

LEGENDS

IN MEMORIAM

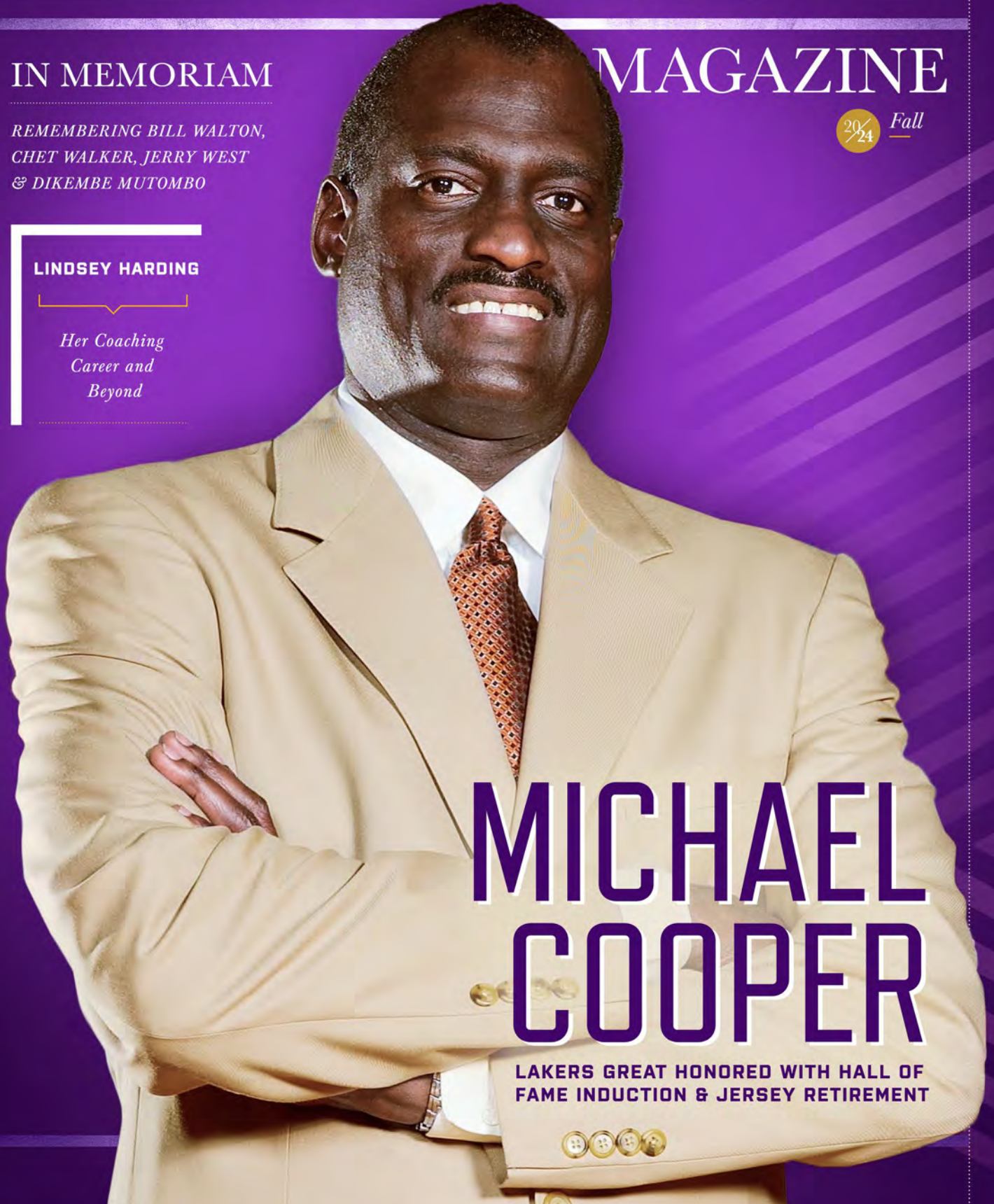
REMEMBERING BILL WALTON,
CHET WALKER, JERRY WEST
& DIKEMBE MUTOMBO

LINDSEY HARDING

*Her Coaching
Career and
Beyond*

MAGAZINE

20/24 Fall



MICHAEL COOPER

LAKERS GREAT HONORED WITH HALL OF
FAME INDUCTION & JERSEY RETIREMENT



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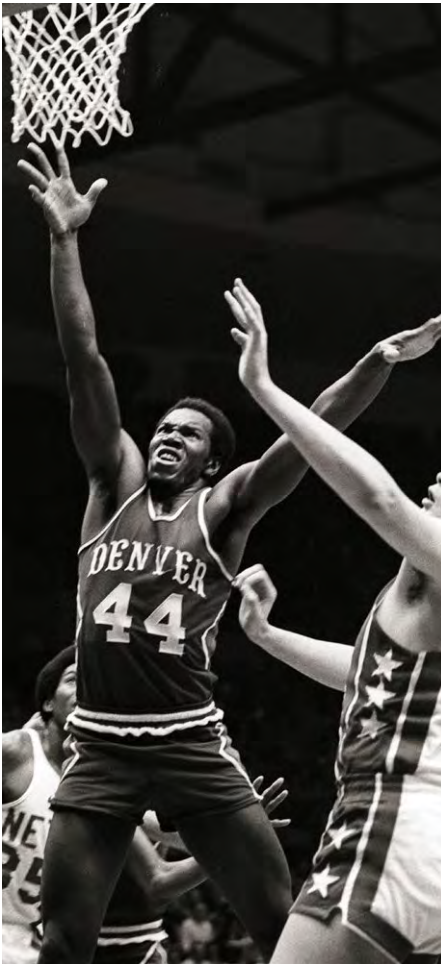


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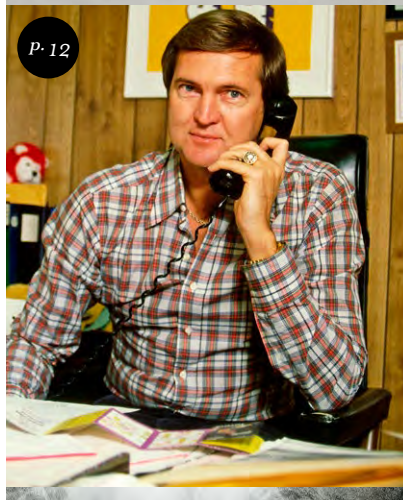
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REMEMBERING BILL WALTON, JERRY WEST, CHET WALKER, AND DIKEMBE MUTOMBO AS LEGENDS WHO SHAPED THE NBA



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CHASE BUDINGER

"I DIDN'T KNOW HOW LONG THIS JOURNEY COULD TAKE... BUT I DEFINITELY MADE IT A GOAL OF MINE RIGHT AWAY LIKE, 'ALRIGHT, NOW THAT I'M MAKING THIS SWITCH, THIS IS MY NEW GOAL AND I'M PUTTING EVERYTHING I CAN INTO IT TO GET TO THE OLYMPICS.'"



LEGENDS SUMMER GETAWAY 2024

ONCE AGAIN TAKES LAS VEGAS BY STORM

by JULIO MANTEIGA



There's a marketing slogan used by Las Vegas in recent years: "What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas." Well, we aren't about to adhere to that. We can't wait to tell the world what happened in Vegas.

For some time now, Las Vegas has become the summer home of not only the NBA but also the NBRPA's Legends Summer Getaway, and this past summer was no different. This year, there was a slight twist; instead of holding the annual rendezvous during NBA Summer League events, the NBRPA scheduled their events to coincide with USA Basketball's Las Vegas training camp and preparations ahead of the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, France.

Year after year, this event has grown, and this year proved to be the biggest yet, with over 200 former players and guests descending onto the latest crown jewel of the Vegas strip: the brand-new and fabulous Fontainebleau resort. The hotel brand that is synonymous with luxury hosted our legends for three days of camaraderie, informational sessions, laughs, golf, and parties.

As the legends arrived at the Fontainebleau, they took in the grandiose entrance, ever-present Art Deco architecture, and incredible amenities that come along with this iconic hotel brand. After all, the Fontainebleau is known for hosting some of Hollywood's elite throughout its illustrious history, and now it would be home to a who's who of NBA, WNBA, ABA, and Harlem Globetrotter legends. Fans gawked and snapped pictures as the likes of Michael Cooper, Byron Scott, Derrick Coleman, Spencer

Haywood, Nancy Lieberman, Allan Houston, and so many others strolled through the lobby and casino on their way to the NBRPA events.

Day one commenced with what is the most impactful and beneficial program this organization provides: the NBRPA Health Screenings. Beginning at 7 a.m., legends lined up for their scheduled visits with a battery of health experts who made sure the legends were receiving the proper care. Bloodwork, EKGs, echocardiograms, balance tests, and brain scans were all featured in what is the most comprehensive former-player health program in all of sports. As the health screenings wrapped up, two other staples of NBRPA events began to commence – the Legends Lounge and Legends Media Day.

The Legends Lounge is the legends' home away from home and thanks to their diverse stable of partners, this is where the party begins for so many NBRPA events. Legends received their credentials and schedules, caught up with friends, and, of course, showed everyone that they still have that soft touch on their jumpers as they shot hoops on the basketball court set up inside the lounge. It's not every day that one can watch Craig Hodges show off his form that won him three NBA 3-point shooting contests, see Harold "Lefty" Williams mesmerize with his ball-handling skills, or enjoy Nancy Lieberman showcasing why her nickname was and still is "Lady Magic."

Over the past few years, Legends Media Day has taken on a life of its own. This is where some of the top media from around the world speak

to our legends and hear their stories, and this year was no different. The event featured USA TODAY and various podcasts (including “Legends of Sport,” “The Second Half Podcast,” “Legends Media and Entertainment,” and EJ and CJ Williams), preserving the incredible stories and rich history associated with the NBRPA.

The opening day continued with exclusive member programming, including the Emerging Opportunities Summit that was hosted by NBA legend Stephen Bardo and featured speakers such as Derrick Coleman, Mieko Perez, Alando Tucker, and Temple University’s Dr. Jonathan Howe discussing business opportunities around cannabis, real estate, and the newly created educational partnership with Temple University, respectively. Not to be outdone, NBA legend Walter Bond gave a preview of his acclaimed motivational speaking seminar “Who Said Talk is Cheap? How To Convert Your Story Into Millions” to a packed room of attentive members.

