



Ken Rosenthal

Healthy cuisine helps Walker put bite back in his game

His name is Patrice Boudou. You've never heard of him, but by this time next year, he could be the hottest free agent in major league baseball. Boudou, 30, is **Larry Walker's**

personal chef. His contract expires next April.

And if **Walker** continues his early pace, Boudou might not just become a household name but also a household necessity for every comeback-minded slugger.

A personal chef, a personal trainer, a highly regimented offseason conditioning program—**Walker**, 34, did everything possible to recover from right elbow surgery and get his oft-injured body into shape to play in 150 or more games.

The last time **Walker**, the Rockies' right fielder, appeared in that many, he batted .366 with 49 homers and 130 RBIs and was chosen the 1997 National League MVP.

Walker says he'll never be that healthy again and that his arm still bothers him. Still, the 2001 **Walker** has been doing a pretty fair imitation of the '97 version.

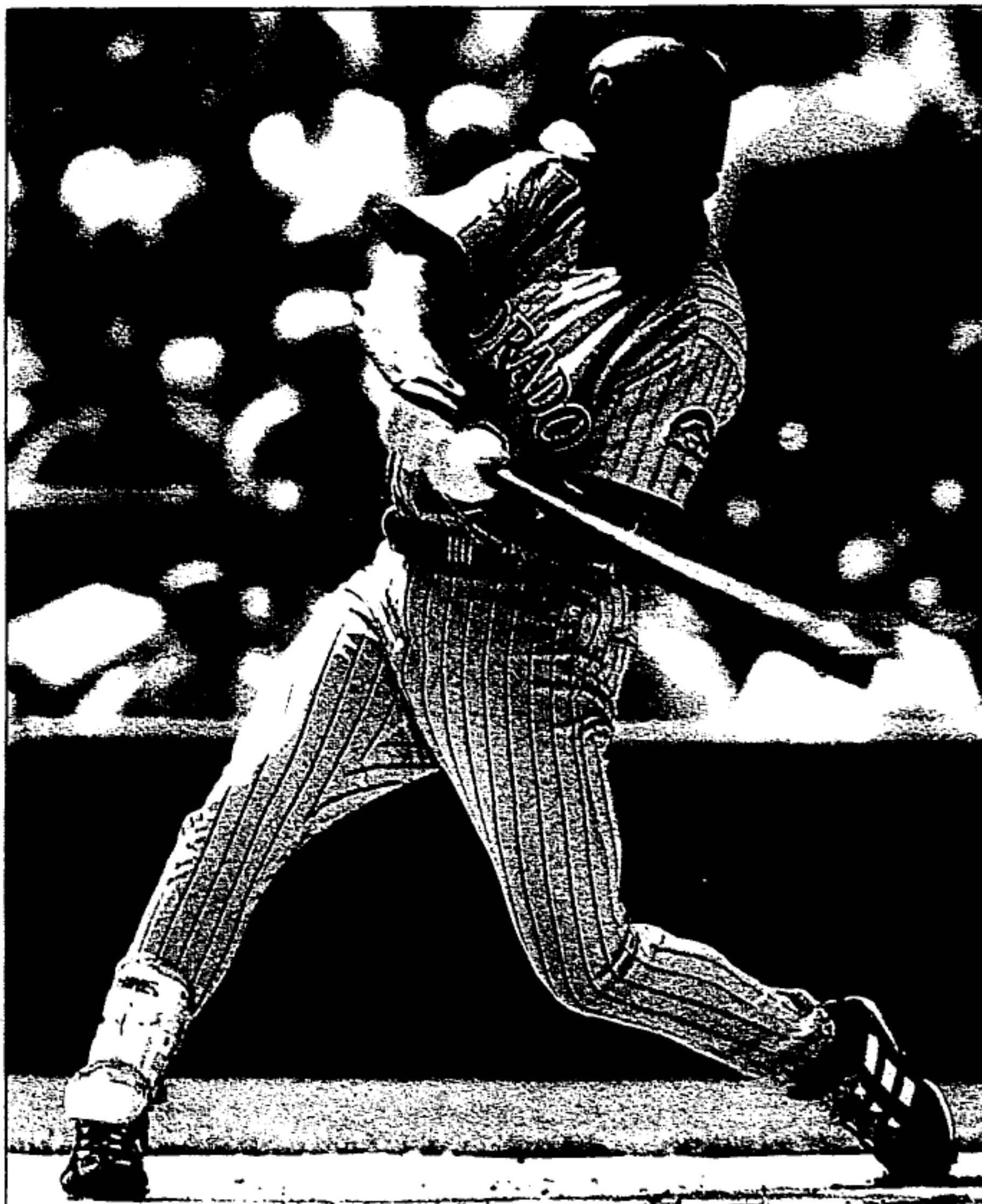
Our compliments to a two-time batting champion who rededicated himself to the sport in the second year of a six-year, \$75 million contract.

