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THE NEW TRAINING TABLE- By Alexander Wolff - Sports Illustrated

From college dining halls to professional clubhouses, a new food consciousness is revolutionizing sports. It's not just about gaining or losing weight. It's about performance targets, wellness and recovery. Eating to win has become a lot more complicated—and athletes are healthier for it.

**SPECIAL REPORT**  
**THE NEW TRAINING TABLE**  
→ MILESTONES IN SPORTS NUTRITION

**1901** *Vladimir Zverev's* Walter Camp writes that "the athlete consumes roast beef, cracked [and] chives ... to his heart's content" and that "the program was abandoned in cases of overtraining, but usually in homeopathic doses."

**1966** *Gregor Brander* Eats 4,000 g of "P" and 300 g of milk, beats an Italian skier in the finals of the Cortina Championship of the World.

**1973** *The Denver Broncos* Because of a beef shortage, the Broncos struggle to stock their training table and begin serving more fish and poultry.

**DWIGHT FREENEY**  
EATS  
DEFENSIVE  
LINEMAN

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**BY ALEXANDER WOLFF**  
Special Reporting by Amanda Doyle

Photograph by **TODD ROSENBERG**  
ILLUSTRATION: GUY LAWRENCE; PHOTOS: JAMES HARRIS (LEFT); STEPHEN FRANKLIN/GETTY IMAGES (RIGHT)

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Soon after Stanford opened its \$20.3 million Arrillaga Family Dining Commons on Sept. 29, a Cardinal football player grabbed a tray and bellied up to the building's serving pavilion. Of course he looked first for dishes coded for Sports Performance. But if he had a big test looming, he might have chosen an offering that also supported Brain Performance. If his ankle was tender and he felt a cold coming on, there were dishes marked Anti-Inflammatory and Enhanced Immunity. And if he wanted to touch every good-food base, he tucked into something that covered Antioxidants and Food Synergy. Cilantro lime brown rice, for instance. Or steamed mussels with cannellini beans, spinach and pancetta. Or creamed Swiss chard with prosciutto.

The collegiate training table, where cooks flipped pork chops at linemen for breakfast, is as yesterday as wilted lettuce. Welcome to the brave new world of the "performance and wellness dining hall." Stanford chefs toss anti-inflammatory spices such as thyme and turmeric into a dish to shorten recovery time after workouts and injuries. They serve grass-fed beef because it has more omega-3 fatty acids than grain-fed beef, and omega-3s promote heart health and immune response. They rotate fruits and vegetables according to what's locally in season, making sure to choose organic produce, which is less likely to contain carcinogenic pesticide residue.

Stanford even sidesteps the objections of ecology-minded undergrads by not using soy from fields carved out of Brazil's rain forest.

Any student can eat at the Arrillaga, but the impetus for performance dining came from director of sports performance Brandon Marcello. He found an ally in former Stanford provost Condoleezza Rice and a sugar daddy in John Arrillaga, the billionaire real estate developer and former Cardinal basketball star whose name also appears on the alumni building and two sports and rec centers (with a third coming in 2013). Not three years after its conception, the dining commons is giving new meaning to Stanford's nickname, the Farm.

The significance of the initiative has less to do with what comes first, the chicken (Stanford's long-standing attention to anything that affects athletes' performance) or the egg (the Cardinal's streak of 17 Directors' Cups, awarded to the nation's top Division I athletics program). It's more that, as a result of the attention paid to the chicken (free range) and the egg (cage free), the school is positioning itself to win the next 17 Directors' Cups- and every other college will feel pressure to emulate the Cardinal. As Marcello says, "We're way ahead of the curve here."

This new food consciousness is revolutionizing pro sports as well. Front offices already spring for all sorts of advantages, from charter flights to software that delivers the latest Moneyball-style analytics. Yet for decades one of the most controllable variables of all-what athletes put into their bodies-was underaddressed in pro sports. Now franchises are adding chefs who pack the plane and lay out buffets before and after practice. Knowing how players' palates have been conditioned, the Heat serves an Egg McMuffin knockoff made with turkey and reduced-fat cheese. The Canucks court free agents with their three-year-old food program, which includes customized entrees for players looking to gain or lose weight (and unlimited takeaway leftovers).

Just as management finally realizes that it's foolish to buy a Maserati and fill it with bad gas, pro athletes, eager to extend high-earning careers, are increasingly hiring personal chefs and nutritionists. When food-sensitivity analysis revealed that Jaguars tight end Mercedes Lewis reacts adversely to pineapple, he gave up his beloved pineapple upside-down cake. Heat forward James Jones eats only vegetables the day after a road trip, to hit the reset button on his system. Colts defensive end Dwight Freeney puts on a couple of pounds before facing a running team and sheds them for a passing team.

