

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE of the NATIONAL BASKETBALL RETIRED PLAYERS ASSOCIATION

LEGENDS

MAGAZINE

20/20 Winter

SOCIAL JUSTICE

CURRENT AND FORMER PLAYERS ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

THE LAST DANCE

MICHAEL JORDAN
and the 1990s
CHICAGO BULLS

UPCOMING SEASON TIP-OFF

LIFE AFTER THE NBA
AND WNBA BUBBLE

A full-page photograph of Kobe Bryant from the waist up, seen from the back and slightly to the left. He is wearing a yellow Los Angeles Lakers jersey with "BRYANT" and the number "24" in white with purple outlines. He is looking over his left shoulder towards the camera. The background is a dark purple with diagonal gold stripes.

KOBE BRYANT

HIS LIFE AND LEGACY



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A NEW NBA SEASON GETS SET TO TIP-OFF

*AFTER LIFE IN THE BUBBLE,
THE LEAGUE EMBARKS ON
ANOTHER NEW CHALLENGE*

by **EDDIE MORAN**

The 2019-20 NBA season was unlike any other in recent memory for many reasons — perhaps none more so than the bubble environment it was played in, a similar situation forced upon many professional sports leagues due to the pandemic.

But for the 2020-2021 season, the NBA will look to return to some semblance of normality, or at least as near as possible while new COVID-19 cases still spike across the U.S.

The current plan is for all 30 NBA teams to play 72 in-market regular season games, down from the normal 82.

NBA teams will also be back at their home arenas — for the most part. Two years removed from a title, the Toronto Raptors will begin the season at Amalie Arena in Tampa, home to the NHL's Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay Lightning. The move south was forced after the Canadian government denied a special exemption request that would have enabled the Raptors and their opponents to play games in Toronto outside of the country's mandatory 14-day quarantine period for anyone entering or leaving the country.



Top: NBA Commissioner, Adam Silver is seen on stage for a virtual group photo with the 2020 NBA Draft Prospects on November 18, 2020 in Bristol, CT at ESPN Headquarters. **Bottom Left:** Luka Doncic #77 of the Dallas Mavericks arrives at the hotel as part of the NBA Restart 2020 on July 8, 2020 in Orlando, FL. **Bottom Middle:** Giannis Antetokounmpo #34 of the Milwaukee Bucks dribbles the ball during practice as part of the NBA Restart 2020 on July 27, 2020 in Orlando, FL. **Bottom Right:** Myles Turner #33 of the Indiana Pacers jumps the opening tip against Bam Adebayo #13 of the Miami Heat for Game two of the first round of the 2020 Playoffs as part of the NBA Restart 2020 on August 20, 2020 at The Field House at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex in Orlando, FL.



No longer in a controlled bubble, the NBA is aiming for the same level of caution, prevention and expertise-focused advice to ensure the truncated season can be played.

The league distributed a 139-page “Health and Safety Protocols” memo revealing — in dense, but important, detail — how the upcoming season will be conducted.

That started during phase one of the league’s “initial workout activities,” which took place from Nov. 24 to 30 and only allowed two players and staffers in the team facility for court work and weight room work. That number increased to four for phase two from Dec. 1 to 5, with no “maximum” capacity will be administered beginning on Dec. 6. At that point, no more than 50 people of the “Tier 1” or “Tier 2” players, coaches and staff members were allowed in the facility.

That will all lead up to opening night on Dec. 22, when perhaps a new challenge will

emerge — keeping players healthy as they travel across the country.

The NBA is limiting travel by having teams play “baseball-style” series against their opponents, which will consist of two straight games in the same city against the same team.

But as outbreaks across MLB, the NFL and now college sports have shown, even the most stringent of precautions could fail, resulting in a domino effect of cancellations and postponements.

There are efforts to keep players away from potential risks. When teams stay on the road at hotels, “members of the traveling party” are prohibited from utilizing amenities like the sauna, spa and gift shop, among others. With some exceptions — and under strict guidelines — they can have access to the hotel’s fitness center or pool. Private flights will be mandated and ground transportation for traveling groups can’t exceed 45 people.



Russell Westbrook #0 of the Houston Rockets drives to the basket against the Portland Trail Blazers during the first half at The Arena at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex on August 4, 2020 in Lake Buena Vista, FL.



Gordon Hayward #20 of the Boston Celtics stands with Head Coach Brad Stevens during the game against the LA Clippers at TD Garden on February 13, 2020 in Boston, MA.



Fred VanVleet #23 of the Toronto Raptors drives the ball during the first quarter in Game Three of the Eastern Conference Second Round during the 2020 NBA Playoffs on September 3, 2020 in Lake Buena Vista, FL.



Jimmy Butler of the Miami Heat speaks to the media after the game against the Los Angeles Lakers in Game Five of the 2020 NBA Finals.



The Los Angeles Lakers pose for a team photo with the trophy after winning the 2020 NBA Championship over the Miami Heat in Game Six of the 2020 NBA Finals at AdventHealth Arena at the ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex on October 11, 2020 in Lake Buena Vista, FL.



James Harden #13 of the Houston Rockets against Chris Paul #3 of the Oklahoma City Thunder for Game Three of the first round of the 2020 Playoffs.

There will be plenty of regular testing, and specific protocols if players come in contact with someone deemed to be at risk. Household members are also being asked to quarantine.

The NBA will only release the first half of the schedule to start the season, dropping the second half about 30 games into the season. That perhaps will allow for flexibility if any games have to be moved.

While the extremely short offseason — it will only be 72 days compared to the typical 127 or more — added an extra layer of complexity to these logistical challenges, it had no impact on another series of notable signings and trades.

On the free agent front, there has been several big deals ranging from Gordon Hayward's new four-year, \$120 million, fully guaranteed contract with the Charlotte Hornets to Fred VanVleet's four-year, \$85 million deal to return to the Toronto Raptors — the largest contract ever given to an undrafted player.

Chris Paul and Russell Westbrook both have new teammates in Phoenix and Washington, respectively, while rumors of a potential James Harden trade continue to swirl.



LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers warms up during practice as part of the NBA Restart 2020 on July 13, 2020 in Orlando, FL.



VINCE CARTER

*INSIDE THE TRANSITION FROM PLAYER TO BROADCASTER
IN THE SECOND ACT OF HIS CAREER*

by **VIKAS CHOKSHI**

Anytime Vince Carter left his feet, fans anticipated something dazzling. There was a reason that the talented guard, who starred for the North Carolina Tar Heels, earned the moniker of “Half-Man, Half-Amazing.”

And, while Carter is hanging up his laces after two decades of playing in the NBA, he is still going to be close to the game he loves. Carter has signed a multi-year contract with ESPN to serve as an NBA and college basketball analyst.

A look at Vinsanity through the years:



DRAFT NIGHT

Back on draft night in 1998, with the fifth pick, the Golden State Warriors selected future Hall of Famer Vince Carter. The Warriors would then go on to trade Carter to the Toronto Raptors for UNC teammate Antawn Jamison, who was selected one pick ahead.

Carter, also known as Half Man, Half Amazing, would go on to become an eight-time All-Star, an Olympic gold medalist, and a ferocious dunker, who then transitioned into a superb veteran mentor. How is that for a career?

"THE DUNK"

While VC had many memorable dunks throughout his career, including the insane ones from the 2000 NBA Dunk Contest, he will always be remembered for what the French call, "le dunk de la mort": the dunk of death. The greatest dunk of all-time came during the 2000 Sydney Olympics when Team USA was facing off against France when Carter stole a pass and then proceeded to dunk on 7'2" French center Frédéric Weis.

"[Carter] deserves to make history. Sadly for me, I was on the video too. I learned people can fly", Weis conveyed.

**"I DIDN'T REALLY
HAVE A PLAN.
I DIDN'T REALLY
THINK THINGS
THROUGH. I JUST
JUMPED AND
FIGURED IT OUT
UP THERE."**

VINCE CARTER

**POST-CAREER TRAINING**

Carter, who has a minor in communications from North Carolina, participated in the NBPA's "Sportscasters U" camp in 2011. The camp, which took place at Syracuse University, serves as a training course to help prepare players for life in media after basketball. Other notable "Sportscaster U" alumni feature the likes of Richard Jefferson and Caron Butler.

Towards the latter stages of his playing career, Carter dabbled in the media space, appearing across several ESPN platforms as a guest analyst. He's also logged experience in calling Summer League games for NBA TV.

**THE TRANSITION**

Carter, 43, officially announced his retirement from the NBA in June after a 22-year run. While Carter is stepping away from the game he loves as a player, he will still be connected to it via the broadcast booth, as he agreed to a multi-year broadcasting contract with ESPN.

