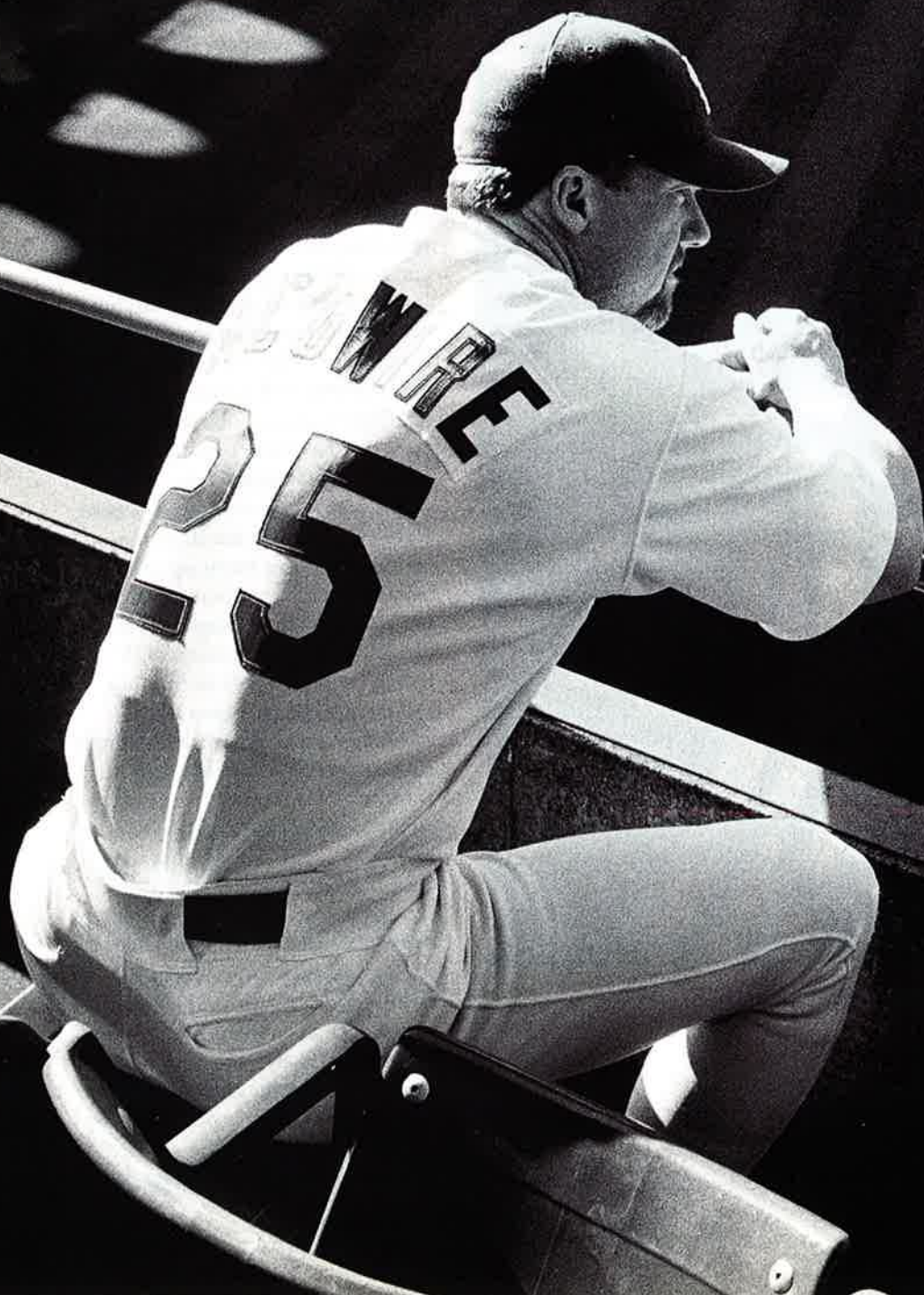


TEAM ATHLETE

# Mark McGwire

Men  
of  
the Year



# Mario Batali

CHEF

THERE IS A WORLD of Fuss Cuisine out there—a world of curried biscotti and spoon-fed cuttlefish—and it is Mario Batali's job to shield you from it. ■ "I hate fusion," he barks from the banquette in his flagship restaurant, Babbo, which serves New Yorkers elegant, inventive Italian as opposed to "five cultures on one plate." His flagship waiters have heard it all before, but they let the boss rant. Another thing he hates: menus that emote about the *pappardelle bolognese*. "Do customers have to hear 'veal simmered in wine until rich and velvety, topped delicately with our wide, flat noodles from Emilia? Fuck that. You want a bowl of noodles or what?'" ■ Here's what Batali likes: acidity, balance, freshness. He likes scampi. He likes olive oil. He likes having a TV show—the Food Network's *Molto Mario*—so he can cook scampi in olive oil. He likes Italy—so much that he dreams about dining at the gas stations. "One of the best meals you can have is at the Autogrill. They make sandwiches with fontina and sun-dried tomatoes. Then they put it on the press and heat it up, and it just becomes something... *else*. You have a little half a beer, shoot an espresso, go. Perfect." ■ If you think Mario Batali sounds like a man of simple pleasures, pat yourself on the stomach. Apart from his ramshackle fashion sense, *simplicity* is what Batali has brought to contemporary cuisine, a culture that lately has been marinating in its own absurd juices. It's the guiding principle in everything from his book (*Simple Italian Food*) to his beef-cheek ravioli. And it's why a signature Batali dish, such as pumpkin-moon pasta, seems to swim in its own essence. (The revelation is rare: It's the *pumpkin*, not the chef, that has achieved something.)

■ Now, in the culinary world, Batali's cooking has inspired a trend of its own: the much-squawked-about Return to Simplicity. Whatever. Just pass the bowl of noodles. •JIM NELSON

