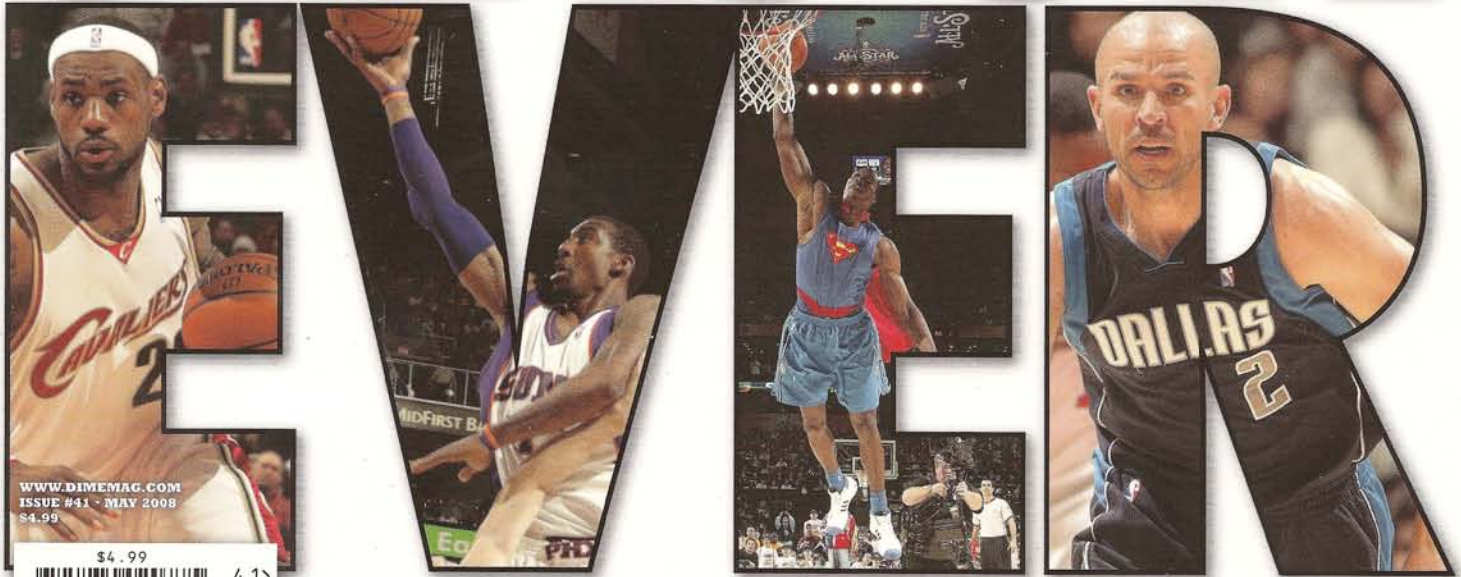
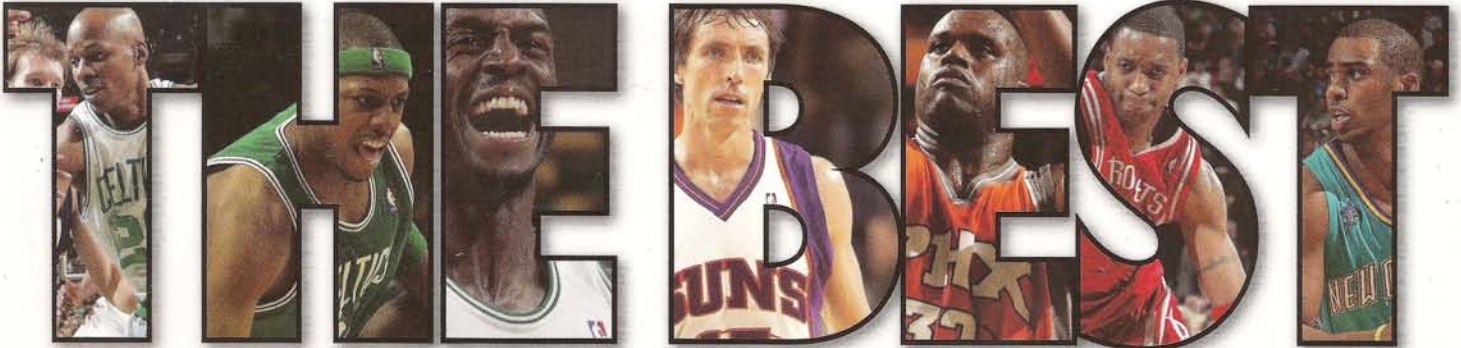


Dime

THE GAME. THE PLAYER. THE LIFE.



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UNFINISHED BUSINESS

WORDS: ANDREW KATZ
PHOTOS: BRADLEY MEINZ

AS THE STARTING POINT GUARD FOR THE LOS ANGELES LAKERS AND PRESIDENT OF THE NBA PLAYERS ASSOCIATION, DEREK FISHER HAS TWO OF THE MOST HIGH-PROFILE JOBS IN ALL OF BASKETBALL. HOW DOES HE SET HIMSELF UP FOR SUCCESS BOTH ON AND OFF THE COURT? WITH ONE OF THE MOST SOPHISTICATED WORKOUT REGIMENS YOU'VE EVER SEEN...