VC will serve as an NBA and college basketball analyst, and is set to appear on various on studio shows such as NBA Countdown, Get Up!, The Jump, First Take and SportsCenter. He will also be making special appearances on shows such as College GameDay and provide color commentary for live broadcasts of NBA and ACC men's basketball games.

**"VINCE CARTER HAS MADE AN
INDELIBLE IMPACT ON THE NBA
WITH HIS REMARKABLE SKILL AND
ENDURING COMMITMENT."**

NBA COMMISSIONER ADAM SILVER





NBA ALL-STAR 2020

*THE LAST REGULAR ALL-STAR WEEKEND AHEAD OF THE
EVENT'S UNPREDICTABLE FUTURE*

by **VIKAS CHOKSHI**



Panelists Sarah Spain, Terri Jackson and Desirée Rogers pose for a photo following the Women of Influence Summit at the ROOF on theWit.

If this was the last “normal” All-Star Game for a while, the National Basketball Retired Players Association (NBRPA) gave everyone a going away party to remember. We saw both new and familiar faces around Chicago during the 2020 NBA All-Star Weekend, including more than 150 former NBA and WNBA Legends. The NBRPA’s yearly celebration commemorates the growth of the league and its players and their continued success off the court.

This year, the NBRPA kicked-off their functions on Tuesday, with a Women of Influence Summit. The event, hosted at the ROOF on theWit, was a cocktail reception for outstanding female entrepreneurs, innovators and industry leaders. The women’s panel was moderated by ESPN’s Sarah Spain and featured Terri Jackson of the WNBPAA and former White House Social Secretary, Desirée Rogers.



(Above): Isiah Thomas and Sheryl Swoopes pose for a photo at the All-Star Tip-Off Party at TAO. (Right): Legends get a taste of the Windy City at the Chicago Style Party.



The festivities really got started Wednesday evening with a tip-off party at TAO, one of Chicago's hottest nightclubs. Upon arrival, members were greeted by the host committee, led by the hometown legend himself, Isiah Thomas. Once the night got rolling, guests mingled with each other and interacted with the NBRPA's Board of Directors all while sipping on Zeke's very own bubbly, Cheurlin. The night's goal was to showcase both the NBRPA and Chicago, and it accomplished just that, as the buzz was palpable all evening.

On Thursday, Miller Lite sponsored the Chicago Style Party at Shula's Steak House. Several players stopped by for the camaraderie and to enjoy the best of Chicago's signature dishes. Barstool Sports joined in by conducting interviews with Dikembe Mutombo, Shawn Marion, Grant Hill and more.

On Friday morning, the Legends Lounge opened to the masses. The NBRPA's key partners were on full display over the weekend, including Wintrust, NuEnerchi, Sun Chlorella, Astellas Pharma, Singleton, Amazon, Barstool Sports, Cheurlin, Gatorade, Coors Light, Miss Jessie's, NIKE, Panini, Pepsi and Spalding.

Later on Friday, the NBRPA team planned and executed its second annual Legends Media Day presented by Astellas Pharma at NBA All-Star Weekend. The



Alex English and Fat Lever, a dynamic scoring duo for Denver in the 1980s, pose together at Shula's Steak House with a photo from their playing days.

team hosted several national media outlets including The Athletic, Bleacher Report, NBA.com, Stadium, Turner Sports and Yahoo! Sports. A few dozen former players were available and participated in interviews during the session. Following media day, the NBRPA held a Welcome Party at Untitled Supper Club, which was graciously sponsored by Singleton. Legends Tim Hardaway and Shawn Marion were the hosts and made sure the patrons partied in style.

On Saturday morning, the day kicked off with the Legends Breakfast with Athletes In Action. Following the breakfast, the NBRPA hosted the Legends Care Full Court Press Clinic, a prep for success clinic for 100 youth participants ages eight to 18, in partnership with Girls, Inc. and Black Boy Joy of Chicago. The clinic featured former NBA and WNBA players Sheryl Swoopes, Adrian Williams-Strong, Nakia Sanford, Danielle Campbell, Mike James, Cliff Levingston, Johnny Newman and Julian Wright as they ran and coached the clinics. The camp was broken out into two groups where the NBA players coached the boys and the WNBA players coached the girls. The Legends also participated in a Q&A session with the youth



Dave Cowens participates in an interview during Legends Media Day.

NBA ALL-STAR 2020 TIMELINE OF EVENTS

TUESDAY

WOMEN OF INFLUENCE SUMMIT

ROOF on theWit



WEDNESDAY

TIP-OFF PARTY

TAO



THURSDAY

CHICAGO STYLE PARTY

Shula's Steakhouse

FRIDAY

LEGENDS LOUNGE OPENED

WELCOME PARTY

Untitled Supper Club



SATURDAY

LEGENDS CARE: FULL COURT PRESS CLINIC

LEGENDS PARTY

Underground Nightclub



SUNDAY

21ST ANNUAL LEGENDS BRUNCH



Hosts Shawn Marion (above) and Tim Hardaway (right) address guests at the Welcome Party at Untitled Supper Club.



A photo cube honoring Kobe Bryant sits at the center of the half court in the Legends Lounge.

afterwards. The NBRPA understands the importance of guidance for youth both on and off the court, which is why this event is always a personal favorite for a lot of the Legends.

The festivities of course carried over into Saturday night, where over 200 alumni and guests came to the Legends Party at The Underground Nightclub. The night was filled with great energy especially while watching the Slam Dunk, Three-Point and Skills competition which was taking place at the United Center. This was the final party of the weekend, so you know the guests did their thing. Many say the party was the highlight of the weekend.

**"I'M JUST DOING MY
PART IN THIS WORLD
AND IN THIS GAME
TO HOPEFULLY MAKE
IT BETTER."**

DWYANE WADE

Closing out the weekend, the 21st Annual Legends Brunch remained the marquee event, which took place at the McCormick Place Convention Center. The Legends Brunch showcases Legends whose legacy and commitment continue to impact the game.

This year's award recipients were Dwyane Wade (Community Ambassador Award), Scottie Pippen (Legend of the Year), Cappie Pondexter (Hometown Hero Award) and Jerry Colangelo (Lifetime Achievement Award).

Wade, the Community Ambassador recipient, was honored and humbled to be able to give back to his hometown of Chicago.



Youth basketball players and Legends coaches pose for group photos following the Legends Care Full Court Press clinic.

"I'm proud to be in a position where I can be a voice of a lot of social conversations. That I can be the voice of families that are dealing with similar issues that my family has dealt with ... I'm just doing my part in this world and in this game to hopefully make it better," said Wade.

We'd be remiss if we didn't show love to some of the greats that passed away this year, most notably David Stern and Kobe Bryant. Both were remembered fondly throughout the weekend and especially at the brunch.

NBA Legend Magic Johnson touched on them both.

"Our hearts have been broken. We've been dealing with it, starting with David Stern and then with Kobe, and of course his daughter and the seven other people who passed away. It's been a tough time for the NBA family, but the NBA All-Star Weekend has helped. Just seeing friends, this is like a big family reunion.

And, Commissioner Adam Silver and what he did, to rename the MVP award of the NBA All-Star Game to be named after Kobe now. I think that is the highest tribute you can give him."

Wade was also appreciative of the award's name change, "No one embodied All-Star Weekend like Kobe Bryant".

And, on that note, we wish you farewell and good health. Hope to see you all next year!



Host Caron Butler welcomes attendees to the Legends Party at The Underground Nightclub.



THE LEGENDS BRUNCH
SHOWCASES LEGENDS WHOSE
LEGACY AND COMMITMENT
CONTINUE TO IMPACT THE GAME

THIS YEAR'S AWARD RECIPIENTS WERE:

COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR AWARD:

DWYANE WADE

LEGEND OF THE YEAR AWARD:

SCOTTIE PIPPEN

HOMETOWN HERO AWARD:

CAPPIE PONDEXTER

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD:

JERRY COLANGELO

WE STAND TOGETHER, TODAY AND EVERY DAY, IN UNWAVERING SUPPORT OF RESPECT AND JUSTICE FOR ALL



THE NATIONAL BASKETBALL RETIRED PLAYERS ASSOCIATION
AND ITS MEMBER LEGENDS REPRESENT A DIVERSE GROUP OF
BACKGROUNDS, BONDED TOGETHER BY AN INCLUSIVE
CULTURE OF ACCEPTANCE, RESPECT, AND EMPATHY.