As evening descended on Sin City, it was time for some fun, and we were in for a treat. As Team USA readied to take the court against Team Canada at T-Mobile Arena, NBRPA members filed into the energized arena to watch the U.S. men’s basketball team in their final U.S. tune-up before the Olympic games. However, this wasn’t your ordinary exhibition basketball game. As USA Basketball celebrated its 50th anniversary as an organization, we were proud to assist in helping bring back legends who made the U.S. a basketball superpower and honoring those who left their mark on international basketball. Where else can members of the 1992 U.S. Dream Team, the 1996 U.S. women’s team, the 2008 Redeem Team, and so many other gold medal-winning Olympians be feted in front of a frenzied basketball-loving crowd? Only in Las Vegas. If that wasn’t enough, the legends were graced by the presence of none other than former President Barack Obama, who hugged, high-fived, and dapped up our legends from his courtside seat. This was truly a night to experience, and it no doubt helped buoy the U.S. team to a victory over Canada. Following the celebration and game, the legends headed to



Topgolf Las Vegas to show off their golf swings, eat, drink, and mingle with this extended basketball family.

Day two continued the great vibes as the legends grabbed their golf gear and headed out to the impressive Bali Hai Golf Club for a morning on the links. The NBRPA, in partnership with the NBPA, hosted the morning golf round where legends tee’d off, putted, and talked trash to each other as only legends can. Not even 117-degree heat can keep our legends from playing their full rounds and showing us why they truly are legends. For legends who did not take part in the golf outing, the NBRPA hosted their Brunch N’ Bubbles event, which featured an incredible food buffet and champagne at the Fontainebleau.

Day two continued with two more informational panels for our members, including the NBRPA Health Summit presented by Endeavor Health and the Mental Health and Wellness panel. The Health Summit showcased the innovative partnership between the NBRPA and Endeavor Health that is centered around Endeavor’s exclusive concierge service that is offered to all NBRPA members and featured experts in orthopedics,





cardiology, urology, and neurology discussing their respective areas. The NBRPA Mental Health and Wellness panel brought WNBA legend Leslie Johnson, NBA Legend John Wallace, and Dr. Kensa Gunter, who serves as the Director of NBA Mind Health, the league's mental health, wellness, and performance program. With golf and panels completed, it was time to do what Las Vegas does best: PARTY! NBRPA members, guests, partners, and VIPs took over the famed LIV nightclub in the Fontainebleau, where drinks flowed, hits played, and legends danced into the wee hours of the morning.

On the last day of the Legends Summer Getaway, the NBRPA once again teamed up with the NBPA to present our members with an opportunity to discuss the pension package for our members. NBPA general counsel Ron Klempner discussed this and answered any questions that the legends had on the inner workings of the pension program that so many of them have to come to depend on. Then, NBRPA members were treated to a delicious breakfast and the annual all-members meeting. As the legends said their goodbyes, checked out of the hotel, and waited for their rides to the airport or other destinations, one common phrase was heard over and over again: "We can't wait to do this again next year!"

Neither can we, and we hope to see you all again next year!





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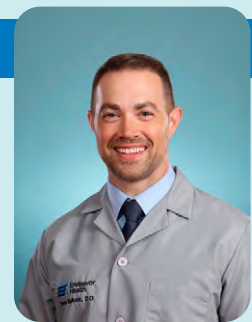
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FROM THE NBA HARDWOOD TO OLYMPICS SAND

NBA LEGEND CHASE BUDINGER'S WORK ETHIC LEADS HIM TO NEW HEIGHTS

by **ANDREW POLANIECKI**

What does it take to become a professional basketball player? If you were to ask the 500-plus NBA players each season, their answers might vary, but the core themes would remain the same: hard work, determination, and an unwavering commitment to chasing their dream. But what does it take to transition from professional basketball to competing in the Olympics – in a completely different sport? Only one person in the world can truly answer that: Chase Budinger. A seven-year NBA veteran, Budinger represented the United States at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, not on the men's basketball team, but as a beach volleyball player.

Though basketball was Budinger's first love, volleyball was in his family's DNA. His sister, Brittanie, played for the University of San Francisco before going on to compete professionally in Europe, while his brother, Duncan, also became a professional volleyball player. At La Costa Canyon High School in Carlsbad, Calif., Budinger made a name for himself in both basketball and volleyball. As a senior, he led his volleyball team to three state championships and was named National Player of the Year by Volleyball Magazine.

As offers from universities poured in, Budinger faced a difficult decision: Should he pursue his first dream of becoming an NBA player or continue splitting his time between basketball and volleyball? Several schools offered him the opportunity to pursue both, but Budinger ultimately chose to focus exclusively on basketball and committed to the University of Arizona.

"I chose Arizona over UCLA and UNC, mainly because I just fell in love with Lute Olson. I knew they had a spot open for me, so I knew I could start or begin playing right away," Budinger explained. "I fell in love with the campus, and the school, and the atmosphere that they had, and just how special of a basketball program that it was. I just wanted to focus on one sport and not get distracted [by] being a multi-sport athlete in college."

Budinger had a breakout season for the Wildcats during his freshman year, averaging 15.6 points and 5.8 rebounds per game.





His performance on the court led many to believe that Budinger was ready for the NBA, and he was projected to be a mid-first-round draft pick. Ultimately, however, Budinger decided to withdraw from the draft on the final day and return to Arizona.

"I felt like I wasn't ready for the NBA yet. I was still pretty immature," Budinger said. "I felt like I still had a lot of things I needed to polish up on my game to get to the next level and be ready to play right away."

Budinger played two more seasons at Arizona, successfully refining his all-around game. He consistently improved, averaging 18 points, 6.2 rebounds, and 3.4 assists by his final season. With the strides Budinger made during his sophomore and junior years, he decided it was the right time to enter the NBA and entered the 2009 NBA Draft.

Unfortunately, draft night didn't go according to his plan, as he fell to the No. 44 overall pick, getting selected by the Detroit Pistons, who promptly traded him to the Houston Rockets. When Budinger finally heard his name

called, his lifelong dream was realized, even if it didn't play out as he'd always hoped.

"I was happy to hear my name called, but I definitely felt I should have been a first rounder," he said. "I had an amazing college career. I felt like I was ready to play in the NBA."

Budinger's disappointment from slipping in the draft quickly dissipated thanks to the draft-night trade that sent him to Houston. There, he would have the opportunity to join the talented trio of Yao Ming, Tracy McGrady, and Shane Battier.

"I was very excited," Budinger said. "They were a very established team, and I knew (Houston) was a great sports town with great basketball culture."

Upon his arrival at training camp, Battier immediately took Budinger under his wing.

"Shane Battier was such a huge mentor to me," he said. "He was a guy who was a great starter, knew the NBA well, and he really just taught me how to be a professional and take every game one step at a time, one game at a time. He taught me how to use analytics to help



you guard certain players, how to learn to get over your shooting slumps, and to not get too wrapped into the NBA season because it might drain you... He helped me out tremendously early on."

After the 2012 season, Budinger was traded to the Minnesota Timberwolves, where he enjoyed a three-year stint. Following the 2014-15 season, the Timberwolves traded him to the Indiana Pacers. Budinger played 49 games for the Pacers before being waived with one month remaining in the season. Just three days later, he was signed by the Phoenix Suns to finish out the season and, ultimately, his NBA career. After one final professional basketball season overseas in Spain, Budinger retired from the sport of basketball to pursue his second passion: professional volleyball.



While most newly retired basketball players are looking for new hobbies and ways to keep busy, Chase had other plans.

“It was always the plan for me to come back home and try out beach volleyball, but I didn’t know at what level that would be,” he explained. “Maybe I thought just playing domestically, playing at home in the AVP... But when I decided to make the switch, I was still pretty young, especially for beach volleyball. I still felt that I had plenty of athletic ability left in me. Because of that, I just dove into the new journey and goal of mine of wanting to make the Olympics. I didn’t know how long this journey could take... But I definitely made it a goal of mine right away like, ‘Alright, now that I’m making this switch, this is my new goal and I’m putting everything I can into it to get to the Olympics.’”

Budinger was a star volleyball player in high school, but his previous achievements were on indoor courts. Transitioning from the hard surfaces of indoor volleyball to the soft and often hot sand of beach volleyball presented a new challenge.

“In beach volleyball, the biggest transition is dealing with the elements,” Budinger said. “Every tournament that you go to is slightly different. Some tournaments might be super windy, so you have to learn to play in the wind. Some tournaments might be super hot and humid, so you got to deal with that. It might be raining in some tournaments. Some tournaments, you have to deal with shallow sand or super deep sand. So, every element that you get in beach volleyball you have to adapt to and evolve your game to that tournament, and that’s what makes the sport really cool and interesting because every tournament is a little different. Every tournament has some different aspect to it, whereas indoor volleyball everything is the same.”

While casual observers might assume that Budinger’s height gives him a huge advantage in volleyball, he attributes his success to other factors from his basketball days.

“My height definitely helped but when you’re playing against the top teams in the world, I’m considered medium height as far as a blocker,” Budinger said. “I give a lot of credit to my work ethic and my professionalism that I had in basketball. I really translated it over to my volleyball. Everyone who talks about beach volleyball, the biggest thing they talk about is that it’s a lifestyle. Sometimes people get too sucked into a lifestyle where it’s kind of laid back, you go down to the beach, and you kind of half-ass the practice and play a match, and then you’re done with practice. I didn’t want to be like that. If I’m going to do this, I’m going to work my ass off. I’m going to train every day and take care of my body when I’m not training, and all these little aspects that I took from basketball.”

After years of preparation, training, and non-stop tournament play, the time had come for Budinger to select a partner for his quest to become an Olympian. After interviewing many talented candidates, he ultimately chose Miles Evans.

“Miles and I were competitors for five years. We played against each other a lot...” Chase explained. “Then, all of a sudden, it was probably a couple months before the Olympic qualifying period would start and I was searching for a partner who I wanted to pair up with. I was interviewing these guys and trying to choose who I wanted to make this journey with. I remember sitting down with Miles and hearing his enthusiasm, his all-in mentality, [and how] he wanted to go for it with me. Once I heard that from him, I was real excited to partner up with him.”

With his new partner in crime, qualifying for the Olympics was the next challenge for Chase and Miles.

“To qualify for the Olympics, you need to have 12 international finishes, and you have to be in the top 18 teams in the world, and (one of the) top two American teams,” he said. “The process was about a two-year period.”

The competition was steep, with little margin for error if Budinger and Evans were to realize their Olympic dreams.

“We had one American team who was in the top five the whole year.” Budinger said. “They

were kind of solidified early on that they were the one team that was already going to go to the Olympics, so now the race was for the second American team. We had a really tight race with this other American team throughout the whole year. It was back and forth. We were mostly behind the whole time, and then we made a really late last push with our last four or five tournaments, pushing us over the edge to take and hold the lead over them.”

