Cigars, sports, and Michael Jordan

To the editor—Sports Illustrated, one of the most widely circulated lay sports publications in the United States, has recently outdone itself in its insidious support of smoking. What message were the editors trumpeting in the recent cover that displays Michael Jordan with his victory cigar? Only an imbecile would miss the link between the "glamour" of champions and smoking. It is bad enough that Sports Illustrated annually accepts $35 million worth of advertisements that mislead and misinform young people about the harmful effects of tobacco. At least young readers can be taught to disregard the advertisements as the specious propaganda that they represent. The magazine's unmitigated celebration of smoking in the lifestyles of athletes is, however, unconscionable.

Had this cover been a unique occurrence or a candid photo opportunity, one might excuse it simply as poor judgment or seizing the journalistic moment. But this photo seems to have been staged and the sidearm烟 that damages the lungs of others must have been airbrushed away. The fact is that Sports Illustrated, presumably because of its dependence on tobacco advertising revenues, has never addressed the harmful effects of tobacco on athletes, even though it has addressed illegal drugs and alcohol. What is more disconcerting than the failure to report on the damage inflicted by tobacco, however, is the indirect support for tobacco products by associating them with triumphant athletic performance. In addition to this recent most egregious example on the cover, last year's story about the National Basketball Association championship included a photo of Michael Jordan smoking. A recent story about the league-leading batter from the Philadelphia Phillies baseball team went out of its way to portray smoking as central to his character without so much as a mention of the fact that his smoking behaviour robs him of the ability to run or field.

I am certain that all who are aware of the harmful effects of tobacco feel sorry for the supremely talented Michael Jordan if he chooses to damage his wonderful skills through the use of tobacco. He should know that smoking will bring new meaning to the adjective that is frequently used to describe his performances—breath-taking. Although the publishers of Sports Illustrated accept tobacco advertisements, they should not promote tobacco through their "journalism" as well. The editors and publishers of periodicals with sizable youth readerships should maintain high standards of journalistic integrity.

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In reply—Commentary on the connection between tobacco and sports has focused on cigarette and smokeless tobacco promotions. However, associations between sports and cigar have occurred through the years in a variety of forms.

In 1980 the Cigar Association of America hired a prominent New York public relations firm to improve the image of the cigar. Two years into the campaign a tobacco trade journal described that image as "a threefold manifestation comprising (1) success, (2) celebration, and (3) masculine achievement." The television portion of the campaign began with a 90 second spot before the 1982 Super Bowl, the premier sporting event in the United States. Cigars were shown being lit and smoked in winners' dressing rooms, and the commercial ended with the announcer saying, "For the winners, it's champagne and cigars; for the losers, it's 'Close, but no cigar.'"

Newspapers have published photographs of professional football coaches smoking cigars—including Mike Ditka of the Chicago Bears and John McKay of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Advertisements for Dutch Treats little cigars, El Producto cigars, and other brands appear in the sports sections of newspapers. An advertisement for El Pro-

C'mon, move up to the pros.

El Pro.