Bjorn Borg
Jim Thorpe
Jim Brown
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THE 100 GREATEST!

28 Mick Doohan
Dominating 500cc grids throughout the 1990s, Doohan would eventually be beaten by only one thing: injury. During his accumulation of five consecutive world championships (94-98), Doohan had his opposition mentally beaten before the lights went green on race day. His mastery in the saddle regularly saw him build an unassailable lead, with the battle for second often out of shot. (Doohan is this month's Legend, P112.)

27 Pete Sampras
He may have been "nice guy Pete" to you and me, but Sampras was a brutal competitor, who once admitted wanting to "kill" opponents. Those on the other side of the net faced an impossibly good serve, outrageous athleticism and brilliant all court play. He took one look at the era of Becker, Edberg and Courier and hauled the game forward.

26 Michael Schumacher
Look up the word "most" in your handy sporting dictionary and you’ll find a pic of Schumacher. Most world championships, most wins, most podiums... The German was a stats machine, who took Ferrari’s cars, technical director Ross Brawn’s expertise and his own talent and determination, and turned F1 into a procession for a decade.

25 Jim Brown
Perhaps the last and best from an era when being a prominent member of the black community meant deeds as well as words. Brown’s program still helps kids caught up in gang life. His gridiron career with the Cleveland Browns in the 1950s and ’60s included records for rushing, touchdowns and overall yardage. He was regularly voted the NFL’s best ever.

24 Bjorn Borg
If only Borg had bothered to fly more than once to Oz, who knows how many slams he’d have won? When he quit, at 26, he’d won 11, completing a career of such ludicrous dominance it was hard to believe he’d gone. Severe training, willpower and talent kept the two-handed hippie cyborg on top until McEnroe finally shattered him at the US Open in 1981.

23 Jim Thorpe
The most versatile athlete of the first half of the 20th century. The half American Indian won the pentathlon and decathlon at the 1912 Olympics, before being banned from athletics for taking baseball. Thorpe’s name is still a byword for all-round sporting brilliance.

22 Paavo Nurmi
The great distance-man took part in three Olympics from 1920-28, winning nine gold and three silver medals. He trained obsessively and alone, and carried a stopwatch even in races because if he ran to schedule, he knew no one could beat him. By 1924, the Finn held the world record at the mile, 5000m and 10,000m, something no one else has managed.

21 Eddy Merckx
His nickname, “The Cannibal”, reflected not just the Belgian’s appetite for victory, but the fear he put into rivals for more than a decade. Unlike Miguel Indurain and Lance Armstrong, Merckx had no specific tastes, but entered everything to win, from le Tour, to the harrowing Paris-Roubaix. He retired in 1978, his haul unlikely ever to be beaten.

20 Alfredo di Stefano
The Pele-Maradona argument may rage forever, but to those who saw him, the “Blond Arrow” is the greatest all-round footballer, and certainly the most influential. The Argentine won five European Cups in a row with Real Madrid during the 1950s, helping European football become the powerhouse it now is. He never played in a World Cup, though.

19 Jesse Owens
Owens’ career may have been mangled by the usual brew of prejudice and bureaucracy (he finished up racing against horses), but his name echoes down the ages as a once-in-a-generation sprinter, who posted times still respectable today. His four golds in front of Hitler at the 1936 Berlin Olympics had significance far beyond sport.

18 Shane Warne
Throw this man the ball and something was guaranteed to happen. Before Warne, there had never been a spin bowler who could generate more excitement than a quick. The total package, he was a genius with the ball and the most charismatic figure in the game. He was a man for the occasion and at his best when the game was in the balance. Warne propelled his team to greatness, was the best bowler of all time and a true global giant.

17 Billie-Jean King
Every shrieking tennis brat should tip her hat to King, for without her, they’d be nowhere. Her 12 singles and 16 doubles Majors in the 1960s and ’70s scarcely tell the whole story. She was an agitator when tennis was run by men for men, founding the WTA. Her ’73 Battle of the Sexes against Bobby Riggs was watched by 50 million worldwide. She won.

100 Greatest! The definitive list of the greatest ever sporting heroes! How many of the 100 did you guess? Read on to find out who made it in the top 100! The GREATEST! 48 Alpha

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES (ARMSTRONG, BORG, BROWN, BROWN, BROWN, EDDIE, FEDERER, KING, LAVER, LEWIS, MARADONA, MERCKX, NICKLAUS, NURMI, OWENS, PELE, SCHUMACHER, SENNA, DI STEFANO, THORPE, WOODS, ZATOPEK); PHIL HILLYARD (PHELPS, WARNE); DARRELL TINDALE (DOOHAN).