Once Chase and Miles qualified, the next stop was Paris to compete in the 2024 Summer Olympics. To kick things off, the Olympic

Opening Ceremony took place on July 26. With 300,000 spectators in attendance and millions of viewers watching at home, Chase and the other athletes experienced the event from a different perspective as they were paraded by boat along the Seine to the Jardins du Trocadéro.

“The coolest part was just seeing all the athletes get together, all wearing the same U.S. outfits. We’re all gathered in this area and we’re all excited while wearing the same things,” Budinger said. “We’re all congratulating each other because we all are in this journey together.”

“One of the coolest moments was finally seeing LeBron. He was pretty busy at the time when I saw him... talking in his room with some people, getting the flag ready for him because he was the flag bearer for us... He was walking by and hadn’t noticed me, but I called his name out. He kind of did a double take at me. He looked at me, and then he looked away, and then he realized who I was and was like, ‘Oh shit, Chase! What up?! Great to see you!’ And he gave me a big hug. That was a cool, special moment.”

Once the excitement of the opening ceremony faded, it was time for Chase and Miles to get to work. Their days were jam-packed from early morning until midnight, filled with workouts, film study, game-planning, practices, and afternoon competitions. Despite the intense routine as they prepared for the Olympics, there was one unexpected challenge: the athlete transportation system.

“Transportation was really rough. Every time we had to get on a bus, it was at least 45 minutes to an hour because of the traffic, because of stops, because of security...” Budinger said. “We were on buses three to five hours a day just trying to get to the arenas and back, and practice and back, or the weight room and back. We were just very busy with being on buses the whole time.”

Although Budinger and Evans fell short of winning their first Olympic medal after being defeated by defending gold medalists Anders Mol and Christian Sorum of Norway in the Round of 16, Budinger gained the respect of not only his competitors but also some familiar faces from his basketball days who admired his transition to a new sport. One of the most iconic behind-the-scenes moments from the Olympics was a video that surfaced showing Kevin Durant, Diana Taurasi, and other U.S. basketball players approaching Budinger after the Olympic games concluded. He earned their respect — not just as a former NBA player, but as an Olympian. That meant a lot to Budinger.





“Just the respect that you get from being in the NBA, there’s a mutual respect that we’ve had for each other just because we’ve known each other for so long,” he said. “KD and I go all the way back to high school where we used to battle against each other. We played on the same McDonald’s All-American team together, and it was just cool to see those guys and to be representing the United States together, but in different sports... It was really special to me.”

Since Budinger retired from professional basketball, his appreciation for the NBRPA’s support runs deeper than beach sand.

“They’ve always been reaching out and checking in on me, which has been really nice that I have their support always... It’s been great just knowing that if I ever need something from them, they’re willing to help out.”

What advice would Budinger give to players who are approaching retirement?

“For players that are retiring, I know it’s a very tough time in your life because I went through it. It’s a tough transition to give up the sport you’ve been playing your whole life... the Player’s Association is there to help with the transition. There are so many guys and ex-players there to help and lead you in the right direction of what you want to do next.”

So, what’s next for Chase? The 2028 Olympics are now less than four years away, and he is determined to return and try to win his first Olympic medal.

“It’s definitely a goal of mine now,” Budinger said. “After making the last Olympics and going through the whole experience, it just gives me more motivation to go for this next one. As long as my body is healthy, and my mind is right, I love this sport, I love this lifestyle, [so] I’m going to give it my all to make the next one.”



IN MEMORIAM:

*REMEMBERING BILL WALTON,
JERRY WEST, CHET WALKER,
AND DIKEMBE MUTOMBO AS
LEGENDS WHO SHAPED THE NBA*

BY BENNETT SCHRAMKO



The basketball world recently mourned the loss of four iconic figures whose contributions to the game have left an unerasable mark: Bill Walton, Jerry West, Chet Walker, and Dikembe Mutombo. These four Hall-of-Famers not only excelled on the court but also made a mark off the hardwood and influenced the evolution of the NBA in ways that will be remembered for generations.

BILL WALTON (BIG RED):

Very few athletes have made a lasting impact both on and off the court like Bill Walton. With his towering presence, signature red hair, and glowing smile, Walton's influence on basketball and broader culture is undeniable. As a player, he achieved greatness with his skill and resilience, while off the court, he has continued to inspire through his philosophies, activism, and passion for the game and beyond.

The Portland Trail Blazers drafted the 6'11" UCLA star with the No. 1 overall pick in the 1974 NBA Draft. Expectations were high for Big Red coming into the league. Once he stepped foot on the court, Walton's impact was undeniable. As a member of the Trail Blazers, he lived up to those expectations, leading the team to their first and only NBA championship in 1977. Walton's NBA Finals performance earned him the coveted Finals MVP award. The following season, he carried that momentum over and was named the regular-season MVP, cementing his status as one of the best players in the game.

Despite his immense talent, Walton's career was impaired by foot injuries, limiting his playing time and preventing him from reaching

his full potential. However, even in the face of adversity, Walton never stopped playing his part. He found a second life with the Boston Celtics, where he came off the bench as the sixth man. His role with the Celtics helped the team win the 1986 NBA championship, and Walton was named the league's Sixth Man of the Year.

When his playing days came to an end, Walton's on-court legacy was solidified, and he transitioned to a career in broadcasting. His very colorful commentary on late-night PAC-12 basketball games made him an immediate fan favorite.

Beyond broadcasting, Walton was an outspoken advocate for several causes, including environmentalism, human rights, and the fight against chronic pain. Having dealt with severe injuries throughout his career, he became a voice for those suffering from physical ailments, sharing his story to raise awareness about the importance of proper care and treatment.

Despite facing setbacks and challenges, both physically and personally, Walton always maintained a positive outlook on life. Whenever he was asked how he was doing, he would always respond with, "I'm the luckiest guy in the



world." His enthusiasm was infectious whether he was calling a game, speaking at an event, attending one of his 869+ Grateful Dead concerts, or simply sharing his life experiences.

We honor Bill Walton as not only a phenomenal player but also a man who has touched lives far beyond the hardwood. His legacy is one of passion, perseverance, and the pursuit of happiness — both in basketball and in life. Walton was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 1993.



JERRY WEST (MR. CLUTCH):

When you think of basketball, one of the first names that might come to mind is Jerry West. His legacy extends far deeper, as he's cemented as one of the greatest players and minds in the history of the sport. His impact transcended the hardwood, influencing basketball for generations as a player, an executive, and the silhouette of the NBA logo.

West's versatility as a scorer was unmatched. Whether it was his trademark jump shot or his acrobatic finishes at the rim, West seemed to score at will. He averaged 27 points per game over his career, a mark that still ranks eighth in NBA history. He was a 14-time All-Star and 10-time All-NBA First Team selection, and in 1972, he finally captured the elusive NBA championship that he chased for so many years.

Yes, Jerry West might be one of the greatest players of all time; however, some might argue that he did his best work after he retired. West seamlessly transitioned into an NBA front-office role, where he excelled at scouting prospects and constructing a team.

As a head coach, scout, and then general manager of the Los Angeles Lakers, West played a pivotal role on the Showtime Lakers, one of the most dominant eras in NBA history. After coaching the team for three seasons, West became the Lakers' GM and helped them win five championships in the 1980s. West was also responsible for signing Shaquille O'Neal and acquiring a high-schooler named Kobe Bryant in a draft-day trade in 1996. These moves laid the foundation for the Lakers' three-peat from 2000 to 2002, solidifying West as one of the greatest architects in NBA history.

His influence didn't stop with the Lakers. After leaving Los Angeles, West took on a consulting role with the Golden State Warriors. His presence helped shape a team that would go on to win multiple championships and revolutionize the way the game was played. West's impact as an executive, much like his playing career, was defined by an unwavering commitment to winning and excellence.

As we remember Jerry West, we celebrate a man whose passion for the game elevated it to new heights. He was a champion on the court, a role model off the court, and one of the best basketball minds the game has ever seen. West was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame as a player in 1980 and as a member of the 1960 gold-medal-winning U.S. men's basketball team in 2010, and he will be inducted for a record-setting third time as an executive in October 2024.

DIKEMBE MUTOMBO (DEKE):

Dikembe Mutombo's legacy in basketball is etched in both his towering 7'2" frame and iconic finger wag, but his impact transcends far beyond the hardwood. One of the most dominant defensive forces in NBA history, Mutombo's career was defined by his incredible shot-blocking ability, but his influence as a humanitarian and global ambassador has left an equally powerful mark on the world.

After being drafted No. 4 overall in the 1991 NBA Draft by the Denver Nuggets, Mutombo's presence was felt immediately. It was clear that he was a game-changer when he was on the court, specifically on the defensive end. "Mount Mutombo" led the NBA in blocks for five seasons and earned the Defensive Player of the Year award four times throughout his career (1995, 1997, 1998, and 2001), which is tied for

the most in league history. His signature phrase "Not in my House" along with the legendary finger wag became iconic throughout his life.

Throughout his career, Mutombo played for several teams, including the Atlanta Hawks, Philadelphia 76ers, and Houston Rockets, amassing eight All-Star appearances and solidifying his place as one of the greatest defenders in NBA history. His 3,289 blocks rank second in NBA history, behind only Hakeem Olajuwon. But while his basketball accolades are well-documented, it is what he did after stepping off the court that truly defined his legacy.

