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# *The University of Dayton*

# *News Release*

April 6, 1994

Contact: Candace Stuart

## **STUDY SHOWS THAT MICHAEL JORDAN, IN ANY LANGUAGE, REMAINS A CULTURAL ICON AND, TO SOME, A "GOD"**

DAYTON, Ohio -- In France, they called him the god of the basketball planet. In England, they likened him to cricket hero Donald Bradman. In Germany, he was described as rivaling soccer star Lothar Matthaus for teens' admiration. And in Poland, they affectionately referred to him as "Mike."

When Michael Jordan announced his retirement from the Chicago Bulls basketball team on Oct. 6 last year, national television networks interrupted their daytime programming to carry the news and American newspapers ran the story prominently on page one.

The announcement also made a big splash across the ocean, according to Jeffrey Griffin, an assistant professor of communication at the University of Dayton who analyzed the Oct. 7 and 8 coverage of Jordan's announcement in 18 European newspapers. Griffin will present his findings Saturday, April 9, during the annual Popular Culture Association convention in Chicago.

"Michael Jordan is not just a sports star," Griffin said. "His fame has far exceeded that.... He's a global cultural icon."

An avid basketball fan who earned his undergraduate and doctoral degrees from the University of North Carolina -- M.J.'s alma mater -- Griffin combined his expertise in international communication and interest in hoops by analyzing European responses to Jordan's surprise announcement.

"(This kind of study) says a lot about how information travels, how American culture is an extremely powerful force that travels around the world," Griffin said.

Griffin reasoned that Jordan's athletic accomplishments, his numerous commercial endorsements, the increasing popularity of basketball in Europe and an international fashion rage for National Basketball Association gear all made Jordan a popular figure in Europe, and

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hence a newsworthy subject in the European press. He studied the content of the coverage, that is, what was said; and the quantity of the coverage, the number of stories, story length, pictures, etc.

He found:

- Every daily newspaper in the study reported the retirement, many giving it extensive coverage and half the newspapers carried second-day stories;
- Spain, where Jordan dazzled fans during the 1992 Barcelona Olympics and home of one of the stronger European pro basketball leagues, had the heaviest coverage in Europe and even exceeded the amount of newsprint allotted by most American newspapers;
- 13 newspapers ran stories, photographs or brief items on Jordan on page one;
- some likened Jordan to their own national sports stars. "They tried to put it in context, choosing widely admired heroes in that culture," Griffin said. A few, sometimes tongue-in-cheek, used analogies to God, Jesus Christ, the dancer Rudolf Nureyev and actress Greta Garbo. "Out of context, some don't make too much sense," Griffin said;
- and in Italy, they referred to Jordan as "The Big Duck." Why? Griffin couldn't say.

True to form, the European press mixed fact and opinion, resulting in stories that were quite different from the American coverage, Griffin said. He added that he expected to find Jordan's influence extending beyond American boundaries because of his charisma, achievements and exposure. "The same qualities we find appealing, Europeans do," he said. "They monitor who we like, what we like, what we wear. They're fascinated with things American."

The 18 newspapers Griffin analyzed were all major publications and included four German, three British, two French, two Spanish, two Italian, one Dutch, one Polish, one Swiss, one pan-European and one global paper. Native speakers or language teachers at the University of Dayton translated some of the articles for Griffin, who deciphered the Italian, some of the German and the English newspapers.

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For interviews, call **Jeffrey Griffin** at (513) 229-3532. He can be reached after Wednesday, April 6, at Chicago's Palmer House Hilton at (312) 726-7500. For a copy of the study, "European Newspaper Coverage of the Retirement of Michael Jordan," pictures or help arranging interviews, contact **Candace Stuart** at (513) 229-3257.