It hardly matters that Freeney's micro-yo-yo diet is mostly about emotional comfort, says gold medal Olympic swimmer Garrett Weber-Gale a classically tutored chef who founded the website [athleticfoodie.com](http://athleticfoodie.com). "If you think one or two pounds are better for you," Weber-Gale says, "they're going to be better for you."

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Sports, especially individual sports, have long had their nutritional outliers: U.S. 400-meter hurdler Edwin Moses attributed his 107 consecutive finals wins from 1977 to '87 in part to meals that featured a rainbow of colors. The horror stories still tend to come from team sports, where a multimillionaire might eat pizza twice a day in order to pocket what ought to be inconsequential meal money. Now team management at least tells athletes that red meat in moderation helps ward off anemia; that it's essential to control your weight as you push through your 30s; and that there's a risk of vitamin D deficiency during the etiolating slogs through airports, hotels and arenas that characterize an NBA or NHL season.

"We feed all this information to our players," says Lakers trainer Gary Vitti, whose team lays out a spread before and after practice. "We'll have some buy into it 100 percent, some buy into it at some percentage and some who'll eat at McDonald's every day. That's pretty much the way society is."

But it needn't be. To that end, Stanford's new dining hall will do more than just label food at the point of service. At the performance breakfast bar Cardinal athletes might find not only walnuts for their oatmeal but also a summary of a recent study that found walnuts to have more antioxidants than any other nut. Indeed, the

Arrillaga will feature a culinary studio for classes and demos, so consumers can learn to take control of their diets.

Like any Silicon Valley start-up, Stanford's performance dining effort benefits from freewheeling brainstorming sessions. Marcello joins the school's dietician, sustainability director, dining services director, executive chef and wellness and performance nutritionist for biweekly exchanges of ideas. "We discuss where we want to go and what the research and trends are in the industry," Marcello says. "We say, Here are the things we recommend you cook with, here are the health benefits, now put it together and make it taste good. Nutrition is one of the last frontiers we have to conquer. It can make a good athlete great, or a great athlete good."

On a spring evening at Chicago's United Center, as a Bulls game against the Suns heads into the fourth quarter, point guards Steve Nash and Derrick Rose represent more than the NBA's past and future. Nash, 37, is in the vanguard of smart eating as his career with the Suns winds down. He won't knowingly put refined sugar in his body, and he works with a naturopath to design the most effective and least inflammatory diet. By contrast Rose, 23, who will be named the league's MVP in a few weeks, so loves Skittles that their manufacturer, the Chicago-based Wrigley Company, has given him a personalized vending machine with a complimentary three-year supply. "Everybody's got their poison," Rose once said, "and mine is sugar."

Three years ago Nash hooked up with Suneil Jain, a Scottsdale, Ariz., naturopath who believes that most human ailments-not just digestive problems but also fatigue, insomnia and chronic headaches-can be traced to what goes into the body. Jain specializes in a kind of precision nutrition, in which blood is analyzed to see how specific foods affect an individual's body chemistry. As a result of this testing Nash discovered that he's averse to gluten and dairy. The Suns' captain also won't eat salsa, the essential condiment of the Mexican cuisine he adores, because he reacts badly to tomatoes and onions.

Across the locker room, Nash's 39-year-old teammate, Grant Hill, took notice and booked his own appointment with Jain. Hill already had some experience with what's known as applied immunology, or nutrigenomics: Eight years ago, recovering from serious ankle injuries while with the Magic, he consulted Sari Mellman, a Miami nutritionist who has worked with Freeney and dozens of other pro athletes. "I remember my mom once saying that pizza is one of the best foods for you because it has all major food groups," says Hill. "There's so much bad information out there."

Hill's current regimen (limited sugar, lots of whole grains, goji berries instead of strawberries) has him feeling better than ever. "I'm not as sore as I once was," he says. "My first year in the league it was fast food every day. Sugar is the last thing you want when you're 39 and your body needs to recover."

Food-sensitivity testing among athletes emerged in the early '80s, when a chunky, underachieving Martina Navratilova connected with Robert Haas, a Florida nutritionist whose dad owned a Burger King franchise. As Navratilova won 104 of her next 106 tournaments, she helped turn Haas's book *Eat to Win* into a No. 1 best seller. But Navratilova's demarche barely penetrated pro team sports, least of all the NBA, where Maurice Cheeks piloted the 76ers to the 1983 championship on a diet of chocolate-chip cookies and Hawaiian Punch, and in 1998 the Wizards' Rod Strickland, late in an overtime defeat of the Nets in New Jersey, threw up his routine pregame meal of pizza and a hot dog on the court.