**It is with these values that we seek to move forward, together,
in advancement of a collaborative culture that openly and
willingly denounces racism and discrimination.**



#LegendsTogether



LEGENDS CARE INITIATIVE

A YEAR OF INNOVATION



Just as many other organizations around the world needed to halt in-person youth and community programming in 2020 due to COVID, so did the NBRPA's Legends Care initiative. But, to quote the Legend Michael Jordan, "Obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it." And "work around it" is just what the NBRPA did when it came to Legends Care programming.

FULL COURT PRESS

Legends Care's cornerstone program, Full Court Press: Prep For Success, is going virtual, giving children around the world the opportunity to learn the iconic moves of Hall of Famers through drills demonstrated by NBA and WNBA Legends in the safety of their own home.



LEGENDS GIRL CHAT

A brand-new virtual program, Legends Girl Chat, debuted in 2020. Through a Legends Care partnership with Girls Inc., interactive and inspirational conversations with WNBA Legends were brought right onto the computer screens of teenage girls throughout the country.

LINCOLN PARK COMMUNITY SERVICES

Over 1,500 articles of adult clothing and duffel/tote bags were donated to Lincoln Park Community Services (LPCS) so that LPCS staff could put together "Welcome Kits" for guests during intake at the shelter in accordance with new COVID protocols.



BUTTERBALL GIFT CHECK

The annual Thanksgiving Community Assist pivoted to Butterball gift checks this year, in lieu of physically handing turkeys over to community members due to COVID. Through a Legends Care partnership with the Greater Chicago Food Depository and No Kid Hungry, 50 families with children under the age of 12 received Butterball gift checks for holiday turkeys at the North Lawndale YMCA's Healthy Student Market.

LEGENDS CARE

IN 2020

100

KIDS

50 girls from Girls Inc. of Chicago and 50 boys from Black Boy Joy were coached by nine Legends at the All-Star Full Court Press Clinic in February



HOME COURTS

2



Community basketball courts in Chicago, IL and San Diego, CA were renovated with Home Courts grants

\$232K

SCHOLARSHIPS

Dave DeBusschere Scholarships were awarded to 78 students, Earl Lloyd Scholarships



MASKS

1,000



Legends masks were sent to NBRPA members to combat the spread of COVID-19

50

FAMILIES

Through the Thanksgiving Community Assist, Butterball gift checks were given to families at the North Lawndale YMCA's



CLOTHING ITEMS

1,500



Items of clothing and duffel bags were donated to Lincoln Park Community Services for Welcome Kits

7

LEGENDS GIRL CHATS

125 girls from 7 Girls Inc. affiliates across the country participated in dynamic conversations with WNBA Legends via Zoom



GRANTS

NATIONWIDE



Hunger Grants were distributed to NBRPA Chapters across the country for local organizations assisting their neighbors



**JOIN THE TEAM DOING LEGENDARY THINGS
FOR CHILDREN & COMMUNITIES IN NEED!**

legendsofbasketball.com/DonateNow





KOBE BRYANT

THE DYNASTIES HE BUILT ON AND OFF THE COURT

By: Ian Thomas

The tragic death of Kobe Bryant, who suddenly passed in a helicopter accident in January along with nine people including his 13-year-old daughter Gianna, rocked the sports world and created a widespread outpouring of grief for one of the greatest basketball players of all time.

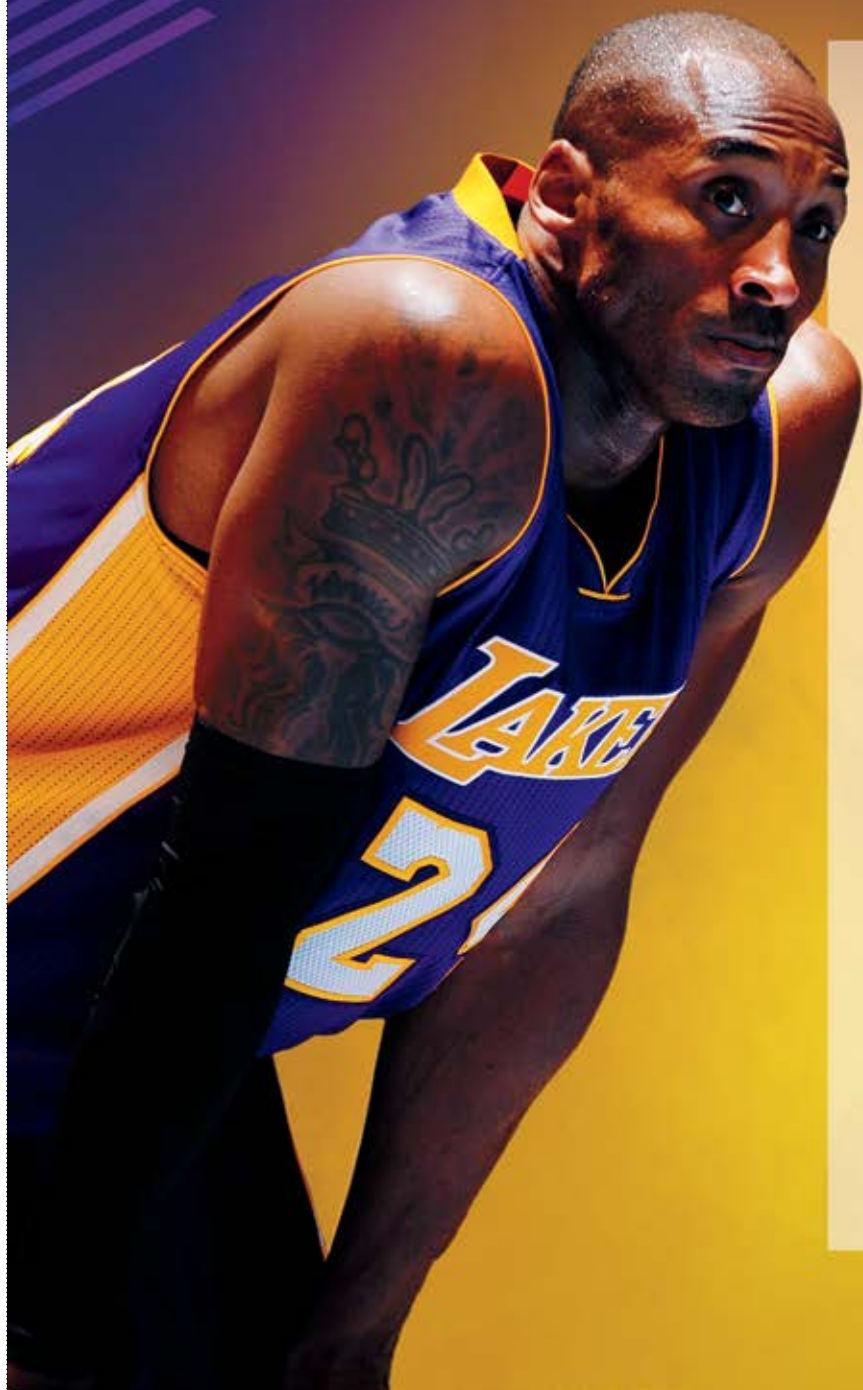
It also caused shockwaves in the business world, a space that Bryant was seemingly also on track to make an outsized impact.

While perhaps best known for his five NBA championship rings and 18 All-Star selections, Bryant had been taking the steps to build his own business legacy for himself and his family.

One of his first investments was in sports drink company BodyArmor, of which he purchased a 10% stake in 2014 for \$60 million. The company was later purchased by Coca-Cola and is aiming to generate \$1 billion in sales this year.

Other ventures include starting the venture firm Bryant Stibel in 2013 with Web.com founder Jeff Stibel, which led to successful investments in companies like Alibaba, Dell and Fortnite developer Epic Games. Bryant's former media company, Granity Studios, produced his animated short film *Dear Basketball*, which led him to become the first former athlete to be nominated and win an Academy Award.

"Now, championships come and go. Right? There's going to be another team that wins an NBA Championship, another player that wins another MVP award," Bryant told CNBC in 2016. "But if you really want to create something that lasts generations, you have to help inspire the next generation."





Here are four executives that worked closely with Bryant over his career about what they learned from him.

BRYANT STIBEL FOUNDING PARTNER JEFF STIBEL:

Kobe was a dynasty builder. He built a legendary dynasty with the Lakers over his illustrious 20-year basketball career, and was in the process of building another dynasty in business before he was taken from this world far too soon. In a short period of time in his business career, he successfully built a production company, produced Oscar and Emmy winning content, a NYT bestselling series of children's books, and invested and supported dozens of technology companies with us at Bryant Stibel. You can't do all this without having tremendous passion and drive, which for Kobe, burned as bright as the sun. There is a powerful lesson to learn here and it is that everyone should pursue what drives them, what inspires them, and ultimately what can make the most impact, both at work and in their lives. I miss Kobe every day but thankfully his legacy will continue to teach and inspire all of us forever.

