

SUNDAY FORUM

GUEST COLUMNIST

Marketing contenders

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DAILY NEWS

By **BRANDON STEINER**

America loves star power. The superheroes of sports capture the fancy of this country and drive business in every way. It's that simple.

We all know about Michael Jordan and Nike, Gatorade and Ballpark Franks, not to mention him space jamming with Bugs Bunny or co-anchoring with Elmer Fudd to become a Warner Brothers star.

We "wanna be like Mike."

With Air Jordan retired, let's take a look at the heirs apparent to Michael's throne.

Derek Jeter: Baseball has enjoyed a renaissance during the past two seasons, thanks to Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa, and the Yankees. But corporate America has embraced Jeter. He actually is a guy who gets it, an All-Star who's a nice guy. He has a great team around him. His Nike ads are classics. But his big baby is the Turn-2 Foundation, raising money to help kids, as it should be for all athletes. Honorable mention: Ken Griffey, Jr. (Nintendo, All-Star Cafe) and Cal Ripken Jr. (Nike, Nabisco).

Grant Hill and Kobe Bryant: Michael's shoes are enormous to fill but I have to call the hoops race for the best marketer a dead heat between Hill and Bryant. Everything about Hill is pure and consistent. The only thing is that he hasn't played for a winning team. Kobe's in the magic land of Hollywood, where good things can happen. He has anchor endorsements - solid foundations - like Sprite, adidas and a candybar company. Honorable mention: Tim Duncan is the real sleeper here, he has the winning attitude with Edge Shaving Gel he will inevitably be a star sooner than later.

Dan Marino, Troy Aikman, Bill Parcells: Quarterbacks sell, and so do coaches who win, thus the three-way dead heat. Dan Marino probably should get a slight edge, having just inked an international deal with Ermenegildo Zegna ties and clothing, not to mention Nike, Logo Athletic and Isotoner gloves. Aikman's folder includes Met-Rx and Coca-Cola. Parcells seems to be doing more commercials than any coach in memory - including Cadillac and Tostitos, even though he can't sing all that well.

Mia Hamm: Using the