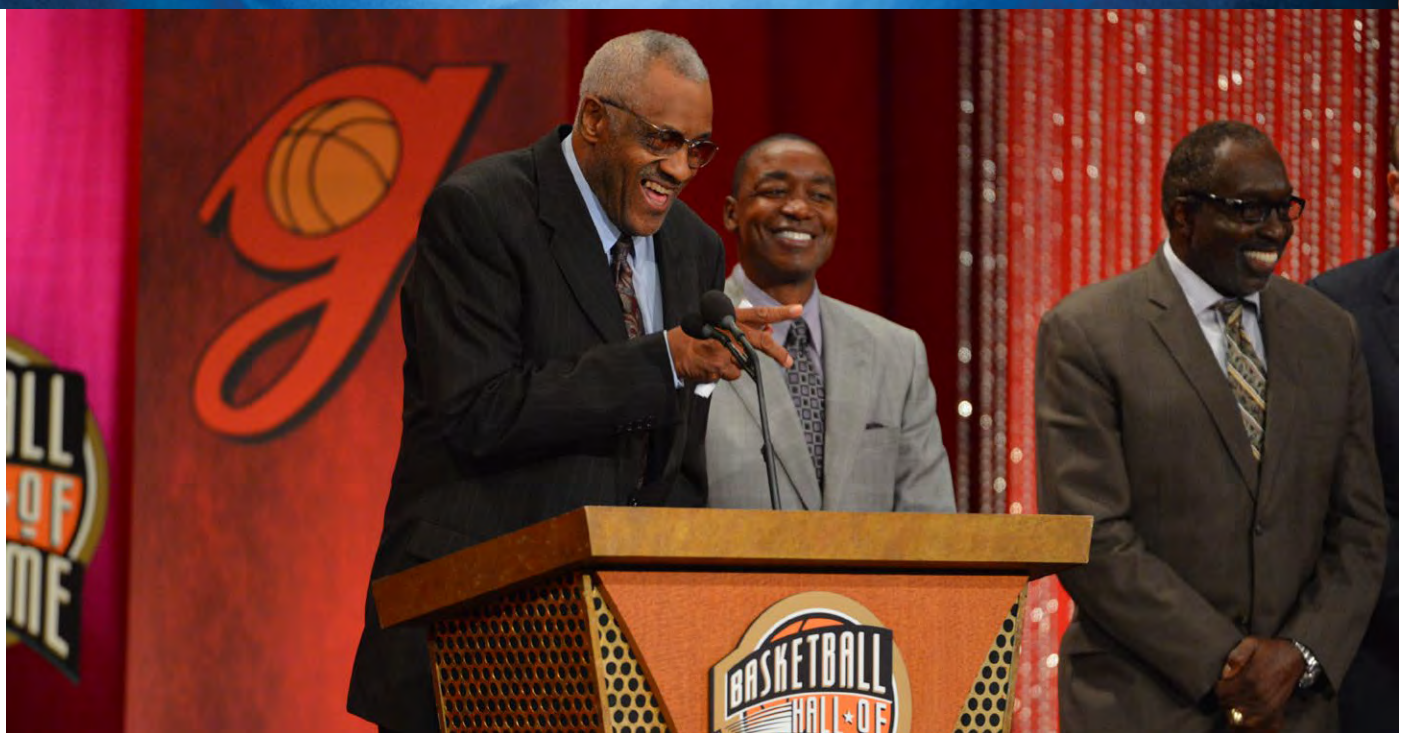
Beyond the stats and finger wags, Mutombo had another goal in mind: to give back to his home country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to improve the lives of people across the globe. Born in Kinshasa, Mutombo never forgot his roots, and from the very



beginning of his NBA career, he worked to use his platform for the greater good. In 1997, Mutombo founded the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation with the goal of improving health, education, and quality of life for people in Congo. The Biamba Marie Mutombo Hospital, named after his mother, is one of the foundation's biggest accomplishments. Opened in 2007 in Kinshasa, the hospital has provided care to hundreds of thousands of people, addressing critical health issues. Mutombo's commitment to healthcare in Africa earned him widespread recognition and admiration, with the hospital standing as a beacon of hope in a region that had long struggled with inadequate medical facilities.

Mutombo's philanthropic efforts didn't stop in his home country. He became the NBA's first global ambassador, traveling the world to promote peace, health initiatives, and education. Through his work with organizations like the United Nations and UNICEF, he brought attention to the challenges faced by underprivileged communities, especially in Africa. Whether advocating for polio eradication or serving as a role model for young athletes, Mutombo used his platform to inspire and uplift.

Mutombo will always be remembered as one of the greatest shot-blockers in NBA history. His true legacy, however, lies off the court. His deep voice, infectious smile, and countless humanitarian efforts throughout the world made him a global icon. Mutombo was inducted into the Naismith Hall of Fame in 2015.



CHET "THE JET" WALKER:

Chet "The Jet" Walker is maybe one of the most underappreciated yet pivotal figures to play in the NBA. Known for his smooth style of play, Walker was an extraordinary athlete who embodied both strength and finesse, paving the way for future generations of players.

Walker played with a smoothness and precision that defined his career as one of the most versatile forwards in the NBA during the 1960s and 1970s. Standing at 6'6", Walker was known for his lethal mid-range jumper, quick first step,

and exceptional ability to get to the free-throw line. His blend of athleticism and basketball IQ made him a consistent scoring threat and a defensive force.

Drafted by the Syracuse Nationals (who later became the Philadelphia 76ers) in the 1962 NBA Draft, Walker immediately became an integral part of the team. He helped the 76ers win the NBA championship in 1967 while playing alongside legends like Wilt Chamberlain and Hal Greer. Walker's ability to score in bunches while also providing defensive versatility made him a vital piece of that historic squad. After being traded to the Chicago Bulls in 1969, he averaged over 20 points per game for four straight seasons and added four All-Star selections to his resume.

Walker's impact on the court was undeniable. However, his impact off the court was just as important. Walker was an outspoken advocate for civil rights and social justice during a time of great upheaval in the United States. He was one of many African-American athletes who used their platform to speak out against racial inequality, aligning himself with other pioneers of the time who believed in the power of athletes to drive societal change. In 1995, Walker wrote an autobiography, "Long Time Coming: A

Black Athlete's Coming-of-Age in America." In it, he reflected on his experiences growing up in a segregated America, his rise to basketball stardom, and the challenges he faced along the way.

Chet Walker's legacy is one of understated excellence. On the court, he was a master of his craft, playing with a combination of skill, intelligence, and grace that earned him a place among the greats. Off the court, he was a tireless advocate for justice and equality, using his platform to push for change long after his playing days were over. Walker's impact, both as a player and as a human being, continues to be felt by those who knew him and those who study the game of basketball. He was a trailblazer in every sense, and his contributions, both seen and unseen, have left an indelible mark on the world. Walker was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2012.

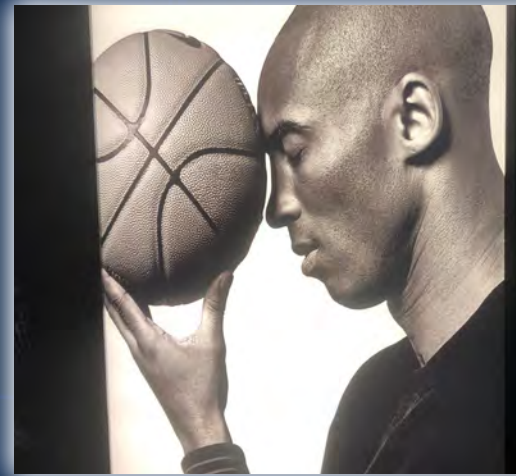
As the NBA continues to evolve, the influence of these three legends will remain a guiding force. They exemplified the best of basketball, both on and off the court, and their memories will live on in the hearts of fans and players around the league. The game of basketball is richer for having had Bill Walton, Jerry West, and Chet Walker as its ambassadors, and their impact will be felt for many generations to come.

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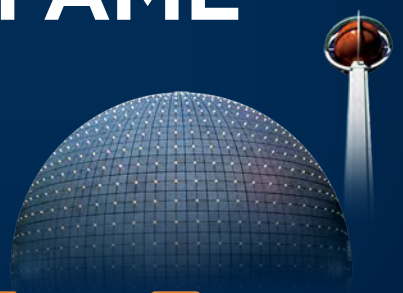
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THE YEAR OF THE COOP

LAKERS GREAT MICHAEL COOPER TO BE HONORED WITH HALL-OF-FAME INDUCTION, JERSEY RETIREMENT

by PETER CROATTO



Michael Cooper #21 of the Los Angeles Lakers blocks the shot of James Donaldson #40 of the Dallas Mavericks during an NBA basketball game circa 1989 at The Forum in Inglewood, CA.

Michael Cooper is treating his Hall-of-Fame induction just like his Los Angeles Lakers glory days when he had to dismantle the NBA's most potent offensive weapons.

He never took anything for granted back then, and Cooper isn't about to take it easy now that he's facing basketball immortality. While the induction ceremony is on October 13, his speech has been done since early September. Now, he's watching game tape — speeches from prior inductees. On that day, his dome will be shaved. The suit will be immaculate. He'll try not to cry...

And then, Cooper will run it back.

His enshrinement at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame precedes another dizzying honor in January when the Lakers will send Cooper's No. 21 jersey to the rafters. He will share space with Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Jerry West, Elgin Baylor, Magic Johnson, Kobe Bryant, and Shaquille O'Neal among others — giants of the game, exemplars of a franchise synonymous with greatness.

Cooper never made an NBA All-Star team, which he says is typically a requirement for the Lakers to send a jersey skyward. That the franchise is breaking the rules "might be the ultimate show of love," he says. It's not surprising. As Cooper likes to say, he left a lot of blood, sweat, and skin on the Great Western Forum floor.

"The Year of the Coop" has reduced one of the NBA's most tenacious defenders to tears. But if Jeanie Buss had decided to make No. 21 available for a history-oblivious draft pick or if Springfield had never called, Cooper still would have been happy. He has already lived a life well beyond the limits of his childhood imagination.

Cooper didn't consider himself a Hall-of-Fame player. His stats weren't gaudy, but his impact on the Showtime Lakers of the 1980s was immense. Lockdown defender might not be a sexy role on a team that tried to entertain the entertainers. But it was essential.

"You don't win championships without playing defense," said Cooper, 68, who played

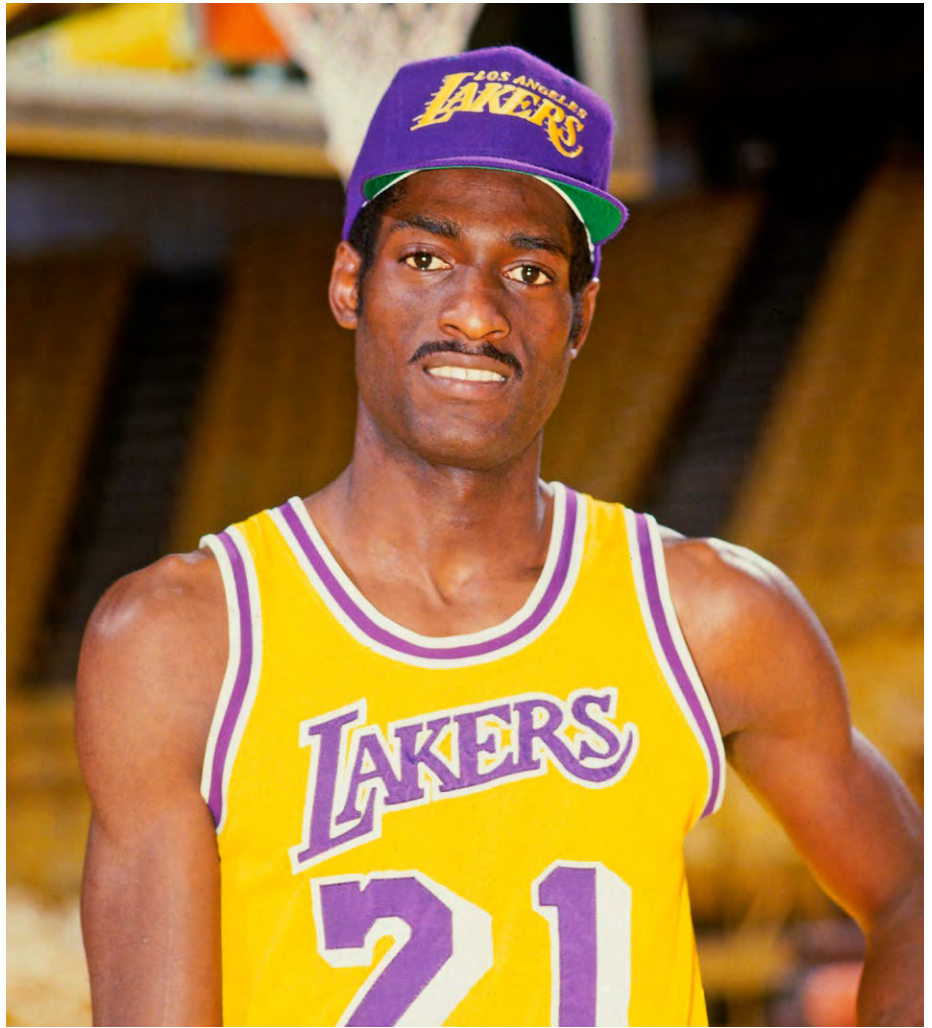
in eight NBA Finals and won five titles with the Lakers.