But almost three decades after *Eat to Win*, food-sensitivity testing is sweeping through pro sports. Mellman and her son, chiropractor Leon Mellman, pay particular attention to foods that affect white blood cells for better or worse, so the body can maximize its immune response. Like at least 6% of the population, many athletes have sensitivity to gluten-not necessarily full-blown celiac disease, or the wheat allergy it is often confused with-but enough intolerance that eliminating gluten can reduce inflammation and the chance of other autoimmune disorders. "The biggest trends I see are gluten-free and dairy-free diets," says Jaguars nutritional consultant Anita Nall Richesson, a former Olympic gold medal swimmer.

Nash is a reluctant evangelist-"I don't like to get up on a soapbox," he says-but he and Hill have had some success influencing younger teammates, including Jared Dudley and Channing Frye. "Guys on our team hear Steve and me talk about it," Hill says. "They see the results, and they're curious."

It's the day before that game between Chicago and Phoenix, and a dozen miles from the Bulls' Deerfield, Ill., practice facility, team chef Steve Jackson has been pinballing around a catering kitchen since 5 a.m. An associate of Jackson's is already at the Deerfield complex, whipping up made-to-order pre-practice breakfasts in a private dining area steps from the court; the Bulls' own Methuselah, 39-year-old forward Kurt Thomas, reliably phones in a request for an egg-white omelet on his way over. Jackson will soon arrive with lunch, which is served as soon as practice ends. "The guys don't have to rush out to eat," he says. "When they come in they can let go, relax, bust each other's stones. I don't see Ronald [McDonald] walking through the door as much as I used to."

"THERE'S SO MUCH BAD INFORMATION OUT THERE," SAYS HILL.

Jackson makes almost everything from scratch. Rather than fry and sauté, he grills and roasts. Today Jackson is offering baked breaded catfish, grilled barbecued chicken breast, roast pork loin stuffed with corn bread and andouille (spiced pork sausage), and a sweet potato mash laced with maple syrup. "It's an off-day, and we're playing well, so I'll use a little fat," Jackson says. Still, the cream of broccoli soup is made with 2% milk.

Jackson has been feeding the Bulls for 10 years, which is to say since before they got good again. Soon after taking over, coach Scott Skiles decided that his players, who would win only 23 games in the 2003-04 season, were spoiled. Arguing that a team chef was a luxury, he persuaded the front office to cut Jackson loose. But the following season Jackson was back, and one day Skiles looked up from his post-practice meal and confessed, "If I'd had this in my day, I'd still be playing."

When they joined the team, big men Eddy Curry and Tyson Chandler, two poster boys for the Bulls' wilderness years, had never heard of salmon and quickly dismissed it with a blanket, "I don't eat fish." By the end of their tenures with the team, in 2005 and '06 respectively, both counted chef Steve's barbecued salmon among their favorite dishes. "A youngster 18 or 20 doesn't get it," Jackson says. "At 23, 24, 25, they start getting it. All it takes is breaking that barrier."

Jackson has made inroads with forward Luol Deng, who at 26 is just past that age of realization and used to forswear fish too. "His tastes have broadened," Jackson says. "One day last year I caught him making himself a tuna-salad sandwich. I'm getting a minimum 70 percent compliance, which is pretty good."

But one Bull passes up the team feeds entirely. Jackson has heard the stories about Rose, such as one told by Robert Dozier, a college teammate at Memphis: The NBA MVP eats candy, pineapple and syrup but "never really eats real food." Jackson has appealed to Rose's mother, Brenda, and his older brother Reggie in hopes of reforming the young star's habits-if only at breakfast, that proverbial most important meal. "If all else fails, just give him a box of Frosted Flakes and a jug of milk," Brenda replied. But the Bulls' chef still hopes for a breakthrough. From debriefing flight attendants on the team charter, he knows that Rose at least picks the chicken off his chicken Caesar salad. And Jackson takes some comfort in knowing that Rose recently hired a personal chef. "Derrick Rose is a fine young man," Jackson says. "He just doesn't know how to eat."

The United Center sits just west of downtown Chicago, on the edge of a food desert, one of those tracts of urban America where people live at least one mile from a grocery with fresh produce. Great pluralities of NBA and NFL players (including Rose, a native of Chicago's South Side) grow up in such neighborhoods, on streets lined with Kwik Marts and fried-chicken joints. Where food is available, it's likely to be canned or processed and overpriced. Where it isn't-well, think of that scene in *The Blind Side* in which the actor playing Michael Oher scavenges the bleachers of a high school gym for leftover popcorn.

