

WHERE SPORTS AND FAITH COLLIDE

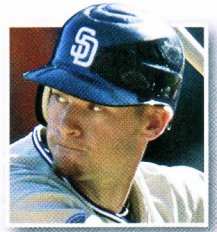
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**PREVIEW:**  
**World Cup Soccer**

page  
52

# SPORTS SPECTRUM



**SAN DIEGO PADRES**

**Chase Headley**

page  
48

The nicest  
player in  
baseball?

**ST. LOUIS CARDINALS**

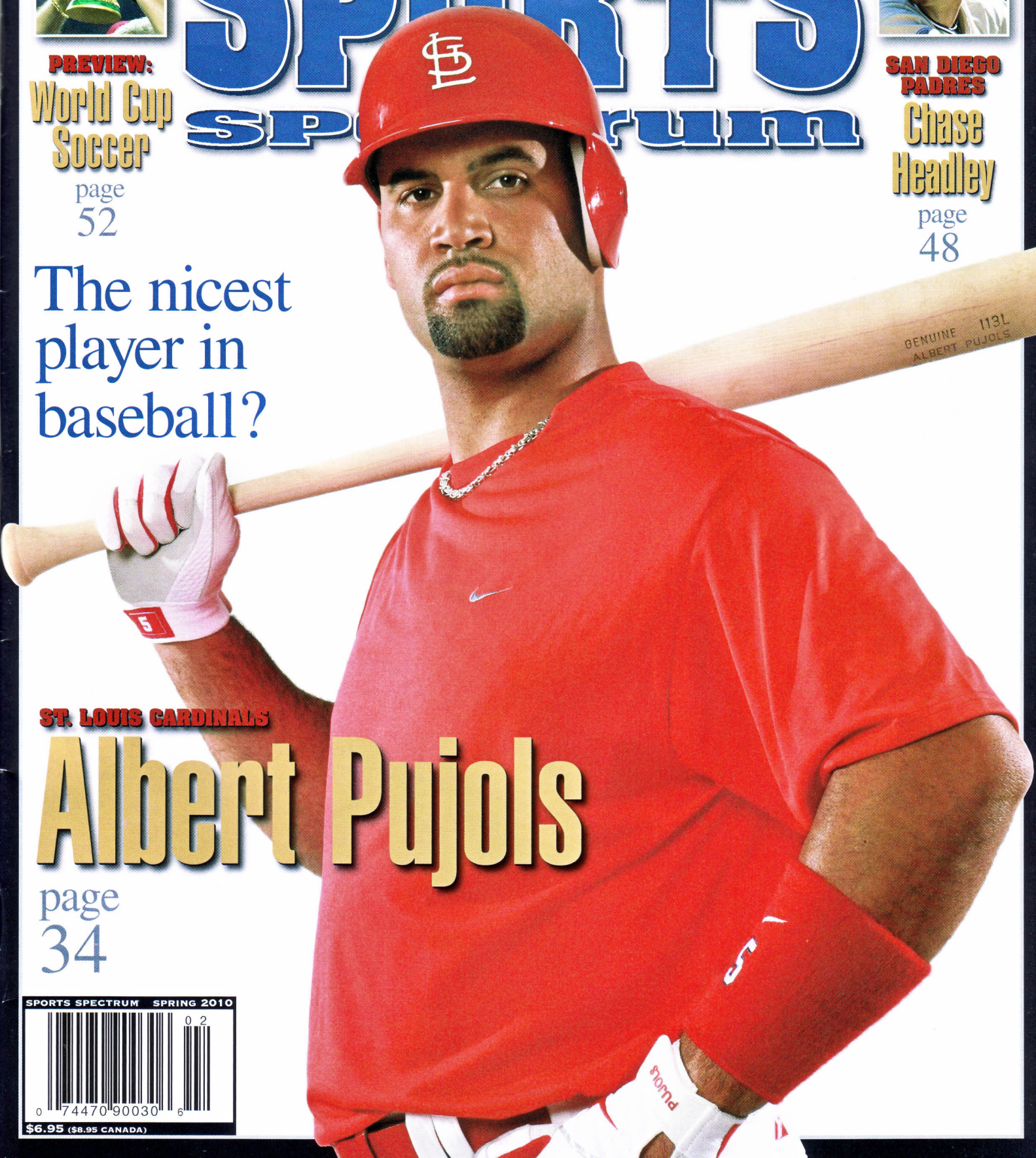
# Albert Pujols

page  
34

SPORTS SPECTRUM SPRING 2010



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tepping up to the plate with the bases loaded in front of tens of thousands of expectant fans, is just another day's work for a Major League Baseball player. But standing on the field with a microphone and sharing your testimony with that same crowd? Not so easy.

