEO of the New Zealand-based company Leafit, which makes the Leafit Blade, a liquid performance fuel shot made from rubisco.

Technically called ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase/oxygenase, rubisco is the heavy hitter responsible for photosynthesis. Scientists talk up its qualities: it has a complete amino-acid profile and can be made into a white, neutral-tasting powder. It can be gelled, emulsified, and worked into just about anything. It doesn't seem to cause allergies in people, which can't be said for dairy or soy. Rubisco is also easy to digest, compared with most plant proteins. And it's incredibly abundant.

"From a food-ingredient point of view, it's one of the best natural proteins out there," says Slavko Komarnytsky, a biologist at the Plants for Human Health Institute at North

Carolina State University. "Every single food company that checks out this protein says, 'We are in love with it, we want to use it, and we want a lot of it.' And this is where the problems come in."

The hitch is that rubisco makes up about 3% of the leaf's content. (By comparison, beans and soy are about 80% protein.) You have to harvest a lot of leaves to get enough rubisco to make a protein product, and are left with a lot of leftover pulp. What's more, getting the rubisco out of the leaves can be a challenge. The protein is hidden inside the plant cell "very well," says Komarnytsky. You have to break the cell wall and the chloroplast membrane, and each step brings additional costs. Eventually, it becomes more expensive to process rubisco than other proteins, and companies lose interest, he says.

But its backers argue that the process is still more efficient than the course taken by many other proteins. Milne says that instead of feeding alfalfa to cows to get milk and beef (as well as methane and waste runoff), Leafit is harvesting about five times more protein per hectare of land by, as he says, "skipping the middleman."



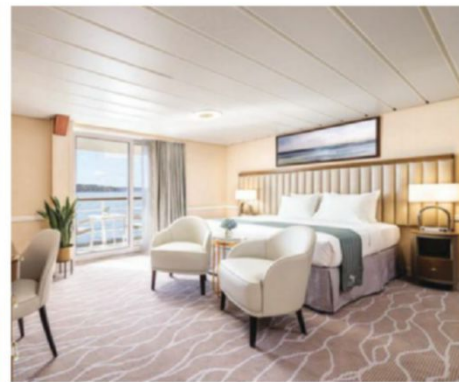
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SOCIETY

The man who ran for their lives

BY CHRISTINA RAY STANTON

IN THE EARLY 1980S, AS AIDS BEGAN TO SPREAD THROUGH New York's gay community, Brent Nicholson Earle was living openly in the city he adored. One morning, after a long night out dancing at the Saint, record executive and nightclub boss Mel Cheren stopped Earle with a challenge that would change his life. "If all you're doing is taking," Cheren said, "you're not really part of us. You have to give something back. And your community is in trouble. Figure out what you can do to help."

Earle watched helplessly as friends fell ill. Then he came up with an idea so improbable it bordered on absurd; he would run the perimeter of the continental United States—9,000 miles, roughly 20 miles a day—to raise awareness for AIDS. He called his journey A.R.E.A.—the American Run for the End of AIDS. At the time, the AIDS epidemic was shrouded in fear, misinformation, and political silence. Many Americans viewed AIDS as someone else's problem. Earle challenged the country to look directly at the crisis and at the people being abandoned. As cuts to HIV prevention and treatment programs threaten to unravel years of progress, Earle's story testifies to the power of courageous action.

Born in 1951, Earle grew up in Lockport, N.Y., traveling into Manhattan as a teenager for theater and the freedom of gay New York. He visited the Stonewall Inn before it became synonymous with resistance, and happened to be barhopping nearby the night police raids erupted into the 1969 uprising. "I saw the mob forming," he recalled. "Garbage cans being thrown. I wanted to join the fight, but my friends pulled me away." By the late 1970s, Earle was co-creating plays with composer Peter Link and studying under the famed acting teacher Uta Hagen. He embraced long-term relationships and built a tight-knit group of friends.

Then came 1981. The *New York Times* published a small article about a "rare cancer" affecting homosexual men in New York and California. Within months, it was clear that something terrifying was spreading. Fear replaced hugs, caution replaced kisses, and paranoia seeped into even the most vibrant corners of the city. By 1984, "I was drowning in grief," Earle says. "My friends were sick. My friends were dying. And no one seemed to care. I wanted to respond in a positive way."

A 5K benefit run seemed small, but it was a start. He raised \$500 for Gay Men's Health Crisis. Then the idea of running the perimeter of the U.S. took shape. Earle never considered himself particularly athletic. He was a 35-year-old theater lover with no sponsors. But he believed that if Americans encountered a man literally running through their towns to talk about AIDS, the epidemic



▲
Brent Nicholson Earle enters New York City's Union Square on Oct. 31, 1987

might transform from being distant or abstract to something human, urgent, and impossible to ignore.

Earle's 70-year-old mother Marion, a retired schoolteacher, volunteered to help. Her role was to drive ahead to set pace, then behind to shield him from traffic. A Winnebago trailed with a small team organizing press stops, public meetings, and fundraisers. Earle, Marion, and two teammates set out in March 1986, heading first to New England. Immediately, they felt the financial pinch. Gas and food cost more than they'd budgeted, and shoes wore out fast. Donations came through sales of A.R.E.A. T-shirts and buttons. Earle believed the details would work themselves out.

Long stretches were solitary. He ran with a Walkman and listened to mixtapes. As a devoted student of Christian Science since age 21, he made prayer part of every step. The physical toll arrived quickly in the form of shin splints, stress fractures, blistered feet, and relentless mosquitoes. Snow, rain, heat, and snakes were constant companions.

The social climate was no kinder.



‘My friends were dying. I wanted to respond in a positive way.’

—BRENT NICHOLSON EARLE, ON THE RUN FOR THE END OF AIDS

In 1986, AIDS was still widely misunderstood. Powerful religious leaders described the epidemic as divine punishment. The White House had only addressed the crisis the year prior, offering a brief mention in response to a reporter’s probing question. Stigma and fear provoked hostility. Marion’s pace car with flashing lights and A.R.E.A. banners made them visible targets, provoking the very fear Earle was trying to confront. Drivers screamed slurs. Bottles flew from car windows. Once, someone leveled a shotgun at them. Cars intentionally swerved close to spook him, sending him into the gravel more than once.

At potlucks in churches, bars, schools, and living rooms, Earle spoke and listened. He met the sick, the fearful, the closeted, the skeptical, and the curious. His mother’s presence proved to be a true superpower during these cross-country stops. Marion embraced homosexual sons abandoned by their families, approached hardened parents with gentle persistence, and planted seeds of acceptance where there had been only fear.

“The real work of the run wasn’t

the running,” Earle said. “It was the outreach, telling people, ‘You may think AIDS isn’t part of your community, but it’s coming.’ And there was symbolism in the run itself: for people dying back home to know they had champions. To know someone cared.”

By the time Earle completed the roughly 9,000-mile circuit in October 1987, nearly two years after he began, he had become a national symbol of AIDS activism. Hundreds of supporters joined him for the final stretch into Manhattan, where crowds gathered in Times Square and Union Square. The next day, Earle ran the New York City Marathon to carry the message that although the A.R.E.A. run was finished, the race against AIDS was not.

AS THE EPIDEMIC continued to accelerate, Earle threw himself into the newly formed ACT UP, the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, demanding urgent government action to develop treatments. In 1989, he was arrested during a demonstration at St. Patrick’s Cathedral. “It was absolutely freezing that day. I’d never been so happy to get locked up,” he joked. From 1988 through the early 2000s, he was arrested 12 times for his activism.

Then came his own diagnosis. After testing negative in 1987 and 1988, Earle tested positive in 1989. “I was horrified,” he says. “But I wasn’t surprised.” The virus came from a partner he loved deeply, a man who would later die of the disease. Treatment options were grim. He began an AZT cocktail, enduring nausea, fatigue, and toxicity. Meanwhile, hospital visits and funerals of friends blurred together. In 1991, Earle lost 42 friends to AIDS. Around the same time, he lost his mother, the woman who had spent thousands of miles protecting him on the road. “She was so proud of me,” he says. “We had a true partnership.”

Today, for those with access to treatment, HIV is no longer the near certain death sentence it once was. Over 40 million people worldwide live with HIV, and advances in HIV prevention, particularly PrEP, have reshaped the landscape. Yet the epidemic is far from over. In 2024 alone, an estimated 630,000 people worldwide died of AIDS-related illnesses, and 1.3 million were newly infected.

Cuts to U.S.-funded programs like PEPFAR—the backbone of global HIV treatment infrastructure—have disrupted care. UNAIDS warns that the funding losses could drive 6 million new infections and 4 million preventable deaths by 2029. On Dec. 1, 2025, for the first time since World AIDS Day was established in 1988, the U.S. State Department refused to recognize it officially. Earle lived through a time when government indifference allowed a virus to devastate an entire generation. That history makes today’s retrenchment feel chillingly familiar. “We fought so hard to get here,” he says. “You don’t want to see that ground lost.”

At 75, Earle still carries the belief that first sent him running across the country decades ago. Change does not require authority or certainty, only the willingness to take a single step.

Stanton has been a licensed New York City tour guide since 1995

TECHNOLOGY

THE AI BOOM'S ARCTIC OUTPOST

BY BILLY PERRIGO/NARVIK, NORWAY





STANDING ATOP A SKELETON OF REINFORCED steel, Torkjell Lund surveys his domain.

To the east and west, snow-covered peaks loom over this vast Norwegian valley. To the south, a fjord deposits icy water into the Atlantic Ocean. Above, the northern lights have been known to grace the Arctic sky. But Lund is pointing to the scene below: a sprawling building site of blasted black rock and half-built metal structures.

This gigantic data-center complex is being built by the British startup Nscale for use by Microsoft and its customer, OpenAI. Data centers are the engines of the AI revolution: cavernous, power-hungry buildings, filled with thousands of high-octane computer chips. The race for AI dominance has led to a stampede of data-center construction across the planet, from the plains of Texas to the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula. More than 800 data centers are currently under construction worldwide, on every continent except Antarctica. Together they will annually consume roughly the same amount of electricity as the nation of Malaysia. The world's biggest tech companies are set to spend some \$7 trillion on data centers by 2030, according to the consulting group McKinsey. It is one of the largest infrastructure build-outs in history.

Perhaps no data center's location is as unexpected as this one. The small Norwegian municipality of Narvik is an old Viking port high above the Arctic Circle, shrouded in frigid darkness for much of the winter because of the earth's axial tilt. In March, TIME was granted an exclusive tour of the site, which is one of the biggest AI data-center projects in Europe, as well as the northernmost in the world. "You picked one of the worst days this year to come," says Lund, the site's manager. For months, the biggest nuisance has been snow. Giant piles flecked with gravel sit unmelted as reminders of one of the coldest winters in recent memory. But today, with the temperature hovering just above freezing, the problem is rain.

The weather hasn't stopped the construction, though. Above us, a workman hooked onto a steel gantry drills loudly. Lund splashes over to a place where he can better be heard, passing two men attempting to sweep accumulating rainwater toward a drain. Behind him, another worker in fluorescent overalls directs a crane operator who is lowering a steel column into place. Around 350 workers are on site today, but that number is expected to rise to at least 1,500 in the coming months as the build accelerates. "I've been project manager for a lot of construction projects in Norway," Lund shouts. "But this doesn't compare to anything."



A drone shot of Nscale's data-center construction site in Narvik, Norway, on March 20

WHAT MIGHT ON ITS FACE seem like one of the most inconvenient places for a data center is actually one of the best, according to Nscale. Northern Norway has an abundance of surplus energy. Vast dams dot the mountainous landscape, supplying nearby hydropower plants with plentiful water, the gravitational energy of which is harvested for cheap electricity. This region has roughly a spare gigawatt of unused power, according to the company that runs the Norwegian grid—roughly enough to power a small city. Nscale has secured electricity in Norway at 3¢ to 4¢ per unit—far less than the European average of 10¢. The cold climate is a bonus. Chips run hot, so the less energy required to cool them, the better.

This data center above the Arctic Circle is partially a product of machinations in Silicon Valley and Washington. In January 2025, President Trump appeared alongside OpenAI CEO Sam Altman at the White House and announced “Project Stargate”—an up to \$500 billion joint venture between OpenAI, Oracle, Softbank, and others to build a network of data centers. OpenAI has since said it hopes to build data centers totaling roughly six times the annual energy consumption of New York City by 2030.

The Nscale data center in Narvik was initially named Stargate Norway and slated to become the first European outpost of the project. But in April, Nscale jettisoned the Stargate branding. OpenAI had dragged its feet on signing a formal contract with Nscale even after announcing the project publicly, according to a person familiar with the negotiations. As a result, Nscale announced Microsoft would step in to take OpenAI’s place. An OpenAI spokesperson said OpenAI would still rent capacity in the data center as a customer of Microsoft. Doing so would fall under existing contracts and thus make more financial sense, they said. OpenAI also pulled out of Stargate U.K. and canceled a planned expansion of its flagship facility in Abilene, Texas. With OpenAI expected to file for an IPO, analysts say the company may be attempting to show financial discipline. “The optionality helps them,” says Alvin Nguyen, a senior analyst at Forrester, a global research firm.

The demand for computing power is so fierce that OpenAI’s departure barely mattered to Nscale, which has quickly become one of Europe’s hottest startups, valued at \$14.6 billion. Known as a “neocloud,” so called because it is built primarily for the needs of new AI models, it is part of an emergent category of tech companies that have risen up to satiate the market’s ravenous hunger for AI computing power. Nscale is barely two years old, but business is booming, with five data centers in various stages of construction in the U.S., U.K., and Norway. Investors are lining up in



▲
Workers inside
an in-progress
data hall
at Nscale’s
Narvik data-
center site on
March 20

advance of a possible IPO later this year. In March Nscale raised \$2 billion, the largest round of its kind in European history. Josh Payne, the company’s 32-year-old CEO, tells TIME he wants to turn Nscale into a “\$1 trillion hyperscaler”—a new cloud company that can compete with the likes of Amazon, Microsoft, and Google.

Far from trying to freeze out this potential threat, large tech companies are eager to partner with Payne and Nscale. The company’s rapid rise is a sign of the generational fortunes that are being minted in the AI gold rush—and the risks many see in being left on the sidelines. “I’ve never seen a startup take off like that before,” Nvidia’s CEO Jensen Huang said last September, just after he invested \$683 million in Nscale.

Nscale’s rapid ascent has also raised questions. The company spun out of a heavily indebted crypto-mining venture in 2024, and has taken on billions in extra debt to finance the construction of new data centers, including the one in Norway. Its central bet is that its initial contracts with large tech companies—which average five years—will cover most or all of its up-front costs, allowing Nscale to continue to turn a profit by renting its chips out on the open market after those contracts expire.

That wager depends on the demand for AI computing power remaining strong even after huge amounts of extra supply have come online thanks to the global data-center build-out. Neoclouds like Nscale will also have to fend off the reigning cloud giants in a market where they lack structural advantages, says Madison Rezaei,

**‘I’VE NEVER
SEEN A STARTUP
TAKE OFF LIKE
THAT BEFORE.’**

—JENSEN HUANG, NVIDIA CEO,
ON NSCALE



an analyst at Bernstein. “Most of their advantage comes from the fact they were early.”

Payne is unfazed. While he casts Big Tech companies like Microsoft as collaborators rather than competitors, he also suggests Nscale can beat them at their own game. Nor is he worried about the nascent backlash to data centers around the world. “Pretty much every industry can be summarized in the following way: it’s turning energy into value,” he says. “AI infrastructure is the largest producer of value per electron. There is no second.”

NORWAY’S DRAMATIC TOPOGRAPHY is a far cry from the plains of Texas, where a different neocloud is building the flagship Stargate campus for OpenAI and Oracle. Construction here, Lund says, is more complicated. We’re standing on a ridge created after half the hillside was blasted away with dynamite to create a flat patch of ground for a data hall. A stream that used to run down the slope now spurts over the cliff edge in a sad waterfall. Elsewhere on site, engineers spent \$11 million constructing a single wall after discovering the rock below was too hard for ordinary steel pilings.

All this expense is but a rounding error in the budget compared with the cost of the site’s chips. These data halls will eventually be filled with tens of thousands of Nvidia’s forthcoming Vera Rubin processors. An Nscale spokesperson declined to comment on the total cost of the build, but said the chips will account for 60% to 80% of it. The semiconductor analyst Stacy Rasgon at Bernstein estimated a total cost of more than \$10 billion for the original Stargate Norway plan, which called for 100,000 of an earlier generation of Nvidia chip. Fewer of the new chips are likely to be needed,

▲
The data center will consume up to 520 megawatts of electricity when fully operational

since each draws more power, but they are expected to cost more per unit—likely putting the final cost in a similar range.

Nscale’s story is as much about financial engineering as the structural kind. From the start, the company found ways to mix debt, joint ventures, stock sales, and other maneuvers to find the funds necessary to cover the huge up-front costs of building data centers. The brains behind all that is Payne, who took an unlikely route into the business. He grew up in Newcastle, on Australia’s eastern coast, where he started his career in a coal mine. He spent a few years laboring on an open-pit mine in New South Wales, a gas plant, and tunnels under Sydney. During breaks he read business books, and eventually he started a series of companies.

One of the first to really take off, in the early 2020s, was a crypto-mining startup called Arkon Energy. Payne’s thesis was that he could acquire cheap energy that was “stranded” with no buyer, and use it to generate cryptocurrency. Doing so, he argued, was also good for the environment. “By putting more baseload demand on the grid, it allows, actually, a lot more renewable projects to be underwritten, increasing the energy supply,” Payne says. “When you think about it from that perspective, it’s actually a net benefit.”

The downturn in the cryptocurrency market coincided with the launch of ChatGPT. Payne decided to pivot. Like crypto mining, artificial intelligence required buildings full of advanced chips. Coreweave and Crusoe, two of Nscale’s rival neoclouds, also began life as crypto miners. Companies around the world were scrambling for AI data centers that people like Payne knew how to build.

The boom came at just the right time for Arkon, which in 2024 lost \$102 million on \$19 million of revenues, and was struggling to repay loans borrowed at up to 17.5%. Its financial statements that year flagged “significant doubt” about the company’s ability to survive. Payne wound down Arkon and spun out a new, U.K.-based company devoted to AI data centers: Nscale.

In one example of Nscale’s creative financing, Nvidia agreed in October to spend \$60 million for the option to acquire a chunk of Nscale stock now worth around \$200 million. In return, Nvidia agreed to step in as a backstop to the tune of \$860 million, should Nscale be unable to meet its financial obligations at a data-center facility it is developing for Microsoft in Texas. Deals like this—which are common in the neocloud sector—have led some investors to worry about a possible structural weakness in the AI market. Some see a snake eating its own tail, with Nvidia both selling the chips and giving smaller companies like Nscale money to buy them. (Huang, the Nvidia chief, downplays those concerns, saying Nvidia’s

investments in smaller companies make up a tiny part of its wealth and are meant to build a thriving AI ecosystem.)