Our compliments to the chef.

Boudou, who's from Bordeaux, France, had never heard of **Walker** before he began cooking for him last winter. But, suddenly, he's talking like a free agent, saying, "I'm looking to take my career to another level," while maintaining that he's "proud" to work for **Walker**.

How long before agent Scott Boras raids the cooking world, produces a 75-page tome entitled *Patrice Boudou: Historical Perspective* and invites players to sample the chef's oven-baked pork chop stuffed with goat cheese and rosemary?

Boras can start by quoting **Walker**, who was so impressed by Boudou's offseason work that he hired him fulltime and invited him to move into his guest house in Evergreen, Colo.



GETTING FOCUSED: **Walker** has taken steps to make himself a force again.

"Mondays, he'd turn in a schedule of what we were getting," **Walker** says. "We'd pick up the menu and go, 'Look what we've having for lunch Wednesday! Can't wait!'"

Walker says that his wife, Angela, loves having someone else to cook, especially now that she is pregnant with their second child. Heck, who wouldn't want Boudou in their kitchen five days a week?

Consider one of Boudou's daily menus from the offseason:

Breakfast: Oatmeal pancakes, turkey bacon, cantaloupe.

Lunch: Green salad with vinaigrette; fresh angel hair pasta with grilled paprika chicken; baby vegetables medley in cilantro-tomato broth.

Dinner: Mix of lettuces with carrot and radish, light Italian dressing; lemon pepper pan-seared salmon steak with brown rice and braised cabbage with sprout and curry.

Babe Ruth might have hit 1,000 homers

feasting on such fare rather than his daily supply of hot dogs.

Walker could snack: a fruit smoothie, a nutrition bar, a glass of orange juice. He even ate dessert, everything from fresh blueberry pie to chocolate marble cheesecake with raspberry coulis.

Yet, **Walker**, who's 6-3 and weighs 233, reduced his body fat from 17-18 percent to 11-12 percent by sticking to Boudou's menus and working out daily with strength and speed specialist Rick Lademan.

Put me in, chef; I'm ready to play ...

"Being French, being around food all my life, having a different lifestyle than people in the U.S., I don't believe in diets," Boudou says. "Diets are something that only exist here, where it's a billion-dollar industry."

"I don't cook **Larry** low-fat yogurt and bananas for breakfast. I like to use fresh fruit and waffles and whatever he needs. The key is eating healthy and the right amounts at the right times."

Or, as **Walker** says, "I ate normal food, but it was just all cooked different. I didn't eat anything fried all winter."

He didn't relent in his workouts, either. "You looked at him," Lademan says, "and you knew he was ready to go."

Lademan designed **Walker's** program specifically to enhance his baseball skills. The difference in **Walker** was evident from the start of spring training.

"We have these drills called 'runners,' where the outfielders get caught in a rundown," Rockies coach Rich Donnelly says. "Last year, (**Walker**) couldn't participate (coming off knee surgery). This year, he not only participated, they couldn't tag him out."

Boudou cooked for **Walker** all spring in Tucson, Ariz. During the season, he feeds **Walker** a substantial lunch before night games, a hearty dinner after day games. But he does not accompany **Walker** on the road.

"I was in a lot better shape before camp started. It has been downhill since," **Walker** says. "The toughest part is on the road after games. You see the stuff we've got to eat (in the clubhouse). And you've got to eat it at 10:30 at night, not the best time."

Boudou frets that **Walker** is cheating on the road, but cooking, too, is a game of adjustments. Boudou tries to compensate for any of **Walker's** culinary indiscretions once the Rockies return home.

It's only May, but **Walker** is again a five-tool terror, and he's lifting weights after games regularly for the first time. Rockies G.M. Dan O'Dowd and manager Buddy Bell rarely saw him healthy after they joined the club last season. Now, O'Dowd calls **Walker** "a joy to watch." Bell calls him "the best player I've ever seen."

