

things on the field, I'm never gonna be like Michael and those other guys.

**IS:** One of the things that separates you from Michael, Magic, Montana, all these legends you've mentioned, is that they have won titles and you haven't. How much of a factor is that?

**BB:** None. Ken Griffey Jr. ain't won one MVP or one championship, and look at the way he's viewed vs. the way I am. They've got him running for president. No, I believe the difference between me and those other guys is they came up without having to be compared with anyone, but I came up being compared to a lot of people. I remember hitting three home runs in a game a few years ago, and the first reporter said something like, "Well, your cousin Reggie Jackson hit three homers in one World Series game." That took out all the enjoyment for me. But I handled the media all wrong back then. Had I handled the media like Michael and Magic, things may have turned out different. I should have taken things more humorously. But I was always focused on not getting respect, on people calling me Bobby instead of Barry.

**IS:** Did the anger you carried, and all the negative press, make you a better player?

**BB:** It did. All that pain I had, I inflicted on the baseball. And I inflicted three MVPs worth of it. And I still inflict it. Every time I go on the field I have that little bit of that pain in the back of my head. But I recognize it and deal with it better. That's why I'm a lot nicer now, a lot easier to talk with. People can flip me off now and I'm like, "Cool, brother. What's up?" This one guy in the stands screamed, "You know, Barry, the Giants suck!" And I turned and said, "Shhhhh. Not so loud." I have fun with it now; before, I couldn't. I'm secure with myself, my place in baseball history.

At the All-Star Game this year, Eric Young's locker was next to mine, and he told me, "You know, Barry, people are wrong about you. You're really a cool dude." I told him, "Eric, if you met me two or three years ago you wouldn't have liked me, because I wouldn't have liked you." Now I try to like everyone. I may not be the same player because I don't have all that pain anymore. It's not as easy for me to play now—I don't get headaches anymore, I don't feel like I want to quit, I don't feel like fighting anymore.

**IS:** Now that you've become a more likable guy, do you think you'll start to be viewed like Jordan, or that you'll start getting some major endorsements like Jordan and Griffey?

**BB:** Nope. Once you've been stamped, that's it. Certain players can have a bad-boy image and it can work for them—Charles Barkley for one, Dennis Rodman for another. They make millions from being bad boys. The worse Rodman is, the more money he makes, because that's society.

I told Albert Belle this season that he needs to have some balance with his image. Rodman throws his jersey to fans after every game. I told Albert he should give a bat away after every game. That way you can still have a bad-boy image, but show your nice side at the same time. I told him he could make a bundle.

**IS:** Did Belle say he'd take your advice?

**BB:** Nah, he growled something like, "It wouldn't matter."

**IS:** Tony Gwynn raves about your ability to hit any pitch anywhere, in or outside the strike zone, anywhere on the field. What makes you such a gifted hitter?

Genetics. Look at Bill Gates. He's a gifted computer wizard. Why? Genetics. Look at my family: Willie Mays is my godfather,

Bobby Bonds is my father, Reggie Jackson's my cousin. Genetically, I have been given the talent. But I'm also a student of the game, and that's helped me elevate my game another level.

**IS:** Besides genetics, what separates you from other hitters? The combination of bat quickness, great eyesight, what?

**BB:** Back in 1989 I hit .248. I went from .223 as a rookie to .261 to .283, then I hit .248. When I got home one night late in the season, I cried. I looked at myself in the mirror and asked, "What's wrong with you, Barry? You're not supposed to be getting worse. You're supposed to be getting better." The next day it hit me. I was sitting in the clubhouse, and Mike LaValliere walked in huffing and puffing, sweating from head to toe. I realized at that moment, "You're wasting what you've been given. You're wasting your talent."

**IS:** Mike LaValliere was your inspiration?

**BB:** Exactly. If you stood Mike and me side-by-side in front of 500 people who didn't have any idea who we were and asked them who's the better athlete, 500 would say me. Yet that guy next to me hit .300. I could probably outplay Mike in any sport, but there's no way I could have outworked him. I wondered that day what Mike had to go through to stay in the major leagues, how hard he had to work. Me, I could just get by on the talent I had—I could keep hitting .248, and they'd probably still stick with me.

That's when I woke up. That's when I realized I was cheating myself, cheating the fans, cheating the organization. From that day on, I started working out harder than I ever had before. I won the MVP award the next year and two more since then—and it could have easily been three or four more.

**IS:** You're one of the few power hitters who chokes up on his bat. Why do you do that?

**BB:** When I was a kid and they had Bat Day at the stadium, the bats were so big that me and my brother always had to choke up on them to swing them. I've been doing it ever since. When my dad brought his bats home, we'd be trying to swing them, but the only way we could was by choking up. From that point on, that's how I thought I had to hit because that's the only way I made contact. Same thing when we played Whiffleball against the garage. We had to choke up because the harder you threw, the harder it was to hit. So I've always choked up.

**IS:** In 1993, your first season with the Giants, the team won 103 games. Now you're on the verge of three straight losing seasons. Are you angry about that?

**BB:** Obviously I want to win, but I don't own the Giants. I don't make any decisions for them. I can only play left field and hit .300 with 30 homers and 30 steals, and drive in 100 runs. I don't try to figure out what the organization is doing. I don't try to figure out what the second baseman or shortstop is doing. All I try to do is be the best left fielder and No. 4 or 5 hitter I can be. I have no control over the direction of the organization. I don't try to think about what the organization has to do.

The Giants have taken very good care of me, and I just want to do my part in my little space out there in left field and in the batter's box and on the bases for what they pay me to do. The direction of the organization, that's what newspaper and magazine writers are for.

**IS:** Let me phrase it this way: Since the Giants were desperate for pitching, were you upset when management didn't make a strong pitch last winter to get a free agent like Jack McDowell or Kevin Brown?