Look! In the Sky!
It’s not bird nor plane. It’s Michael Jordan.

Taking to the Air: The Rise of Michael Jordan
By Jim Naughton ’79

Jump, jump, jump. Very quick,
Very fast. Jump, jump, jump.”
So said a Spanish basketball player
when asked his impression of
Michael Jordan, after losing to the
United States during the 1984 Olympics.

No athlete dominates a sport the way
Jordan does professional basketball, and
few stars are held in such high regard. Taking to the Air traces Jordan’s ascent to
greatness as player, marketing phenomenon, role model, idol, and prisoner of
fame.

“Jordan is, by any measure, the most
popular athlete in America,” Naughton
writes, “and perhaps the best-known
sports figure in the world . . . the one
whose packaging and popularity have
opened a window on myth-making and
hero worship in the 1990s.”

Via court triumphs, sneaker commercials,
media coverage, clean living, and
a likable persona, Jordan leapt be-
yond sports to household-name
status. Or brand-name status; Jor-
dan earned about
$17 million from endorsements in
1991. This figure bespeaks accep-
tance by a wide dem
graphic swath of the U.S.
public, unique
for any public fig-
ure, especially an
African-American. “Magnetism
and the market-
place surmounted racial prejudice and
created an icon,” Naughton writes.

Jordan was raised in North Carolina
by a close, protective family. His child-
hood revolved around sports, fueled by
an intensely competitive nature. He at-
tended an integrated high school, where
he was shy of girls. He took a class in
home ec just to meet them. That tale,
when reported later by the press, “bur-
nished [Jordan’s] image as a regular
guy—and a sensitive, new-age regular
guy at that,” Naughton writes.

Naughton details the elaborate man-
euvering and courting of Jordan by col-
lege coaches, his family’s emphasis on
academics, and his decision to attend
the University of North Carolina.

Athletically and socially, Naughton
writes, “these were wonderful times for
Jordan . . . He kept a busy social calen-
dar, but virtually abstained from the
carousing and alcoholic initiation that
play such a big part in many students’
college experience.”

Jordan left college after his junior year
and was drafted by the woeful Chicago
Bulls. He immediately exceeded all ex-
pectations.

“As word of Jordan’s exhilarating per-
formances spread, the Bulls’ exhibition
road trip became suddenly chaotic,”
Naughton writes. “Fans in almost every
city jammed hotel lobbies, massed at
arena exits, and swamped the team bus
trying to get a look at Jordan.”

Naughton devotes considerable ink
to analyzing the Nike corporation—
makers of Air Jordan athletic shoes
($125 per pair)—and its lucrative, long-
standing relationship with Jordan.

Naughton also traces the history of mod-
ern sports agency by focusing on Pro-
Serv, the aggressive management
agency that procures millions for Jordan
and other athletes.

Naughton’s ceaselessly laudatory take
on his subject appears to be warranted.
For every show of temper or episode of
petulance on Jordan’s part—they are
few—Naughton provides an explana-
tion. (The book was published prior to
revelations about
Jordan’s gamble-
ning. See the edi-
tor’s note below.)

Naughton is no fanzine hack, nor is Taking to the
Air hagiography. Lucid and adroit,
it will be best appreciated by hardcore Jordan
devotees, who will delight in its
wealth of detail and depth of re-
porting. It coun-
terbalances Sam
Smith’s The Jor-
dan Rules, which
earned its best-
seller status by poking holes in
the Jordan mys-
tique.
Naughton, a 1979 SU graduate in journalism and American studies, is a reporter for the Washington Post. He has written features for the Syracuse Post-Standard and was a sportswriter for the New York Times and New York Daily News.

Editor's Note: In March, shortly after publication of Taking to the Air, allegations surfaced that Michael Jordan had bet on dice, golf, and card games. Shortly thereafter, Naughton told us that the news fits his image of Jordan: “He’s an intensely competitive person, and it’s not surprising that it spills over into other parts of his life.”