Payne argues Nscale's model is superior to that of rival neoclouds because it usually owns the land, buildings, and chips that power its data centers instead of renting one or more of those ingredients from a third party. That allows Nscale to keep costs down and limits the company's risk, Payne says, because if the AI market slows, the company can repurpose its data centers rather than being on the hook to pay rent for an empty building. "We're exiting a contract with an asset vs. a liability," Payne says. (As well as building and operating five of its own data centers, Nscale also rents space in seven others, according to a spokesperson.)

As he steered the company through breakneck growth, Payne set out to stack Nscale's board with heavyweights who could lend credibility to his startup. High on his list was Sheryl Sandberg, the former Google executive who joined Facebook in 2008 to turn an unruly upstart into a powerhouse. When Payne finally managed to secure a call with Sandberg, the first thing the former Meta chief operating officer told him was: "I don't join boards, and I don't do calls like this." Then the Australian started talking. "Ninety minutes later, I was very interested in joining his board," Sandberg says.

In March, she officially joined Nscale's board of directors—her first big move in the business world since she quit Meta's board in 2024. One of the factors that persuaded Sandberg to take the plunge was reading a note that Payne had recently sent to his executives, laying out both a sweeping vision for the company and a detailed road map for how to get there. "The only person I'd ever seen write like that was Mark Zuckerberg," she says. "I see in Josh a potentially generationally defining leader."

THE FIRST PHASE of the project in Narvik will consume around 230 megawatts of power—nearly as much as all of Norway's existing data centers combined, and roughly the total used by 190,000 U.S. homes. But contractors on site are already laying the groundwork for a second, bigger phase of construction, under the assumption that the required power permit from the local authorities is likely to be granted.

Some energy economists fault the logic of Payne's argument that data centers will be good for the environment because they create consistent demand that gives investors the confidence to bankroll new renewable projects. It is true that tech companies have historically accelerated the arrival of renewable energy by promising to buy electricity, says Olivier Darmouni, an associate professor at the business school HEC Paris. But as the AI race accelerates, many companies are no longer

waiting the five to seven years it now takes to connect new clean power plants to the grid.

So even as companies like Nscale are scooping up the last remaining "stranded" clean energy—like the hydropower in northern Norway—they are simultaneously turning to fossil fuels in greater quantities. Nscale is currently constructing a data center in West Virginia next to a gas plant that is not connected to the energy grid, thus bypassing the multiyear waits for grid connectivity. This fossil-fuel-powered data center will be far bigger, and use far more power, than the one in Norway. "In North America, natural gas is the only fuel that meets the scale, speed, and reliability demands of AI infrastructure today," says Nscale's chief power and energy officer, Daniel Shapiro. "Renewables can't economically deliver 24/7 baseload."

The low energy prices that are attracting data-center builders to Norway are unlikely to last for long, either. Partially as a result of surging demand from data centers, electricity prices in northern Norway are expected to double within two to three years, says Tor Reier Lilleholt, the head of analysis at Volue Insight, an energy data company. Part

of that increase was likely to happen anyway: years of unusually wet weather have caused rock-bottom electricity prices that analysts do not expect to last forever. But the dynamic of data centers sending prices upward is a pattern playing out across the world, including in the U.S., where Trump demanded in February that tech companies pay for any rise in consumers' electricity costs out of their own pocketbooks.

The prospect of price increases in Norway, where cheap electricity helps soften the blow of long winters, is generating political opposition. "We might have an enormous amount of data centers in Norway within a few years," says Lars Haltbrekken, a left-wing lawmaker in the Norwegian Parliament, who foresees the state's total power consumption tripling or quadrupling by 2030. "That will be a problem for our electricity system."

Oslo sees data centers as a strategic asset, wants to build more of them, and has designated them critical national infrastructure. Tech companies, including Nvidia, OpenAI, and Nscale, have urged countries to construct them as a way of bolstering their sovereignty in the AI era. But Haltbrekken complains that the government has no way to stop overconstruction from eroding Norway's strategic energy reserves. That's because prospective builders only need to receive legal permits at the local level. Haltbrekken's party is supporting a bill to give the government more powers to block data centers, though in a recent parliamentary vote it failed to secure a majority.

'WE MIGHT HAVE AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF DATA CENTERS IN NORWAY.'

—LARS HALTBREKKEN,
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT



Lund, the site manager who was born and raised in Narvik, sees it differently. “For me, it’s obviously beneficial that we utilize the green electricity here, instead of sending it to London or Stockholm,” he says. Lars Norman Andersen, the administrator of Narvik municipality, is another staunch supporter of the project. He expects it will create 200 jobs, and praises Nscale for supporting a new technical-skills curriculum at a local university.

Norway might seem a better place for data centers than the similarly energy-abundant United Arab Emirates—where an Amazon data center was hit by Iranian drones in March, and where OpenAI is planning another Stargate campus. But in the high Arctic there is the looming threat of Russia, with which Norway shares a polar border only a few hundred miles from Narvik. “In a direct conflict, we should expect this kind of infrastructure will be attacked first,” says Katarzyna Zysk, a professor at the Norwegian military’s Institute for Defence Studies, referring to data centers. “You could see them as ideal targets.”

IT’S STILL RAINING in Narvik. Lund is behind the wheel of his electric car now, driving to a nearby hydropower plant—a turbine buried deep in the

▲
Global data centers already consume as much power as France; that figure is expected to double by 2030

heart of a mountain, fed by water from a dam high above. This entire plant can generate 60 megawatts of electricity, little more than a tenth of what his data center will use when finished.

When we visit, the turbine is not spinning. Energy prices here are so low that the flow of water has been plugged, with officials deciding that it’s better to stockpile than flood the market with even more energy. The plant’s operator, a hulking Norwegian in blue overalls, is enthusiastic about the nearby data center’s effect on demand. “With the prices going up,” he says, “we’ll turn it back on.”

The length of the day has just overtaken that of the night here; even Lund’s unhappiness about the weather is tempered by his optimism for the oncoming summer. This evening, in Narvik’s town center, locals will don traditional Norwegian dress, along with joyful costumes, for a festival to welcome the end of winter. Soon the sun won’t dip below the horizon at all, drenching the valley in perpetual light.

It is in this beatific state that a poster in the site’s head office depicts the completed complex—a 3D rendering of gleaming data centers that back up to green forested slopes. The only snow in the image is that which caps the tall mountains beyond the fjord in the far distance. □



HEALTH

Behind The Music

THE DAD WHO BRINGS KIDS JOY AND MOVEMENT
AS DANNY GO! GRIEVES THE LOSS OF A SON

BY VERONIQUE GREENWOOD

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MIKE BELLEME FOR TIME



*Daniel Coleman,
star of Danny Go!,
created the show
with his childhood
best friends*

Not long ago,

a man in an aviator cap began appearing on screens around the world. A slender fellow in a teal short suit, he grooves against computer-generated backdrops—a pirate ship, a gemstone mine, an island guarded by sinister flamingos—inviting his viewers, with intense cheerfulness, to mimic his dance moves. “Hey!” he calls out to the kids watching on YouTube. “You wanna shrink down with me and dance like some different insects?”

Electronic beats throb as he swipes groceries across a scanner and hops around in a gingerbread-man costume, joined by his comrades: a drummer, a woman in a pink jumpsuit, a scientist in a lab coat, and someone wearing a giant teddy-bear head who communicates only in grunts. Now they’re wearing capes, freezing floating cars with their superpowers; next, they battle a giant goldfish. It’s so high energy that you can lose your breath just watching.

Julia Monette, an administrator at a preschool in Chicago, remembers seeing her son’s classroom of 3-to-6-year-olds watch *Danny Go!* for the first time in 2023. “It was like watching a flame ignite,” she says of the show. Kids jolted into action, performing feats of cardio that would have adults needing a lie-down. In classroom environments, where it is increasingly recognized that children learn better with breaks for movement, *Danny Go!* delivered something teachers were looking for—and children responded.

Danny Go! has exploded. Episodes of the YouTube show now rack up tens and sometimes hundreds of millions of views each. Adults, even music snobs, love the songs (as does Khloé Kardashian). The group has played more than 70 live shows, mostly sold out, across North America to screaming crowds. They have a new line of toys and recently published their first picture book. And the crew scored a Netflix deal in March 2026, with five episodes, dubbed into four new languages, that dropped on the platform the next month.

Daniel Coleman—the real-life Danny—is now a bona fide children’s superstar. But just as he is realizing his dream on a scale that very few entertainers ever do, Coleman is grieving the death of a child. On May 21, Coleman’s oldest son, Isaac, passed away from cancer at age 14.

AT THE END of a dirt road in the woods of North Carolina, Mindy Coleman—otherwise known as Mindy Mango, Danny’s pink-jumpsuited co-star and real-life wife—pulls her four-wheeler to a halt, gravel crunching. Levi Coleman, a 10-year-old with a mop of light brown hair, hops off. “We got the mail!” he shouts, running up the driveway to his dad. “What’s in the big box?” asks Daniel, who’s 38. It’s medical supplies, says Mindy; those are always arriving, and they always come in boxes far too large for what they carry, padded with miles of packing material. “It’s probably a single catheter,” Daniel says, and Mindy smiles ruefully.

On this April day, Isaac is home, on hospice, asleep in the house. Isaac was born with Fanconi anemia, a rare genetic

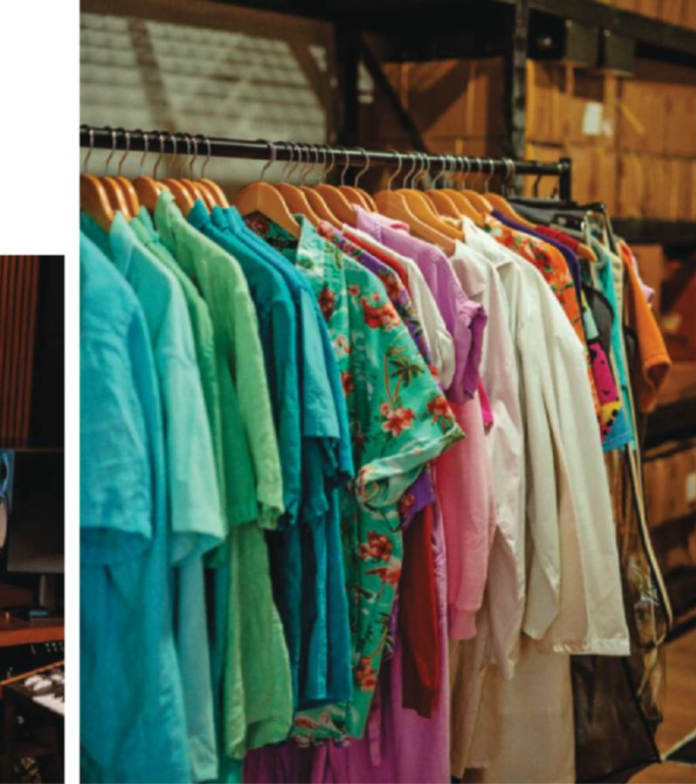


disorder in which the body’s ability to repair damaged DNA is destroyed. Many people with the disorder eventually develop cancer, but Isaac’s struck particularly early and hard. The tumor had spread beyond what could be removed.

Today, Coleman is pingponging between Isaac’s room and the converted horse barn across the driveway, where he and his best friends film *Danny Go!* It’s a playground for children’s entertainers and for children; Isaac and Levi have spent many hours there, watching their dad film. Autobiographies of Dick Van Dyke and the children’s musician Raffi, along with a talking Mister Rogers figurine, sit on bookshelves. A drum set, vibraphone, and a pair of timpani share the space with synthesizers and a booth for recording vocals. This is where Coleman works out the melodies and hooks for songs, which his friend since fifth grade, Michael Finster—whom kids know as Bearhead—then produces to make the finished pieces. Sometimes Isaac wakes up singing them, “which is just so precious,” Coleman says. “I’m like, I’ve made it in life. This is it. He’s singing my song.”

Before Isaac was born in 2011, Daniel and Mindy learned from ultrasounds that he was missing multiple bones. One doctor sat them down for a chat. “We didn’t know the diagnosis. But he knew it was serious,” Coleman says. *This is either going to make you or break you*, he remembers the doctor saying. *You guys are going to split from this, or you’re going to be stronger for it*. The Colemans’ experience of parenthood began with six weeks in the NICU and multiple surgeries.

Isaac needed a bone-marrow transplant and eventually a kidney transplant. He needed a shunt in his brain and a feeding tube, and even when he was doing well, his health was fragile. There



was also the looming threat of cancer.

But at age 3, after years of being carried everywhere, he finally started to walk. “It just felt like a ray of hope,” Coleman says. They decided to try for another child, and in 2015 Levi was born. He was healthy.

Sometimes, when you’re raising a profoundly ill child, the impulse is to retreat from the world, Coleman reflects. “It’s easy to want to isolate,” he says. “And I get it.” There’s nothing wrong with that path, he says. But that’s not the one he took.

BEFORE DANNY GO!, there was Campbell the Band, the garage band Coleman and his friends formed when they were in high school in Charlotte. “We were all very Christian at the time and very well behaved,” says Finster. Coleman played drums. “We were touring, little tours, playing for nobody,” he says. He loved it. He also worried there was no future for him in being a musician.

Coleman enrolled at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, where he studied marketing and met Mindy, whom he married his senior year. It was time to get a job where he could use his degree, he felt. He started hustling for one where he already worked—a local Lowe’s Home Improvement store—by printing up business cards and handing them out to customers. One day in 2010, he mixed paint for the right person—a director at Lowe’s corporate headquarters—and charmed his way into a marketing job there.

“He was very young,” says Jonathan Stanley, Lowe’s director of influencer marketing and social media, who eventually became Coleman’s boss. “But he knew home improvement really well.” They used to geek out together about YouTube

The Danny Go! crew films out of a horse barn on Coleman’s property, which he converted into a studio

metrics, he recalls. “Those were the early days of YouTube ... this exciting era, where we were trying to figure out how to succeed.”

Coleman thought he could improve on what production companies were providing to Lowe’s. “I’ve always had a little bit of a chip on my shoulder,” he reflects. “I get a kick out of [thinking], ‘I can do this better on my own.’”

In 2017, Stanley gave him a camera, a subscription to an editing course, and some time to experiment. The result was *The Wall*, a quirky YouTube series still up on the Lowe’s channel, where Coleman teaches viewers how to make their own accent walls. The upbeat, hyper-warm tone is instantly recognizable to *Danny Go!* fans.

Meanwhile, one of Coleman’s high school friends and bandmates, Matthew Padgett, was feeling fed up with what he was showing his three young children on YouTube. It didn’t seem as if the content creators were putting in much effort. But he loved Coleman’s videos for Lowe’s. One day in 2019, while his kids were watching YouTube, “My wife leans over and says, ‘Don’t you think Dan could do this? But so much better?’” Padgett recalls. It was a perfect idea. He immediately texted Coleman: “Have you ever thought about making kids’ content?”

That’s when the band got back together. On the summer night when Coleman, Padgett, and Finster met to discuss the idea, they all felt the old electricity return. “I can’t tell you how good it feels to be with you both again,” Coleman texted the group afterward. “I love you both so much. This is going to be so much fun, even if it sucks.”

Coleman was always going to be the lead. “Kids like Dan,” says Finster. “As a young adult, I didn’t know what to say to kids. Dan always knew.” (Padgett likes to tell people about Isaac and Levi’s birthday party years ago, when Coleman dressed up as the Claw from *Toy Story*, climbed up on his roof, and rained lime green balloons with alien faces down on adoring children.) In its first conception, *Danny Go!* had a lot in common with *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, a favorite

of all three creators. Danny would travel to see how things were made and meet people and talk to children about emotions. That's where the name came from—Danny would “go” places—and why the character wears an aviator cap.

But while the team did make full-length, 20-minute episodes early on in 2020 and 2021, they saw more success with songs. “In our hearts, we’re musicians,” says Finster. Adults often find themselves bopping along to songs like “Razz-Ma-Tazz” and “Happy Moon,” surreal ballads that have some of the mournful beauty of alt-rock from the early aughts. “It’s, like, *good*,” says Hannah Cisneros, a preschool teacher in Chicago public schools. Kids’ music does not usually elicit this kind of response from adults required to endure it. “That has always kind of been the goal for us: to make songs that are not going to be, hopefully, annoying,” Coleman says. “My boys listen to stuff over and over. I’m at least going to try to make it fun for the parents.”

BECAUSE IT WAS SOMETHING Coleman could make in his garage, during odd hours with his friends, *Danny Go!* fit into his life as a parent of a kid with significant needs. It could take as much or as little time as he had, between helping Mindy—Isaac’s full-time caregiver—with Isaac’s medications, dropping Levi off at school, and heading to his job at Lowe’s. Life wasn’t always in crisis mode. “He’d have good seasons and even years where things were pretty peaceful,” Coleman says. “We’d go to doctor check-ups not that often.” During those good times, Isaac went to school and fought with his younger brother and played with friends and developed his lasting enthusiasm for Sith knights from the *Star Wars* universe.

Then, in 2022, the *Danny Go!* crew—most of whom were still working day jobs—saw a major traffic spike with one of their new videos: “The Wiggle Dance.” “That’s really where we saw the growth just go nuts,” Coleman says. The viewing numbers exploded overnight, and the team realized they had tapped into something big. “The Stomp-Clap Song” and “The Gingerbread Cookie Dance,” both released in 2021, had already given them some inkling that videos that taught dances were a potentially popular niche.

They also realized that while many children’s YouTubers talked about weekends being their highest numbers, *Danny Go!* got most of its views during the school day. “We owe that early spike to teachers,” says Padgett, who handles most of the team’s business affairs and also plays the scientist character, Pap Pap. With *Danny Go!*, teachers say, they found content that both they and their students enjoyed, and which they could use



^ Coleman's 14-year-old son, Isaac, developed cancer related to his genetic disorder. He passed away in May

as “brain breaks” for the kids—a window for intense movement after periods of sitting.

The numbers snowballed as teachers grew to trust *Danny Go!* content. These are not YouTube videos designed to glue children to the screen with quick-cut editing. Online videos can be intensely rewarding, especially to children.

It is not difficult for the relationship between content creator and audience to turn predatory, but in the case of *Danny Go!*, “it’s like he’s using that for good instead of for evil,” says Kelsie Olds, a pediatric occupational therapist in Australia who uses the videos in sessions.

After “The Wiggle Dance,” *Danny Go!* started releasing a new dance video and original song roughly every two weeks, for two years. “We try to keep things really pure and really focused, and it’s really just about giving a fun time to these kids dancing around,” Coleman says. “The true goal is that if they see it’s a *Danny Go!* video, they know they’re going to be getting up.”