NIKE'S ERIC AVAR, WHO WAS THE CHIEF CREATOR OF BRYANT'S SIGNATURE SNEAKERS:

There are honestly countless things we have learned from Kobe over the 15+ years that we have worked, collaborated and dreamed directly with him on.

Kobe relentlessly pushed us and challenged us to dive deeper, to think bolder and to achieve the balance between science, art and storytelling.

He taught us to push the understanding and limits of science and performance of his product. He demanded that we create the best performance basketball shoes on the court...period!

He taught us to push the boundaries of form and aesthetic often referring to the notion that there is no performance without beauty.

"IN THAT VERY MOMENT WITHOUT
FURTHER EXPLANATION, I KNEW
EXACTLY WHAT HE MEANT.
CURIOSITY IS EVERYTHING, IT
DRIVES EVERYTHING AND IS THE
ENERGY AND SOURCE OF WONDER,
UNDERSTANDING, INSPIRATION
AND CREATION FOR ALL WE DO."

ERIC AVAR

He taught us to push the limits of the "embedded story", fusing inspiration and purpose in all his products. That the best products have a deep and authentic narrative literally and figuratively woven into the very fabric of them.

Although all of these learnings have been important, there is one learning in particular that has proven to be the most profound and inspiring that has crystalized for me about a month or so before his passing.

During one of our eventful conversations, I posed him a question around Mamba Mentality — this is something we have discussed ad nauseam over the years but I wanted in his simplest of terms "what exactly is MAMBA MENTALITY?"

He paused for a moment and stated, "I have one word for you...CURIOSITY!"

In that very moment without further explanation, I knew exactly what he meant. Curiosity is everything, it drives everything and is the energy and source of wonder, understanding, inspiration and creation for all we do.

Behind the relentless work ethic, the pursuit of perfection, the ruthless mindset and the notion to simply be better...is CURIOSITY!



Kyle Kuzma #0 of the Los Angeles Lakers wears Kobe Bryant Nike sneakers during a preseason game against the Golden State Warriors at T-Mobile Arena on October 10, 2018.



Kobe Bryant acknowledges the crowd before taking on the Utah Jazz in Bryant's final NBA game at Staples Center on April 13, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA.



Kobe Bryant #24 of the Los Angeles Lakers address the media after the game against the Utah Jazz at Staples Center on April 13, 2016 in Los Angeles, CA.



Kobe Bryant #10 of United States kisses his gold medal after defeating China in the Men's Basketball gold medal game on Day 16 of the London 2012 Olympics Games at North Greenwich Arena on August 12, 2012 in London, England.



Kobe Bryant poses with his family at halftime after both his #8 and #24 Los Angeles Lakers jerseys are retired at Staples Center on December 18, 2017 in Los Angeles, CA.

NBPA EVP OF STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT & DEVELOPMENT CHRYSA CHIN:

For me, Kobe's attitude underscored what I learned from my family and taught my son, Joel.

Focus. Determination. A Winning Mentality. Give Your All Every Day.

As a lover of the game and a seasoned industry executive, I was always encouraged by his accomplishments on and off the court. I witnessed and knew Kobe consistently applied the same 4 tenets — FOCUS, DETERMINATION, WINNING MENTALITY, and GIVE YOUR ALL EVERY DAY — to anything he committed to. His ability to prioritize the two most important things in his life — his family and the game — yielded the successes, personally and professionally, that we all aspire to achieve. By employing those principles, I believe he was able to confidently expect a "W" no matter what obstacles he encountered.



Kobe Bryant pictured at NikeTown on October 22, 2017 in London, England.



HYPERICE FOUNDER ANTHONY KATZ:

I met Kobe for the first time in 2009. When I met him, we were both about 30 years old and I had seen almost every game he played as a Laker and followed his career very closely off the court. That summer, he was coming off his fourth NBA title and was already a global icon. But everything I knew about him was filtered through the media, so I was really curious to know who he really was. Over the next few years, I got to know Kobe from our long conversations about basketball, the science of recovery, branding, and film. If there's one thing that stood out to me about Kobe, it was his relentless quest for knowledge. His curiosity was the engine of his genius. If he saw a film he really liked, it wasn't enough for him to just

watch it and move on. He wanted to know everything about the backstory and the people who created it. He would often leverage his network and get in touch with the director of the film, or the film's lead actor or actress. This was how he was with his interests - he wanted to know everything there was to know about whatever it was. But he only wanted to learn from the people who were the best in the world at whatever the craft was. He was interested in design, so he found a way to meet Jony Ive. Became interested in investing, and met Warren Buffet. Directing? Christopher Nolan. As for fellow athletes and coaches from other sports? Only the icons garnered his interest. He wanted to know how the best in every other sport did it. Anything that would make him better at his craft. Kobe only wanted to learn from the best.

Above: Kobe Bryant walk out to center court during his jersey retirement ceremony at halftime of a basketball game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Golden State Warriors at Staples Center on December 18, 2017 in Los Angeles, CA. Below: Kobe Bryant attends the 90th Annual Academy Awards Governors Ball at Hollywood & Highland Center on March 4, 2018 in Hollywood, CA.



Kobe Bryant poses for a photo during the Mamba Mentality book launch Q & A on October 25, 2018 at Staples Center in Los Angeles, CA.



Kobe Bryant sits on the sideline during a game against the Dallas Mavericks on December 26, 2014 at the American Airlines Center in Dallas, TX.





NEW EXPANDED MULTIMEDIA PLATFORM TO SHOWCASE THE STORIES, SUCCESSES, LESSONS AND PERSONALITIES OF NBA AND WNBA LEGENDS

The National Basketball Retired Players Association (NBRPA) announced the expansion and launch of Legends Media & Entertainment (LME), a multifaceted storytelling platform that will produce, distribute and quantify the wide-reaching stories of many of the NBA and WNBA's biggest stars. The content will span the history of both leagues and feature more recent alums of the game ranging from Sheryl Swoopes and Grant Hill to the sport's greatest legends and business successes on and off the court, delivered through all forms of media, from print and spoken word to long and short form video.

The NBRPA represents over 1,000 former NBA and WNBA players, making it the largest agency of its kind in basketball. This has allowed for direct access to players for opportunities domestically and internationally.

"With the creation of LME, we are building a multimedia platform for some of the most compelling men and women connected to basketball's history and culture under one umbrella, something which has been asked for, and needed for some time," said NBRPA President and CEO Scott Rochelle. "LME will be a vibrant stop for fans, businesses and others who want to enjoy, learn and explore the amazing stories of our Legends both on and off the court. These stories are some of the best in the global business of sport, and now we can house them under one impactful roof."

NBA Champion and NBRPA Director Caron Butler adds, "Every NBA and WNBA player has a story to tell and Legends Media & Entertainment offers ALL Legends a platform to tell their stories and let their voices be heard."

Some of the key unified elements of LME will include:

Legends Magazine which debuted in 2018 and is the official publication for NBA and WNBA Legends. Produced quarterly, Legends Magazine has featured cover stories about NBRPA Director Caron Butler, Jerry Stackhouse, Elton Brand, Jamal Mashburn and "The Knuckleheads" – Quentin Richardson

and Darius Miles. Each issue is delivered to all former players, active players, coaches, stakeholders, influencers and league officials worldwide.

Legends Studios also debuted in 2018 with the launch of original live-action and animated short videos and two podcasts, the All-Access Legends Podcast and On Deck with Scott Rochelle. In April 2020, Legends Live, a weekly web series broadcasted to multiple social media platforms featuring live conversations with NBA and WNBA Legends, was added to the Legends Studios portfolio. In addition to 32 standard episodes, Legends Live also covered the 2020 WNBA Draft and ESPN's The Last Dance with live commentary from Legends. Last week, media personality Tyler Johnson, aka Trill Withers, joined the LME team as host of Legends Live, where he will spend time with many of the game's most successful and dynamic personalities and business people. Johnson will also be a key contributor to Legends Magazine, the All-Access Legends Podcast and the NBRPA's social media strategy and content.

To follow along with LME
content from the NBRPA,
find us on social media.