"The numbers alone are staggering," Phillies outfielder Rob Ducey says. "But just to watch his total game, it's unreal. I know he gets a lot of recognition. But he still may be underrated."

Underrated, but not undernourished.

C'mon, **Larry**, lock up Boudou long-term. **TSN**

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Preheat to .400



Michael
KNISLEY

But Colorado's Larry Walker thinks his chances of joining baseball's exclusive club are, well, done

A conversation with the man living life at .400 into July takes unexpected twists and turns. Sometimes, speeding around the blind corners of a chat with Larry Walker, you run smack into Randy Johnson looming large and dead ahead. One minute you're talking about stances and swings. The next minute, Walker is talking about Johnson.

We're all alone in the Coors Field clubhouse today, because the rest of the Rockies are on the field taking batting practice. Batting practice isn't an everyday thing for Walker.

Today, for instance, it's skippable. What could more batting practice do for a man living life at .400 into July?

"The thing is," he says, "I just step in the box, see the ball and hit it. Or try to hit it. That's how I learned how to do it. Ralph Rowe, who was my hitting coach in the Expos' chain when I was in Utica and Burlington, told me, 'Kid, just see the ball and hit the ball. That's all there is to it. See it and hit it.' I said, 'OK.' He said it was real simple. So I took it real simple."

When the Padres came through Denver in early June, an inventive reporter sat Walker down with Tony Gwynn and asked them to compare notes about hitting. Gwynn talked about preparation, about studying video, about swing analysis. Walker talked about video, too. He talked about *Tin Cup*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Slapshot* and the other videos he watches during rain delays.

When it was suggested that the June Rockies-Padres series featured a pair of .400 hitters, Walker said no. He said it featured a .400 hitter and a .285 hitter, which was his career batting average entering this season.

But disclaimers aside, living life at .400 into July means hearing about it every day. At least once, usually more. Living life at .400 into September 1, on the other hand ... you wonder how many times a day he would

hear about it then.

"If I was to think about it," Walker says, "I probably wouldn't be any different than I am right now. It doesn't change anything. I still come to the park. I still screw around. I still show up like I am right now, unshowered all day, looking like a bum, hair not combed. Nothing will change that. Not even Randy Johnson."

Walker, who was hitting around .415 the night the Rockies played at Seattle a few weeks ago, chose the sensible approach to facing Johnson's lefthanded cruelty. He rested his aching knees and shoulder. Other lefthanded hitters take a personal day all the time when Johnson pitches. Rafael Palmeiro does it. Don Mattingly did it. The difference is that Walker told everyone he was going to do it before he did it.

But Johnson isn't what I've asked him about here. I've asked him how he gets better if he doesn't study hitting. I've asked him how he goes from .285 to .400 into July if he doesn't take batting practice every day.

"It's just being in there all the time," he says. "That's been my downfall in past years, being injured and not being in the lineup every day. This year, for the most part, I've stayed fairly healthy and I've been able to be in the lineup almost every day. Except for when I'm scared to face pitchers, I guess. I spoke the truth about that, by the

way. I said, 'Hey, Johnson is tough on lefties.' I said, 'We can put an all-righthanded lineup in there.' I said, 'That will increase our chances against him.'

"The way people reacted, that must be the worst thing I've done in my life. It's everywhere I go now. It's on America Online. It's in the papers. It's on TV. It's in my mailbox. It's everywhere."

The thought that Walker can still be living life at .400 at the end of the season is silly.

Nobody has done it since Ted Williams in 1941. The thought that Walker could win the Triple Crown this season is silly, too. Nobody has done that since Carl Yastrzemski in 1967. But just before the All-Star break, Walker was leading the league in home runs. He and Gwynn were flip-flopping for the National League lead in batting average, and he was third in runs batted in. So he hears about the Triple Crown every day now, too.

