

have broken one of baseball's most hallowed records by hitting 62 home runs?

**AB:** Not really. That just leaves me with another challenge. And if I don't challenge for it this season, then it'll be something to chase the following year. Anyway, I really don't think about things like that until someone brings it up. I know a lot of people in spring training are going to start asking me, "Can you do it? Can you hit 60?" But my main concern isn't 60 homers. It's winning the World Series.

**IS:** Let's say you *are* chasing 61 homers. Once you get to 56 or 57, ESPN will be cutting in to broadcast every at-bat, and there will be maybe 300 reporters to cover it. Given your poor relationship with the media, can you handle that?

**AB:** I'll be able to handle it because I'll handle the media the way I want to, not the way anyone else wants me to. I actually think I'd thrive going for a record like that. The only problem is that 50 home runs was tough enough. I was ready to sit out the last few games to get ready for the playoffs; I felt 49 was enough. Trying to hit that last one was tough. So obviously 60 will be tougher.

But I'm tough enough, mentally, to handle it [media pressure]. When I'm grilled over and over about something, yes, I do get irritated. It drains on you. But if the questions are intelligent and are asked at the right time, I won't mind. The best thing about it, though, is that our team will get a lot of attention, and I like that. We'll become America's Team.

**IS:** Isn't that the Braves?

**AB:** That'll change.

**IS:** How?

**AB:** When we win the World Series this year.

**IS:** Is that a guarantee?

**AB:** Yeah. No doubt about it. We have all the ingredients. We're better than last year now that we have Jack McDowell and Julio Franco, and have re-signed just about everyone on the team for the next few years. No one can touch us. We're as close to unbeatable as a team can be. I could see us breaking the record for victories in a season [116, by the 1906 Chicago Cubs].

**IS:** Let's discuss the MVP award that you didn't get. How much did that bother you?

**AB:** The problem I have with it is that after the voting nobody has said, "Albert didn't win it because he didn't have the stats."

They say it's because I didn't talk to the media enough. Every year there's a different argument. One year Rickey Henderson wins it over Cecil Fielder because Cecil played for a third-place team; I play for a first-place team, and the argument changes. The other problem I have is, since when is character supposed to be a requirement for the award?

**IS:** For about the last 50 years.

**AB:** Well, I never heard of character being important. So since I don't talk to the media, they get upset and cost me the

yet they're up there criticizing players for striking out or making a mistake.

**IS:** Will losing the MVP award sway you to treat the media differently?

**AB:** No. I won't change. If I want to talk to you, I will. If I don't want to talk, I won't. Depends on my mood and the situation. If giving an interview is in the way of something I'm going to do that is going to help the Indians, I won't do it. Hey, I even had [teammate] Kenny Lofton mad at me for not doing an interview for his TV show, "Kenny's Kids." That's because he wanted

to interview me the morning of a day game, and it was going to interfere with my preparation. He won't let me forget it, either.

**IS:** Considering the controversy surrounding the MVP award, how do you define a MVP?

**AB:** It's the player who has the greatest impact on a team's success.

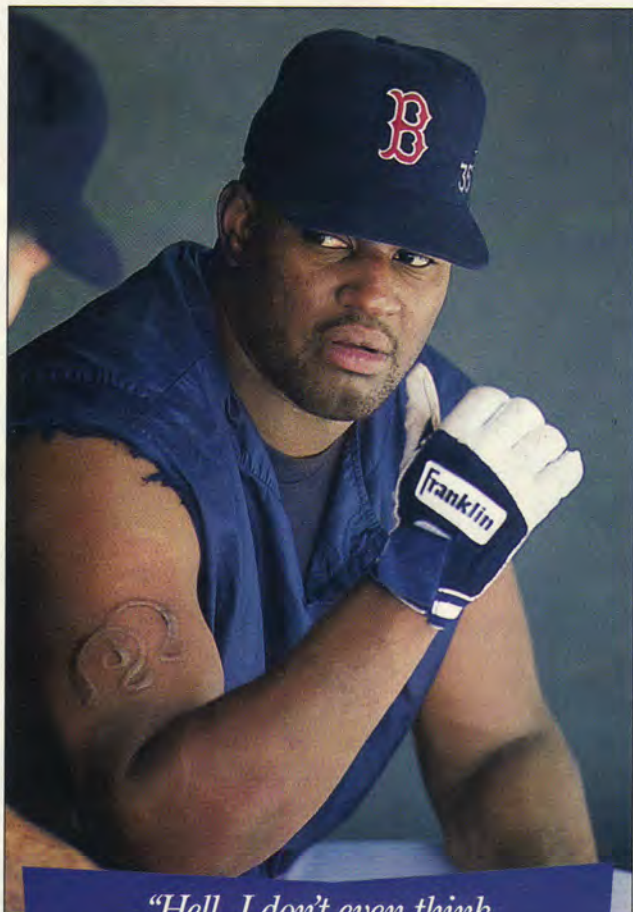
**IS:** So which player had the greatest impact in that regard: You, Mo Vaughn, or...?

**AB:** [Indians reliever] Jose Mesa did. He was by far the most dominant player in the league. Without him in '94, we finished a game out of first place [at the time of the strike]. With him last season, we win the division by 30 games and get to the World Series. To me, that's impact, that's making a difference.

Hell, I don't even think Mo Vaughn was the MVP on his own team. Tim Wakefield was the Red Sox's MVP. If he doesn't start off 14-1, the Red Sox go down the tubes, and Mo Vaughn couldn't have saved them. The only thing is, Mesa and Wakefield are pitchers, and the MVP should go to an everyday position player. So when you look at Mo or me or Edgar Martinez, I think I had the greatest impact.

What pisses me off is that media people said I didn't

do anything until the race was over, that I hit all my home runs in the second half, when the pitching isn't as good. That's wrong. Pitching gets *better* in the second half—and that's when pennant races heat up, when you've got to kick it into gear and raise your game to another level. No one can tell me we had the race wrapped by July. People said in September that the Angels had it wrapped up, and look what happened to them. I admit I had a terrible first half, but no one had a better second



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award. Frankly, the media should have the vote taken away—players, coaches, and managers should vote. They're the ones who know the game. The media are biased. Players, coaches, and managers aren't.

I think it should be a panel of past and present players, managers, and coaches. They've been there; they've played the game. What do most media people know about the competitiveness of the game? Most never played past Little League. Most can't tell a slider from a change-up,