Based on information that was public at that time, Naughton doubted Jordan’s contact with a criminal element had been regular or intentional. He speculated that the gambling would be widely viewed as petty—even if the dollar amounts are grand by most standards—and that it would have no lasting effect on Jordan’s reputation or marketability. The NBA is taking no action on the matter, determining that Jordan has not bet on basketball.

Minority Party: Why Democrats Face Defeat in 1992 and Beyond
By Peter Brown ’72, G’74

Over the course of several past presidential elections, millions of Democrats—white middle-class liberals—jumped ship. They felt neglected, passed over by a party catering to racial minorities and the poor, Brown writes. In swinging their votes to the right, they doomed many a Democratic candidate’s shot at the White House. Through interviews with many of these swing voters, Brown, chief political writer for Scripps Howard News Service, illustrates that unless the Democratic Party retools its rhetoric to embrace the white middle class, its decline is inevitable.

Sandino in the Streets
Photographs and essay by Joel C. Sheesley ’72
144 pp. Indiana University Press. $24.95.

This book contains images of and prose by Augusto César Sandino, the adopted symbol of freedom and national identity in Nicaragua’s Sandinista revolution. Sheesley, a professor of art at Wheaton College, assembles popular images of Sandino found throughout Nicaragua on bridges, fences, trees, and on the walls of buildings. The book also includes excerpts from Sandino’s letters and journals.

Reaching the Affect: Style in the Psychodynamic Therapies
By Emanuel Hammer ’48

The author offers suggestions for therapists to enliven therapeutic technique by shaping language artfully. Borrowing examples from creative writers such as Auden, Sandburg, and Updike—and touching on the works of Groucho Marx and Billy Crystal—Hammer seeks to show therapists how to reach the mind’s eye and ear to speed the pace of treatment and healing.

“My Mommy Has Cancer”
By Carolyn Stearns Parkinson, illustrated by Elaine Verstraete ’83
20 pp. Park Press. $8.95.

The author offers guidance for parents and other adults on how to explain cancer to children. Stearns, an educator who was diagnosed with cancer in 1987, intends the book to foster discussions among families of people living with the disease. Verstraete, a magna cum laude graduate of the School of Visual and Performing Arts’ illustration program, contributed original water colors.

Aldus and his Dream Book: An Illustrated Essay
By Helen Barolini ’47
221 pp. Italica Press. $17.50.

This book pays homage to the pioneering 16th-century scholar-publisher Aldus Manutius, who revolutionized book publishing, created the prototype of the modern printed book, and designed type styles still in use today. Manutius achieved a harmony of text, image, and proportion that reached its zenith with the greatest of all illustrated Renaissance books, the Hypnerotomachia Poliphili.

The Southern Forest: A Chronicle
By Laurence C. Walker G’53
320 pp. University of Texas Press. $29.95.

In the early 17th century, the first European explorers to reach the southern shores of North America faced a solid forest stretching from the Atlantic coast to eastern Texas and Oklahoma. This book examines how they and their descendents used and abused the forest over the ensuing 400 years. The land’s abundance became its greatest liability as the forests were clear-cut, animals over-hunted, and soil despoiled by unwise farming.

From Nyet to Da: Understanding the Russians
By Yale Richmond ’47
200 pp. Intercultural Press. $15.95.

Richmond, a former U.S. Foreign Service officer, analyzes Russian culture, especially as it differs from that of America, in this cross-cultural guide. He illustrates the critical interrelationship between Russian geography and the behaviors it has conditioned, and looks at the extremes and contradictions of Russian character. Also included are negotiating strategies useful for business people grappling with the maze of the new Russian society.

—George Lowery

A Gift They’ll Treasure
For Students or Alumni
only $45

A gift they’ll treasure for every SU spirit. The professional artist Ron Streeter is offering a limited edition of 16" x 22" portraits of your friends or loved ones.

For ordering and shipping info write: ABOUT FACES! 204 Darrow Ave., Solvay, N.Y. 13209

For Students or Alumni available.

Syracuse University Magazine, Vol. 8, Iss. 3 [1992], Art. 2

5 JUNE 1992