Gradually the three were each able to leave their jobs and make *Danny Go!* full time, taking the show on tour in 2024. Much of their income comes from YouTube, which sells ads on the content. Mindy and their friend Dominic Gerald, a touring professional drummer and former Campbell the Band—mate, also appear in the videos, but they have kept the number of people involved very small in order to be sure that they can personally stand behind the content. They have not engaged much with the media worlds of New York and Los Angeles. That world comes to them, in the form of opportunities like the Netflix partnership, that they feel they can take or leave as they see fit. “I kind of love that about what we’ve done,” Coleman says.



“It’s just me and two of my childhood best friends making this thing in the woods of North Carolina.”

Remarkable as his path has been, it has come with an emotional toll. “There’s the other side of doing kids’ content, when your kid is not healthy, that is difficult,” he said in April. “I don’t know how things will go over the next few months, to be honest. But I want to believe that there’s enough light on the other side—especially just seeing how much this show means to not just kids, but other families that are experiencing painful situations.”

OVER THE YEARS, parents have written to Coleman when their children die. Perhaps because he has been open about Isaac’s journey on social media, they often reach out to him and ask if he could record a video for their child’s surviving sibling. It is one of the most meaningful parts of the job. “It can be fuel for wanting to continue, even when things feel painful at home,” Coleman says. “That’s the stuff, you know—that’s why you do it.”

It is also one of the hardest parts of the job. It eats at Coleman that since the show really took off, he can no longer send a video to every person who reaches out, because there are so many of them. “I read stories of Mister Rogers and how he would be up late at night responding to all the fan mail. And I feel just like ... there’s another world in which I could be that guy,” he said in April. But he didn’t have the bandwidth to respond—especially not then, when he’d decided to pause *Danny Go!*’s normal production schedule. He had his own dying child to care for and love.

In December 2025, the Colemans sat across from Isaac’s doctor at the Levine Children’s Hospital in Charlotte and learned that the lump they had noticed in Isaac’s mouth was an aggressive cancer that had spread through his head and neck. “It just happened so fast,” says Mindy. “He was

so young, so we weren’t looking hard for it.”

The next day, still in shock, Coleman donned his teal short suit and aviator cap. He’d made arrangements earlier in the month with the hospital to perform for kids who were spending Christmas there. For more than an hour, Coleman danced, handed out high fives, and cuddled kids who needed a hug. The following day, he and Mindy were back at Levine Children’s, as the parents of a pediatric cancer patient, to discuss surgery options.

In January 2026, Isaac had surgery to remove the mass. But partway through, one of the doctors emerged. *It was a lot worse than we hoped*, Coleman remembers him saying. *The surgery is not going to get it out*. Chemotherapy is generally too toxic for people with Fanconi anemia. The doctors suggested targeted radiation to try to slow down the cancer’s growth, but they made it clear that there was no real chance of stopping the tumor. “After only two days, he was already begging not to go,” says Coleman. They decided to stop treatment and focus on Isaac’s comfort.

April was full of sleepless nights for the Colemans—up with Isaac until 1 a.m., trying to get him comfortable, then up at 6 to get Levi up for school—and the studio in the horse barn was quiet most days. Coleman was grateful that the channel’s success meant he could still pay the mortgage. But it couldn’t buy him what he really wanted.

“For me, what is money right now? I can buy toys for Isaac,” he said during Isaac’s last weeks. “That’s it. I would pay for time. I just want time, and that’s the thing I don’t have.”

ISAAC DIED THREE WEEKS LATER. Coleman started spending more time alone in the woods on his property. “It’s hard to know what to do right now,” he says. “I’m not working on *Danny Go!* really. I don’t really want to for a little bit.” There’s a part of the woods without any trails where he’s building a memorial for Isaac—a bridge and seating area by the creek where he can watch peregrine falcons, his son’s favorite animals, fly over the tall trees.

He sits there and wonders what to do next. How can he keep making a kids’ show that was so deeply inspired by his son, who’s no longer here? Then again, how can he not? “Am I going to want to run away from kids’ stuff, or am I going to be doubly motivated?” he says. “I don’t know what the future looks like.”

For now, he is reflecting on the path he chose after becoming a parent: love, music, and creativity, not isolation and despair. “I’m proud of what we’ve built,” he says of *Danny Go!*, “and I think that there’s very few things that I could go and do with my life that would probably have more meaning.” □

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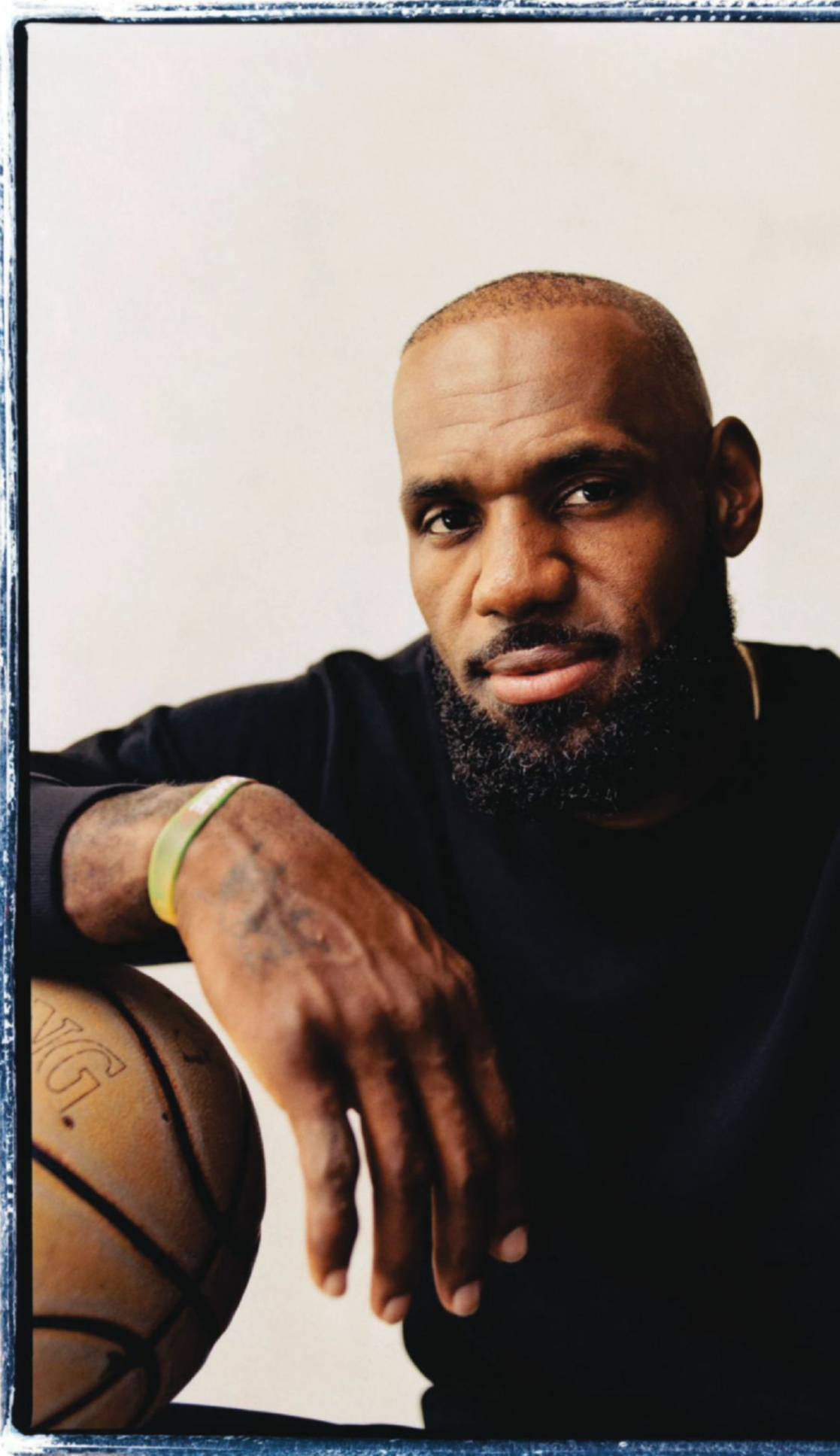
TIME100

S P O R T S

From **athletes** and **coaches**
to **advocates** and **investors**,
these are the people
shaping sports today

▶ JAMES IN EL
SEGUNDO, CALIF.,
ON APRIL 15

—
PHOTOGRAPH BY
MARK CLENNON
FOR TIME





LeBron James

How the NBA star reinvented the modern athlete over a historic 23 seasons

By Sean Gregory/El Segundo, Calif.

A PURPLE SMOCK ADORNED WITH SMILEY FACES CLOAKS LEBRON JAMES' body around 7:30 a.m. one mid-April morning, as he's groomed for a magazine cover shoot at the Los Angeles Lakers practice facility in El Segundo, Calif. Typically, this would be awful timing for a reflective talk with one of the world's most famous people. James hasn't been sleeping well. His speech is groggy. A first-round playoff series with the Houston Rockets opens in three days. He has practice soon.

But throughout a rare exclusive interview, James is utterly locked in. In fact, I can't recall an athlete more present for one of these sit-downs. As some half-dozen people hover around him, James maintains his focus, answering each question that comes at him, including the most pressing one: How long does he want to keep playing?

"It's up to the mind," says James, 41. "Where the mind goes, the body will lay. When I'm not in love with getting to the arenas on game days five hours before to start my preparation, if I'm out of love with getting to practice 2½ hours beforehand, then I know I'll be done."

Right now, James remains very much enamored. "Hell yeah," he says. "I'm sitting here talking to you. I don't have a voice, I've got practice in an hour. You think I'm not having fun still? I could have my ass at home, with a hot pack on my throat, having a f-cking hot toddy and some scrambled eggs."

Instead, James continues to sustain his excellence, to a degree never before seen in major pro sports. Already the leading scorer in NBA history, a middle-aged James once again produced at an All-Star level in 2025–26, his 23rd NBA season. When Lakers stars Luka Doncic and Austin Reaves missed postseason games with injuries, James showed he can still play head honcho, propelling his team past a talented Rockets squad, before the Oklahoma City Thunder sent his undermanned team home.

Having entered the NBA as the most-hyped high school athlete in history, James wrote the blueprint for exceeding the types of expectations that felled so many before him. His superior skill level and genius hoops IQ as well as the great care he's given his physique allowed him to run roughshod over NBA record books: 22 straight All-Star selections, all-time leading playoff scorer, most first-team All-NBA selections, etc. "He's had the greatest career in NBA history," says two-time NBA MVP Steve Nash, who co-hosts the *Mind the Game*

podcast with James. “You combine his peak and his longevity, and there’s nobody that comes close.”

Add in his off-court accomplishments, and James may be the most influential athlete of the past half-century. In the decades before his arrival, superstar athletes mostly stayed in their lane. James ushered in the era of player empowerment, showing that you can start companies, mix it up in politics, and elevate the people around you—all while playing like the GOAT of your game. “I don’t think it’s a stretch at all to say LeBron is one of the most important athletes in American history, and one of the most important Americans of the 21st century,” says Todd Boyd, professor of race and popular culture at the University of Southern California.

In the face of public doubt, he entrusted his business affairs to friends, used leverage to make his own decisions on where to play, and engaged with the broader world around him. He invested his equity in global sports brands, technology, and his hometown of Akron, Ohio, while enjoying healthy returns. “He’s a smart guy on the court, he’s a smart guy off the court,” Warren Buffett, who’s met with James several times over the years, tells TIME.

And while he’s been outspoken about politics and social justice, drawing criticism from the right, his decades-long career has been basically scandal-free. His big controversy this year? Dissing the hotel he’s stayed at while playing in Memphis. “Everything I say and do is overblown,” says James during his haircut. “I don’t have a problem with Memphis people. People need to know that. I have a problem with that hotel, and I don’t like going there.”

GOAT debates pit James against Michael Jordan, whose come-fly-with-me style, six titles in the 1990s, and rocket fueling of global sports marketing, through Air Jordans and other endorsements, created a lasting legend. While the relative merits of their basketball bona fides can be—and most definitely have been—argued ad nauseam, James spoke up on uncomfortable topics. Jordan, on the other hand, said he was reluctant to do so, because Republicans buy sneakers too.

When I invite James to agree that he’s a more influential athlete than Jordan, he just laughs. “You ask somebody that grew up in the Jordan era, they’re gonna say Jordan,” says James. “You ask somebody who grew up in the LeBron era”—he pauses for a beat—“they’re still gonna say Jordan.” Which he understands. “Listen, to each his own,” he says. “I can tell you this. I never step my feet in another man’s shoes, saying, ‘OK, well, sh-t, I got to do better than him.’ My journey is my journey. I do what I do. I know what I’ve brought to the table. From a basketball standpoint, an inspiring standpoint, an influential standpoint, I know I can walk in any room.”



AGE 18 DURING HIS ROOKIE SEASON WITH THE CLEVELAND CAVALIERS IN NOVEMBER 2003



LEBRON BY THE NUMBERS

42,184

Career points in the regular season; James is the only player in NBA history to cross the 40,000-point threshold

22

All-Star game selections, an NBA record

12,016

Career assists in the regular season, fourth all-time

1,297

Consecutive regular-season games in which James scored double digits, a record

GROWING UP IN A TOUGH AREA of Akron, James spent hours in his own head. “I had so much time to explore and imagine and want to be more than a little Black kid that stays in the house and feels sheltered,” he says. He rarely saw Akron marked on maps. “When you feel like you are being slighted, that’s a motivating factor,” he says. “I felt slighted that I was in a single-parent household. I felt slighted because I didn’t have any siblings. So I’ve always felt a certain chip on my shoulder.”

James, who skipped college to turn pro, was determined to share his success with his inner circle. The Cleveland Cavaliers won the 2003 draft lottery and took their native son with the top pick. He won Rookie of the Year and after his second season fired his agent and formed a company called LRMR, a first-name acronym for LeBron James and friends Rich Paul, Maverick Carter, and Randy Mims, to handle his business. Critics derided the move, given their lack of traditional management experience. In 2016 Phil Jackson sparked controversy when he referred to them as James’ “posse.” (Jackson later said his “word choice could be something I could regret.”)

“If I would have listened to the narrative of the outside world, I would have been doomed,” says James. “Because everybody said it was a bad idea. Why am I hiring people with no education? Why am I hiring people that haven’t been in the business? Why am I hiring my childhood friends? Everybody, when it comes to things that have never been done before, they want you to go to the sound of the beat that was from yesterday, or the beat that was from 10 years ago. My mom never raised me to be that way.”

“You know how LeBron James changed the game?” says Paul, who now runs the Klutch Sports Group, an agency representing James, A’ja Wilson, Jalen Hurts, and some 700 other athletes. “He changed the game because he was the athlete that was willing to tell that prominent person that was in position with a business card from a high-level corporate institution to go f-ck themselves.”

▼
JAMES' FIRST OLYMPIC GOLD MEDAL FOR TEAM USA AT THE 2008 BEIJING GAMES



▼
FACING OFF AGAINST THE DALLAS MAVERICKS IN GAME 2 OF THE 2011 NBA FINALS



▼
THE 2016 NBA CHAMPIONSHIP, CLEVELAND'S FIRST MAJOR PRO SPORTS TITLE IN 52 YEARS



James played seven seasons with Cleveland, winning two NBA MVPs, leading the Cavs to two seasons with 60-plus wins, and reaching the NBA Finals. Still, he fell short of a title, and in 2010 seized an opportunity to join forces with Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh. On the now infamous ESPN program *The Decision*, James told the world he would “take my talents to South Beach.” A portion of the ad revenue, \$2.5 million, was donated to the Boys & Girls Clubs of America.

Still, critics hammered the televised event as egotistical and self-serving. In Cleveland, fans burned his jersey. “It was the most ridiculous thing,” says James. “I thought it was overblown then. I know it’s ridiculously overblown now.” The source of the venom was twofold. First, by reporting the news himself and creating a super-team in Florida, he was wresting his story from entrenched power structures: the media and NBA suits. Second, superstars were supposed to deliver titles for the teams that drafted them, like Jordan had done in Chicago, Larry Bird in Boston, and Magic Johnson in L.A. That James left Northeast Ohio without ending Cleveland’s excruciating championship drought—the city hadn’t won a major pro sports title since 1964—added to the furor.

“I was comfortable with changing that narrative because my journey is different from those guys’ journey,” says James. He points out that Johnson, for example, in his rookie season joined with Hall of Famer Kareem Abdul-Jabbar for the first of the five titles they would win together. “I wasn’t privy to that,” he says. “M.J. spent his first couple years without a Hall of Fame teammate. But then, boom, they drafted Scottie Pippen, and boom, here comes Phil Jackson.” Bird, meanwhile, teamed up with Robert Parish

and Kevin McHale in year two. “I didn’t see that the franchise was going on the trajectory that I was going on in my career,” says James. “I wanted more. I wanted to win at the highest level.” He rejects the notion that chasing titles with fellow stars counts as some kind of cheat code. “It’s no different from someone in business going from one place to the next place, because they get a better opportunity to be around better people,” he says. “In sports, sometimes people get so caught up in ‘He should do this on his own.’ I don’t play tennis and I don’t play golf. The way I grew up is, we’ve got to do this together as a team.”

Superteams soon became the norm. “It was a turning point for the league,” says five-time All-Star Kevin Love, who played with James and Kyrie Irving during James’ second tour with the Cavs. “You know who has the power here. In the past, it was always ownership and the front office. LeBron completely flipped that on its axis.”

James’ move proved prescient, but he was villainized at the time. He embraced the black hat during his first year in Miami. The low point came in the 2011 NBA Finals, where the Heat dropped Game 6 at home, giving the Dallas Mavericks the title. Johnson had four championships in his first eight seasons, Bird three, Jordan two. James zilch.

After the series, James, who scored nearly 9 points per game below his regular-season average in those Finals, seemed to take solace in the misery of others. “All the people that was rooting on me to fail, at the end of the day, they got to wake up tomorrow, have the same life that they had before they woke up today,” he said at a press conference. “They got the same personal problems they had today.”

While James now admits he could have been more diplomatic, he regrets nothing—those comments, making *The Decision* a TV show, none of it. “The best teacher in life is experience,” he says. “I learned from that moment. I see how that could have been taken. But f-ck, I was angry. I was mad. I was sad. I got stomped on all year. And I let the media get the best of me.”

JAMES TRANSFORMED HIS ARC that offseason. “That’s not you, bro,” he says. “Get back to who you are.” He traveled to Houston to train with Hall of Famer Hakeem Olajuwon, who taught him footwork tricks. In 2012 and 2013, James won back-to-back MVPs, and the Heat back-to-back NBA titles.