AS HIS TEAMMATES LOUNGE IN THE Lakers' locker room, closing their eyes and letting the sounds of their iPods relax them in the hours before game time, Derek Fisher can be found in the bowels of the Staples Center, also with his eyes tightly shut. Fish, though, is tuned into something completely different from his teammates. The 12-year veteran is locked into a rigorous 20-minute pre-game workout designed to stimulate his body and mind in order to give him a unique step up on his competition – all with his eyes closed.

The unorthodox routine has done wonders to elevate Fisher's game and his career. Back in 2004, you'll remember Derek's famous game-winning shot against the Spurs with 0.4 seconds left on the clock in Game 5 of the Western Conference semis. That shining moment, though, was an aberration from what was an otherwise disappointing '03-04 campaign. When Gary Payton was brought on-board to L.A., Derek started only three regular-season games, with his numbers dropping in all major statistical categories. The former first-round draft pick (1996) wasn't at all happy with where he was in his career.

So when he showed up at Elite Performance Management training guru Tom Vachet's door that summer, Derek thought that his playing days were coming to a close. He hoped to buy another year or two in the League despite serious recurring pain in his lower right leg.

"Derek sat in my office the first day we met and he said, 'I'm really unhappy with where I am with my career,'" remembers Vachet. "He said, 'I'm really looking for one more year at this point.'"

Fisher didn't realize that this meeting would do far more than help him hang around in the League. In addition to intense physical therapy, which helped him regain symmetry of strength in his legs, Fisher overhauled his pre-game routine with a brand-new workout philosophy called "proprioception." It's basically super body weight exercises with your eyes shut in order to enhance your other senses.

Since then, Fisher's last three seasons – which he spent with the Warriors, Jazz and now back with the Lakers – have been the most successful of his career at just under 12 points and four assists per night. Ultimately, he's been reborn as a player.

"When you have someone that loses one of his senses, the others become heightened," says Vachet. "That's the same reason that I have Derek do this workout with his eyes closed, because he comes out of that with a whole altered and elevated sense of perception of the environment around him."

"At the moment that we're done I feel like I'm engaged – physically and mentally," says D-Fish. "I'm ready to go to work and go to battle. It's hard to put into words, but you feel refreshed even though you just got done training. It's almost like you just put in the woodchips to get the fire started, and now the fire is burning. And now you get a chance to go out on the court, and with the fire burning for you to do your thing."

As his numbers reached new heights, Fisher's responsibilities off the floor also skyrocketed. In 2006, the same year that he played a full 82-game season for the first time since '97-'98, he also took a new role as the president of the NBA Players Association.

After almost five years as a player rep, Fish

jumped into the captain's seat with the same energy that he got from his newfound training routine. As union chief, Fisher combs through briefs on other professional sports unions to stay on top of all issues concerning players' rights. Over time he's become a certified expert on the intricacies of the NBA's salary cap, and provides invaluable leadership to his counterparts. For example, when the Jason Kidd-to-Dallas trade morphed from an on-again, off-again deal to a fiasco of contracts and NBA trade regulations, Fisher was a rock of guidance and support for all players involved.

If there's one lasting impact of Fish's legacy as president, it's that he is the consummate player's advocate. He has his ear to the ground with the NBA's next frontier, the potential construction of an off-shoot NBA China brand and league. He is vested in this process to ensure that the League appropriately addresses its obligation to the players who built the brand.

"I know that the NBA has made a huge commitment financially to build NBA China," says Fish. "Right now it's being positioned as a separate entity. But there's a possibility that current players in our league would share in revenue that is generated through an NBA China entity. That's one of the things that we're going to have to keep our eye on – how that relationship develops between China and the NBA. That way current players understand what their involvement will be not just from financial perspective. But it's one entity building another entity basically with the same name – just starting it in a different country. There's still an obligation to the members that are currently playing in the NBA that have to be there."

Dime TRAINING

TOM VACHET, DEREK FISHER'S PERSONAL TRAINER AND ARCHITECT OF DEREK'S REGIMEN, GUIDES US THROUGH A TYPICAL PROPRIOCEPTION WORKOUT.

FRONT LUNGE WITH PRESS

20-lb. weights, 12 reps on each leg

"To do it well, the exercise requires flexibility, rotational flexibility, a high degree of core stability and balance, and finally the strength component. Everything that Derek does has demands on multiple systems. He never does an isolated exercise — never just a dumbbell curl. If he does a dumbbell curl, he'll do it on one foot. It creates a demand on the opposite side of his body to work on stability. They're all complex exercises."

"We work physiologically as a system. There's an old saying: "You need to train the way you play." It's about orchestrating parts into a whole."



ONE-FOOT DUMBBELL RAISES

12 reps with each foot. 24 total reps.

"Lifting one foot slightly off the floor, one (10 lbs.) dumbbell comes up laterally, but the other dumbbell comes up straight in front of your face. Bring them both down, and then rotate. Then they switch. It engages your entire core."

"You always have a weak side and a strong side standing on both feet. All of the work we do is unilateral. The goal is to create symmetry left to right."