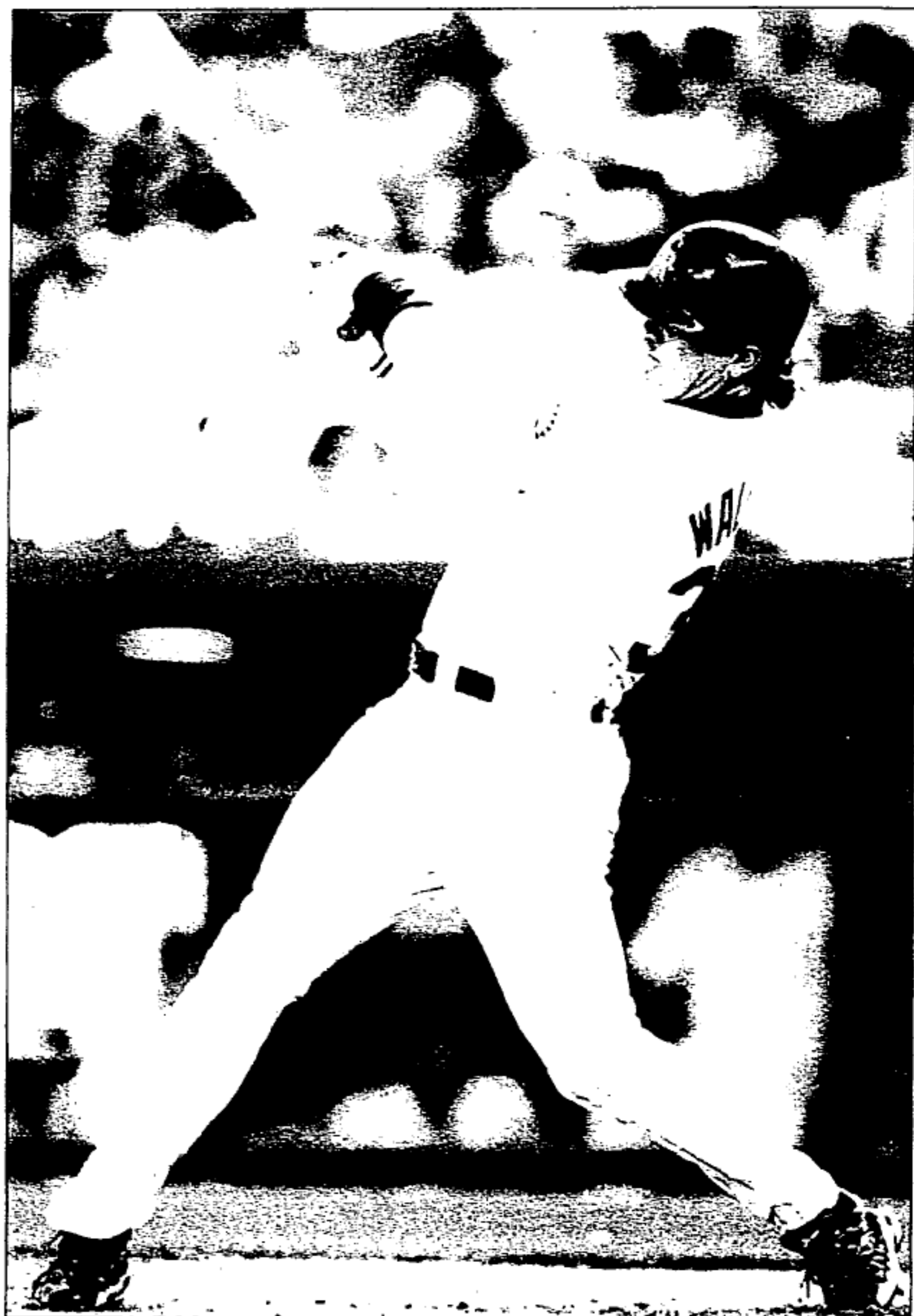
Hearing about it, though, and being consumed by it are different animals. The man living life at .400 into July says he can hear the Triple Crown talk and still not think it's anything but silly.

Then he takes me around another sudden bend in the road.

"I hear about Randy Johnson every day, too, but I don't think about Randy Johnson

'It's just being in there all the time. That's been my downfall in past years, being injured and not being in the lineup every day. This year, for the most part, I've stayed fairly healthy and I've been able to be in the lineup almost every day.'

— Larry Walker



More than one way to swing a bat: Gwynn does swing analysis and checks videotape; Walker (above) skips batting practice and watches his favorite movies. Different strokes for different folks.

every day," he protests, perhaps too much. "I don't go around having little thoughts in my mind about Randy. I don't have little thoughts in my mind about hitting .400 or winning the Triple Crown, either."

Gwynn will win the batting championship, Walker says. Andres Galarraga will win the RBI title, he says. Galarraga will win the RBI title partly because Walker hits in front of him in the Rockies' batting order. A man living life at .400 into July creates a lot of RBI opportunities for the next hitter.