He made strides as a human too. James pushed his foundation to do more than host one-off events, like his annual bike-a-thon. “That

‘He’s had the greatest career in NBA history ... There’s nobody that comes close.’

—TWO-TIME NBA MVP STEVE NASH

2003: JOHN BIEVER—SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY IMAGES; 2008: HELEN H. RICHARDSON—THE DENVER POST/GETTY IMAGES; 2011: MIKE EHREMAN—SPORTS ILLUSTRATED/GETTY IMAGES; 2016: JOSE CARLOS FAJARDO—BAY AREA NEWS GROUP/GETTY IMAGES

loss was the best thing that ever happened to the LeBron James Family Foundation,” says Michele Campbell, executive director of James’ nonprofit. “We had some deep conversations about what we were doing and frankly, where we were missing the mark.” Since then, the organization has started the I Promise School in Akron, for grades 3 through 8, and funded college scholarships for 25 community members who’ve earned degrees. It’s built affordable housing, provided job training and health care services, and, in April, opened a restaurant, Buckets, which serves “The Goat” smashburger.

In February 2012 Trayvon Martin, an unarmed teenager in a hooded sweatshirt, was shot and killed by neighborhood-watch volunteer George Zimmerman in a Sanford, Fla., gated community. (Zimmerman, who claimed self-defense, was later acquitted on second-degree murder and manslaughter charges.) The incident divided the U.S. along racial and political lines. In March, James posted a photo on social media of him and his Heat teammates bowing their heads while wearing hooded sweatshirts. #WeAreTrayvonMartin, James wrote.

James had two young boys. The incident had unfolded relatively close to his city. “Things that hit home have always been easy for me to speak about,” he says. “Things that get into my soul. We’re the most powerful team in the world at this point. We’re the Heatles. There’s no way we can’t speak up.” In 2014, James wore an I CAN’T BREATHE shirt in warm-ups at a game against the Brooklyn Nets after a New York City grand jury declined to indict the police officer implicated in the chokehold death of Eric Garner. At the 2016 ESPY awards, he joined fellow NBA stars Chris Paul, Carmelo Anthony, and Wade to call on athletes to follow in the footsteps of Muhammad Ali and denounce social injustice and violence.

James’ activism didn’t hurt his bottom line. He signed a lifetime deal with Nike in 2015. He endorsed brands like Kia, Intel, and AT&T. He pushed for equity stakes in enterprises: Instead of taking a fee for promoting Beats by Dre, he negotiated a small piece of the company; in 2014, he reportedly netted around \$30 million when Apple bought the brand. In 2021, he and Carter exchanged a minority stake in Liverpool, the English Premier League club, for a broader ownership interest in Fenway Sports Group, which owns Liverpool, the Boston Red Sox, and the Pittsburgh Penguins. In 2022, according to *Forbes*, James became the first active NBA player to reach billionaire status.

In a 2014 *Sports Illustrated* article, James announced that after four years in Miami, he’d be returning to the Cavs. “That was, unintentionally, the starting point for a business,” says Carter, who with James in 2015 launched *Uninterrupted*, a platform for James and other athletes to share their own stories. “I didn’t quite like the fact that, you know, I could sit and talk to the media for 15 to 20 minutes, and then only two minutes of a sound bite will come out,” says James. “I got tired of being interrupted. I got tired of not letting my voice be heard thoroughly and all the way through.”

Uninterrupted’s signature offering *The Shop*, a talk show in which athletes and celebrities join James and/or members of his inner circle in barber’s chairs, appeared on HBO for four seasons and now runs on YouTube. Credits for his production outfit, SpringHill Company, include documentaries on Ali and the Tulsa race massacre of 1921, the *Space Jam* sequel, and an Adam Sandler basketball drama. (TIME Studios worked with SpringHill on the docuseries *Top Class*.) Athletes like Steph Curry, Kevin Durant, Peyton Manning, and Patrick Mahomes have followed James into the media space. “I love storytelling,”

James says. He wrote his best script in 2016 when he led the Cavs back from a 3-1 deficit against the 73-win Golden State Warriors to claim the city’s first title in more than 50 years.

That November, Donald Trump was elected President. (James campaigned for Hillary Clinton in Ohio.) As Trump escalated his attacks against athletes who criticized him, James responded in kind. In September 2017, Trump withdrew a White House invite to the Warriors after Curry said he didn’t want to go. In response, James called Trump a “bum” on Twitter. In 2018, James and Durant knocked Trump in a podcast interview, with James saying Trump doesn’t “give a f-ck about the people,” and Durant mentioning that the country is “not ran by a great coach.”

On her Fox News show, Laura Ingraham called James “barely intelligible” and labeled the players’ comments “ignorant.” Then came those flammable four words. “Shut up and dribble,” she said.

Adam Mendelsohn, James’ communications adviser, texted him the next day. “Oh, I laughed,” says James. “I was like, ‘Oh man, this white lady is telling this Black man to shut up and dribble. Are you kidding me?’” James didn’t know who Ingraham was. “I definitely don’t watch Fox News,” he

says. “You can put that in all caps. I definitely don’t watch Fox News.” He knew her now. “I was like, ‘Ohhh man, she has no idea what she just started,’” he says. “This is about to be the complete opposite.”

James signed with the Lakers in 2018, following his eighth straight trip to the Finals.

In his second season with the team, he won his fourth championship, in the 2020 COVID bubble at Walt Disney World. After Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd in 2020, James founded More Than a Vote, a nonprofit whose registration efforts increased turnout in key areas that Joe Biden needed to win the 2020 election. Later that summer, following the police shooting of Jacob Blake, another Black man, in Kenosha, Wis., NBA players thought about leaving their bubble and canceling the season. James led the charge to stay, contingent on NBA owners making meaningful investment in social-justice initiatives. Efforts by the league, players, and coaches helped sign up 20,000 new poll workers; open 23 NBA arenas and practice facilities for voting; and over the past five-plus years, support legislation that protected voting rights in Minnesota and gave formerly incarcerated people easier access to jobs in New York, Utah, and Pennsylvania.

“She was like one of them schoolteachers, telling you to stop talking in the back and be

‘Things that hit home have always been easy for me to speak about.’

—LEBRON JAMES



quiet,” says James of Ingraham. “But she didn’t realize I was the dean. This is my school.”

PEERS CITE JAMES as an inspiration. Last October Novak Djokovic, the all-time leader in men’s Grand Slam singles titles who turned 39 in May, said James was one of the athletes motivating him to keep going. Olympians Lindsey Vonn, 41, and Allyson Felix, 40, brought him up when discussing their comebacks. Sleep, soft-tissue massages, strength training, yoga, Pilates, cryotherapy, hyperbaric chambers, IVs, and a clean diet have kept James sharp. Some of his longevity stats—he’s played against 36% of all NBA players, he’s the only player to score 40 or more points in a game in both his teens and 40s, he’s played against 10 sets of fathers and sons in the league—often make him chuckle. “It doesn’t make any sense,” he says.

His son Bronny wasn’t born when he made his debut. Now they’re teammates, and the first father-son duo to assist each other on baskets. “Out of all the sh-t I’ve done in basketball,” says James,

▲ JAMES, WHO TURNED 41 IN DECEMBER, IS NOT READY TO SAY IF HE’LL PLAY ANOTHER SEASON

be me getting it back, because you can’t get time back. But my daughter is 11 years old. I’m going to pour into her. I’m going to pour into my wife. Because I wanted to be the greatest that ever played this game, I’ve had to not be the complete husband and complete dad that I want to be.”

Whenever James hangs up his sneakers, he’ll put a bow on an unprecedented journey. “I just knew the police sirens and all that type of sh-t was not for me,” he says. “I knew that the handcuffs was not for me.” And while James won’t directly make the case that he’s the most influential athlete of the past half-century, on the barroom debate about the basketball GOAT, he doesn’t hesitate.

“I’m not taking nobody over me,” says James. “There’s no question. But I think Mike will say the same thing. Rest his soul, Kobe will say the same thing. Magic will say the same thing. Bird will say the same thing. Shaq could say the same thing. The late great Wilt. Kareem. I don’t think none of us are going to take somebody else. If there’s a general manager and he’s eyeballing all of us on a baseline, with the No. 1 pick, it’s gonna be hard not to take me, champ.” —*With reporting by* LESLIE DICKSTEIN □

“that’s the best accomplishment I’ve ever had.”

James hears the nepotism claims. “The kid has earned his right to be a professional athlete,” he says. “The thing you’re not going to do is throw stones at us as a family. I’m not letting that sh-t slide, because I know what I’ve created because of what I didn’t have. So if you want to talk about the kid, that he shouldn’t be an NBA player, I don’t care about that. As long as you don’t get to the fatherhood piece. I don’t play those games.”

James appears in no rush to decide on next season. While Bronny remains under contract with the Lakers for at least one more year, his dad is entering free agency. But when asked if he’d take a discount to come back to L.A. and give the team more financial flexibility, James declined to comment. He also suggests that it’s unwise to read too much into his interest in golf—a popular retiree pastime. “I’m happy that I picked it up at this point in my life, but that has nothing to do with my decision on my playing career,” says James. “That is separate. I love golf, man. But I also know the main thing is the main thing. And that’s my love for the game of basketball. If I continue to play, then that’s always gonna be my passion.”

On their podcast, James told Nash his answer may arrive in August. “I love being out there and competing at the highest level, which the post-season is,” James told *TIME* after the Thunder eliminated the Lakers. “Playing the game that I love and having fun, enjoying the competition, was something that you always live for, no matter where you are in your career.” The lure of family, however, remains. His younger son Bryce, who turns 19 in June, is on the basketball team at Arizona, and his youngest child, daughter Zhuri, plays volleyball.

“I’ve spent a lot of time sacrificing,” says James. “I spent a lot of time putting in the work of my own individual craft, and I’ve had to give up a lot of family time. So a big part of the next 10 years won’t

Marie-Philip Poulin

Poulin has secured her Olympic legacy as a clutch scorer. In Milan, at her record-setting fifth Winter Games, the Canadian captain was injured in the second game of the women's hockey tournament; she returned to the ice in the knockout round, scoring twice to set a new Olympic record for most career goals (20). Though Canada lost gold to the U.S., she now has five medals—three gold, two silver—and is tied for the record. She led the Montreal Victoire to their first Professional Women's Hockey League championship in May. —Avery Stone



Aitana Bonmatí

Bonmatí, the reigning winner of both the Best FIFA Women's Player award and the Ballon d'Or Féminin, is the best women's soccer player on the planet. The midfielder led Spain to its first women's

World Cup title in 2023, and her pro team, Barcelona, has won the Liga F title seven years running and Champions League crowns in 2021, 2023, 2024, and 2026; she has been the Champions League Player of the Season three times. Her dominance makes it difficult for the sport's

traditional powers to deny the women's game the attention it deserves. And her public criticism of former soccer official Luis Rubiales, who kissed Bonmatí's teammate Jenni Hermoso without permission at the World Cup award ceremony, showed her embrace of a leadership role. —S.G.



Shohei Ohtani

Ohtani, a four-time MVP, is quite simply the most spectacular baseball player to roam the earth. Just take the 2025 postseason: in the thrilling World Series against the Toronto Blue Jays, which the Los Angeles Dodgers won in seven games, Ohtani slugged three home runs, including two in an 18-inning epic game in which he reached base a record nine times. The two-way player signed a deferred \$700 million contract with the Dodgers in late 2023 to allow the team to build around him, and Los Angeles went on to win back-to-back titles in his first two seasons. —Sean Gregory



Mondo Duplantis

Duplantis keeps one-upping himself, one centimeter at a time. He first broke the pole-vault record in 2020, clearing 6.17 m. In March, at a meet he hosts annually in Sweden, he cleared 6.31 m, his 15th consecutive world record. It's a lucrative strategy: Duplantis receives a bonus, anywhere from \$30,000 to \$100,000, every time he sets a record. He has said vaulting 6.40 m is in "the realm of possibility." —S.G.



Oksana Masters

One of the most decorated Paralympians of all time, Masters has won an incredible 24 career medals, competing for the U.S. across a range of sports—cross-country skiing, biathlon, cycling, and rowing—at the Winter and Summer Games. Born in Ukraine with birth defects suspected to be from Chernobyl radiation, she took home three gold medals in cross country, another in biathlon, and a cross-country bronze at the Paralympic Games in March. —S.G.



Lee "Faker" Sang-hyeok

Widely regarded as the best esports player of all time, he has won a record six *League of Legends* world championships with T1, his South Korean team. —S.G.

Mikaela Shiffrin

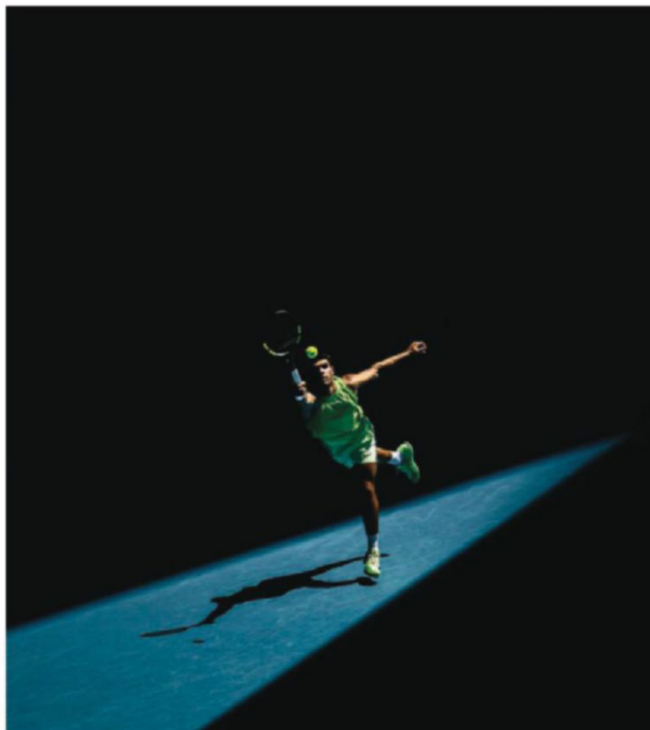
She won Olympic gold in slalom in February, then clinched her sixth Crystal Globe, given to the world's top all-around alpine skier. —S.G.

Saquon Barkley

One of nine NFL players ever to rush for over 2,000 yards in a season, the Philadelphia Eagles running back shows the power of a ground game. —S.G.

Mandy Horvath

In May, the climber earned her eighth world record: the first bilateral amputee to crawl up the 832 steps of the Space Needle in Seattle. —Alice Park



Carlos Alcaraz

Alcaraz is missing the French Open and Wimbledon this year because of injury, but with the physicality of Rafael Nadal and drop-shot artistry of Roger Federer, the 23-year-old tennis phenom from Spain may ultimately obliterate the record books. After winning the 2022 U.S. Open, Alcaraz became the youngest world No. 1 in men's

tennis history. His defeat of rival Jannik Sinner at the 2025 French Open was an instant classic, and his win over Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open in January made him the youngest man to earn a career Grand Slam. A seven-time winner of Grand Slam tournaments, Alcaraz uses speed to play exquisite defense, and his ability to smash winners on the move makes him difficult to beat. —S.G.



Lando Norris

Norris' run to the top of the Formula One standings in 2025 broke Max Verstappen's four-year hold on the driver championship and gave McLaren its first such title since Lewis Hamilton won in 2008. The British driver is now transcending auto racing. Norris was named Breakthrough of the Year at the annual Laureus World Sports Awards

in April; previous honorees include Hamilton, Lamine Yamal, Carlos Alcaraz, Naomi Osaka, and Patrick Mahomes. Norris has 1.8 million followers on the gaming platform Twitch, and his engagement with Gen Z fans is part of a broader marketing strategy across F1 to reach younger audiences. His 2025 title in Abu Dhabi brought with it a flood of emotions. "I didn't think I'd cry, but I did," he said. "It's a long journey." —S.G.



Ilia Malinin

When your social media handle is quadg0d, people expect you to deliver. And Malinin, 21, generally does. He's the first figure skater to land a quadruple axel in competition and the first to complete seven quad jumps in a single program. But after winning his fourth national championship in January, Malinin made a series of uncharacteristic mistakes in his free program at the Olympics and finished eighth. Just over a month later, in Prague, he earned his third consecutive world championship title. —A.P.



A'ja Wilson

A quick tour of Wilson's mind-blowing 2025: The 6-ft. 4-in. Las Vegas Aces superstar won a record fourth WNBA MVP award. She became the fastest player in league history to reach 5,000 points. And she became the first player in WNBA or NBA history to—deep breath—win a championship, claim the scoring title, and be named Finals MVP, league MVP, and Defensive Player of the Year in the same season. In that same year, Nike debuted Wilson's signature shoe, the first for a Black WNBA player from the brand in over two decades. —S.G.

BONMATI; LETTING GAO—BSR AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES; OHTANI; LUKE HALES—GETTY IMAGES; DUPLANTS; CAMERON SPENCER—GETTY IMAGES; MASTERS; DANIEL KOPATSCHE—VOIGT/GETTY IMAGES; LEE; CARSTEN KOALL—PICTURE ALLIANCE/GETTY IMAGES; ALCARAZ; FELIPE FIGUERIDO; MALININ; WAJA HITIJ—GETTY IMAGES; WILSON; CHRISTIAN PETERSEN—GETTY IMAGES; NORRIS; NICOLAS ECONOMOU—NURPHOTO/GETTY IMAGES

Jordan Stolz

For years, American fans had no real reason to get excited about long-track speedskating, which in the 1980s and '90s made superstars of U.S. Olympians such as Eric Heiden, Bonnie Blair, and Dan Jansen. At the Milano Cortina Olympics, Stolz changed that narrative. He entered the Games at age 21 with the world record in the 1,000 m and two world championships at each of three distances: the 500 m, the 1,000 m, and the 1,500 m. In Milan, Stolz set Olympic records in the 500 m and the 1,000 m and also won a silver in the 1,500 m. —Sean Gregory



Caitlin Clark

Clark has brought unprecedented attention to women's basketball. In 2024, during her first season in the WNBA, she won Rookie of the Year and appeared in the most-watched WNBA games ever on ABC, CBS, ESPN, and ESPN2, prompting the move of multiple Indiana Fever matchups to larger arenas. Clark missed much of her sophomore pro season with injuries, but in 2026 she became the fastest player in WNBA history to record more than 1,000 points, 250 rebounds, and 250 assists—reaching all in just 54 games. —S.G.



Jannik Sinner

Sinner, the lanky Italian world No. 1, has all but ensured that men's tennis will enjoy another rivalry for the ages: Sinner-Alcaraz, which has quickly become the sports rivalry of the 2020s, could exceed even Federer-Nadal in generating intrigue. Sinner has won four of the past 10 Grand Slam

singles titles. He outlasted Alcaraz in the 2025 Wimbledon final and, in March, the hard-court stalwart completed a "Sunshine Double," winning back-to-back tournaments at Indian Wells and Miami. In May, Sinner became the first Italian man to win the Italian Open in 50 years, and the second man after Novak Djokovic to win all nine Masters 1000 events. —S.G.