TWITTER, INSTAGRAM,
YOUTUBE AND TWITCH:
@NBAALUMNI

FACEBOOK:
NBA ALUMNI



Legends Studios, presented by the NBRPA, is the #1 podcast destination for basketball fans who want to hear from NBA and WNBA Legends.

Episodes of the All-Access Legends Podcast, On Deck with Scott Rochelle and Legends Live with Trill Withers can all be found in one place at Legends Studios.



SUBSCRIBE to Legends Studios on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, Stitcher or wherever you listen to podcasts to stay up-to-date with Legends content.





THE LAST DANCE

MICHAEL JORDAN. THE 1990S CHICAGO BULLS. RELIVING THE LEGACY OF ONE OF BASKETBALL'S MOST ICONIC ATHLETES AND TEAMS

by **MIKE MCCARTHY**



Michael Jordan #23 of the Chicago Bulls handles the ball against the Dallas Mavericks on March 12, 1998 at the Reunion Arena in Dallas, TX.

There's one scene in ESPN's "The Last Dance" that's a personal favorite of director Jason Hehir.

We see Michael Jordan — at the height of his powers during the 1997-1998 NBA season — driving into the Chicago Bulls' old training center in Deerfield, Ill.

As Air Jordan cruises into the parking lot, another Bulls employee scurries aside. Like a King entering his castle, MJ parks his sleek sports car wherever he wants before strolling inside for practice.

The wordless but riveting footage encapsulates one of the most appealing aspects of the Emmy Award-winning 10-part docuseries, Hehir said.

"The Last Dance" is not just a documentary. It's a time machine that transports viewers back to a sports world before social media. The film lifts the curtain on how Jordan and his Bulls lived, trained and played in a much different time and place.

Thanks to social media platforms, today's superstars are, if anything, overexposed. LeBron James, for example, invites his 72 million Instagram followers to virtually join him on "Taco Tuesdays" during the off-season.

Jordan's image, on the other hand, was carefully cultivated. Fans saw only what he and his corporate handlers wanted them to see. Finally, with "The Last Dance," fans got the opportunity to see Jordan "in the wild," as Hehir puts it.



Michael Jordan #23 of the Chicago Bulls celebrates in the locker room while spraying champagne after defeating the Utah Jazz on June 14, 1998 during the 1998 NBA Championship Finals at the Delta Center in Salt Lake City, UT. Bulls won 87-86.



Michael Jordan #23 of the Chicago Bulls drives during a game played on May 31, 1998 at the United Center in Chicago, IL.



Michael Jordan #23 and Scottie Pippen #33 of the Chicago Bulls celebrate in the locker room after winning the 1998 NBA Championship against the Utah Jazz on June 14, 1998 in Salt Lake City, UT.



Dennis Rodman #91 and Scottie Pippen #33 of the Chicago Bulls listen to head coach Phil Jackson during the game against the Charlotte Hornets at the United Center in Chicago, IL. The Bulls defeated the Hornets 93-84.



Scottie Pippen #33, Michael Jordan #23, and Head Coach Phil Jackson of Chicago Bulls are smiling at the Chicago Bulls Championship Parade and Rally on June 16, 1997 at Grant Park in Chicago, IL.

"Michael was the superstar of all superstars, but there were far less outlets for him to be publicized than there are now. You didn't have social media. You had a handful of cable stations that were showing his image. You obviously had the major TV networks. But you didn't have access into his life — especially off the floor. So we were not accustomed to seeing him out of uniform. And when we heard his voice, during a post-game interview or in a commercial, it was something that was very scripted and regimented," Hehir said.

If nothing else, ESPN's most-watched documentary also reminded the world of Jordan's sheer charisma.

The six-time NBA champion and "Dream

**"IN ORDER TO AMPLIFY
HIS ACCOMPLISHMENTS
LATER IN THE SERIES,
WHEN HE BECOMES
SUPERHUMAN, IT
WAS IMPORTANT TO
ESTABLISH HIM AS
VERY HUMAN EARLY ON"**

*JASON HEHIR,
DIRECTOR*

Team" Olympic gold medalist was not only the world's best athlete, but one of the top pitchers for brands like Nike, McDonald's and Gatorade.

"Be Like Mike," exhorted Gatorade in a popular ad campaign of the time. And a smitten generation took Gatorade's advice, buying his sneakers and No. 23 jersey and slapping his poster on a million bedroom walls.

Then there's the colorful supporting cast in "The Last Dance."

Hehir and his producers conducted 108 interviews about the 90's Bulls dynasty. Subjects ranged from the Bulls' Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman and Phil Jackson to former Presidents Barack Obama and Bill Clinton.



The 1997-98 NBA Chicago Bulls pose for a team portrait in Chicago, IL. Front row (left to right): Randy Brown, Ron Harper, Scottie Pippen, Michael Jordan, Dennis Rodman, Jud Buechler, Steve Kerr. Second row: , Rusty LaRue, Dickey Simpkins, Toni Kukoc, Joe Klein, Luc Longley, Bill Wennington, Scott Burrell, Keith Booth. Back Row: Chip Schaefer (Trainer), Frank Hamblen (Asst Coach), Bill Cartwright (Asst. Coach), Head Coach Phil Jackson, Jimmy Rodgers (Asst. Coach), and Tex Winter (Asst. Coach), John Ligmanowski (Equip Manager)



As Hehir says, the Bulls dynasty had Jordan as Batman, Pippen as Robin and Rodman as the Joker. Throw in Jackson as Zen Master and “you could have done full-length documentaries about so many of the figures we examined in the story.”

ESPN’s series also takes viewers back to a rougher, tougher NBA. It was a bruising era in which teams like the Detroit Pistons physically beat Jordan up before finally giving way to his brilliance.

They hated each other. They lived to defeat each other. They played their entire careers for a single franchise. Even as Bird’s Celtics gave way to Thomas’ Pistons, and the Pistons gave way to Jordan’s Bulls, they went out kicking and screaming.

By reliving those stories, “The Last Dance” filled the longing among some fans for the rivalries and animosities that are largely missing from today’s NBA, Hehir said.

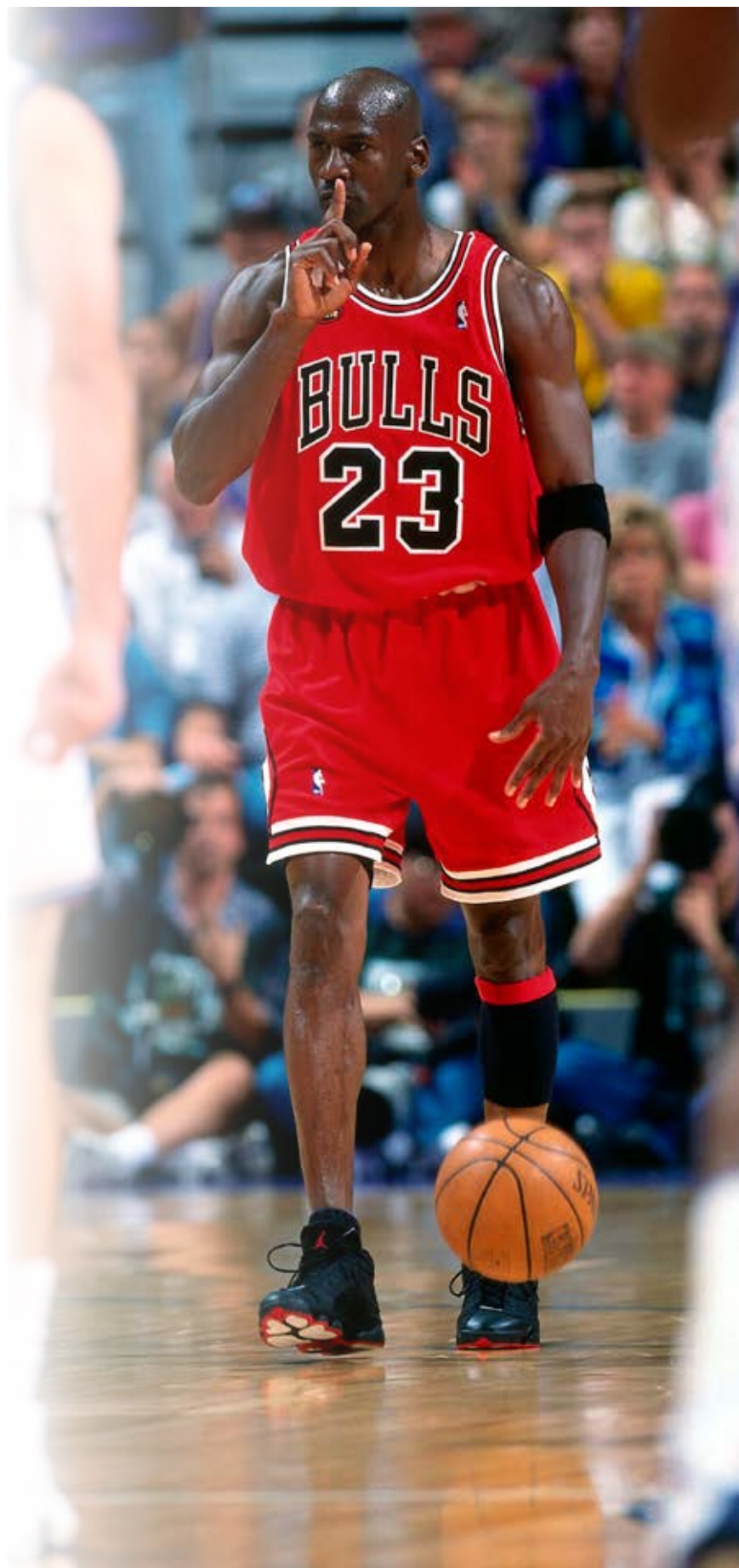
Even now, Jordan retains an air of intrigue, preferring a more private life as the majority owner and chairman of the Charlotte Hornets rather than a more public role as a TV analyst like TNT’s Charles Barkley or Shaquille O’Neal.