A man in a white t-shirt and shorts is performing a lunge with a medicine ball extension in a gym. He is in a lunge position with his right leg forward and left leg back. He is holding a black medicine ball with both hands, extending his arms upwards and slightly to his right. The gym background is dark with some equipment visible, including a wooden box with 'SPS' on it.

**LUNGE WITH A 12-POUND
MEDICINE BALL EXTENSION**

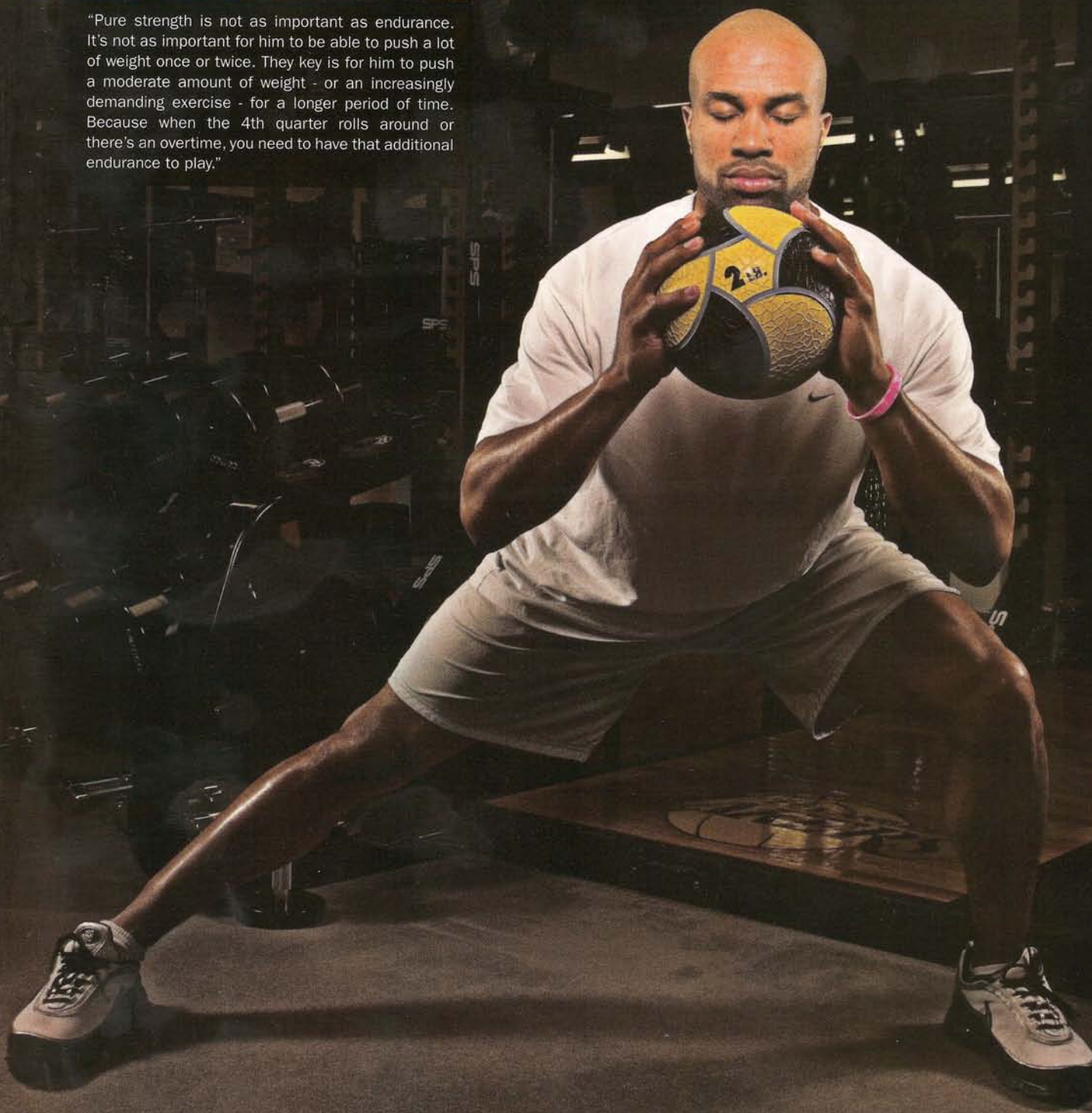
2 sets, 12 reps each

"An athlete's power comes from rotational movement. Athletes need to be able to work through multiple planes. He does a lot of work that takes him through rotation, because that develops power. As you turn and bring that med ball over the opposite shoulder, you've got all of that weight over your body on the left side, it really challenges your core stability."

LATERAL LUNGE WITH MEDICINE BALL PRESS

12-20 reps on each side

"Pure strength is not as important as endurance. It's not as important for him to be able to push a lot of weight once or twice. The key is for him to push a moderate amount of weight - or an increasingly demanding exercise - for a longer period of time. Because when the 4th quarter rolls around or there's an overtime, you need to have that additional endurance to play."



To see samples of D-Fish's proprioception training first-hand go to www.dimemag.com for the video of his workout.