Every season, many major league teams across the country host a "Day of Fellowship," giving players an opportunity to share their faith with fans who choose to stay after the game and listen.

This past August, Chase Headley was one of several San Diego Padres who spoke about their relationship with Jesus Christ in front of 5,000 fans. "This is more important than anything I do on the field," the left fielder said that night. Teammates Adrian Gonzales, Nick Hundley, Joe Thatcher and Heath Bell also shared. "It was a great turnout and it's fun to be able to do that," recalls Headley, 25. "It's not the easiest thing to do (speak in front of a big crowd), but when you look at all the people that God can reach through you, you realize what a great platform you have."

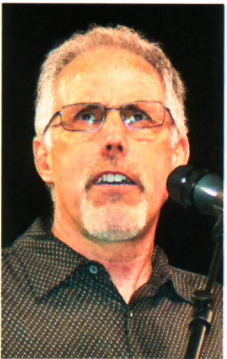
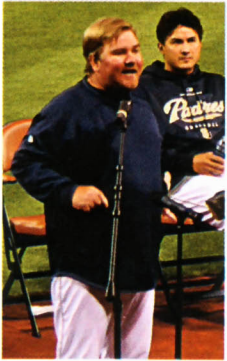
Headley, who made his debut with the Padres in 2007, has quickly become

# FINDING CHASE

**SAN DIEGO OUTFIELDER CHASE HEADLEY REALIZES THE NEED FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND BIBLE STUDY WITH TEAMMATES SO THAT OTHERS CAN SEE CHRIST IN HIM**

■ BY JENNA SAMPSON





PHOTOS COURTESY OF LORETTA MILLER VIA RIC TOLHURST

▲ **Padres on a mission:** Even more significant than Chase's development as a batter is his spiritual growth and willingness to take the mic at Fellowship Nights.

(Middle) **Another moving story:** Mark Merila, the Padres bullpen catcher, who was a very promising prospect, but because of a brain tumor cannot catch any more.

(Bottom) **Padres' chaplain:** Doug Sutherland leads a Bible study for players as well as taking part in these outreach events.

one of San Diego's up and comers, making big strides each season.

"God has put me in this position to reach as many people as I can on this platform. God gives me the ability to play this great game for a reason."

When an athlete professes to be a Christian, everyone watches a little closer, so trying to live life differently in a way that honors Christ can sometimes be a challenge.

"I try to keep that in my head," adds the switch hitter. "If there's a bad call or I strike out with bases loaded, I realize people are looking at me and notice how I respond. I try to reflect the Christian life by how I handle myself on the field."

Off the field, Headley has plenty of help to keep him on track even during the hectic season. Padres' chaplain Doug Sutherland gives players an opportunity to get together once a week, and is always there for encouragement.

"We do Bible studies on a Tuesday or Wednesday on the week of a home game, and on the road we'll try to go over a book and get together," says Headley. "More than that though, it's important to surround yourself with guys who have the same beliefs as you. When we're on the road, you have so many opportunities to go out and get into trouble and do things you shouldn't be doing."

## Beginnings

Headley, a Colorado native, came to know Christ when he attended an FCA Huddle his freshman year of high school.

"One of my best friends invited me to come to an FCA Huddle at school. My family was a two-day-a-year-church-going-family—Christmas and Easter—so I had no idea what it meant to be a Christian. The day I went, if you'd asked me the day before, I would have said I was a Christian—but that day the talk was on salvation and I was saved that day. God puts the message out in different ways. And for the message that day to happen to be on salvation, that was pretty cool."

His senior year of high school, he was named the 2002 FCA Athlete of the Year, a huge honor.

"At the time, I didn't even think about the magnitude of it, but looking back, it's one of the coolest things I've ever been honored with," Headley says. "To be the Christian athlete of the year—meaning, you're a Christian before you're an athlete. Looking back on that, that's what I'm really proud of."

In 2003, he transferred to the University of Tennessee, where he earned team MVP and Academic All American honors. San Diego chose him in the second round of the 2005 MLB Draft.

## Encouragement Within

These days, Headley hangs tight with Christian teammates like Adrian Gonzalez and Nick Hundley to make sure he has accountability and someone to answer to. Beyond that, Headley also makes it a point to spend personal time at night studying the Bible.

"It's difficult to get to church during the season, but sometimes my wife Casey and I are able to get to the Rock (Church in San Diego) after a day game."

The couple, who met through Chase's brother at the University of Tennessee, married in November 2008.