In his 12 years donning the purple and gold, Cooper was the ace – forever a reliable character actor to the marquee names. He made eight NBA All-Defensive teams and received the league's Defensive Player of the Year award for the 1986-87 season. During his playing days, Larry Bird called the rangy, spry, and skinny Cooper the best defender in the game. Magic Johnson, who played against Coop every day in practice for more than a decade, described him as "the greatest defensive player I've seen in the NBA."

Where Coop differed from fellow defensive-oriented Hall of Famers like Ben Wallace and Dennis Rodman was in his offensive ability. He had a reliable three-point shot, setting a then-Finals record with six three-pointers against the Boston Celtics in Game 2 of the 1987 Finals. On the break, Cooper was a tempting target for Johnson's lobbs or "Coop-a-Loops." He could play the point. And he did all of this (mostly) as a reserve, starting 94 of his 873 career games.

His zeal for defense came from necessity. Cooper, who missed most of his rookie season, came to a grim realization at 1979's training camp: he had no place in the Lakers' offense. There was Abdul-Jabbar and his cloud-scraping sky-hook. Jamaal Wilkes had his funky, accurate jump shot. Norm Nixon was an emerging star. Magic, another playmaker, was hailed as a savior for the team — and for a league desperate for star appeal. Cooper had to embrace defense if he wanted to stick around.

He grew to enjoy it. Sure, Magic's no-look passes ignited the crowd and Kareem's signature move deflated the opposition, but defense could be his calling card. He could help his team



win by affecting another player's game. Look at Game 3 of the 1987 Western Conference Finals. Forty-two seconds left, Seattle SuperSonics down three. Cooper is on Dale Ellis, Seattle's young scoring machine. Everyone knows the ball is going to Ellis. He zig-zags for a sliver of space, with Cooper on him like an

impossible-to-scratch itch. He finds a safe haven near the right baseline behind the massive Maurice Lucas, who sets a screen. But Cooper, recovering from a Tom Chambers screen on the left low post, isn't done. He races toward Ellis, jumps forward, angles that thin body — perfect for squeezing through picks — and gets his





fingertips on the ball, which falls harmlessly to the floor.

Pat Riley told Cooper it was the best defensive play he had ever seen.

Nothing came easy. When he was 2 years old, Cooper cut his knee on a coffee can, leading to 100 stitches and eight years in a metal brace. The inspirational narrative took a while to unfold. He was a third-round draft pick out of the University of New Mexico, playing alongside Marvin Johnson, who was viewed as the star with an NBA future and picked one round earlier than Cooper. When Jerry West, then the Lakers head coach, was invited to a game by Lobos head coach Norm Ellenberger, Cooper saw an opportunity. He played great against

Wyoming, finishing with 18 points (with some slams) and four assists. He was also a pest on defense, recording four steals.

“Coop,” Ellenberger told his co-captain a few days later, “West really likes you.”

For the first time, Cooper, a senior, realized he had a chance to make the NBA. Growing up in Pasadena, California — with his father not around, his grandmother running the house while his mom worked non-stop — basketball was a way to go to college. The NBA was not a career option. Cooper didn’t feel like he belonged in the league until 1982, four years after he was drafted. By that time, he’d earned two All-Defensive team selections. Marvin Johnson never played in the NBA.



Lakers Legends Byron Scott and Michael Cooper pose with their wives, Cecilia Scott and Yvonne Cooper, at the 2024 Legends Summer Getaway in Las Vegas, NV.



Candace Parker #3 and Head Coach Michael Cooper of the Los Angeles Sparks discuss a play on the bench during the game against the Washington Mystics on June 26, 2008 at Staples Center in Los Angeles, CA.



Los Angeles Sparks head coach Michael Cooper speaks during a press conference announcing Lisa Leslie's retirement at the end of the 2009 WNBA season at Toyota Sports Center on February 4, 2009 in El Segundo, CA.

You will not hear any “my-time-was-better” rhetoric from Coop. He loves basketball without reservation. He has coached for years, which has allowed him to use his best asset: his mind.

Cooper wanted to share the knowledge that coaches had given him. People have listened. He led the Los Angeles Sparks to back-to-back WNBA championships in 2001 and 2002. He has coached at just about every level. Cooper, who spent the summer coaching 3's Company with the BIG3, is also an assistant at Division II Cal State LA.

Yes, he tries to sell young players on defense. Yes, he knows offense is sexy and leads to big contracts. But who better to extoll the benefits of steady play and excelling at the unglamorous than Coop?

“I tell kids this all the time, ‘I don't care

how good you are coming out of a college – any NBA team you go to is going to have three people there already doing what you think you're good at,” Cooper explained. “The best way you can fit in as a rookie: Be a good passer. Don't turn the ball over. Be a solid defensive player. That enables you to stick on a team.”

With the upcoming honors, Cooper has become reflective. Yes, Showtime was glorious. The Lakers, where he serves as an ambassador, are like a family. But he has thought about his childhood frequently. There were nuggets of wisdom family members shared. An uncle advised Cooper to put God first, while his grandmother's counsel has achieved an unimaginable poignancy: “Michael, keep on living. You're going to get the chance to experience some good and great things.”



Michael Cooper, Earvin Magic Johnson and Byron Scott attend the Lakers Showtime Reunion on September 12-18, 2022 at the Four Seasons Resort in Maui.





WNBA ALL-STAR 2024

*THE WOMEN'S GAME CONTINUES TO
HEAT UP IN PHOENIX*

by ERIN LAW

The history of the WNBA All-Star Game stretches back to 1999 when the inaugural contest was played in front of a sellout crowd at Madison Square Garden in New York.

25 years later, Team USA & Team WNBA brought the heat to Phoenix, Arizona in a way that has to make the early trailblazers of the league incredibly proud.

This year's WNBA standouts sold out Footprint Center in record time, delivered 3.44 million TV viewers (the most-watched WNBA All-Star Game to date), and generated nearly 10 million fan votes, an all-time high.

Before the action on the court took place, however, the NBRPA made sure to give the Legends of the league their flowers and host the annual WNBA All-Star Legends Brunch. This year's pre-game brunch was open to fans for the first time, giving both long-time and brand-new WNBA supporters the opportunity to mingle with some of the original stars of the game. This year's brunch also included a panel discussion about some of the most pressing topics for all women, athletes or not. NBRPA Director Rushia Brown moderated the discussion and was joined on stage by Leslie Johnson, who spoke candidly about mental wellness, Anita Maxwell-Skipper, who discussed key components of financial wellness, and Bridget Pettis, who shared valuable insights about physical wellness.

After the mimosas had all been consumed and the many photo ops

were complete, the NBRPA and its WNBA Legends made their way to Footprint Arena to watch the 2024 WNBA All-Star Game from the comfort of premium arena suites. Team WNBA, led by fan favorites like Caitlin Clark, Nneka Ogumike, and Jonquel Jones, took on Team USA, led by league veterans including A'ja Wilson, Diana Taurasi, and Breanna Stewart as they finished their preparations for the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

The hard-fought game and an energizing halftime performance by Pitbull dazzled fans on the Phoenix Mercury's home court all night long. In the end, Team WNBA edged out Team USA with a scrappy 117-109 victory. Arike Ogunbowale of the Dallas Wings led the way with 34 points for Team WNBA, breaking the WNBA All-Star Game scoring record and earning her a second All-Star MVP Award.

As the game concluded and the arena emptied, Legends and their guests made their way over to Majerle's Sports Grill (owned by Phoenix Suns Legend Dan Majerle) for the NBRPA's post-game party. The celebration lasted well into the night with former WNBA and WBL players alike reminiscing on their playing days, sharing life updates and stories, and enjoying another heartwarming reunion within the basketball sisterhood.

Next up: the 2025 WNBA All-Star Game at Gainbridge Fieldhouse in Indianapolis!

LINDSEY HARDING

OPENS UP ABOUT HER COACHING CAREER, ADVICE FOR FELLOW PLAYERS INTERESTED IN COACHING, AND MORE.

by ALEX KENNEDY

Two decades before Lindsey Harding joined J.J. Redick's Los Angeles Lakers coaching staff, they got to know each other at Duke University. Back in the early 2000s, Harding and Redick developed a friendship while they were simultaneously starring for the Blue Devils.

Redick was named the Naismith College Player of the Year in 2006, and then Harding won the same award in 2007. They reunited briefly on the Philadelphia 76ers during the 2017-18 NBA season when Redick was a player and Harding was a player development coach. Then, when Redick was hired as the Lakers' head coach this offseason, he made sure to hire Harding to his staff.

"I've known JJ for 22 years now," Harding said. "We got to Duke the same summer, so I've known him a long time. Personally, just to see his growth as a player into this position and as a man into this position, it's been incredible to just see that growth.

"When I was with Philly, my first time being a player development coach, he was a player there. And I don't know if he remembers this, but I remember actually sitting with him at lunch and, it's funny, I told him, 'Oh my God, you've grown so much!' Whenever we saw each other in passing, it was like, 'Hey, how are you?!' We've always had that relationship. But actually sitting down talking, it had been years. But [I told him] I saw the growth just from being an 18-year-old kid to now. That's been a great thing to see."