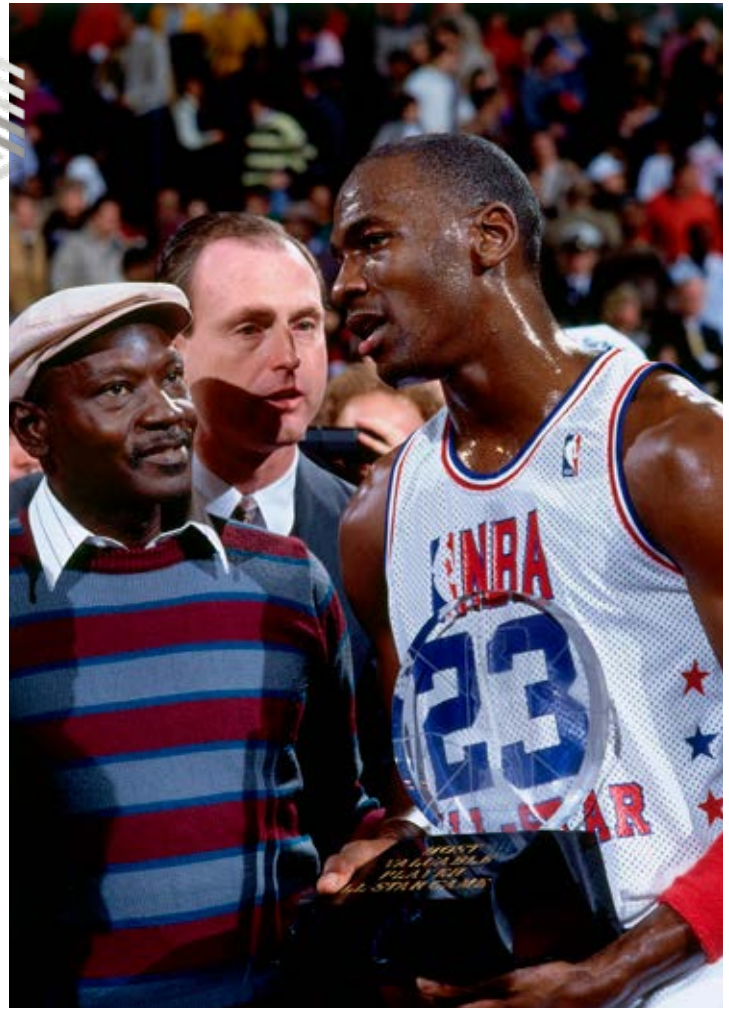
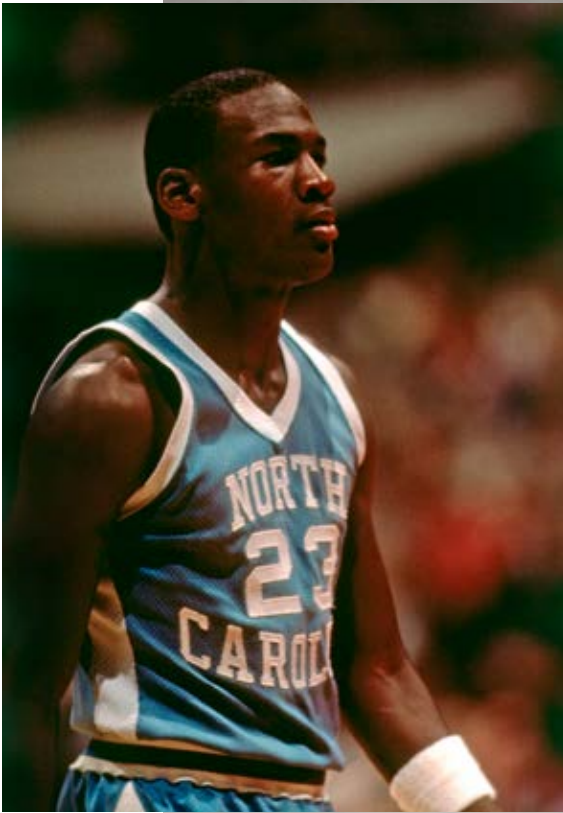


1998: Michael Jordan #23 of the Chicago Bulls guards the ball from John Stockton #12 of the Utah Jazz during the NBA Finals Game Three at the United Center in Chicago. The Bulls defeated the Jazz 96-54.



1989: Isiah Thomas #11 of the Detroit Pistons looks to pass against Michael Jordan #23 of the Chicago Bulls during an NBA game in 1989 at the Chicago Stadium in Chicago.





Michael Jordan #23 of the Eastern Conference All Stars stands on the court with his father James Jordan after receiving the MVP award in 1988 at Chicago Stadium in Chicago, IL.

Yes, “The Last Dance” highlighted the obsessive competitiveness that alienated many of Jordan’s competitors and teammates alike. “They all knew who I was. My mentality was to go out and win — at any cost,” Jordan said in the series, offering no apologies.

But the documentary also showed a different, more human side to the basketball legend.

Viewers saw footage of Jordan as a broke college kid at North Carolina, humbly asking his mother Deloris Jordan for stamp money. We saw a son grieving over the murder of his father James Jordan. Then riding the buses of minor league baseball to honor his dad’s sports dreams. We watched his trusting relationship with Gus Lett, the Chicago Bulls

security guard who Jordan regarded as his “second father.”

That’s why Hehir deliberately placed the interview scenes with Jordan’s mom in “Episode I.” If “The Last Dance” only depicted Jordan as a ruthless competitor, it would not have worked as well dramatically.

“In order to amplify his accomplishments later in the series, when he becomes superhuman, it was important to establish him as very human early on,” Hehir said.

The highest-rated NBA Finals in history is still Jordan and the Bulls’ sixth and final championship over the Utah Jazz in 1998. The legacy has been so engraved throughout the league and sports world that the Last Dance never really ended.



LEGEND SIGHTINGS

FORMER PLAYERS CONTINUE BETTERING THE GAME AND TAKING ON COACHING ROLES IN THE SECOND ACT OF THEIR BASKETBALL CAREERS



Doc Rivers, then-head coach of the LA Clippers, seen prior to the game against the Indiana Pacers on March 19, 2019 at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, CA. On October 3, 2020, the Philadelphia 76ers announced Rivers as their new head coach.



Teresa Weatherspoon of the New Orleans Pelicans smiles prior to a game against the Utah Jazz on November 23, 2019 at vivint.SmartHome Arena in Salt Lake City, UT. On November 16, 2020, Weatherspoon was promoted to a full-time assistant coach for the Pelicans.



Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame Class of 2018 enshrinee Steve Nash speaks during the 2018 Basketball Hall of Fame Enshrinement Ceremony at Symphony Hall on September 7, 2018 in Springfield, MA. On September 3, 2020, Nash was announced as the new head coach for the Brooklyn Nets.



Assistant Coach Kristi Toliver of the Washington Wizards looks on during the game against the Sacramento Kings on March 3, 2020 at Golden 1 Center in Sacramento, CA.



Assistant Coach Jason Kidd of the Los Angeles Lakers looks on prior to a game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the New York Knicks on January 22, 2020 at Madison Square Garden in New York City, NY.



Assistant Coach Becky Hammon of the San Antonio Spurs coaches against the Sacramento Kings on February 8, 2020 at Golden 1 Center in Sacramento, CA.



