SPORTS

TWO OF THE GREATEST SPORTS photos ever taken occurred at opposite ends of the last 20 years: Hans Kluetmeier's image of the U.S. hockey team celebrating its victory over Russia in the 1980 Olympics, and Fernando Medina's image of Michael Jordan's game-winning shot against the Utah Jazz in the NBA Finals in 1998. What these photographs have in common is their ability to conjure up, in an instant, the incredible emotions surrounding two of the most memorable moments in the history of sports.

The enormity of the moment has a lot to do with the greatness of sports photographs—but it is not everything. Witness the grace and the athleticism of Dwight Clark's infamous playoff catch against the Dallas Cowboys, captured at the perfect moment in a photo by Walter Iooss Jr. Athleticism is an attribute we forget to associate with Dennis Rodman, who's remembered more for his off-court shenanigans than his basketball ability. Which is exactly why we love Sam Forencich's photo of an airborne and horizontal Rodman leaping into the crowd for a loose ball.

Sports photography can also be a celebration of the human qualities of athletes. Indeed, of the thousands of images of hockey's Wayne Gretzky, we were struck by two taken away from the ice: a candid locker-room shot by Bruce Bennett, showing the angelic face of a star yet to be born; and a photo by Paul Bereswill, in which Gretzky, surrounded by teammates and overcome with emotion, shows more than hockey fans why he is called The Great One.

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