As a coach, Redick has made a strong first impression on Harding, who is very excited about the staff that's been assembled in Los Angeles.

"As far as his coaching, he knows the game, he has a brilliant mind," Harding said. "He has a way of speaking to the players thus far that I've seen that they just really respond to what he's doing and what he's saying. A lot of it is also just the respect for the kind of player he was and what he brought to the table and what other players say about him. It's all about perception. A lot of these players talk to other players, like, 'Tell me about this guy.' So with his reputation and everything like that, it really does help. But he has his vision. He knows where we want to go and how we want to get there. And so far, it's been a great experience.

"And with the experienced staff that we have – Nate McMillan, Scotty Brooks, Bob Beyer, who I was with in Sacramento – that experience is invaluable, and for me to sit and be able to learn from these guys has been incredible. ... I think a big part of it is that you want people that have great minds and know basketball, but that can work well together. The personalities mesh, let me just say that. So it's been a really great experience so far. We've been working very well together."

Harding was the No. 1 overall pick in the 2007 WNBA Draft, and she played 10 seasons in the WNBA, averaging 9.8 points, 4.0 assists, 2.9 rebounds, and 1.1 steals. She believes her time as a player helped make her the coach she is today.



Stockton Kings head coach Lindsey Harding talks to her players during the game against the Ontario Clippers on March 12, 2024 at Crypto.com Arena in Los Angeles, CA.





“You have to learn the game somehow. I played it, but a lot of these other coaches learned it from the video room. You have to learn it somehow, and that was my experience. And I’ve always been a people person. I was a point guard, so I was understanding personalities and managing them as a player on the court. It’s understanding who to get the ball to when, why, and how. I’ve always been aware of what’s going on. I’m aware of facial expressions, I’m aware of feelings. I say that while laughing, but it matters! It matters if they feel that they haven’t touched the ball in a while. It matters if they haven’t had a play called for them in a while. All of that, it comes together, being a coach and trying to have that awareness now. Being a head coach, it’s hard to see all of that, and that’s why you have assistants. So having that awareness, trying to make it as smooth and as easy as possible for JJ, seeing all these things that I’ve experienced, I



Number one overall draft pick by the Phoenix Mercury, Lindsey Harding from Duke University, receives her Mercury jersey from WNBA commissioner Donna Orender during the 2007 WNBA Draft at the Renaissance Cleveland Hotel April 4, 2007 in Cleveland, OH.

think, will be helpful. You get to see different things – I played all around the world and had different coaches and played different styles – and understand everybody's an individual, so there's not one size fits all. It's just understanding that and having the awareness."

Initially, Harding wanted to work in a front office, and she even joined an NBA program meant to help former players land an executive role. However, the coaching bug eventually bit her.

"When I retired, I worked in the league office for a year in New York City. I was a basketball operations associate. It was a program they had for former players, so there were four of us there, and we kind of circulated through all the departments within basketball operations for the NBA, and it was actually a position to get you more into management," she said. "That's kind of how I really started and then got a job in Philadelphia as a scout, and that's obviously like front office. Then, I was asked if I wanted to be a player development coach, and I took that and that's kind of how the coaching started.

"I think the best advice I got is that people who have coached have gone to the front office, but a lot of people in the front office don't really become a coaches. So, if I wanted

to try it, I knew I had to do it now before I established which direction I was going in. And [I knew] I could always go try working in the front office if that's the direction I wanted to go... But it stuck!"

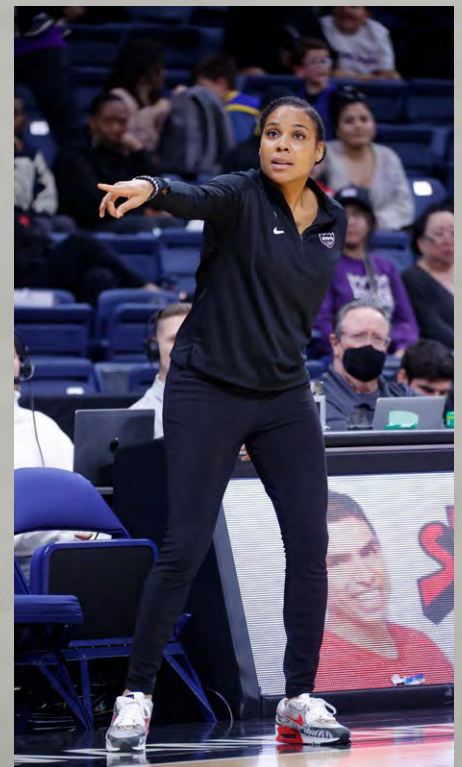
What other advice would she give to retired players who want to pursue a coaching career?

"Meet everyone you can while you play. Everybody wants to know somebody who's playing basketball, so meet everybody – whether it's business people, whether it's marketing, whether it's social media, whether it's front offices, meet everybody and let them know [you want to coach]," Harding said. "I mean, if you're getting toward the end, there's nothing wrong with letting coaches and front-office people on your team and other teams know that this is something you'd be interested in.

"And be willing to work your way up. Some get the opportunity because they may have a bigger name or an amazing relationship to automatically jump on a bench or jump to the front of someone's bench, but just know that is very rare. You are not starting from the bottom, but you will have to start in a position to work your way up because it is a different job. It is a completely different job and a different role than what we've been doing as a player.



Shareef Abdur-Rahim presents the Coach for the Year trophy to Lindsey Harding of the Stockton Kings before their playoff NBA G-League game against the Santa Cruz Warriors at Stockton Arena on April 4, 2024 in Stockton, CA.



Lindsey Harding head coach of the Stockton Kings looks on during an NBA G-League game against the Rip City Remix.



Lindsey Harding #10 of the Duke Blue Devils celebrates during their game against the Maryland Terrapins during the 2006 NCAA Women's Basketball Championship Game on April 4, 2006 at the TD Banknorth Garden in Boston, MA.

So have that patience, whether it's through the video room, whether it's through player development, whether it's through the G League, and just be present in those steps. Just because I played, I thought I was going to be a good coach, but that's not necessarily the case, so you have to be willing to work for that. I think that's the biggest thing."

Harding knows a thing or two about working her way up the coaching ranks. She says her time in the NBA G League helped her "tremendously" in terms of her development.

"Your staff is smaller, your budget is way smaller, it's all hands on deck," she said. "You don't just have one role – you have to plug the leaks. You have to do everything that needs to be done. Sometimes, you're the one checking the players in the hotel. You have to make sure you're on tiny buses to go to and from games and to and from the airport. Sometimes you plan to have a full set of two-way players and assignment guys and at a moment's notice, they could all be taken back up to the big team and then you're changing your entire game plan. That can happen when you're doing a scout and the entire starting five changes because the opposing team decided to send their assignments and two-ways back up to the big team. So, you adjust on the fly, and I think that is huge. You can prepare as much as possible, but being okay with not being perfect, I had to learn that a little bit. It just teaches you all of these things, and that's only probably part of it. But I think being able to adjust on the fly is probably the biggest thing because now in the NBA, when there are changes, it'll never be like the G League, so you're always prepared."

Last season, Harding won the NBA G League Coach of the Year award, becoming the first female coach to earn that honor. This accolade meant a lot to Harding.

"Well, first, I had an incredible staff and that's really a coaching staff award, not just the head coach. I think the biggest part is knowing that my peers – all these other coaches and GMs – are the ones who voted. Knowing that these men voted for me, it means a lot. It means that they saw the basketball, because we did have a great season, and they voted on the work that we did. That really did mean a lot to me because you go into this not thinking about that award. You don't think about that, you just think about getting the experience, hopefully having a good season, and helping the team as much as you can. But winning that, it's huge. I think a lot of people are actually already here, but the ones that still have questions about changing things or giving more women opportunities, I hope it shows them that if you give us an opportunity, great things can happen."

Now, Harding is also the first female coach in the Lakers' franchise history. She hopes to see more and more women coaching in the NBA in the near future.

"I think, more than anything, you just want to be judged on the body of work, right? That's the most important thing. I think the biggest question that really needs to be asked and focused on and talked about is why haven't there been women? What are we talking about? Are we still back in the 1960s as far as 'women can't do that'? We're beyond that, right? We're beyond that, hopefully, as a society, we're beyond that in the NBA. And it's not trying to say, 'Oh, a woman can do what a man can do.' It's how it should be.

"Whether you're a man or a woman, you should get an opportunity – same as your background, same as your race, same as your religion, same as everything. I understand that I'm getting certain opportunities, and I'm treated no different than any other coach here. If I mess up, I'll get cussed out. (laughs) If I'm doing a great job, I'm going to be praised. I'm going to be held accountable just like everybody else. And hopefully, more and more people will get opportunities and not think of it as, 'Oh, are we taking a chance on this? Are we taking a risk on this?' It's not a risk or a chance. I'm just like any man that you would hire. It's just, is this person a fit or not?"

Meanwhile, Harding is thrilled to see the WNBA surging in popularity and breaking ratings records.

"I think it's great. I mean, women's basketball has been good the entire time, way before me. I'm so happy that they're starting to recognize that," Harding said. "And you know what? Sometimes you need a change-maker. We would say that Michael Jordan might've been the change-maker [in the NBA], right? Sometimes you need a change-maker, and I think this class has been huge. I think Caitlin Clark has been huge. I think Angel Reese has been huge. Like it or not, sometimes you need the change-maker. Now, it's good to see it on TV a lot more. It's good to see conversations about it – normal conversations in places. It's good to see it on in bars and restaurants alongside baseball games that are on. It's good and not just for the little girls, but the little boys need to see that this is normal and they're also someone you can look up to."

While Harding can relate to being the No. 1 overall pick in the WNBA Draft and the pressure that comes with it, she's the first to admit that Clark and other top prospects are facing a different beast these days thanks to social media and NIL deals.

"I can't imagine being those young women and young men who are getting drafted in this day and age with the level of social media and now NIL. Once you make money, for some reason, people feel like they can be in your business and judge you even more," Harding said. "The level of strength from these kids is incredible. ... I've thought about it, like, 'Man, how would I have handled being a top pick [today]? How



Assistant coach Lindsey Harding of the Philadelphia 76ers looks on prior to the game against the Chicago Bulls at the Wells Fargo Center on April 10, 2019 in Philadelphia, PA.

would I have handled all of that?' There's so much scrutiny at times. Obviously, there's a lot of praise too, but there are a lot of things said and written that really should not be, [especially when] it's said to and about kids. I just commend all of them for having that strength and continued perseverance and pushing forward and honestly not caring because they're younger than me, but I use that as inspiration for me moving forward. But as far as on the court, they're playing their game. They're doing the thing that they love and they're competing at the highest level, and that's all you can ask of them."

