

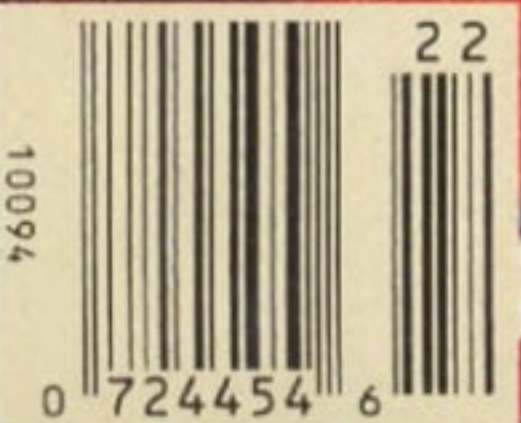
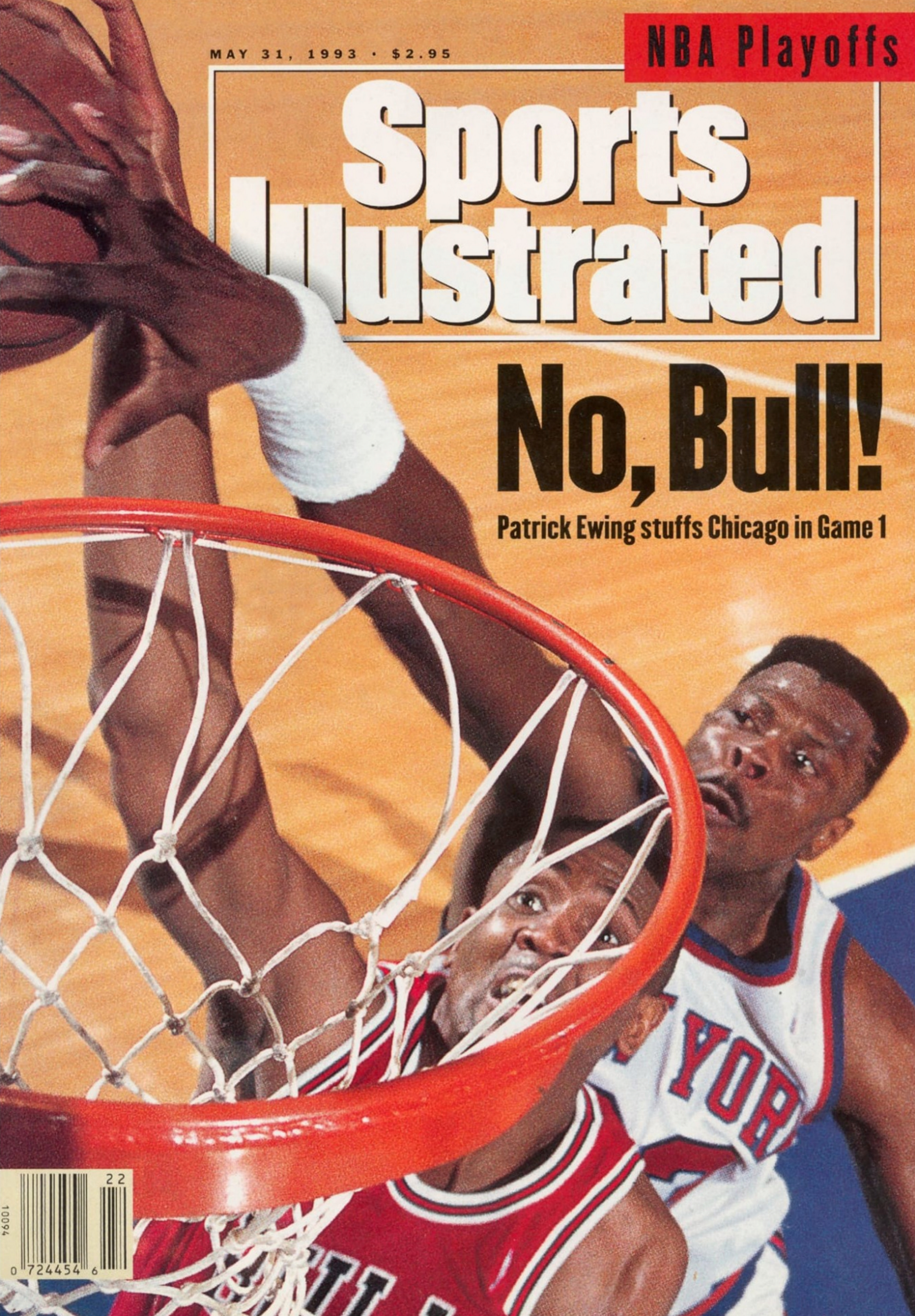
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NBA Playoffs

