



# POLO SPORT

"When I step on the court, everybody know they gonna lose," says Jade "Polo" Best—all 5-7 and 165 pounds of him. "This is my world." And we ain't talking about Oz. This is real life. Ain't no fugazis in here. Going hard is mandatory, just like the sentences they hand out. Polo, who is also known as federal prisoner No. 48228-066, hails from North Philly and reigns as the undisputed best player on the pound at FCI-Fairton, the medium-to-high security institution in South Jersey where he's serving a 15-year sentence for crack cocaine conspiracy. On the court, Polo whirrs through the air like a cyclone, quick and ambidextrous as he slashes to the rack to challenge bigger, stronger opponents. "I just wanna destroy a motherfucker in my path," says the 29-year-old Polo, thinking back to his days in Philly's Sonny Hill League. "I've been a scorer my whole life."

For real, dude's game mirrors another Philly mighty mite, Allen Iverson. "I can't compare my game, but I compare my heart to Al," says Polo. "Shorty ain't backing down. It's whatever with him." Polo is like that, too, both on and off the court. Showing his brave heart in the face of adversity. "My heart can get me as far as I wanna go," he promises. Hopefully, that means he'll be back on a basketball court as a free man before long.—SETH M. FERRANTI



# ROLE OUT

As the Lakers' Hall of Fame machine sputtered to a halt in the NBA Finals, one truth became abundantly clear: They sure could've used Kurt Rambis. The misfit of the Showtime Lakers, the 6-8 Rambis was more set manager than star, a blue-collar guy who put on those taped-up black-frame glasses and went to work. Current Laker GM Mitch Kupchak was a teammate: "His effort, persistence, his understanding of the game made it difficult to play against him." Rambis was a tough, efficient player who accepted his role and reaped the benefits, earning four rings. He would earn three more as a front-office type before returning to the bench as an assistant in 2001-02 (he was previously an assistant from '94-97, and the Lakers head coach for the latter part of the '99 season).

Strangely enough, the Cali product (he's Santa Clara's all-time leading scorer) was selected 58th overall in '80 by the Knicks but was cut in training camp. After a year overseas, he signed in L.A. and became a key contributor. Exposed to the expansion draft in '88, he played for Charlotte, Phoenix and Sacramento before re-joining the Lakers for his final two seasons. "If you told Kurt to run through a brick wall to win a game, he would do it," Kobe Bryant once said. If only more of their guys thought that way now.—RUSS BENGTSON

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

CHARLES BARKLEY



Forget the NBA itself—right now, we really just miss *Inside The NBA*. Did you try and watch the Finals? The Draft? Sure, they were good—at least the games and the picks were—but shouldn't it be required by law that Charles Barkley provide commentary for absolutely all NBA-related games and events? (Well, except for the WNBA—we don't think David Stern would stand for that.) Forget the golf, Chuck—from what we hear, it ain't getting any prettier—and get back on the air sooner rather than later, with NBA TV or something if you have to, and make us all happy. Please?

Expansion in pro sports is just plain weird. Where else do you get totally new teams built from scratch, with unknowns and retradees heading to a new locale and putting up major numbers (because hey, someone has to do it)? Careers are often born and re-born. Take the last time Charlotte got an NBA franchise. In '87-88, Kelly Tripucka was on the decline with the Jazz, known more in Utah for who he was acquired for (Adrian Dantley) than what he did on the court (9.1 ppg over two seasons, this after averaging 20-plus over five seasons in Detroit). He was acquired by the expansion Hornets in a preseason trade for Mike Brown and—well, we'll let the numbers tell it.

YEAR	G	GS	FG%	FT%	3P%	RPG	APG	SPG	PPG
'88-89	71	65	.467	.866	.357	3.7	3.2	1.2	22.6



## STAT BOX

KELLY TRIPUCKA

# NOYZ

Bird thought that being guarded by a white player was disrespectful to his game, maybe that helps explain why he never actually played any defense....Hey, it could be worse, Franchise—they could have dealt you to the Shanghai Sharks....We haven't seen the photos or anything, but just on principle, we're fine with Lauren Jackson posing naked. Lord knows the WNBA needs as much exposure as it can get....Larry Brown did a great job with the Pistons and all, but what was up with all the Detroit gear he wore throughout the playoffs. Lions? Tigers? Red Wings? Has anyone ever been *less* loyal to a single city than Pound For Pound? Congrats anyway, LB....Bobbie Sloan....Bobbie Sloan....Bobbie Sloan