Harding is also doing what she loves, and she admits that her perception of coaching has changed since her playing days.

"I think, as a player, you just don't realize how much work goes into coaching – the level of preparation, the amount of film, the amount of conversations, the amount of planning, the analytics and numbers. All of this stuff comes together to make one decision on how we may defend something. It's a lot of work, and I just didn't realize exactly how much work goes in and how many minds are behind it. When I got to this side, I realized it. And obviously, I didn't have as much of appreciation for it then as I do now."



De'Aaron Fox #5 of the Sacramento Kings speaks with Assistant Coaches Lindsey Harding and Luke Loucks prior to the game against the Golden State Warriors during Round 1 Game 5 of the 2023 NBA Playoffs on April 26, 2023 at Golden 1 Center in Sacramento, CA.



LEGENDS CARE

Legends Care is the initiative of the NBRPA that positively impacts communities and youth through basketball. NBRPA Legends give back through clinics, mentoring, charitable outreach and other grassroots initiatives in the United States and abroad with the goal of educating, inspiring and keeping youth active, healthy, and safe.

Ongoing Legends Care initiatives include the Legends HBCU Scholarship, Full Court Press, and Legends Home Courts. Past initiatives have included international goodwill missions, Thanksgiving Community Assist turkey donation drives, BACK2BACK school backpack drives, and Legends Girl Chats between WNBA Legends and middle school & high school girls.

To learn more about Legends Care or donate to support these initiatives, visit legendsofbasketball.com/LegendsCare



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NBRPA INTRODUCES

MIXTAPE MONDAYS



Follow @NBAalumi on Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, Threads and YouTube and be the first to see the newest #LegendsMixtapes every Monday.

In September of 2023, the NBRPA debuted a brand-new and highly anticipated content series across all @NBAalumni social media channels, remixing some of the best moves in NBA history as part of countdown to the start of the 2023-2024 NBA season.

Mixtape Mondays, also known as "Legends Mixtapes," reimagine old-school NBA highlights set to unexpected music from a different era, starting with a contemporary showcase of 6x NBA Champion Bob Cousy accompanied by M.O.P.'s "Ante Up." The Houdini of the Hardwood himself loved seeing the new interpretation of his ball-handling talent and said: "What a treat!"

In the first 24 hours after its release, the inaugural mixtape produced over half a million views on @NBAalumni social media. The series has also featured Isiah Thomas's legendary handles, "Pistol Pete" Maravich's smooth moves, "Nick the Quick" Van Exel's timeless highlights, and Larry Bird proving why he'll forever be called "Larry Legend." The Legends Mixtapes series has, to date, produced over 3 million views and hundreds of thousands of engagements, and counting.



TRILL'S TAKE:

TOP 10 BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME SPEECHES

by TRILL WITHERS

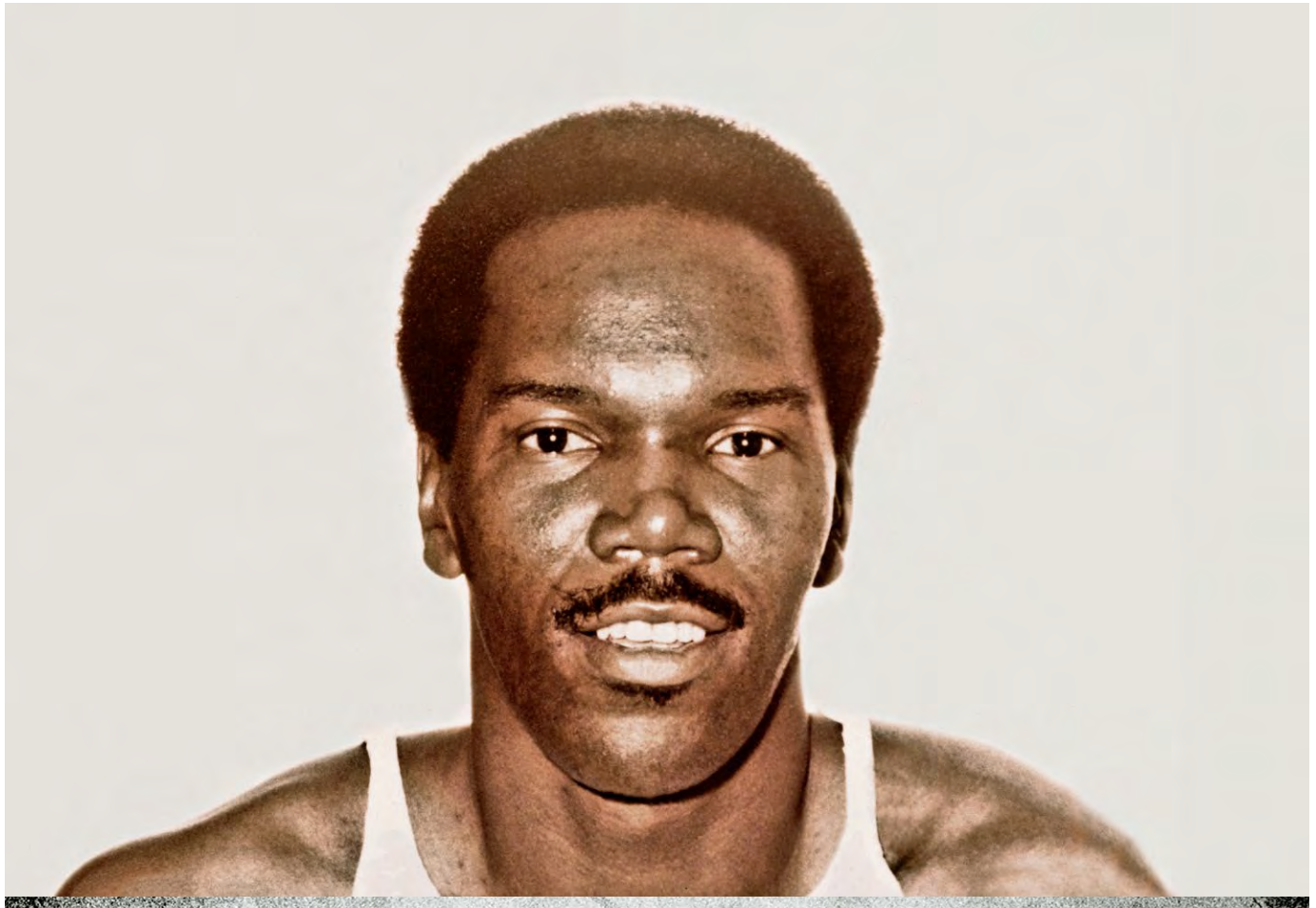
As we ease into Fall, we welcome our newest members into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame. The enshrinement ceremony this year was delayed a couple of months to accommodate the Summer Olympics and give the class the recognition they deserve. The best part of every ceremony is, of course, the speeches! For years, these athletes have heard every cheer, jeer and bit of trash talk from the public and now we get to hear what they have to say in return. From the laughs to the tears, we take a look back at some of our favorite Hall of Fame speeches.

TOP 10 TOP 10 BASKETBALL HALL OF FAME SPEECHES

10. Dwyane Wade (Class of 2023)
9. Bill Walton (1993)
8. Dawn Staley (2013)
7. Chris Bosh (2021)
6. Cheryl Miller (1995)
5. Pat Head Summitt (2000)
4. Michael Jordan (2009)
3. Teresa Weatherspoon (2019)
2. 1966 Texas Western men's basketball team (2007)
1. Kobe Bryant (2020, delivered by Vanessa Bryant)







A CONVERSATION WITH AN ABA/NBA STAR AND PODCAST HOST

RALPH SIMPSON

by MYAH TAYLOR

Ralph Simpson remembers when professional basketball had more than one Rockets team.

In 1970, after two years at Michigan State, the Detroit native signed to play hoops with the Denver Rockets in the American Basketball Association, which merged with the NBA in 1976. Simpson, a 6'6" swingman who scored 11,785 points throughout his professional basketball career from 1970 to 1980, is credited as a major reason Denver joined the NBA in the merger.

Now, the 75-year-old is campaigning for a spot in the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. He currently has the backing of Hall-of-Famers Spencer Haywood and Julius Erving, along with other figures like Larry Brown, Steve Smith, George Gervin, and Dave Bing. Simpson has been inducted into both the Michigan Sports Hall of Fame and Colorado Sports Hall of Fame, and the self-described sports historian has stayed close to basketball by developing his upcoming sports show on Roku. He has also enjoyed watching hoops evolve over the decades.

"Centers used to be around the bucket all the time and so were forwards, but now, we have stretch forwards and stretch centers who can

shoot the 3-point play," Simpson said. "I think that has made the game more exciting too because the scoring is up."

Before Simpson went to Michigan State and became a pro, he was a high school basketball star at Pershing High School in Detroit. At Pershing, where Simpson won a state championship under legendary coach Will Robinson, he was teammates with Haywood, an NBA champion in 1980. A junior at the time of the 1967 Michigan state title game against Flint Central, Simpson led his team — including then-senior Haywood — with 43 points. His performance set a state record that stood for 30 years.

Haywood is the namesake of the Spencer Haywood Rule, a 1971 Supreme Court decision that ruled against the NBA's requirement that a player couldn't be drafted by the league until four years after graduating high school. Simpson saw many players benefit from the ruling.

"We want to acknowledge [Haywood] for that," said Simpson's wife, Shelli. "He helped others come from poverty to wealth in minutes."