The man living life at .400 into July was to play in the All-Star Game in Cleveland this week, as he should. A week and a half before the game, we talk about that, about the rewards that come with a season like this. And even that innocuous subject turns an unforeseen corner. To Walker, the All-Star Game means ... Randy Johnson.

"I get to face Johnson, you know," he says. "If we both get in the All-Star Game, I get to face him. I mean, I shouldn't have said anything about it from the very start. If I was the manager that night in Seattle, I'd be sitting me out on my own. I should've said I was playing right up 'til the game, and then not played. I should've told everybody that (Don) Baylor took me out of the lineup.

I should've blamed it on him. But I took it like a man. I didn't bail. Well, I did bail, but I didn't bail on somebody else's back. I did it on my own.

"I feel like Bill Buckner right now. Buckner has a great career, and he makes one error and that's all people remember him for. It's not right."

As I write this, I don't know whether Walker faced Johnson in Cleveland on Tuesday night. I do know that Johnson will have little or no effect on the outcome of Walker's season; the Rockies and Mariners face each other only twice more. And I know this: Ninety minutes after our talk in Denver, Walker hit a home run deep into the seats in the bottom of the first inning. When he trotted out to his position in right field for the top of the second, the fans in the Coors Field stands stood with their arms raised, and then bowed repeatedly.

As if to say, "We're not worthy." Coming out of the All-Star break this weekend, the Padres play in Denver again. Gwynn and Walker are both living life at .400, or damn near it, and we're into mid-July. The second half, and Williams and Yastrzemski await.

Silly as that sounds.
Michael Knisley is a senior writer for THE SPORTING NEWS.

Three for the Show

The Rockies' terrific trio of Walker, Burks and Bichette—all offensive behemoths at one time or another—could wreak havoc on N.L. pitchers this season if they click in unison

BY JACK ETKIN

Their collective output is intriguing, a sky's-the-limit possibility for terrorizing National League pitchers. Larry Walker, Ellis Burks and Dante Bichette have had prolific seasons. They just haven't had them together.

What if the three members of the Rockies' outfield avoid injury? What if each is able to get 600 at-bats? What if they start clicking in unison and spur each other as it becomes apparent there's no better outfield in baseball?

What if...
"It could be a special year if we all stay healthy," Bichette says. "If you look at the potential with the stolen bases, the home runs, the RBIs, hitting for average—all of that combined. Definitely with the offensive era we're in right now, we could do some things that haven't been done."

Imagine an outfield where each member hits 35 home runs, maybe even 40, steals 30 bases, drives in 100 runs, scores 100 and averages .300. Imagine an outfield where no one is a defensive liability. Imagine.

"On an everyday basis, you don't see that from three guys," manager Don Baylor says. "You see it in an All-Star Game. They could be a very special group if they're all healthy at the same time."

And, so far, that has been a very big if. In 1995, Burks was recovering from wrist surgery the previous September, bothered by hamstring problems while batting only 278 times. In 1996, Walker suffered a broken collarbone in June, an injury that in essence ended his season. And Bichette underwent reconstructive knee surgery last October. The Rockies expect him to be ready to start the season April 1, but Bichette knows it will be a couple of months before he is fully confident about his knee.

Regardless, Burks, Bichette and Walker are expecting what might finally come to pass in their third season together.

"That thought's been crossing my mind all winter," Burks says, pausing to think back to the long rehabilitation periods as well as the possibilities for the future. "I'm sure we all could use a little extra work defensively because I know I can. I'm sure there's better defensive outfields, but a whole healthy season I can't see a better offensive one."



Color Rockies' trio all click, (from top) Bichette, Burks and Walker potentially could be one of baseball's most powerful outfields.

Last week in an empty Hi Corbett Field in Tucson, Ariz., Bichette ran from home to first base in 4.2 seconds, which is average major league speed. Yet it makes him wonder what he, Burks and Walker might accomplish. "I think potentially we've got a chance to be the best outfield in the major leagues," Bichette says. "I think we should strive to be that."

First baseman Andres Galarraga, who turns 36 in June, has proved that any hitter fortunate enough to play half his games at Coors Field can keep time at arm's length. Bichette, 33, Burks, 32, and Walker, 30, haven't caught a glimpse of the twilight—yet.