"She's great. She is a hungry Christian, always pushing me to be going to church," Headley admits. "Sometimes after a day game, I'll look forward to going home and relaxing, but if we have a chance to go to church, she'll help push me to go."

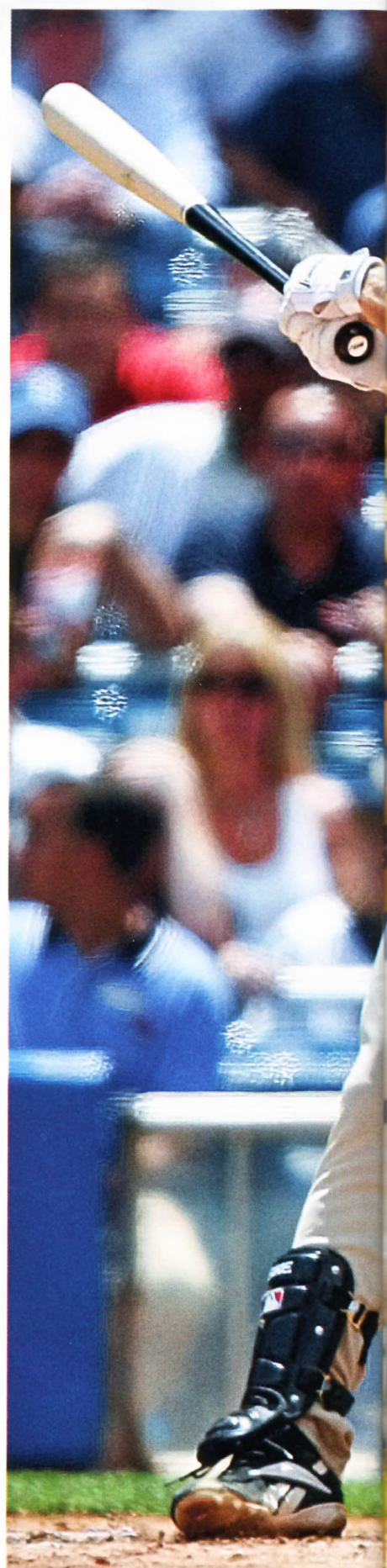
On the field, Headley especially looks to teammate Adrian Gonzales for encouragement when things get tough.

"Adrian is awesome with that. Earlier this year, I got off to a really slow start, and it was wearing on me," he admits. "One day Adrian left me a note in my locker that mentioned, 'Don't let your success be judged by the box score in your attitude toward God.' I decided to make my main focus to glorify God by the way I go about my business, by how I work, how I handle adversity, and my relationship with my family when I leave the field. Ever since I did that, I was able to go out onto the field and relax, and things turned around."

His favorite turnaround moment of the season was in Arizona, when Headley was having—in his view—a terrible game.

"I was hitting 0-3 or 0-4, with a couple strikeouts in big situations, and grounded into a double play with bases loaded. We ended up scoring five runs in the bottom of the 9th inning to tie it. I hit a two-run homer in the 10th to win the game. It had the potential to be a horrible game for me, and I had the perseverance to work through it. It was a pretty cool moment."

With the 2009 season behind him and thoughts of spring training fresh on his mind, Headley is eager to continue to establish himself as a solid player.







"My goal is to be the best player I possibly can," he says. "Whether that's being an everyday guy, being an All-Star, Hall of Famer—whatever that entails—I just want to go out there and use the ability God gave me as best as I can. If I do that, I'll have no regrets. If I don't play another big league game, or if I play for 15 years, my goal is just to use what I have to the best of my ability."

No regrets. Somehow, coming from Headley, that statement is easy to believe.

*Freelance writer Jenna Sampson lives in Carlsbad, Calif. and serves as Communications Coordinator at North Coast Church in Vista, Calif.*



ROB LEITER / MLB PHOTOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

## Grounded

### CHASE HEADLEY'S FAVORITE SCRIPTURE...

MATTHEW 7:13-14: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

"When we turn on the TV, everything is about money, sex, and power. It's thrown at you from all directions every day. If you're not careful it's easy to get caught up in, especially in our profession with guys who are making a good living and are looked at as heroes by some people. You can easily turn into the type of person who gets caught up in that. I know a lot of guys that have success, and change. It's very easy to have happen if you don't stay grounded in your faith, so it's always on my mind."

### ...AND BANDS

"I love Third Day, Casting Crowns, and Brandon Heath," Says Headley, a huge music fan who admits he has a hard time picking up a book. "Heath's song, 'Give Me Your Eyes' is awesome. I'm a musically inclined person, and I'd love to learn how to play the piano sometime. Everybody plays guitar now, so I'd want to do something different."



—JENNA SAMPSON