

MAN OF THE YEAR

Magic Johnson

Earvin "Magic" Johnson has always baffled a bit—not just with his wizardly moves on the court, but with his own feelings about being the world's most famous person with HIV. *POZ*'s 1996 June/July cover story chronicled the Hall of Famer's final, short-lived return to the L.A. Lakers—and what some perceived as his reluctance to take a more public stand on AIDS issues. "He's not using his power to change anything," snapped author-activist Larry Kramer, to which the six-foot-nine legend replied with quiet defiance, "I'm doing more than anyone, [so] I don't care what people say."

In fact, since his 1991 press conference at which he shattered forever the nation's delusion that only "other

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people" get HIV, he not only made an NBA comeback but dramatically resigned as head of the National Commission on AIDS, saying that President George Bush had "dropped the ball" on HIV.

Not so for Magic: By the mid-'90s, the enterprising entrepreneur had opened an HIV-research foundation and a network of testing centers while dragging retailers like Starbucks into underserved communities of color. In 2002, he appeared in a massive GlaxoSmithKline campaign affirming that treatment was helping him live healthy with HIV. Soon after, he cleared up wife Cookie's 1997 remark to *Ebony* that "The Lord has definitely healed Earvin," which famously helped fuel public confusion about HIV. "I'm not cured by any stretch of the imagination," Magic, 44, told *POZ* in 2003. "I don't have any magic drug no one else has."

He Got Game: "I can still run up and down the court with guys half my age," Magic told *POZ* last year.



But he does have the star power to captivate audiences of black and Latino teens to whom he preaches prevention, telling them he got HIV "because I had unprotected sex. Don't mess up your life in a night." His life, no surprise, still centers around b-ball: He co-owns the Lakers, and he hosted the MTV "street ball" reality/game show "Who's Got Game" in 2003—the same year he caught up with *POZ* to say, "I wear my status as a badge of honor."

'96 PERSONAL BEST

Look Who's Talking Shawn Decker

In 1996, at 20, I decided to go public with my HIV. A hemophiliac, I was only 11 when diagnosed and can remember thinking *If I shut up, maybe the virus will go away.* Nine years later, I realized it wasn't going to—but nor was I anytime soon, so I'd better get a life. I considered pursuing music like my idols Depeche Mode, whom I'd met through the Make-a-Wish Foundation. But I was too shy to sing in

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After reading article after article by and about HIVers in *POZ*, I wrote to the magazine's publisher, Sean Strub. (I loved that his initials were SOS—almost as good as mine, STD) He invited me to the first *POZ* Life Expo, where I spoke out for the first time. A lightning bolt



struck: I'm positive...and I don't give a fuck what anyone thinks about it! Soon, I was on the cover of a special hemophiliac issue of *POZ*.

Since then, I've built a speaking career and found love. (Gwenn and I teach teens about HIV by taking probing questions about our sex life.) Occasionally, I dig out the *POZ* with me smiling on the cover. I love having that vivid chronicle of my most crucial turning point: 1996—the year I embraced my inner positoid.

Shawn Decker, whose "Positoid" column debuted in 1997, lives in Virginia.