Unlike Bichette and Burks, Walker is coming off a season that began promisingly but turned into a summer of torment. He was hitting .283 with 14 homers, 43 RBIs and was 12-for-13 in stolen-base attempts when he spun into the wall June 9 at Coors Field, breaking his left collarbone. He missed 60 games, played two weeks when he returned but strained the shoulder in a collision at second base with the Reds' Barry Larkin. Walker batted 13 times after August 28, finished the season as a defensive replacement in right field and hit .276 with 18 home runs and 58 RBIs in 83 games.

That was a long fall from 1995, when Walker signed a four-year contract with the Rockies that guaranteed him \$22.5 million, then hit .306 with 36 homers and 101 RBIs.

"I've got a lot to prove this year," Walker

says. "Not only to myself, because I'll never make myself happy no matter how good I do. I've got a lot to prove to the city of Denver and the fans."

Walker's plans to work with a personal trainer in the offseason ended in October when he slipped on a rock while fishing and separated his right shoulder. Instead, Walker worked with Mark Wilbert, the Rockies strength and conditioning coordinator, with the emphasis on getting his shoulder in shape for spring training.

Those who know Walker well sense more determination, an almost maniacal resolution to succeed. "I want to win and want to do well," he says. "I know it's there. It's just a matter of doing it."



Burks thrived last season when he played left field, and his deficiencies in center in '95 were at the root of Baylor's decision to realign his outfielders. Burks will start in center if Bichette isn't ready to start the season. He can expect to move to left in the late innings when Quinton McCracken comes in as a defensive replacement for Bichette.

"I never have doubted myself," says Burks, who knows he will be scrutinized in the Coors Field's vast center field. "People are always going to put doubt on you. They're going to say, 'OK, this guy's 32 years old. He didn't play center field well in '95. Moved him to left, he had a great year in left field. Can he go back to center field and do the job?'"

Prodigious best describes Burks' '96 season. He hit .344 with 40 homers, 128 RBIs

and 32 stolen bases and led the N.L. in runs scored (142), slugging percentage (.639) and total bases (392). Hank Aaron in 1963 is the only other player with at least 200 hits, 40 homers and 30 stolen bases in one season.

"You don't ever want to go backward," Burks says. "You always want to excel. That's a great motivational thing right there for me. Coming off last year, people always say, 'Well, what can you do better than you did last year?'"

Bichette was so disgusted with his inability to plant his left leg and throw or stop and cut sharply in the outfield that he opted for reconstructive knee surgery.

"I hope I can take my game to another level, and it's going to have to be defensively," Bichette says. "I want to be a positive in the outfield, someone you want out there, someone that's going to help the club instead of someone who's out there because he can hit."

Not that there were any drastic drops offensively. Looming surgery didn't prevent Bichette from joining Burks at the 30-30 level in home runs and stolen bases. Bichette hit .313 last year with 31 home runs and reached career highs in RBIs (141), runs scored (114), hits (198) and, yes, stolen bases (31).

"Last year was a stalemate," Bichette says. "There was improvement for me in some areas. I put up some career numbers but only because we played a full season (for the first time since 1993). I felt I kind of leveled off last year instead of improving like I did the first three years here."

So Walker, Burks and Bichette are aiming for individual heights that this season could produce an aggregate impact, a year where the stupendous whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

"But as we all know, it's tough to keep all three of us healthy and in the lineup," Bichette says. "One wrong move can ruin a season for somebody."



You can't count on these things. You can only talk about 'what if,' which doesn't mean a whole lot right now."

Jack Etkin covers the Rockies for the Rocky Mountain News in Denver.

Power pack

What if Burks, Bichette and Walker put together, in one year, the kinds of numbers they had in their best seasons? You would have an outfield that could potentially produce 116 home runs and 357 RBIs. Warning: The following material may be unsuitable for the viewing of National League pitchers.

Name	Best season	The numbers
Ellis Burks	'96 Rockies	40 HRs, 128 RBIs, .344, 211 hits, 32 SB
Dante Bichette	'95 Rockies	40 HRs, 128 RBIs, .340, 197 hits
Larry Walker	'95 Rockies	36 HRs, 101 RBIs, .306, 151 hits

The skinny

Joined Hank Aaron as the only players with at least 200 hits, 40 homers and 30 stolen bases in one season. Was a one-man SportsCenter highlight package that season. Enjoyed a power surge in his first season at Coors Field.