Tyronn Lue, then-head coach of the Cleveland Cavaliers, looks on against the Indiana Pacers on October 27, 2018 at Quicken Loans Arena in Cleveland, OH. On October 20, 2020, Lue was promoted to head coach of the Los Angeles Clippers.



Assistant Coach Natalie Nakase of the LA Clippers smiles against the Brooklyn Nets on March 17, 2019 at STAPLES Center in Los Angeles, CA.



ADVOCATES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

*A CLOSER LOOK AT
CURRENT AND FORMER
NBA AND WNBA PLAYERS
USING THEIR PLATFORMS
TO ADVOCATE FOR
RACIAL EQUALITY*

by **VIKAS CHOKSHI**

Both NBA and WNBA players of past and present have heeded the much needed calls as advocates of social injustice. Nothing about the NBA and WNBA seasons was normal, especially after the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. Ever since the NBA and WNBA announced that it was returning to action late July, players and coaches have addressed issues they care about via Zoom, social media, and symbolic gestures. The NBA and WNBA also painted “Black Lives Matter” on its courts and

enabled social justice statements to be worn on the back of jerseys.

Nearly 75% of the NBA and WNBA’s players identify as Black or African American. After Floyd’s murder many of the players took to the streets, organizing and participating in peaceful protests. They walked arm-in-arm with alarmed citizens, activists and organizers, drawing attention to the tentacles of racial and social injustice.

Many athletes from a variety of sports share a common thread: they’re all making a difference.

The Phoenix Mercury stand in honor of Kobe Bryant’s birthday before game against the Washington Mystics on August 23, 2020 at the Feld Entertainment Center in Palmetto, FL.





MAYA MOORE

After what transpired this summer, Moore's name is now among sports' most influential civil-rights voices. Moore, a four-time WNBA champion, six-time All-Star and 2014 Most Valuable Player, put her career on hold in February 2019 to pursue a career in criminal justice reform. Her goal was to free Jonathan Irons from the Jefferson City Correctional Center in Missouri. While in high school, Moore learned about Irons' story through a prison ministry group. She then proceeded to meet him shortly before she left to attend the University of Connecticut.

Irons was arrested at 16 and then given a 50-year sentence on charges of burglary and assault. 22 years later, Moore led the charge in reopening his case. A judge overturned Irons' convictions in March and then a county prosecutor declined to retry the case. Moore scored her greatest advocacy victory yet, as Irons was then released from Missouri's Jefferson City Correctional Facility with Moore there to greet him. Moore pledges to continue to fight for those who can't themselves.

Maya Moore #23 of the Minnesota Lynx handles the ball against the Connecticut Sun on July 15, 2018 at Target Center in Minneapolis, MN.



RENEE MONTGOMERY

Montgomery decided to opt out of the WNBA season to fully dedicate herself to fighting social injustices. Since then, she has been working relentlessly to increase votes in Georgia, joined the LeBron James-led "More Than A Vote" campaign, and launched her own initiative titled "Remember the 3rd." Montgomery also is working on uplifting HBCUs, particularly in Atlanta with Morris Brown College via another initiative she has championed, "The Last Yard".

Montgomery isn't a stranger to standing up for what is right. In 2016, she played for the Minnesota Lynx, when WNBA players became early supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement. The Lynx were one of the first teams to wear pro-Black Lives Matter t-shirts during warmups.

The Dream guard also started the Renee Montgomery Foundation in 2019. The organization's goal is to impact the community of Atlanta through Montgomery's learnings in sports such as leadership, teamwork and confidence building.

Renee Montgomery #21 of the Atlanta Dream handles the ball against the Phoenix Mercury on August 16, 2019 at Talking Stick Resort Arena in Phoenix, AZ.



Caron Butler receives the 15th Annual National Civil Rights Museum Sports Legacy Award during a game between the New Orleans Pelicans and the Memphis Grizzlies on January 20, 2020 at FedExForum in Memphis, TN.

CARON BUTLER

The former NBA star is currently an assistant coach for the Miami Heat. He hosts a podcast called “The Tuff Juice Podcast,” and is a producer with CloseUp360. In addition to the great work Butler does in regards to basketball, he has also become a force for social justice and community impact. Most recently, Butler released a special video feature that was recorded during his hometown return to Racine, Wis., for Juneteenth this year. Through the CloseUp360 partnership with Yellowbrick, viewers of the feature were invited to participate in Butler’s essay contest, from which 25 scholarship winners were selected.

Butler has also been hosting the NBA’s virtual roundtables on social justice and recorded a remote chat for CloseUp360’s “Hoopers Meet Heroes” series with his 7th grade English teacher from Racine, simultaneously highlighting the importance of educators and spotlighting his hometown community. Butler continues to invest in his hometown of Racine’s underserved communities.

In addition, Butler also is the host of the “1-on-1 With Caron Butler” interview program through NBA Cares. He continues to encourage the NBA to align itself with the Black Lives Matter movement and to be a beacon of change while other sports leagues have shied away from such statements.

REX CHAPMAN

When Chapman isn’t having fun on Twitter, he is doing some great things off of it. The former University of Kentucky star and 12-year NBA veteran created the Rex Chapman Foundation, with a focus on raising funds and awareness for other non-profit groups fighting against the prescription drug epidemic in the United States. After COVID-19 hit, Chapman’s Foundation donated \$20,000 to the New Orleans Pelicans and Saints Social Justice Leadership Alliance to help coronavirus relief efforts throughout the Greater New Orleans community. The donation provided masks, PPE, hand sanitizer and other support to children in non-traditional school settings, group homes and detention centers, among others.

Rex Chapman waves to the crowd during week seven of the BIG3 three on three basketball league at Rupp Arena on August 6, 2017 in Lexington, KY.





LeBron James #23 of the Los Angeles Lakers points to the sky as he wears 24 on his finger guard to honor Kobe Bryant against the Portland Trail Blazers in Game Four of the Western Conference First Round during the 2020 NBA Playoffs at AdventHealth Arena at ESPN Wide World of Sports Complex on August 24, 2020 in Lake Buena Vista, FL.

STEPHEN JACKSON

George Floyd's death has resonated as a rallying cry for a nation too long affected by police brutality. Floyd's death hit Jackson hard, as he knew Floyd growing up in the Houston area.

Post basketball, Jackson found his voice co-hosting the popular "All the Smoke" podcast with Matt Barnes on Showtime. Jackson, who called Floyd his "twin", is now using that voice to bring about change for social justice. He says he found a new calling as a vocal leader for the black community to fight injustices such as what happened to Floyd. While he did not expect to be in this position, he is embracing it by organizing protests, talking to state officials and encouraging people to vote.



Stephen Jackson #5 of the Killer 3s reacts during a press conference during the BIG3 Playoffs at Smoothie King Center on August 25, 2019 in New Orleans, LA.

NATASHA CLOUD

Cloud opted out of the season to focus on social justice after the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. Since then, she has made public appearances to discuss social justice and has been outspoken about the topic on social media. Over the summer, Cloud led her teammates and over 1,000 participants in a Juneteenth rally. Wizards guards John Wall and Bradley Beal also walked alongside her during that march. She also spent time in Washington focusing on issues like voter outreach.

Cloud's commitment to social justice is nothing new for her, as she has continually used her platform to call for social change on pressing matters. The WNBA champion has been actively involved within the DC community for years. In 2019, she organized the Mystics media blackout in response to shootings near Hendley Elementary School in Ward 8. The organization backed her as she made a concerted effort to direct attention to the gun violence surrounding youth in the DC community.



Natasha Cloud marches to the MLK Memorial to support Black Lives Matter and to mark the liberation of slavery on June 19, 2020 in Washington, DC. Juneteenth commemorates June 19, 1865, when a Union general read orders in Galveston, Texas stating all enslaved people in Texas were free according to federal law.



JOHN THOMPSON JR.

The Georgetown and basketball community mourned the late great coach John Thompson Jr. who passed away this year at the age of 78. Thompson was successful on the court by becoming the first black coach to win a National Championship but was a pillar for social justice off the court. Thompson challenged the fairness of Proposition 42 and standardized testing, a rule that barred freshmen from playing games if they failed to qualify academically. During his tenure as a coach at Georgetown, he pulled his players off the floor in protest during one game and walked off the floor in the middle of another. Thompson railed against the criminal justice system for its inherent bias against young Black men and showed that he wasn't all talk when he offered Allen Iverson a scholarship to Georgetown after he was released from jail. As talented as Iverson was, no other big program wanted to get near him at the time.