Lionel Messi

When Messi signed with Inter Miami of Major League Soccer in 2023, skeptics wondered if he was just playing out his string in the U.S. Messi, however, took the country by storm, going on a goal-scoring tear upon

his arrival, causing surges in MLS attendance and viewership, and ultimately turning Inter Miami from a cellar dweller into the 2025 MLS Cup champs. Now, another World Cup, perhaps his last, awaits Messi, 38,

in his adopted home. He stamped his legacy at the last World Cup, in Qatar in 2022, when he won his first title and was named best player of the tournament. Back-to-back championships for his native Argentina would resolve the GOAT debate once and for all. —S.G.



Eileen Gu

The 22-year-old freestyle skier is the only action-sport athlete to win three medals apiece at two Olympics. She won her third career gold on the halfpipe in February. —S.G.

Nikki Hiltz

In March, the first out trans, nonbinary athlete to win a USA Track & Field title—and vocal advocate for the LGBTQ+ community—won their fourth consecutive USA Track & Field title in the indoor 1,500 m, their 10th national title. —Rebecca Schneid

Roger Goodell

In 2010, the longtime NFL commissioner set out to grow the league's annual revenue from \$8 billion to \$25 billion by 2027. In the fiscal year ending March 2025, NFL revenues hit \$23 billion; this February, the Super Bowl drew an audience of 125 million. —S.G.



Dawn Staley

Even before Staley reached her eighth NCAA Women's Final Four as coach of South Carolina in early April, she had signed a \$25.25 million contract extension through the end of the decade, making her

the highest-paid coach in the history of women's college basketball. Under her leadership, South Carolina has made it to the NCAA championship game five times, including the past three years in a row, and the university had the most alums (eight) suiting up in the 2025 WNBA

playoffs. Las Vegas Aces phenom A'ja Wilson credits Staley's mentorship for pushing her to all-time greatness. Meanwhile, Staley's style—designer jackets, hoodies, and other outfits from labels like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Balenciaga—has set a new sideline dress code. —S.G.



Rayssa Leal

Brazilian skateboarder Leal won silver at the first Olympic women's street skateboarding event in Tokyo as a 13-year-old in 2021, inspiring young athletes in soccer-mad Brazil to trade kicks for kickflips. The prodigy eclipsed Neymar as the youngest Brazilian to win multiple Olympic medals with a bronze at the 2024 Paris Games. Leal, 18, won her fourth straight Street League Skateboarding Super Crown World Championship in December. —Scott Allen



Hilary Knight

With two minutes left in the U.S.-Canada women's hockey gold-medal game in Milan, Knight, 36, notched the tying goal, giving her the most

Olympic goals (15) and points (33) in U.S. women's hockey history. Team USA clinched the gold medal in overtime—her second in five Olympic

appearances. In April, Knight's Seattle Torrent of the Professional Women's Hockey League helped set a U.S. women's hockey attendance record of over 18,000 fans at Madison Square Garden. —S.G.



Tadej Pogacar

A four-time Tour de France champion, Pogacar, 27, can triumph anywhere: Grand Tours, one-week stage races, one-day classics, world-championship road races, individual time trials. The Slovenian cyclist can win across cobble or gravel and is a master uphill climber. "Anyone who rides a bike, even for fun, knows what it's like to suffer on a hill or battle through cold and rain," he told the website of Union Cycliste Internationale in 2024. "It's what unites the cycling fraternity and makes it a special sport." —S.G.



Portia Woodman-Wickliffe

After leading the Black Ferns to a second rugby sevens gold medal at the 2024 Paris Olympics, New Zealand legend Woodman-Wickliffe retired—only to return and compete for a third consecutive women's World Cup title in England last summer. New Zealand lost to Canada in the semifinals to finish in third, but the 34-year-old became the all-time leading try scorer in New Zealand rugby history—men's or women's. The two-time World Rugby Women's Player of the Year announced her second retirement in February. —S.A.



Trinity Rodman

The list of athletes who have a rule named in their honor is brief and prestigious. Shohei Ohtani has the “Ohtani Rule,” allowing a starting pitcher who hits for himself to stay in the game, as a designated hitter, after he’s done his work on the mound. The

“Larry Bird Exception” lets NBA teams exceed the salary cap to re-sign their own qualifying free agents. And in December, the National Women’s Soccer League (NWSL) introduced the “Rodman Rule,” technically called the High Impact Player rule, which

lets teams spend up to \$1 million above the salary cap on high-performing, marketable stars. Trinity Rodman, who in January signed a three-year contract with the Washington Spirit worth more than \$2 million annually, making her at the time the highest-paid player in league history, inspired the provision.

The NWSL is riding

a wave of women’s-sports momentum. In March, the league set opening-weekend attendance records. According to Sportico, franchise valuations jumped 77%, on average, in the 18 months leading into the 2026 season. “Every single game, I think I have five to 10 people saying this is the first soccer game they’ve ever come to,” says Rodman. “That speaks volumes.”

She was the youngest player ever drafted in the league when, in 2021, the Spirit picked her second overall at age 18. In her first season, Washington won the title, and she was Rookie of the Year. On the international stage, Rodman played forward for the U.S. squad that lost to Sweden in the round of 16 at the 2023 World Cup. But at the 2024 Olympics, the U.S. women won gold.

Rodman is currently featured in a men’s World Cup campaign for Adidas alongside Lionel Messi, Timothée Chalamet, Bad Bunny, Lamine Yamal, Jude Bellingham, and others. “They trusted me and felt that I was that personality that was going to grab people’s attention, which I think is huge,” she says.

Some trailblazing athletes don’t embrace their celebrity. Luckily for women’s soccer, Rodman relishes the role. “No matter what game it is, no matter what team I’m playing for, you’ll always see creativity and fun,” she says. “I want to be a face off the field as well.” She’d like to tease what’s coming, but she’s been sworn to secrecy. “Watch out,” she says. “Watch women’s sports. That’s it. Drop the mic.” —SEAN GREGORY

Smriti Mandhana

The records keep tumbling in for Mandhana. The Mumbai-born opening batter is a joint holder of the most international women's cricket centuries with 17, and the first woman to score over 1,000 one-day international runs in a year. She captained the Royal Challengers Bangalore to the 2026 Women's Premier League title and was vice captain for India's triumph at last year's ICC Women's World Cup. In 2024, she set the record for most international runs across formats by a woman—and then beat her own record last year. —Charlie Campbell



Aaron Judge

Judge slugged 62 home runs for the New York Yankees in 2022, breaking Roger Maris' mythical American League record of 61 set in 1961. Since the 6-ft. 7-in. outfielder signed a nine-year, \$360 million contract to stay in pinstripes, he has turned in two more 50-plus-home-run seasons, earned the past two American League MVP awards, and is again among the home-run leaders this season. All that's missing on his mantle is a World Series championship: the Yankees have been stuck on 27 titles since 2009. —S.G.



Rory McIlroy

Back-to-back Green Jackets are looking spiffy on McIlroy. His Masters win in 2025 ended an 11-year drought between majors and gave him the career Grand Slam: he's one of six men, alongside the likes of Jack Nicklaus and Tiger Woods, to win the Masters, U.S. Open, British Open, and PGA Championship. At the

Ryder Cup last fall, the Northern Ireland native's clutch play helped deliver victory for his European side. With his 2026 victory at Augusta, McIlroy, 37, tied for the second most major titles for a European player (six) and became just the fourth golfer ever to win consecutive Masters. "I certainly don't want to stop here," he said after his win. "I'm in a really good spot with my game and my body." —S.G.



Mellody Hobson

Hobson, the co-CEO and president of Ariel Investments, knows a good opportunity when she sees one. "If you look at women's sports, the data is staggering," she told CNBC last year. "All the arrows point straight up and to the right. Attendance, participation, the amount of money that's being spent." To that



Cristiano Ronaldo

The all-time leading scorer in men's international soccer, with 143 goals for Portugal and 973 overall for club and country as of May, is headed to his sixth World Cup at 41. —S.G.

Victor Wembanyama

The 7-ft. 4-in. Frenchman and NBA Defensive Player of the Year helped lead the San Antonio Spurs to their first NBA Finals in over a decade. —S.G.

Curt Cignetti

The Indiana coach steered the Hoosiers and Heisman winner Fernando Mendoza to a 16-0 season—and their first national football championship. —S.G.

Cherie DeVaux

With 23-to-1 long shot Golden Tempo's comeback victory, the crowd at Churchill Downs witnessed history as a female trainer won the Kentucky Derby for the first time. —S.G.

end, Ariel's Project Level, founded and chaired by Hobson and dedicated to women's sports, closed a \$250 million raise in early 2026. The fund has stakes in Denver Summit FC, the National Women's Soccer League expansion team that debuted this season, and League One Volleyball, a consortium of youth clubs that launched a professional league, which just completed its second season. —S.G.

Jaxon Smith-Njigba

In his rookie NFL season with the Seattle Seahawks in 2023, Smith-Njigba's one-handed catch on Thanksgiving announced his arrival. A Pro Bowl berth followed in 2024, and this past season, his 119 receptions, league-best 1,793 receiving yards, and 10 touchdown catches won him NFL Offensive Player of the Year honors. His Seahawks handled the New England Patriots in Super Bowl LX, and in March, the team signed him to a four-year, \$168.6 million contract extension, making him the highest-paid wide receiver in NFL history. —Sean Gregory



Jeenno Thitikul

In 2017, just a few days after turning 14, Thitikul won the Ladies European Thailand Championship in her native Thailand as an amateur. Nearly a decade later, she returned in February as the world's top-ranked golfer and won her eighth LPGA title, and her first in her home country. In 2025, she became the first player since Lydia Ko, in 2022, to win both the LPGA's Rolex Player of the Year Award and the Vare Trophy. Thitikul's quest for her elusive first major championship title is one of the most compelling storylines in her sport. —S.G.



Nneka Ogwumike

As WNBA players negotiated a new collective-bargaining agreement with the league this past offseason, Ogwumike, the 10-time All-Star, one-time league MVP, and president of the players' union since 2016, insisted her colleagues would hold their position. "Players understand their worth, they understand

their value," she told TIME in December. "That's what we want. It's what we deserve." In March, the players signed a historic agreement: the salary cap for 2026 nearly quintupled to \$7 million; the average salary is now \$583,000, up from about \$120,000, while the supermax salary rose from \$250,000 to \$1.4 million. This year, Ogwumike is back with the Los Angeles Sparks for her 15th season. —S.G.



Diana Flores

Flag football will step firmly onto the global stage at the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, and Flores is a key figure who helped it get there. The Mexico City native began playing at age 8 and made her country's national team by 16. As the quarterback and captain, she led Mexico to back-to-back gold medals at the World Games in 2022 and



David Mulugheta

The powerful agent represents over 40 NFL players. In 2024, he became the first agent in league history to negotiate over \$1 billion worth of contracts in a single year. —Tashan Reed

Mike Tirico

The versatile NBC sportscaster called his first Super Bowl on Feb. 8, then flew to Italy to host *Primetime in Milan* from the Winter Olympics. —Scott Allen

Asisat Oshoala

The decorated Nigerian women's soccer superstar is a six-time winner of the African Women's Footballer of the Year award. —Michael Errigo

Johannes Hoesflot Klaebo

In February, the Norwegian cross-country skier swept all his races to win a record six golds in one Olympics. —S.G.

2025 and was also named MVP of the 2022 victory over the U.S. She's an ambassador for the NFL and starred in a flag-football advertisement that ran during the Super Bowl in 2023. Since then, the sport has continued to gain momentum. Twenty-three states have sanctioned girls' high school flag football as a varsity sport, colleges are offering Division I scholarships, and the NFL is creating professional leagues for men and women. —T.R.



Erling Haaland

Haaland, the 6-ft. 4-in. Norwegian soccer phenom, went on another tear during the 2025–26 season: his 27 goals were tops in the Premier League, earning him his third Golden Boot. (Last year Haaland

scored his 100th career Premier League goal, reaching that milestone faster than any other player in history.) And in May his team, Manchester City, won the FA Cup, an annual English domestic club knockout competition. This summer, Haaland will make his World Cup debut: his 21 goals in 14

qualifying games helped Norway make the tournament for the first time in nearly three decades. He will also star in a YouTube competition series premiering in the fall, and he is set to voice an animated version of himself—a Viking named Haaland—in an upcoming film. —S.G.



Amanda Serrano

Serrano, who in May tied the record for most knockouts in women's boxing history, has captured nine major world titles across seven weight classes. Her recent rivalry with Ireland's Katie Taylor has energized the sport and bolstered her reputation despite her losing all three matches. In 2022, the duo squared off in the first women's boxing match to headline Madison Square Garden. Last year's bout drew nearly 6 million viewers on Netflix. —S.A.



Jack Hughes

Has anyone, in or out of the dentist's chair, shone more brightly after losing teeth than Jack Hughes, the New Jersey Devils center who at the Milano

Cortina Olympics scored the game-winning goal in overtime to give Team USA a 2-1 victory over rival Canada, and the Americans their first

men's hockey gold medal since the 1980 Miracle on Ice? The image of Hughes—American flag draped over his shoulders, fist up, bloodied, smiling, and missing two choppers—will endure. —S.G.



Temba Bavuma

In 2016, Bavuma became the first Black South African to hit a century (scoring 100 or more runs in an inning). Five years later the cricketer was his nation's first Black captain. Last year, he led South Africa to a historic Test series win in India as well as victory in the World Test Championship, beating heavily favored Australia and emerging undefeated. It was South Africa's first international title since 1998 and owed much to Bavuma's heroic 66 runs in the final despite his being hobbled by a hamstring strain. —Charlie Campbell



Kristin Juszczyk

The designer turned her custom NFL game-day apparel into a business, dressing celebrities and athletes. Last year, she launched the label Off Season with Emma Grede, the NFL, and Fanatics. —Avery Stone

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander

The unstoppable Oklahoma City Thunder guard from Canada won his second consecutive NBA MVP award this season. —S.G.

Alex Morgan

The former pro soccer player's venture-capital firm is investing in new sports leagues, including one for women's golf, and another for flag football for men and women. —S.A.

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Alysa Liu

If there is one word people use to describe Alysa Liu’s figure skating, it’s *joyful*. In a sport defined by rigidity, Liu, 20, is a rebel and role model for simply loving to skate. Her attitude toward competition has made her a fan favorite—at the Milano Cortina Olympics

she seemed as excited about Japanese skater Ami Nakai’s bronze medal as she was about her own gold. “I hope more skaters become friends; it sucks not liking your fellow competitors, because you have to see them all the time,” she says.

But that joy wasn’t always there. Liu made history at 13 as the youngest U.S. national champion, yet that only increased the pressure she felt to execute at the highest level. “I felt the weight of every mistake I made, and if I wasn’t in first place, I was super upset,” she says. “I was so scared of disappointing people.” During the COVID pandemic, when

her rink closed and she was off the ice for the first time on a regular basis, she realized she didn’t really like skating that much. “But I didn’t know how to leave,” she says.

After the 2022 Beijing Olympics, where she placed sixth, she decided she was done. She enrolled at UCLA, majoring in psychology. “I never thought about [skating], never missed it for a second,” she says. Until she went skiing and reveled in the feeling of flying down the mountain. Eager to re-create that adrenaline rush, she turned back to the ice.

This time, however, she made sure it was different. Skating gave her freedom, a creative outlet, and happiness, because now she was doing it on her own terms. She insisted on making decisions about her programs, music choices, and training schedule. It led her to the top of the podium in both the team and women’s skating events in Milan.

Liu is finishing a skating tour this summer with many of her Olympic teammates, and she has been busy indulging in her love of fashion, appearing at the Met Gala and serving as a Louis Vuitton house ambassador. Amid the attention, she considers herself an artist who uses the ice as her canvas. “You know how there are some paintings where people don’t know the artist, but they know the painting? I think that’s so beautiful. I wish I could skate anonymously, but I can’t,” she says. “I kind of wish nobody knew me.” Sorry, Alysa, that’s one wish that can’t come true. —ALICE PARK



Michael Rubin

Fanatics has a ubiquitous presence in sports. Since taking over as CEO more than a decade ago, Michael Rubin has both grown the apparel side of the business and expanded the company's footprint into collectibles, sports betting, and prediction markets. In 2024, he started Fanatics Fest, the sports fan's answer to Comic Con, which drew over 125,000 attendees to Manhattan's Javits Center last summer. Fanatics Studios, which is focused on producing premium sports and culture content, launched this year. —Sean Gregory



IShowSpeed

It's difficult to name a streamer more influential and popular than Darren Jason Watkins Jr., widely known as IShowSpeed. The 21-year-old has grown from a YouTuber who occasionally posted

gaming content into an international superstar who did livestream tours on five continents last year. Today IShowSpeed has more than 53 million subscribers on YouTube, 50 million followers on TikTok, 47 million on Instagram, and 4 million on Twitch, and his growing platform has drawn

the attention of prominent figures in the sports world. He has raced Noah Lyles, faced off against Tom Brady in flag football, and wrestled at WWE events. FIFA president Gianni Infantino jokingly turned over his job to him for one minute during the 2025 Club World Cup opener. —Tashan Reed



Clara Wu Tsai

She has transformed the WNBA's New York Liberty since purchasing the team with her husband Joe for roughly \$12 million in 2019. *Forbes* recently valued the franchise at \$600 million. —Scott Allen

Anna Leigh Waters

The top-ranked player in singles, doubles, and mixed doubles on the Pro Pickleball Association Tour, she was signed as Nike's first pickleball athlete in January. —S.G.

Stephen M. Ross

The Miami Dolphins majority owner has helped make South Florida a sports destination with investments in venues and events like the F1 Grand Prix and Miami Open. —S.G.



Jalen Brunson

The 6-ft. 2-in. New York Knicks point guard has reached elite status through a mix of impeccable footwork, body control, and mindset. The NBA's Clutch

Player of the Year in the 2024–25 season shone again in 2025–26, as he averaged 26 points per game and led the Knicks to their first NBA Finals

since 1999. A two-time NCAA champion at Villanova, three-time NBA All-Star, and now Eastern Conference Finals MVP, Brunson is already one of the most beloved players in franchise history. —S.G.

Susie Wolff

The managing director of F1 Academy, she leads an all-female racing series aimed at developing new talent in the historically male-dominated sport. —Michael Errigo

Sebastian Sawa

The Kenyan runner became the first person to break the two-hour marathon mark in an official competition at the London Marathon in April. —S.G.

Pat McAfee

In 2023, ESPN licensed the former Indianapolis Colts punter's YouTube show in a five-year, \$85 million deal. Its unfiltered style has gained traction among sports fans. —S.G.