# Sports Illustrated

## No, Bull!

Patrick Ewing stuffs Chicago in Game 1



# Stalking the Wild Shuttlecock

*In 50 years of traveling the world, Hugh Forgie*

*kept his eye on the birdie* | by FRANZ LIDZ

**T**HE BADMINTON BIRD IS AN elusive beast that cannot tweet, build a nest or lay an egg. But it's capable of flying at speeds of up to 200 mph, which can make it as difficult to sight as a red-rumped green woodpecker.

For half a century, starting in 1935, Hugh Forgie chased the feathered shuttlecock to the far corners of the globe. He stalked it on parquet, on dirt, on ice—especially on ice. Slack-jawed Ice Capades audiences used to watch Forgie frantically circle a badminton net on skates, playing one-man matches. “I did for badminton what the Harlem Globetrotters did for basketball,” Forgie says. In fact, for a while he was the Globetrotters’ halftime show.

Forgie is 80 now. A smallish man about 5’ 6” tall, he lives in a tidy little condo in Boynton Beach, Fla. He wears a white yachting cap around his apartment and meditates on his brilliant career.

“Jack Dempsey told me I had the finest eye in sports,” he says, absently snapping a spoon with his thumbnail and making it ring. “Ed Sullivan had me on his show five times. I played the Moulin Rouge in Paris, the Savoy Hotel in London, the Borghese Gardens in Rome. I played Tel Aviv and Turin. Charlie Chaplin caught my act in Switzerland and laughed so hard he cried.” Forgie’s face is burnished and weathered like a piece of old ivory. Yet his steady eye and tight mouth are much the way they were when the young Hugh Forgie wore a hobo getup occasionally for his act.

In 1934, at 22, he flashed out of Brantford, Ont.—the hometown of Wayne Gretzky—and headed for Madison Square Garden as a left wing for a Canadian amateur all-star hockey team. He



On skates Forgie could return all shots—including his own.

stayed in Manhattan but not in hockey. Too small for the NHL, he made a living by giving badminton lessons.

Badminton was booming in the '30s. Forgie became a pro in '35 and began barnstorming around the country, challenging all comers. When he returned to Manhattan in 1938, Forgie teamed with British trick-shot artist Ken Davidson for an exhibition at the Roxy Theater. Davidson’s placements of the shuttlecock were so amazing and Forgie’s recoveries so spellbinding that the two were later signed for a tour of England, Scotland and Ireland. A 38-week run at the Palladium in London culminated in a command

performance before King George and Queen Elizabeth. Forgie even starred in two badminton newsreels, *Flying Feathers* and *Volley Oops!* Forgie passed the time before each show by playing badminton for money. He became world pro champ in 1941 and didn’t lose a match for another 11 years. But the end of World War II marked the end of big-time badminton. “The halls we had rented for \$500 a month were now getting \$1,000 a night for basketball,” he says.

So Forgie decided to put his act on ice. He left Davidson and teamed up with a protégé, Stig Larson. The two became modestly famous, rattling around the country with the Ice Capades. Larson would bash the birdie across the net to practically every place Forgie wasn’t. Yet Forgie always managed to run it down, sometimes looking the other way when he returned it, sometimes skating away from the net to swat through-the-legs forehands or double-take backhands. In the act’s frenzied climax, Forgie played and returned his own shots as he speed skated around and around the net.

By 1959 Forgie had decided it was time to try out a new act. He enlisted Shirley Marie Mans, who taught badminton at Wellesley (Mass.) College, to act as a foil for his comic antics, and they toured the country together. In their act Mans played the straight man to Forgie’s bumbling big-game hunter, who turned out to be a much better badminton player than Mans’s character had anticipated.

Forgie stopped performing in 1985, at 73. “I’ll bet not one percent of my audiences understood badminton, much less badminton on ice,” he laments. He’s silent for a space and then adds, “I really had the game down cold.” ■