The pathology of food deserts extends beyond malnutrition to poor education. Before last season Jaguars defensive tackle Terrance (Pot Roast) Knighton showed up at training camp 40 pounds overweight after pigging out on macaroni and cheese prepared by his mother, Rochelle, who had moved to Jacksonville from Hartford to live with him. After eating dinner for two weeks at the home of Richesson, the Jaguars' nutritionist, and two meals a day at training camp, where his choices could be monitored by Richesson's husband, Luke, the team's strength coach, Pot Roast was not only a leaner cut but was also rid of his migraines.

Every time a new player reports to the Bakersfield (Calif.) Jam, the Clippers', Raptors' and Suns' affiliate in the NBA's Developmental League, strength and conditioning coach Tim DiFrancesco takes him through the aisles of a grocery store. "I ask him to point out five cereals and five snack foods he'd be willing to eat," says DiFrancesco, who grew up among the farmers' markets of rural Vermont. "Then we figure out which would do the least damage." The point is, sometimes chefs, nutritionists and trainers have to meet young athletes halfway.

"Guys want to recognize what they're eating," says Glenn Lyman, a personal chef who spent five years in Cleveland cooking for LeBron James and collects recipes from clients' mothers and grandmothers. "You can't go from junk food right to tofu and salads. So you take food that's familiar and present it in a healthier way. Barbecue is familiar, the smell of charcoal is familiar-that's how you do it. Instead of fried chicken and sweet potato pie, you roast the chicken and serve it with baked yams."

If adapting to those tastes improves a young athlete's diet even marginally, it's well worth doing. Food matters: In studies performed in Europe, researchers varied the amount of exercise offered to children during the school day. They found that kids who got less exercise made up for it with more physical activity after school, and those who got more in school took it easier once they got home-which indicates that people have a self-regulating mechanism that keeps them within some range of physical exertion each day. These findings suggest that efforts to control obesity and promote health would best be focused on caloric intake rather than energy output. In other words, instead of Let's Move, Michelle Obama should probably call her anti-obesity initiative Eat Your Peas.

The question is how to get fresh peas to the plates of people in food deserts. It's an issue being tackled by Will Allen, the former Miami basketball captain and ABA player who has won a MacArthur "genius" grant for his work with Growing Power, which has created urban farming oases in hardscrabble parts of Milwaukee and Chicago. The challenge of food deserts also animates Grant Hill. "A lot of kids have never tasted a real tomato," he says. "We need to offer them safe, healthy options." Otherwise a huge cohort of Americans-the pool from which so many pro athletes are drawn-will continue to be, as Allen puts it, "malnourishing [themselves] to death."

As the endgame between the Bulls and the Suns unspools, it confirms the changing of the NBA guard more than the virtue of healthy eating. Hill and Nash close most of a 22-point gap, but Rose scores the Bulls' final two field goals to help secure a 97-94 victory.

Afterward Nash is asked about that Skittles machine in Rose's home. A reporter has just swung through the Suns' locker room carrying a gracious message for Nash from down the hall: Rose says he hopes he can perform at Nash's level once he too has logged 15 seasons in the league. Nash produces a reply as well-balanced as his meals. "Derrick can probably eat as many Skittles as he wants and it won't affect him because he's young," he says. "But he's humble and hardworking, and when he's ready, it'll be just another area where he can improve."

The very nature of major league baseball-from the late nights and odd-hour flights to the appetite-suppressing, dehydrating heat of high summer to the unpredictability of extra innings and rain delays-discourages healthy eating. But even baseball's nutritional norms are beginning to change. MLB now encourages road teams to

stipulate what they want in a buffet, and most do. But because of the unhealthy rhythms of the game, a major league team can seize the advantage by introducing a comprehensive food program. And there's no better example than that of the Pirates, who have installed a \$250,000 "performance kitchen" at PNC Park.

Team chef Tony Palatucci regularly prepares Latin dishes before games, and dietician Leslie Bonci urges every player to have two meals before arriving for a night game. "If they eat something, they're more likely to drink something," she says, "so they're hydrated." Bonci advises pitchers and catchers not to lard up with heavy meals or big portions before they work, and she huddles with Delta, the team's charter carrier, to make sure flight attendants offer smoothies and sliders as stand-ins for beers and burgers.

The Bucs infantilize their players to an extent: Pirates who tend to skip breakfast or struggle to keep weight on are packed off with Bucco Bags, which include yogurt, fruit and a breakfast sandwich to get them started the next day. Palatucci cuts up fruit for players and uses the team's two Convo-therm oven-steamers to give foods "that look of a fried product," he says. "It's sort of fooling the players, but we don't say that to them."

The team that finished last in the National League Central for four straight years led the NL Central sporadically into July. No one attributes the Pirates' rise solely to their diet, but no one is dismissing its influence either. "It's never about perfection. It's about how good you can get when you're eating right. The athletes make the choice. And if they reap some benefit in terms of strength, speed, stamina and recovery, then bravo. That makes me happy, and it makes them happy too."