LUU: CATHERINE STEENKESKE—GETTY IMAGES; RUBIN: ALEX SUBERS—FANATICS; TSAI: TAYLOR HILL—GETTY IMAGES; SHOWSPEED: RICH FREEDA—WWE/GETTY IMAGES; BRUNSON: DAVID REGINEK—IMAGN IMAGES/REUTERS



Denny Hamlin & Michael Jordan

In 2024, 23XI Racing—the NASCAR Cup Series team co-owned by Hamlin and Jordan—and Front Row Motorsports led an antitrust lawsuit against NASCAR. The parties settled with no admission of liability by NASCAR, but NASCAR agreed to amend existing charters in a way that would make it easier for teams to get sponsors and recruit drivers. —Sean Gregory



Michele Kang

Kang, a billionaire entrepreneur, is betting big on women's sports—investments that should pay off, given rising viewership, attendance, and valuations for teams and leagues. She owns three women's soccer teams: the Washington Spirit in the U.S., OL Lyonnes in France, and England's London City

Lionesses. In 2024, Kang seeded the Kynisca Innovation Hub, a multinational research and education center helping female athletes train and compete. In December, U.S. Soccer announced the launch of the Kang Women's Institute, which, through a \$55 million pledge, has begun a study to assess the emerging needs of female players and develop tools to support physical and mental well-being. —S.G.



Pablo Torre

The sports journalist's podcast, *Pablo Torre Finds Out*, won the Pulitzer Prize in audio reporting in May for its investigation into allegations that the Los Angeles Clippers and their owner, Steve Ballmer, evaded NBA salary-cap rules by funneling money to star Kawhi Leonard through a now defunct startup. Torre's reporting prompted an NBA investigation that is ongoing; Leonard and Ballmer have denied wrongdoing. —Avery Stone



Rob Mac

Mac's quixotic idea to purchase a struggling soccer team in Wales and recruit Hollywood pal Ryan Reynolds to join him on the project might just be *the* feel-good sports story of the decade. Mac, co-creator and one of the writers and lead actors on the long-running sitcom *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, proved the move was no vanity play:



Will Ahmed

The founder of wearables company Whoop, valued at \$10.1 billion, built the business around the daily recovery score that's become a popular metric for athletes. —Alice Park

Gabi Butler

The face of American competitive cheerleading joined the Pro Cheer League, which launched its inaugural season in January. —A.S.

Sun Yingsha

In 2026, the table-tennis world No. 1 became the first player to win three straight Women's World Cup singles titles. —Charlie Campbell

Khalida Popal

The Afghan soccer pioneer helped organize Afghan Women United, a team of refugees that was recognized by FIFA in April. —Michael Errigo

his investment in facilities and success in attracting sponsors have helped Wrexham A.F.C. become the first-ever team to be promoted within the top five divisions of English football for three consecutive seasons. Meanwhile, *Welcome to Wrexham*—the Emmy-winning FX docuseries that spotlights the blue collar city's bond with the team—began its fifth season in May, executive-produced by Mac and Reynolds. —S.G.



Cooper Flagg

The Dallas Mavericks got the top pick in the 2025 NBA draft and might have found their next superstar. Flagg, 19, had a sensational debut, averaging 21 points per game, the most among rookies this season. He's the youngest player to score 50 points in an NBA game and won the Rookie of the Year award. —S.G.



Brittany Hampton

Hampton is a key figure behind the WNBA's fashion evolution. The Los Angeles-based stylist, consultant, and agency founder has worked with New York Liberty guard Sabrina Ionescu, Los Angeles Sparks guard Kelsey Plum, and Portland Fire point guard Nika Mühl, as well as non-WNBA athletes like tennis star Sloane Stephens and the Cleveland Cavaliers' Evan Mobley. Her styling of 2025 Rookie of the Year Paige Bueckers has helped establish the Dallas Wings guard as a fashion icon. —A.S.

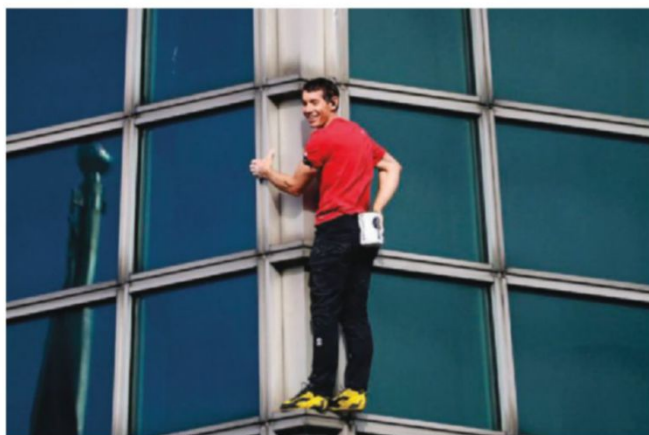


Lindsey Vonn

Her historic Olympic comeback may not have ended as she hoped. But her courage going after it, at age 41, nine days after suffering a knee injury, won admirers the world over. Vonn, who had retired

from skiing in 2019 before a partial knee-replacement surgery that would revive her storied career, entered the Feb. 8 Olympic downhill in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, having won two World Cup races in the season and leading the global standings in her discipline. But 13 seconds into her

Cortina run, Vonn hit a gate and crashed down the mountain, shattering her left leg and breaking her right ankle. She has undergone five surgeries since the crash. As Vonn continues to rehab, she hasn't closed the door on an audacious possibility: another comeback. —S.G.



Alex Honnold

The American rock climber, known for death-defying feats, rose to prominence when he scaled El Capitan in Yosemite National Park without ropes

or safety gear in 2017—a feat featured in the Oscar-winning documentary *Free Solo*. In January, Honnold climbed the tallest building in Taiwan, a 101-story

structure, for a live-streamed event on Netflix watched by millions. Near the top, Honnold—who began climbing at age 5—dangled off the side of the building, later chalking the move up to “style points.” —S.G.



NiJaree Canady

After being named USA Softball Collegiate Player of the Year as a Stanford sophomore in 2024, the ace pitcher transferred to Texas Tech, where its name, image, and likeness collective made her college softball's first \$1 million player. The right-hander has been worth every penny. Canady, who became the first college softball player to release a signature cleat, led the Red Raiders to two straight trips to the Women's College World Series. —Scott Allen

HAMLIN / JORDAN; CHRIS GRAYTHEN—GETTY IMAGES; KANG; LEXEY SWALL; AHMED; VICTOR J. BLUE—BLOOMBERG/GETTY IMAGES; TORRE; SHURAN HUANG—THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES; MAC; CHRIS JACKSON—POOL/AP/GETTY IMAGES; FLAGG; TROY WAYRYNEN—IMAGN IMAGES/REUTERS; VONN; DANIEL KOPATZSCH—VOIGT/GETTY IMAGES; HAMPTON; BAZ; HONNOLD; CROTO—FUTURE PUBLISHING/GETTY IMAGES; CANADY; JOHN E. MOORE III—GETTY IMAGES



Prince Harry, the Duke of Sussex

A FEW MONTHS AFTER finishing his second combat tour in Afghanistan in 2013, Prince Harry lit the cauldron at the Warrior Games, a sports competition hosted by the U.S. Olympic Committee for wounded service members and veterans. He left inspired to build on the concept—adaptive sports for injured troops. “I thought, ‘Wow, look at the power of sport, look at how it is literally changing lives in front of my very eyes,’” Harry tells TIME. “It was so clear to me. Let’s invite as many countries as possible to make

it international, because clearly more countries need to benefit from this.”

A little more than a year later, Harry’s inaugural Invictus Games took place in London. (*Invictus*, a Latin word, means unconquered.) They hosted more than 400 military personnel and veterans from 13 nations. “When you are wearing your nation’s flag on your arm, on your chest, once that’s removed, there’s something that’s missing,” says Harry, who served for a decade in the British army. “What we’ve managed to achieve through Invictus over the

years is not only to give people their purpose and their meaning back, but give them their identity back.”

The Invictus Games meld Harry’s passion for sports with his desire to give back to veterans. “I was one of those kids at school who did not enjoy classroom work,” he says. “If it wasn’t for the sports field, and the amount of sports that were on offer, there’s no way I would have stayed in school.”

He hopes to keep growing the Invictus Games and perhaps make them two weeks rather than one. “One thing that we really celebrate at Invictus is not only do we change lives, but we save lives as well,” he says. “That’s not based

on anything other than the amount of individuals that come up to me and say, ‘If it wasn’t for Invictus, I would have killed myself.’”

In July, Harry is set to travel to the U.K. for celebrations anticipating next summer’s eighth Invictus Games, in Birmingham, which will welcome some 550 competitors from around 25 countries and include three new sports: esports, laser run (which combines cross-country running with pistol shooting), and pickleball. “To be amongst that community, those are the moments that I cherish,” Harry says. “You wish that every society, every community, had this same vibe about it.” —SEAN GREGORY

Claudia Goldin

Harvard economist Goldin, who won a Nobel Prize in 2023 for her work studying outcomes in women's labor markets, took on a key advisory role for the WNBA players' union in collective-bargaining negotiations. Goldin kept the players focused on revenue sharing. With careers so short in the league, she advised them to prioritize salaries, because increased wages would provide more long-term value than ancillary benefits. The result: players received a nearly 400% raise in the deal, which was ratified in March. —S.G.



Elana Meyers Taylor

Meyers Taylor's sixth Olympic medal shines brightest. In February, the American mother of two won gold in monobob—a driver-only bobsled event—adding first-place hardware to a collection that included three silvers and two bronzes from the previous four Games. Meyers Taylor, 41, tied the record for most Winter Olympic medals by an American woman and became the oldest woman in history to win an individual gold at the Winter Games. She also extended her mark as the most decorated Black athlete in Winter Olympic history. —S.G.



Myles Garrett

On his record-breaking 23rd sack of the 2025 NFL season, Cleveland Browns defensive end Garrett crossed the line of scrimmage in 0.23 sec., the fastest get-off time by any player on any sack last year. His moment came in the last week of a 17-game season, whereas previous record holder Michael Stra-

han got 22.5 sacks in 16 games, and T.J. Watt tied that total in 15. But Garrett was the most efficient of this trio: he reached 23 sacks in 540 opponent pass plays; Strahan needed 567, and Watt 557. Garrett's strength, agility, and smarts give quarterbacks fits. And now that he's leaving Cleveland—on June 1, Garrett was traded to the Los Angeles Rams—he may finally sniff a Super Bowl. —S.G.



Elle Duncan

After nearly a decade at ESPN, Duncan moved to an even bigger stage. In December, Duncan—a veteran *SportsCenter* anchor and mainstay across ESPN's basketball coverage—joined Netflix as its first on-air sports host. Her multiyear deal is part of the streaming giant's ongoing push into live sports and events. In January, Duncan's Netflix



Kimi Antonelli

A year ago, during his rookie Formula One campaign, Antonelli, the Italian driving prodigy tapped to replace Lewis Hamilton in the Mercedes lineup, spent the days after his first podium finish completing his final high school exams. (He passed.) This season, school in the rearview mirror, Antonelli can't stop winning and setting new records. He finished first in four consecutive races—in China and Japan in March, then in Miami and Canada in May. At 19, he is the youngest driver to ever lead the F1 standings, and he joins Michael Schumacher and Ayrton Senna as the only drivers to achieve their first three pole positions consecutively. Unlike those legends, Antonelli won all those races too. —S.G.

hosting debut—a two-hour special in which free solo climber Alex Honnold scaled the tallest building in Taiwan—garnered 6.2 million views in its first weekend. She also leads the streamer's MLB and combat-sports coverage (including boxing and MMA) and is set to cover the NFL and the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup. In May, Duncan also began a stint as studio host for USA Sports' inaugural season broadcasting the WNBA. —Avery Stone

Gianni Infantino

The president of FIFA, which governs the world's most popular sport, Infantino is overseeing the most extravagant World Cup in history this summer. The most-viewed sporting event on the planet will consist of 48 teams—a significant rise from 32. He is staking his reputation on a smooth, successful World Cup, spread across Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. amid a volatile geopolitical climate. FIFA's revenues are expected to exceed \$13 billion for the 2023–2026 men's World Cup cycle, which would be a 71% increase over the last quadrennial. —Sean Gregory



Stephen Curry

Few people have changed athletic behavior, strategy, and decisionmaking more than Curry. His Golden State Warriors dynasty, which claimed four NBA titles from 2015 to 2022, demonstrated the value of long-range shooting and a more spaced-out, free-flowing offense. The average number of three-pointers a game more than doubled since he started in the league. Curry's 4,248 career three-pointers lead his closest competitor's by 858. This year's animated sports comedy film *GOAT*, inspired by his story, made nearly \$200 million worldwide. —S.G.



Aryna Sabalenka

The defending two-time U.S. Open champion and world No. 1, Sabalenka is positioned for a dominant run. The Belarusian hits the hardest forehands in the game. And while her emotional outbursts have backfired at times, they make her even more compelling to watch. A four-time Grand Slam title winner as of May, she

recently advocated for players to receive a larger cut of revenue at Grand Slam tournaments, even predicting a walk-out if organizers don't step up. "I think at some point we will boycott it," she said at the Italian Open in May. "I feel like that's going to be the only way to fight for our rights." Some of the game's luminaries, such as Novak Djokovic, Jannik Sinner, and Coco Gauff, have backed Sabalenka's stance. —S.G.



Becky Hammon

Before joining the WNBA coaching ranks for the 2022 season, Hammon was already a trailblazer. At the end of her 16-year pro playing career in 2014, San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, winner of five NBA titles, hired Hammon as the first full-time female assistant coach in NBA history. In the W she has implemented more offensive



Shams Charania

For NBA fans, the ESPN reporter is a must-follow. He beats the competition to scoops on everything from daily injury updates to seismic trade news.

—Michael Errigo

Nelly Korda

The world No. 1 golfer is on a hot streak, having won three LPGA titles, including her third major, as of May (in 2024, she won seven for the year). —S.G.

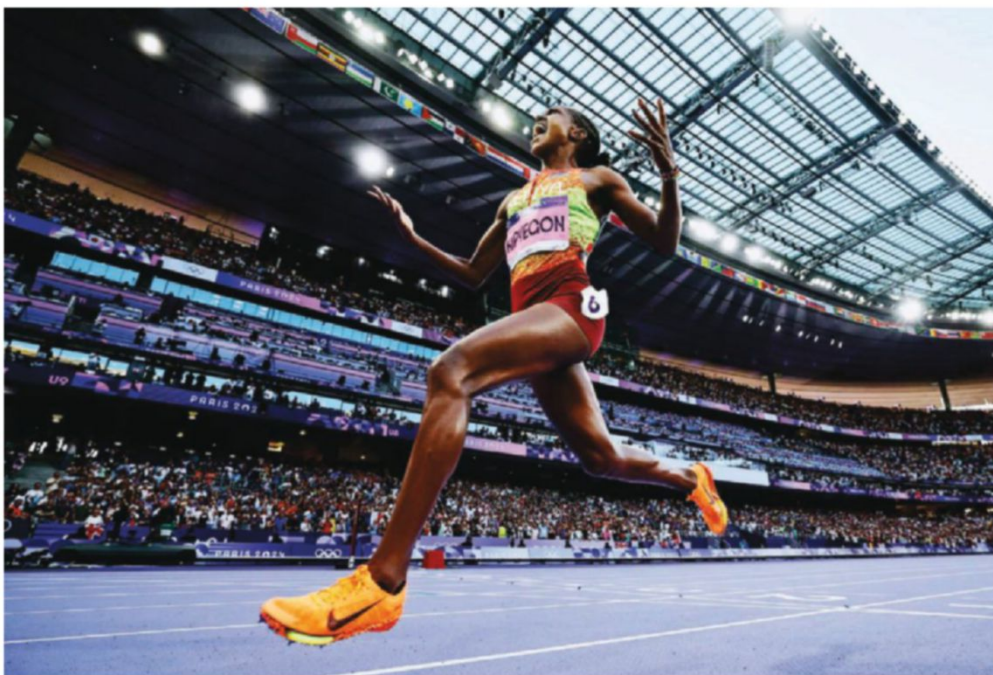
Dana White

The UFC boss has turned the organization into a \$1.5 billion operation, and in 2025 secured a seven-year, \$7.7 billion media-rights deal. —S.G.

Ed Stack

The Dick's Sporting Goods executive chair grew the retailer into the U.S.'s largest sporting-goods seller, with \$17 billion in sales in 2025. —M.E.

spacing and a faster pace for the Las Vegas Aces. In three of Hammon's first four seasons, A'ja Wilson has won the MVP award and the Aces have won the title, cementing them as a dynasty. Whether or not Hammon breaks one of the highest glass ceilings in sports—female head coach for a major men's pro team—she's one of the best to roam the sidelines. "I don't need the stamp of approval from the NBA," Hammon told *TIME* in 2023. —S.G.



Faith Kipyegon

A middle-distance specialist from Kenya, Kipyegon has consistently run faster in her races than any other woman in history. She's the first runner to win three straight gold medals in the 1,500 m at the Olympics.

After a scientific study published last year in the journal *Royal Society Open Science* concluded that Kipyegon, already the world-record holder in the mile, could break the four-minute barrier, a time that long seemed impossible for a woman to achieve, she tried in a Nike-sponsored race in

Paris. She fell about six seconds short, but no matter: about a week later, Kipyegon broke her own world record in the 1,500 at the Prefontaine Classic in Eugene, Ore. She returns to Oregon this summer to run the mile at the Pre. Breaking four will be difficult, but watch her try. —S.G.



Gerry Cardinale

Cardinale might just be the most powerful person in sports you've never heard of. RedBird Capital Partners, his \$14 billion investment firm, is one of the controlling shareholders of Paramount Skydance, and he was a key player in the conglomerate's \$110 billion offer to acquire Warner Bros. Discovery in February. Paramount broadcasts the NFL and UFC; the deal will add properties such as the NHL and U.S. Soccer. RedBird also owns stakes in teams including AC Milan. —S.G.



Fernando Mendoza

Mendoza accomplished one of the great surprise college-football feats: he won a national championship and Heisman Trophy as

quarterback for Indiana, a basketball school with so little football tradition that before Mendoza's arrival in 2025 (he transferred from Cal), the Hoosiers

hadn't played in a Rose Bowl since 1968. His enthusiastic postgame interviews became a staple that fans can only hope continue with the Las Vegas Raiders, who took him No. 1 in the NFL Draft in April. —S.G.

Carlie Irsay-Gordon

Since taking over as the Indianapolis Colts' principal owner in May 2025, she has rapidly become the most prominent woman to own an NFL team. She's so involved that she wears a headset on the sideline. —Tashan Reed

Bill Simmons

His voice-of-the-fan perspective shaped an era in sports media. In 2020 he sold his outlet the Ringer to Spotify for \$250 million; it consistently churns out chart-topping podcasts, from his own to *The Zach Lowe Show*. —S.G.