Former Head Coach John Thompson Jr. cheers his former team during a college basketball game against the Georgetown Hoyas on March 9, 2013 at the Verizon Center in Washington, DC. The Hoyas won 61-39.



Jerry Harkness during the ABA 50th Reunion on April 7, 2018 at the Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Indianapolis, IN.

JERRY HARKNESS

Harkness, who was a former NBA player and most remembered for his role as team captain and All-American player on the 1963 Loyola national championship team, was also a champion for civil and social justice.

The backstory of the Ramblers' 1963 tournament win was meaningful as well. After African-American athletes were excluded for years, things started to change in the early 1960s when playing college basketball. Even then, there were still unwritten rules about exactly how prominent a black player's role would be allowed on the court. But Loyola's coach, George Ireland, had other ideas. In 1960, he decided to start recruiting the best basketball players available, regardless of race. His team, with four African-American starters, Harkness being one of them, overcame brutal racism, especially when traveling in the south. By 1963, the Ramblers were one of the best teams in the country.

Harkness' accolades spoke for him as his career resulted in numerous awards. When it came to basketball, he was inducted into Indiana, Manhattan, and Harlem Hall of Fames and the National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame with the 1963 Loyola team. For his community work, he has received the NCAA Silver Anniversary Community Service Award; the Boy Scout "This is Your Life" Service Award; the Jefferson Community Service Award; the Sports Illustrated Award; and the Muhammad Ali Award. He also received recognition from President Barack Obama for his contributions.



A general overall view of the court with Black Lives Matter messaging as part of the NBA Restart 2020 on July 7, 2020 at The Arena at ESPN Wide World of Sports in Orlando, FL.

WE'RE PROUD TO SUPPORT THE NATIONAL RETIRED BASKETBALL PLAYER ASSOCIATION

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INSIDE THE WNBA BUBBLE

HOW A GLOBAL PANDEMIC CREATED A COMPETITIVE AND EMOTIONAL SEASON LIKE NO OTHER

by **TORREY HART**

When WNBA players came together at the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla. July to play their 2020 season, much was at risk.

The league was looking to continue the tremendous momentum it had built during its offseason, highlighted by a CBA extension that granted players new benefits like paid maternity leave, pay increases and betting housing options.

It also came as the league's players wanted the league to join them in focusing on social justice initiatives.

All of that was compounded by the challenges of playing a single-site tournament away from their families amid a pandemic.

Four players who competed in the 'Wubble' chatted about the experience and how the unique circumstances impacted the competitive side of the game.



Lexie Brown #4 of the Minnesota Lynx handles the ball against the Indiana Fever on August 7, 2020 in Palmetto, FL.

Q: How did playing a season in the Wubble differ for you from an emotional and mental perspective than a regular year?

Lexie Brown - Minnesota Lynx:

Playing in the Wubble for me was extremely hard mentally and emotionally. I am a very emotional person and basketball has always been an outlet. But it felt more like a cage this season. And with the ups and downs of a season, it is always good for me to do things I enjoy and see people I love that are completely separate from basketball. I didn't have that and it affected me. Especially when I was dealing with my concussion. I felt like I had to play because there was nothing else to do.

Bella Alarie - Dallas Wings:

As a rookie, there really isn't another year to compare it to. However, in many ways, it felt a lot like college—being on a campus, going from practice to



Jocelyn Willoughby #13 of the New York Liberty plays defense during a game against the Las Vegas Aces on August 9, 2020 at Feld Entertainment Center in Palmetto, FL.

meals to film and spending all my time with teammates. Emotionally and mentally, it was tough to be away from family and friends at the start of my professional career.

Allie Quigley - Chicago Sky:

The biggest difference was the amount of effort I put into staying mentally strong. In a regular season, I'm used to seeing my family (parents siblings nieces nephews) all the time. This makes me happy, especially after tough games/losses. We didn't have this in the bubble as an outlet so I found myself really focused on staying positive and happy to try to make up for that void. I did a good job for the most part.

Jocelyn Willoughby - New York Liberty:

The Wubble definitely had its moments of being emotionally and mentally challenging. Understandably, a part of the mental exhaustion was due to the social and political climate that we are living in... grappling with fact that there is civil unrest going on in the world and that despite us being removed or separate from the unrest in a physical sense, as a league of predominantly black women, many of us identify and resonate with the unrest in an emotional sense. As a league we chose to dedicate the season to the SayHerName campaign and demanding justice for Breonna Taylor. The subject matter is inherently heavy and there is a mental and emotional toll that comes with educating, advocating and organizing around it.

But of course, there was also a different level of mental focus and resilience that this season required for our performance on the court...and definitely more than I believe a regular year would require. Playing an every-other-day schedule for the regular season required me to be "on"



Bella Alarie



Allie Quigley



**"IT WAS ENERGIZING
TO BE AROUND OTHER
TEAMS, SEEING
EVERYONE GRIND
DAY AFTER DAY, AND
KNOWING THAT I HAD
TO STAY MENTALLY AND
PHYSICALLY TOUGH
TO BE PREPARED TO
PLAY THEM."**

BELLA ALARIE



and mentally locked-in essentially at all times. My mind could easily be consumed by basketball. If the focus wasn't practice, then it was the game...or film from a previous game, or scout in preparation for the next game. Even for those of us who love the sport and can eat, sleep, and breathe basketball, being "on" all the time can be a grind and cause burn out or increased exhaustion if we're not careful to take breaks and decompress...particularly when it's harder to separate our professional and personal lives and compartmentalize the different aspects of our personhood.

Q: Did you notice any differences in how you felt competitively and physically while being around other teams and potentially having your mind on the game for so much of the time?

Brown:

I loved seeing some of my friends in the W that I normally don't get to see. But overall having to be "on" 24/7 was draining. It was basketball all the time and it was particularly harder for me to bounce back from tough performances. Also, the lack of practice time was detrimental to me.

Alarie:

I definitely had my mind on basketball for the majority of my time in the Wubble. There isn't much of an escape from basketball when you're around your teammates and other teams every single day. As a rookie, having the privilege of seeing all the women in the league put in work every day was a great example for me. It was energizing to be around other teams, seeing everyone grind day after day, and knowing that I had to stay mentally and physically tough to be prepared to play them.

Quigley:

I don't think being around players/teams affected me competitively. I think no fans/the environment had a bigger impact on competitiveness. Also, I think playing every other day can sometimes wear on your competitiveness. After the 10th game in 22 days, it can be hard to get amped up like you were for game one.



Bella Alarie #32 of the Dallas Wings drives to the basket against the Phoenix Mercury on August 10, 2020 at Feld Entertainment Center in Palmetto, FL.



"KNOWING THAT THE OTHER TEAM IS GOING HARD MAKES ME AND ANY OTHER COMPETITOR WANT TO GO HARDER IN ORDER TO MATCH (IF NOT EXCEED) THE ENERGY THAT'S COMING FROM NEXT DOOR. "

JOCELYN WILLOUGHBY

Willoughby:

I didn't notice a physical difference as a result of being around other teams. I do think there was a competitive difference, however... which definitely came with its own pros and cons. Normally when you are in your practice facility, it's just you and your team—you don't hear other teams or your eventual opponents playing and yelling from the adjacent court. From a competitive standpoint, knowing that the other team is going hard makes me and any other competitor want to go harder in order to match (if not exceed) the energy that's coming from next door. Constantly being around other teams also allowed us to take note of the habits of other players and teams. For example, as a rookie it was inspiring to see other players doing extra work in the weight room, or coming in the evening's open gym hours for extra shots. Again, seeing that made me want to raise my own bar. On the flip side, as a competitor, you're not always eager to see the team you're getting ready to play... or that you've just played (particularly if you've lost the game). Sometimes seeing players or even refs allowed me to dwell on games for longer than I realistically should focus on them (especially since another game was coming in less than 48 hours). But ultimately, being in the same vicinity of other teams also allowed for the competitiveness to be set aside and for real camaraderie to take root. The league is filled with some pretty phenomenal women and it was nice to see the human side of them, and not just the player/competitive side.



Jocelyn Willoughby #13 of the New York Liberty handles the ball against the Connecticut Sun on August 22, 2020 at Feld Entertainment Center in Palmetto, FL.



(Above:) Lexie Brown #4 of the Minnesota Lynx looks on before the game against the Los Angeles Sparks on August 31, 2020. (Left:) The Seattle Storm celebrates winning the WNBA Championship after defeating the Las Vegas Aces 92-59 during Game Three of the WNBA Finals at Feld Entertainment Center on October 6, 2020.



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