Oleksandr Usyk

The undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, Usyk is a best-of-generation boxer. With his win over Rico Verhoeven in Egypt on May 23, Usyk, 39, improved his career record to 25-0. He came from humble beginnings in Ukraine, took up boxing at 15, won Olympic gold in 2012, and has become a symbol of Ukrainian resistance in the face of Russia's 2022 invasion. In the early days of the war, he took up arms as part of a territorial defense battalion in Kyiv. His foundation helped purchase military equipment and deliver humanitarian aid. —S.G.

CURRY: DAVID GONZALES—IMAGN IMAGES/REUTERS; SABALENKA: DAVID RAMOS—GETTY IMAGES; CHARANIA: MATT WINKELMEYER—GETTY IMAGES; HAMMON: ETHAN MILLER—GETTY IMAGES; KIPYEGON: PATRICK SMITH—GETTY IMAGES; CARDINALE: AC MILAN—AC MILAN/GETTY IMAGES; MENDOZA: GRACE HOLLARS—USA TODAY/REUTERS; USYK: BRADLEY COLLYER—PA/AP

Amna Al Qubaisi

There aren't currently any female competitors in the Formula One Grand Prix championship series, but this Emirati driver hopes to change that. This year she became the first woman to race in the Pro class of the Porsche Carrera Cup Asia. —*Tashan Reed*

Luke Littler

The 19-year-old darts player from England, nicknamed the Nuke, has shattered records and exploded to global fame. The youngest player to earn a world No. 1 ranking, he's won back-to-back world-championship titles. —*Michael Errigo*



Jessie Diggins

The most decorated cross-country skier in U.S. history, Diggins capped off her career with one last Olympic medal, as she fought through a rib injury to earn bronze in the 10-km interval

start freestyle at the Milano Cortina Olympics. This year, she won her fourth overall Crystal Globe as the best women's cross-country skier in the world. Despite all these accolades,

what's moved Diggins most is the response she's gotten from both kids and adults since she opened up about her struggles with an eating disorder. She has called it the "most meaningful thing I've ever done in my life."

—*Sean Gregory*



Masai Ujiri

In May, less than two months after Ujiri joined the ownership group of the WNBA expansion franchise the Toronto Tempo, the Dallas Mavericks named him their new president. He's tasked with surrounding 2026 NBA Rookie of the Year Cooper Flagg, who is still just 19, with championship-level talent. "We have a little prince here. Now we're going to turn him into a king," Ujiri said in his introductory press conference. Born in England and raised in Nigeria, Ujiri is the only non-American to win the NBA's Executive of the Year award: he was given that honor in 2013 as general manager of the Denver Nuggets. —*S.G.*



Jordan Chiles

Chiles was part of the gold-medal-winning U.S. women's gymnastics team at the 2024 Paris Olympics, but she is still fighting for the bronze medal from the floor-exercise event. Days after she stood on the podium, Chiles was stripped of the bronze when an arbitration court said she had not challenged an error in her score in time. She appealed, and finally, in January, the highest court in Switzerland, where the International Olympic Committee is based, ruled in her favor, declaring the arbitration court had to rehear her case. "This case is bigger than one competition or one result," she wrote in *TIME*. "It is about trust. Athletes give everything to their sport. Our bodies. Our time. Our youth. We deserve a system that treats us with the same respect and seriousness that it demands from us." Last year, Chiles published a memoir and founded a mentorship program. —*Alice Park*



Carson Hocevar

Hocevar could be the next face of NASCAR. The 23-year-old from Michigan possesses a combination of talent and confidence that attracts a fervent following. In his third season as the driver of the No. 77 Chevrolet for Spire Motorsports, Hocevar captured his first Cup Series win at the Jack Link's 500 at Talladega in Alabama in April. His postrace celebration, hanging out the car window, was even more memorable. —*M.E.*

TIME 100/AI

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Time Off



ALIENS AMONG US

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

The stars of *Disclosure Day* on Steven Spielberg's latest encounter with extraterrestrial life

INSIDE

MINDY KALING RETURNS
TO THE WORKPLACE COMEDY

A CAMPY, APOCALYPTIC
NEW VAMPIRE SHOW

COMEDIAN JOHN EARLY MAKES
HIS DIRECTORIAL DEBUT

STEVEN SPIELBERG HAS BEEN MAKING MOVIES about aliens for half a century, and each blockbuster reflects the time in which it was made. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is a post-Watergate movie about distrust in government; *E.T.* channels the consumerist, suburban anxieties of the Reagan era; *War of the Worlds* captures post-9/11 panic. Now *Disclosure Day*, out June 12, tells the story of a planet on the brink of world war, where a furtive battle breaks out over what to do with a radical new truth: we are not alone. The debate over whether the disclosure of this information will bring humanity together or fracture it further puts corporate titans, scientists, broadcasters, and even nuns at dangerous odds with one another. Colman Domingo plays a soothsayer orchestrating the revelation of decades' worth of evidence that aliens have visited earth in peace. Josh O'Connor and Emily Blunt are his overwhelmed disciples, imbued with discomfiting powers that could be key to making contact with these otherworldly guests. A mysterious company in cahoots with the government, both of which stand to benefit from suppressing the information, gives chase to the would-be whistle-blowers. The trio of actors spoke with TIME about how Spielberg persuaded them to believe in alien life, their encounter with fellow believer former President Barack Obama, and how the movie will continue to shift the cultural conversation around extraterrestrials.

What made you want to do this movie, besides the fact that Spielberg was directing it?

Blunt: I mean, we would all do craft services for Steven.

Domingo: We would do anything, anything.

Blunt: I ran home with a hard copy [of the script], and I read it so fast, and I called him—Colman, we both called him and cried. We were just so overwhelmed by how breathtaking the script [by frequent Spielberg collaborator David Koepp] was.

Did he discuss his preoccupation with alien life with you before or during filming?

Blunt: It's evident in his movies, even some of his earliest work that he would shoot as a 17-year-old boy, that he has always had a fascination with what's beyond the stars. Some directors have explored going there themselves. He has been interested in how visitations would affect us, and I think that is very true to Steven's humanistic tendencies: How would we be shifted as a civilization?

Domingo: It sort of upends us and makes us rethink everything—government, religion, division, race, you name it. It puts that all aside, and we have to form another union. I think, in a beautiful way, we're all together in this.

O'Connor: We're living in an incredibly hostile, fractured world politically. In those times, what we need is humility, and there's nothing better to see how small we are in the grand scheme of things than to have visitors come—visitors who have never caused any harm or violence or hatred.

The movie reckons with how alien life would challenge the notion of God and our belief systems.



^
O'Connor, left,
and Domingo
pursue
transparency
at any cost

Blunt: It brings into question how much really we can control. I think it would be an arrogant thing to presume we are alone in the universe or that we are the most powerful, technologically advanced civilization... All the research we did through the congressional hearings, the documentaries, what was evident is the people who had these experiences [encountering UFOs], whether they were from a religious background, wildly different political backgrounds, there was just a peacefulness that had taken over them. Whether they were discredited, laughed at, lost their jobs, they knew what they had seen, they had shifted because of it. It was inarguable they had experienced something profound.

Did Spielberg change your mind on whether aliens exist?

Domingo: I leaned in. There's one gentleman named John E. Mack who was a clinical psychiatrist and Harvard professor, and really kind of an inspiration for [my character] Hugo. He practiced as a psychiatrist and found that the people he studied really had full experiences and emotionally connected to it, and he believed they were telling the truth. Someone who was a bit more of a scientist, he was shunned. But he believed.

Do you believe, Josh?

O'Connor: It's not that far-reaching that there's life beyond, for sure. Whether they're visiting us? Part of me thinks, don't bother. It's not that great here. [Laughs.] When you hear



accounts of people who have had these experiences, they weren't traumatic. The traumas come from the way people responded, how they've been patronized and gaslit and shunned. I completely believe that they had those encounters.

In the past year, Barack Obama said he believes in extraterrestrials. Meanwhile, the Pentagon released papers related to UFOs. Why do you think the conversation around aliens is shifting?

Blunt: It's great that it's converging with this film. It's hit a critical mass of people who really want to know that truth. For those who are concealing it, they want to know why? A few crumbs of extraterrestrial life have been released, but I think there's a bakery.

Domingo: We want full disclosure.

Speaking of Obama, he visited the set of *Disclosure Day*. Did you speak with him?

O'Connor: We were not scheduled to work that day. But we needed to go in.

Blunt: Dressed to the nines.

O'Connor: I bowed. I promised myself I wouldn't, but it just happened.

Blunt: It was an incredibly low bow.

O'Connor: And what did he say to me?

Blunt: He said, "Oh, we have the same ears."

O'Connor: I felt very seen for the first time.

Famously, Spielberg movies feature what's come to be known as "the

Spielberg face." Are you familiar?

Domingo: I didn't know what that was. We look into the light, right?

Blunt: Remember that amazing bit in *Jurassic Park* where Laura Dern is looking through stuff, and the hand comes down and turns her head, and she looks up [at the dinosaurs]?

O'Connor: Oh, I love that.

It's when he zooms in close on your face during a moment of awe. I think you all had to do it in this movie. Does he give specific direction for that?

Domingo: To say, "Come on, give me Spielberg face"?

O'Connor: No, mostly the way he and [cinematographer] Janusz [Kaminski] light a scene, you just sort of fall into it. Spielberg films are all in our subconscious, so I think you know if there's a big beam of light shooting down, look into it.

Colman, you worked with Spielberg on *Lincoln*, which was released in 2012. How has he changed as a director since then?

Domingo: Listen, I think I worked with him for four days on that movie.

'He had a joy every single day. He would come in excited, so you got excited.'

COLMAN DOMINGO, ON STEVEN SPIELBERG

And he was very warm, but maybe because of what that film needed he was probably in video village more for the big shots. Here, he had his handheld, and he was close to the action most of the time, right there with us. He also had a joy every single day. He would come in excited, so you got excited.

Blunt: I'll never forget seeing him direct the little girl [played by Delaney Anne Cuthbert]. The way he was like, "Look up and what do you see? Oh, look at that," talking her through it. You just realize how gifted he is with children. All the kids in Spielberg movies are always incredible.

O'Connor: Because he also still sees as a child sees. He's still so in touch with his childhood wonder.

He's also known for his blocking. Emily and Josh, you have a scene where you need to jump from a car that's being pushed into a moving train.

Blunt: I don't know anyone who can convey more with a camera than Steven. He dreams it up in the moment a lot of the time. But for an action sequence, mainly for safety because he's like everyone's dad, that was very carefully shot-listed from when the car rear-ends our car to when the window would blow out to shots of my feet on the brakes. It was all very carefully orchestrated because you have to tell so much geographically to build tension.

O'Connor: Like Emily said, he has this parental side. He really wants to make sure you're safe, and that can be in a stunt situation. But it's also true of emotional scenes. There's a vulnerability you have to take on, and Steven understands that. In the same way he works with kids, he's all about creating an environment that feels safe, that has wonder if it needs wonder, has quiet if it needs quiet. If there's an intensity, he'll cry.

Blunt: If you're emotional, he will be emotional.

O'Connor: The famous thing is when he calls "Cut!" and says, "That's in the movie." But then the other thing I found incredibly moving to witness is that he would call "Cut!" and there would be silence because he's crying. He's gathering himself. It's so moving. □



TELEVISION

A roommate comedy Not Suitable for Gen Z

BY JUDY BERMAN

WATCHING *NOT SUITABLE FOR WORK*, A NEW HULU sitcom from Mindy Kaling, I found myself thinking, improbably, of Richard Nixon. Elected Vice President at 39, Nixon was famously described as “an old man’s idea of a young man.” *Suitable*, a post-collegiate roommate comedy in the tradition of *Friends* and *New Girl*, is an older person’s idea of a show about young adults. The cast is relevant and the scripts peppered with internet slang. But the characters bear so little resemblance to the Gen Z we know, they might as well be at Central Perk in 1994.

Like so many shows of this sort, *Suitable*, which will release new episodes on Tuesdays through June 23, is set in New York. Unlike the outer-boroughs boho types of *Girls* and last year’s *Adults*, however, these pals live in Manhattan’s fratty Murray Hill neighborhood. “I’m not cool enough for Brooklyn,” frets first-year investment banker AJ (Ella Hunt), in a lament as dated as a *Sex and the City* bisexuality plot. She’s moving in with her best friend, Abby (Avantika), the enterprising assistant of a bratty stylist (Constance Wu). Across the hall are their love interests. Reluctant med student Kel (Nicholas Duvernay) longs to be an actor. Josh (Jack Martin) has the politics of a middle-aged liberal (Obama poster, NPR merch) and the entitlement to use his mogul dad’s clout to get hired by the Anderson Cooper–esque cable-news host (Victor Garber) he idolizes. A bumbling version of a rom-com lover boy, Davis (Will Angus) falls hard for AJ, who also happens to work with him.

Suitable is an older person’s idea of a show about young adults

<

Hunt, second from left, anchors a crew of ambitious new grads

That these characters are what boomers would call squares and millennials basic isn’t a bad thing. Artsy, young urbanites are overrepresented on TV; *Industry* even makes finance bros look cool, for psychos. Hunt, Avantika, and Angus are especially good as overgrown kids trying to hide their softness beneath ambition. Even when the jokes fall flat, as they often do, their charm keeps episodes breezy.

YET THIS FRIEND GROUP isn’t just out of step with the generational zeitgeist. They also exist in an alternate universe where, strained references to looksmaxxing techniques and already-archaic Labubu jokes aside, the Gen Z young-adult experience isn’t much different from the Gen X model. Is the economy a nightmare? Is AI eliminating precisely the entry-level, white collar jobs these recent grads are able to easily lock down? Is anyone besides, we’re told, Josh’s boss queer? Not in this neck of the multiverse!

Nor, it seems, did the great workplace reckoning that was #MeToo ever happen. As its title suggests, *Suitable* is invested in its characters’ professional lives, and particularly how they’re complicated by matters of the heart. It opens with Davis failing a sexual-misconduct training and Abby being exhorted not to sleep with famous clients. Three of the five leads are eventually entangled in work-related love triangles. AJ’s involves her managing director (Jay Ellis from *Insecure*), a cut-throat who loves his job so much, it’s hard to believe he would consider jeopardizing it by pursuing an underling. A generous interpretation of all this would be that Kaling—who’d been on a hot streak with *Never Have I Ever*, *The Sex Lives of College Girls*, and *Running Point*—is saying every generation has to make its own mistakes, no matter the institutional guardrails. That may be true. But it doesn’t mean TV scripts should sound as oblivious as the green characters that populate them. □

TELEVISION

A 'performative vampire' *Lestat*

IMAGINE THAT AN ESTEEMED JOURNALIST published a book profiling a real-life vampire, and then that vampire's twisted soulmate—also a vampire—started a rock band. If this were 1985, when Anne Rice's novel *The Vampire Lestat* came out, you could expect such a revelation to upend human society. But in today's U.S., an aspiring tech dystopia where the news can be weirder than the conspiracy theories? You'd get hours of social media chaos, days of cable-news hysteria, and then, most likely, everyone who didn't already believe in lizard people would write off the author as a scammer and the rocker as a fraud. Or, as Lestat de Lioncourt (Sam Reid), now fronting glam-garage revival act the Vampire Lestat, tells it: Americans "lifted their heads from their algorithmic hand masters, uttered a collective 'huh,' and swiped left."

This florid voice narrates *The Vampire Lestat*, airing Sundays on AMC, an alternately rollicking and gutting work of apocalyptic camp that creator Rolin Jones has suggested is, at once, the third season of his beloved Rice adaptation *Interview With the Vampire* and a new show with the same characters and personnel. In *Interview*, the vampire Louis de Pointe du Lac (Jacob Anderson) told his epic, 145-year life story to the hard-boiled reporter Daniel Molloy (Eric Bogosian). That biography took the form of a dark romance between the self-lacerating Louis and his fiercely loving but brutal maker, Lestat, filtered through the former's brooding subjectivity. Dozens of harrowing twists later, Daniel was turned into a vampire by Louis' terrifyingly powerful, 500-year-old lover, Armand (Assad Zaman), and published Louis' confessions to the ridicule of the human media and the outrage of the understandably press-shy immortal community.

Lestat, for his part, did not appreciate his depiction in the book as "a mayonnaise villain with sociopathic tendencies." He reclaims his narrative in a new season steeped in the end-times decadence of MAGA-era nihilism, whose opening chapters are as exuberantly arch and overwrought as the title character's monologue. In place of the sweeping emotionality that defined Louis' perspective comes a Vampire Lestat North American tour diary that is part scuzzy rock doc, part druggy, neo-glam fantasy, and, as Lestat is stalked by vamps who'd prefer he didn't draw so much attention to their existence, part supernatural thriller. A device that frames the season's

events as a flashback also teases a climax of global proportions and introduces doubt around the survival of the self-described "performative vampire" Reid so vividly portrays.

JONES USES his antihero's blunt self-appraisals to avoid the pretentiousness endemic to stories about artists. Instead of dazzling us with his ostensible genius, Lestat complains his band is stuck in the "Alps of adequacy" and gets scathing reviews. *Interview* had a sense of humor about its high drama, but this season sometimes plays like a full-on comedy. A Czech look-alike gives the real Lestat alibis for the murders he commits on the road. There's a running gag about vampires discreetly peeing blood at public urinals.

This marvelously fun shift in tone more than justifies the title change. Yet as the season progresses, Lestat reunites with his hot undead mom (an icy Jennifer Ehle), and his origins as an aristocratic misfit in 18th century France come into focus, the new episodes feel increasingly in sync with *Interview*. The Louis-Lestat romance fans love to dissect is far from over. And *Lestat* becomes, like its predecessor, an empathetic portrait of an immortal monster with human psychology. A life that spans centuries means more catastrophic mistakes and more formative traumas and more time for pain and guilt to fester in the subconscious. To make the musical masterpiece of his dreams, Lestat will have to break on through his shell of witty cruelty and hope an authentic soul remains intact beneath it. —J.B.

▼
Reid returns as Lestat, with more guitar and eye makeup



PROFILE

John Early crosses over

BY RICH JUZWIAK

MUCH OF WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE ART that inspired John Early to become the artist he is today is somewhere in his directorial debut, *Maddie's Secret*. The curry of connotations and reference ratatouille in his tale of a food influencer's struggle with an eating disorder evokes the melodramas of multiple eras, from '50s woman's films to '80s and '90s issue-oriented TV movies like *Kate's Secret* (after which it was named) and *Perfect Body*. It is both hilarious and deathly serious, sometimes simultaneously. There's a pinch of Alfred Hitchcock's *Marnie* in the mother-daughter dynamic. The sound is modeled after what Early calls the "winkingly pornographic" sonic design of Paul Verhoeven movies like *Showgirls* and *Starship Troopers*.

Early says that when he set out to write the film, he envisioned making something "very handmade and ratty," like John Waters' 1974 classic *Female Trouble*. We are sharing a "Maddie's-coded" lunch he's brought of onigiri, milk tea, yuzu seltzer, and mochi in Manhattan's Stuyvesant Square park, just steps from his digs while he finishes the run of his off-Broadway play *What We Did Before Our Moth Days*. His buzzed head is covered with a protective layer of camel-toned peach fuzz, and a few inches below, he rocks a borderline translucent mustache that he grew for the play. "It does make me feel like a real gay person, having a mustache, instead of an impostor gay guy on the apps," he says.

During our nearly two-hour conversation, he mentions Waters' influence repeatedly. Early, 38, reflects that in his 20s, as he was getting his start as a stand-up comedian and releasing videos on the internet, he felt "an equal desire to be both John Waters and Divine," the filmmaker and his linebacker-size, cross-dressing muse. "But I also was like, 'Wouldn't it be nice if I was just Divine?' Then I waited for a few years for a John Waters, and I was like, 'It's not coming, right? It's not happening.'"

And so, John Early became his own John Waters and his own Divine.

THE MOST DISTINGUISHING FEATURE of *Maddie's Secret*, which premiered to raves at the Toronto International Film Festival and hits theaters June 19, is that Early plays a woman. It may appear to be a gag, but the performance is nothing if not earnest. He considers the physical transformation drag only insofar as what Divine was doing in *Polyester* and *Hairspray* was drag. That's to say: it isn't, really. Unlike in drag, the overt female impersonation "is meant to slip away." In other words, it's the subtext. As writer-director-star vehicles go, we haven't seen something this outlandish since Tommy Wiseau's 2003 cult drama *The Room*.

We meet Maddie when she is a lowly dishwasher working for a food content company, too camera-shy to present



to the world the ingenious recipes she creates in her free time. When her supportive husband (Eric Rahill) persuades her to upload a cooking video, it goes viral overnight, jump-starting her career. But soon, the pressures of the industry lead to a relapse of the bulimia she'd had under control.

Early feels it's useful to confront the audience's gender perceptions as Maddie hits the ground running. "I think there's something about me playing Maddie that allows people to suspend their disbelief," he says. "If people can give themselves over to that illusion, then they will be able to give over to [film's] tonal extremes, which is something we're losing. There's a certain kind of expressiveness that is being bred out of culture."

That's not for Early's lack of trying. He has long played ridiculous characters who are prone to self-absorption and emotional explosions, like his

**'I love
movies
because
of women.'**

JOHN EARLY



▲
Early as himself, left, and getting glammed up behind the scenes as Maddie

breakout turn as the diabolical Elliott Goss on *Search Party* or his arc as the questionably heterosexual TV writer Josh on the final season of *The Comeback*. Maddie exists in contrast to those roles. For much of the film's running time, Maddie is a woman on the verge. "You can only be screaming for so long before your voice gets hoarse," says Early. "I don't want to be playing a raging narcissist for the rest of my life. I've done that a lot, and there was a crackling there. It was really cathartic because I grew up a good Presbyterian boy."

Early credits his work on *Moth Days* as making way for his current, gentler vibe. He and his castmates rehearsed on and off for two years in multiweek blocks. The show, which was written by Wallace Shawn and directed by his longtime collaborator André Gregory (together they wrote the 1981 art-house hit *My Dinner With André*),

consists of a series of monologues told by four characters, who reflect on life and love.

"I felt totally cracked open," says Early of the intensive rehearsal process, which led right into the filming of *Maddie's Secret* in the winter of 2025. His vision was to make something fast and cheap, and that he did, with a budget around \$750,000. Juggling so many roles in a frugal production harried him—at one point, Early banged his head on a car door and didn't realize he had blood running down his face as he continued going about his day. He filled the production with friends, like his ex Gordon Landenberger (who did the production design and appears in a small role); his former teacher at NYU, the Emmy-winning actor Kristen Johnston; and elusive chanteuse Sky Ferreira (who shows up in a brooding cameo). His creative other half Kate Berlant, with whom Early starred in 2022's sketch special *Would It Kill You to Laugh?* among many other projects, plays Deena, Maddie's lesbian co-worker with a penchant for ruining straight girls' lives. Early says he directed Berlant to go bigger to compensate for his more subdued turn. "She's the funniest person I've ever met," says Early. "When we first became friends, I couldn't believe she was someone my age and not some old diva that I worshipped."

Berlant says Early's meticulous script and vision made filming a breeze. But she did wonder what people would make of this "inherently strange movie." "I have full confidence in John, but I did worry when he first told me, 'I'm going to be playing a bulimic woman,'" she recalls, noting the "carceral nature of the culture." But early festival and critical response has been overwhelmingly positive, which Berlant says is a testament to Early's craftsmanship. "It's not mean. I think that's the thing that really protects it."

THOUGH EARLY INITIALLY ENVISIONED his protagonist as a gay guy, he quickly dropped that idea. "It made the movie feel more satirical, a little more blackhearted," he says. He centered his narrative in the food world because of his fascination with the current way food is commodified both online and in real life. His character is bulimic because, he explains, "I can't convincingly play an anorexic person." *Maddie's Secret* also comes from his experience of having circles of close female friends from a young age. "When someone would get an eating disorder, I suddenly felt kind of kicked out," he recalls. "I was confronted with my gender, like, 'Oh, I'm too stupid to understand this.'"

Though it swings wildly from absurdity to earnestness, *Maddie's Secret* is John Early's open love letter. "I love movies because of women," he says. "All the people I fell in love with as a child were women." While it began as a labor of love rooted in his comedic path, it evolved into something deeper. "As we were shooting, I was like, 'Is this just totally sincere?' I'm sitting there in boobs, and I'm like, 'Is this just literally not funny?'" To be clear, it most definitely is. But Early pulled off a miracle in making the laughs co-exist easily with the gut punches. "I thought I was doing some kind of crazy backyard sleepover genre experiment with my friends," he says, "and then before I knew it, on some mysterious level, this was incredibly personal to me." □

CHINA WATCH

PRESENTED BY CHINA DAILY 中國日報

Monkeys make golden return

Caretakers help in bringing secretive subspecies back from the brink with a tender touch

BY LI MENGHAN

Attracted by a caretaker's closed fist, a 26-inch-tall golden snub-nosed monkey swings gracefully through the branches of Shennongjia in Hubei province.

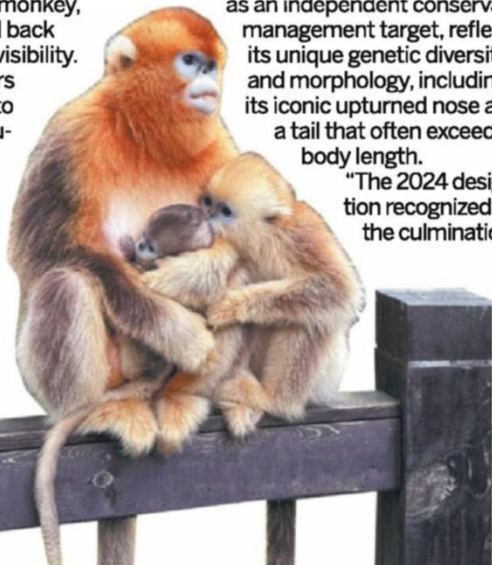
When the fist reveals nothing, the monkey, a 55-pound male named Beike, meaning conch, taps the caretaker and tugs at his sleeve. He eventually finds two peanuts in the other hand, swiftly seizing and cracking the rare treat.

"This monkey recently won a battle to become the new head of his family," says Yang Jingyuan, director of the scientific research institute at the Shennongjia National Nature Reserve. He looks on as dozens of monkeys dart through the canopy, grooming one another and occasionally tussling in the dappled sunlight.

After 40 years of conservation, the Shennongjia golden snub-nosed monkey, the rarest subspecies of the golden snub-nosed monkey, has bounced back from near invisibility.

Its numbers have tripled to 1,618 individuals across 11 groups,

Golden snub-nosed monkeys in Shennongjia.
LI MENGHAN / CHINA DAILY



roaming a habitat of 155 square miles, a resurgence made possible by policy support, scientific management and technological empowerment.

The golden snub-nosed monkey, with a life span of about 20 to 25 years, is classified as a first-class State-protected wildlife species.

In 1978 a group of Chinese scientists unexpectedly encountered two specimens in Shennongjia. In 1980 Professor Liu Minzhuang of East China Normal University in Shanghai confirmed the presence of golden snub-nosed monkeys in Shennongjia, extending the species' distribution eastward by about 300 miles from Sichuan province into Hubei.

By the 1980s numbers of this subspecies had plummeted to just 501 individuals clinging to a mere 33 square miles of habitat. To stem the tide, Shennongjia was designated a provincial reserve in 1982 and upgraded to national status in 1986. In 2024 the subspecies was designated as an independent conservation management target, reflecting its unique genetic diversity and morphology, including its iconic upturned nose and a tail that often exceeds its body length.

"The 2024 designation recognized both the culmination of



field research over decades and the species' protection value," Yang the caretaker says. As early as 2005 scientists had selected one of the 11 groups — the very group that includes the family Beike now leads — as their focal study group for long-term behavioral and ecological monitoring.

At that time the group had 105 individuals and inhabited a natural valley in Dalongtan, northeastern Shennongjia.

For close observation, researchers built simple living quarters, set up monitoring plank walks and established the Dalongtan Golden Snub-nosed Monkey Research Base in 2005. Through continuous tracking and observation, they identified winter food shortages as one of the key factors driving the monkeys toward endangerment.

To address the problem, the research team conducted a diet supplement experiment in which apples, oranges and pine nuts were stuck onto branches and coated with moss to mimic wild fruits. However, no monkey dared to approach, a stalemate finally broken when a male became the first to take the food.

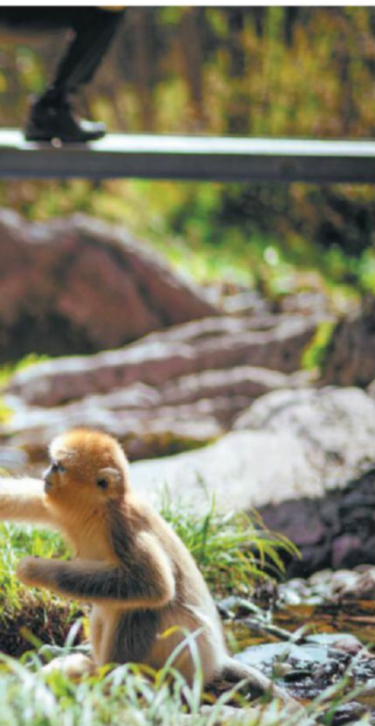
A few months later the monkey group began to regularly accept the supplemental food,



Above: Researchers record monkeys' behavior at Shennongjia National Nature Reserve in September 2024.
LI SHUHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Right: A researcher observes monkeys at the Dalongtan base in May 2024.
LIU KANG / FOR CHINA DAILY





Top: A child interacts with a golden snub-nosed monkey at Dalongtan Golden Snub-nosed Monkey Research Base in Shennongjia, Hubei province. WANG CHUNYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



which opened the door for researchers to systematically observe their feeding, reproduction, social behavior and even individual personalities.

Yao Hui, deputy director of the scientific research institute, says the Shennongjia golden snub-nosed monkey typically lives at altitudes above 5,250 ft., where vegetation is limited. About 60% of their diet is tree bark and lichen, supplemented by bird eggs, insects and soil for protein and trace elements.

"As a result, during winter when food intake is severely insufficient and nutrition is lacking, their fur turns grayish," Yao says. "However, around July and August it becomes a beautiful golden color."

Human intervention remains minimal with researchers providing only a small amount of supplemental food during extreme winter shortages, Yao says. The overall approach is to let the monkeys live as naturally as possible while working to restore their natural habitat.

Measures included the construction of 25 ecological corridors, which facilitate the reconnection of fragmented habitat patches and promote gene exchange among different monkey populations. In addition, more than 7.7 square miles of degraded habitat has been restored to expand their living area.

For residents living in areas in which the monkeys are distributed, the reserve has relocated them and organized skills training to help them transition to new livelihoods.

Those living in peripheral regions receive alternative energy subsidies to replace coal and firewood with electricity, reducing the human impact on the monkeys' habitat. A comprehensive electrification transformation project at the Dalongtan base was completed in 2024, with many photovoltaic panels installed to power most daily needs such as cooking and heating. This initiative not only reduced fire risks but also further minimized human disturbance to the monkeys' habitat.



Online
Watch the video by scanning the code.

Duo builds timely friendship bridge

BY JI HAISHENG

Nestled in the green hills near the coastal city of Fuzhou, Fujian province, is a village named Kuliang, once home to a vibrant international community. After the foreign residents left in the mid-20th century, people largely forgot about the thriving community that once called Kuliang home.

Decades later the stories are being revived thanks to a trans-Pacific partnership. Using old photos, personal networks and new technology, a Chinese professor and a cultural researcher from the United States are rebuilding human connections lost to time.

The collaboration began in 2015 when Elyn MacInnis, a U.S. citizen with strong family ties to China, traveled to Fuzhou with her husband to fulfill two wishes. The first was to scatter her father-in-law's ashes in the Minjiang River, which flows through Fuzhou, thereby honoring his wish to return to the city where he once lived and taught. The second, and more challenging task, was to find the family's old home in Kuliang.

To help with the search, they brought with them a collection of faded color photos taken in the 1940s. Among those who tried to help was Lin Yanan, a Fuzhou native and an associate professor at East China University of Science and Technology in Shanghai.

"We got the photos and tried to identify the house, but we couldn't pinpoint its location," Lin says.

Upon returning to the U.S., MacInnis delved deeper into the archives to uncover Kuliang's stories and began contacting

other U.S. families with connections to the mountain village, leading to the establishment of the Kuliang Friends group. The breakthrough came in 2016 when she found a map of Kuliang and a name list, but it was written in an incomprehensible script: English phonetic approximations of the Fuzhou dialect.

Lin stepped in to bridge the gap. "I'm a local," he says. "I can understand the dialect, and I speak both English and Chinese, so I could help decode it."

Lin's and MacInnis' skills proved complementary. In the U.S. MacInnis took on the role of archival detective, scouring libraries, family collections and online databases for photographs, letters and diaries. Lin in China became the decoder and field researcher, using his knowledge to translate names and verify locations on the ground.

As the flow of information grew, a new challenge emerged: how could the unnamed faces in the old photographs be identified? Lin and his team of students developed the Kuliang Genealogy system, China's first digital archive for an overseas community. The system scans old photos, identifies individuals and reconstructs family trees and social networks.

With their joint efforts, Lin and MacInnis have traced at least 80 families and 120 houses with links to Kuliang, and the Kuliang Friends network has expanded to comprise more than 50 members.

The Kuliang community, MacInnis says, was made up of real people, including teachers, doctors, scientists and farmers, who had lived, worked and built trust alongside their Chinese neighbors over generations.



Lin Yanan (right), an associate professor at East China University of Science and Technology, introduces to Elyn MacInnis in June 2024 the genealogical system to search for foreigners who lived in Kuliang, Fujian province. LIN SHANCHUAN / XINHUA

Ellie Hollander The CEO of Meals on Wheels America on why local programs are closing and what she's going to do with a \$70 million gift

Is it fair to say that Meals on Wheels is the least controversial charity in the U.S.? When we did our last public survey of voters, 9 out of 10 knew of Meals on Wheels, and of those, 9 out of 10 thought favorably of it.

Does that reputation make it harder to get your concerns heard? We're a little hidden in plain sight. We got a boost in attention during the pandemic, when all of us were having to isolate at home, wondering where our next meal was coming from. This is the reality that the adults that Meals on Wheels serves deal with on a day-to-day basis.

How worried are you about the number of programs that are closing? Some smaller programs have had to fold. Some are merging. We have a shortage of volunteers. Since I've been working here, I've been trying to get the charitable mileage reimbursement rate raised from where it was set in 1997: 14¢. The business rate is 72.5¢. But there's a lot of polarization right now; it's hard to get attention for really anything on Capitol Hill.

Meals on Wheels America is calling for \$2.285 billion in funding for the Older Americans Act Nutrition Program in 2027, which is more than double current levels. Why so much? Because it's never kept pace with need or the rising costs. Today, we're serving about 2.6 million seniors. One in 3 programs reports waiting lists of, on average, four months. Some programs have 4,000 people on a waiting list.

MacKenzie Scott recently gave Meals on Wheels America \$70 million. Even for her, that's a big gift. What are you going to use it for?

Why do you think volunteerism hasn't bounced back since the pandemic?

I wish I knew. It isn't for a lack of our programs seeking help. Our seniors have had amazing lives; they're a lot of fun. I don't know if it's a time issue, inflation, the cost of fuel, or that all of these are adding to a financial strain.



The goal of Meals on Wheels America is to do what our individual programs can't do. What they do best is help vulnerable seniors. What we do is advocate for them, raise public awareness and visibility, and do research to help make the case with donors in their communities. That's the thing about getting a gift like that. You could spend it down in an hour getting people off waiting lists, but are you going to solve the bigger problem? We're trying to do both.

We have Social Security and Medicare, and America has no food shortage. Why are seniors hungry? There are 14 million seniors who are threatened by hunger, and that's grown by about 3.1 million in just three years. They have limited mobility. They're dealing with multiple chronic conditions. They're not able to get to a food bank. They're not able to prepare their own food.

Where are their families? Their family may live nowhere near them. We're often the first point of contact when something goes wrong. We're the people that reach out to a family member to let them know that there's a problem.

Is one of the challenges that it's hard to make this feel urgent? I think unless you have an older adult in your life, you think Meals on Wheels is always going to be there.

To be clear, Meals on Wheels is always going to be there, right? Well, Meals on Wheels is a network of individual community programs. Is there always going to be a Meals on Wheels program in your community? I can't guarantee that. But will there always be Meals on Wheels somewhere? Yes, I absolutely believe it. —BELINDA LUSCOMBE

Just Can't Do It

Skechers Sneaks Up On Nike

in Latest YouGov Research



Nike topped next-purchase-considerations, followed closely by Skechers at no. 2, which also secured the top spot with the female cohort.



Nike emerged no. 1, netting 36.3% of respondents. Skechers trailed closely at 35.5%. Nike led males at 40.6% while Skechers topped the female list at 40.9%.

Skechers posted the largest improvement for '25 over '24, to its overall **35.5%** result.



Skechers' value perception marketing paid dividends with the no. 3 spot on "good/poor value for money" with a 35.1 value score, while Nike landed no. 9 with a 21.6.

AUDEMARS PIGUET

Le Brassus



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