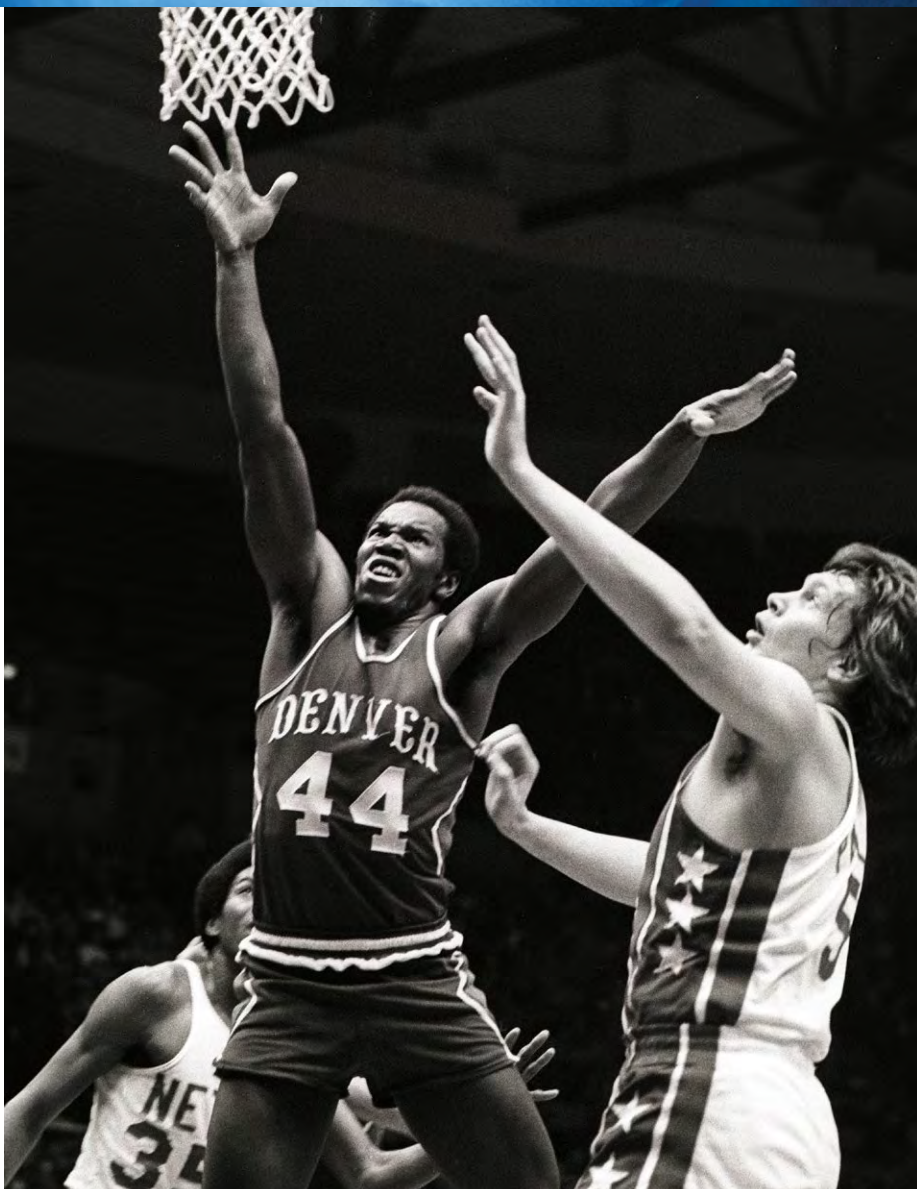
Those previous requirements prevented Simpson from being selected in the NBA draft until 1972 when his class graduated college. The

Chicago Bulls chose Simpson with the No. 11 pick that year, but he stayed in the ABA with Denver.

The five-time ABA All-Star averaged a career-high of 27.4 points per game in the 1971-72 season, and after the NBA-ABA merger in 1976, Simpson returned home to Michigan as a member of the Detroit Pistons. Two years later, he went back to Denver, which changed its name to the Nuggets in 1975. After stints with the Philadelphia 76ers and New Jersey Nets in 1978 and 1979, respectively, Simpson retired and settled in the Mile High City, where he raised his four children: Jon (a successful businessman), Kamesia (an admin secretary), Victoria (a business owner), and India Arie (a Grammy award-winning singer). He also has two stepchildren, Greg (a former Colorado Buffaloes football coach) and Leah (a singer, business owner, and reporter).

Some of Simpson's favorite memories from his basketball career include meeting notable people and building relationships with players like Haywood. He'll never forget the time in high school when he met Boston Celtics legend Bill Russell at Kutsher's Country Club, a hot spot for professional athletes in the 1950s and '60s. One day, while Simpson was waiting for the arrival of his idol Oscar Robertson, Russell walked past him. Simpson asked if he could take his bags, and Russell agreed to it.

"I took them up to his room and he didn't give me a tip," Simpson said. "But it started a relationship I had with him."



Ralph Simpson #44 of the Denver Rockets/Denver Nuggets goes up for a rebound against Billy Paultz (R) of the New York Nets during an American Basketball Association (ABA) game at the Nassau Coliseum circa 1975 in Uniondale, NY.

Simpson saw Russell eating with his Celtics teammates that night and remembers the center laughing at him. Russell's teammates asked him why he was laughing at Simpson. He told them he didn't give out autographs and wouldn't give the kid a tip. They convinced Russell to humor Simpson, who they had heard was a solid high school basketball player. So Russell did, giving Simpson a tip and his autograph, which he still has today. After the encounter, when Simpson was at Michigan State, he received a letter from the Celtics.

"It was a \$200 tip from Bill Russell," Simpson said. "It was so nice of him to do that."

Simpson cried when Russell died in July 2022 at the age of 88.

"That's one of the real highlights I can remember," Simpson said.

Since his basketball career ended, Simpson pastored a church in Aurora, Colorado, for three years. He still attends church faithfully, and he is very active in his grandchildren's lives. He has run a few small businesses, and he had a show on a Denver sports radio station called Mile High Sports from 2019 to 2022.

"We interviewed a lot of people, a lot of sports guys came on. Movie stars came on. It was really great," Shelli said.

About a year ago, the couple decided to make use of Simpson's wide sports knowledge. Roku gave them a station that they named Audacity TV. Simpson will host a show called "Talkin'



Sports” that is set to launch Oct. 7 at 10 a.m. MST on Audacity. Perhaps Simpson will discuss basketball’s evolution on the show. Considering the rise of 3-point shooting, Simpson said he thinks Golden State Warriors point guard Stephen Curry has revolutionized the game.

“A lot of young kids today are watching sports and watching basketball and watching Curry and LeBron James,” Simpson said. “They want to be like them. They start at such a young age — at 4, 5, 6 years old — that it’s allowed them to be greater and better than the prior generation.”

Basketball has also become more globalized since Simpson’s time in the league. Denver’s own Nikola Jokić, a three-time NBA MVP and NBA champion with the Nuggets, hails from Serbia. Simpson said the league does a great job marketing players like Jokić, who is popularly

known as “The Joker.” Jokić is one of many international players that dominate today’s NBA, a league that is enjoyed worldwide.

In July, the NBA announced a multibillion-dollar, 11-year global broadcast deal with The Walt Disney Company, NBCUniversal, and Amazon Prime Video that will begin in 2025.

“That’s phenomenal,” Simpson said. “It just shows you how popular the game has become.”

That visibility is another big difference between then and now, Simpson said. Basketball stars today are full-blown celebrities on and off the court. Simpson can hardly resist that kind of star power.

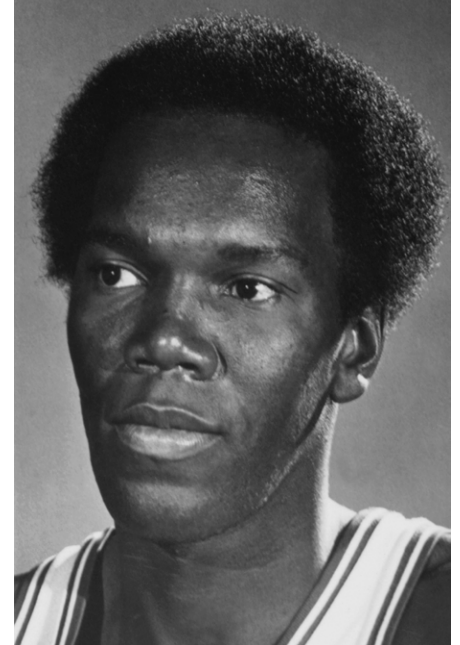
“I look forward to watching the game because of the superstars,” Simpson said. “The game has so many talented players and good coaching.”

“A LOT OF YOUNG KIDS TODAY ARE WATCHING SPORTS AND WATCHING BASKETBALL AND WATCHING CURRY AND LEBRON JAMES. THEY WANT TO BE LIKE THEM. THEY START AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE — AT 4, 5, 6 YEARS OLD — THAT IT’S ALLOWED THEM TO BE GREATER AND BETTER THAN THE PRIOR GENERATION.”

RALPH SIMPSON



Robert Hawkins #11 of the New Jersey Nets drives on Ralph Simpson #32 of the Detroit Pistons during an NBA basketball game circa 1978 at the Rutgers Athletic Center in Piscataway, New Jersey. Hawkins played for the Nets from 1977-78.





LEGENDS CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT
NEW YORK

On Saturday, October 5, 2024 members of the NBRPA New York Chapter joined their community to celebrate Harlem Globetrotters Legend Carl C. Green with a street naming in his honor at the intersection of 113th Street and St. Nicholas Avenue in Harlem. Among those in attendance were NBRPA Chairman Charles “Choo” Smith, NBRPA New York Chapter President Tom Hoover, Smush Parker, Sam Worthen, Albert King, Earl “The Pearl” Monroe, Nate “Tiny” Archibald, and Eric Jones, as well as Judith Green, the wife of the late Carl C. Green.

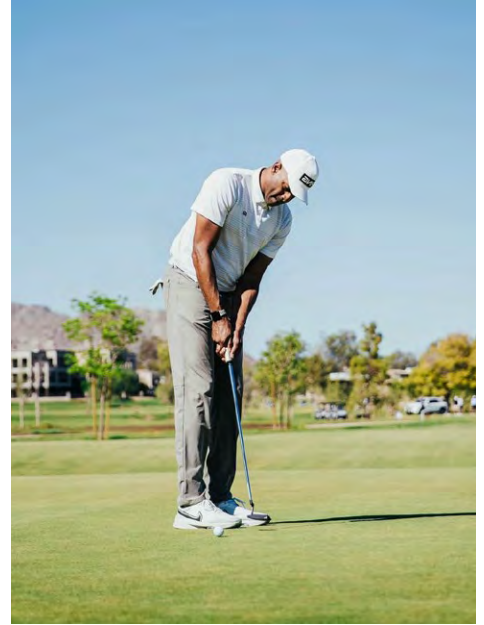




LEGENDS CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT PHOENIX

The NBRPA Phoenix Chapter, led by Chapter President Fat Lever, teamed up with the Boys & Girls Clubs of Tucson, Toys for Tots, and Tucson Police volunteers for a Basketball Fun Fest on Saturday, September 21, 2024. The event brought together basketball Legends, local law enforcement, and hoops-loving youth to foster community engagement through basketball.





LEGEND SIGHTINGS

*JERRY COLANGELO BASKETBALL
HALL OF FAME GOLF CLASSIC*

The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame held its 12th annual Jerry Colangelo Golf Classic on September 12-13 at the iconic Arizona Biltmore Golf Club. The star-studded weekend, hosted by Julius "Dr. J" Erving, included a star-studded Welcome Reception, dinner, and silent auction, followed by a competitive golf outing with Hall of Famers and basketball celebrities.



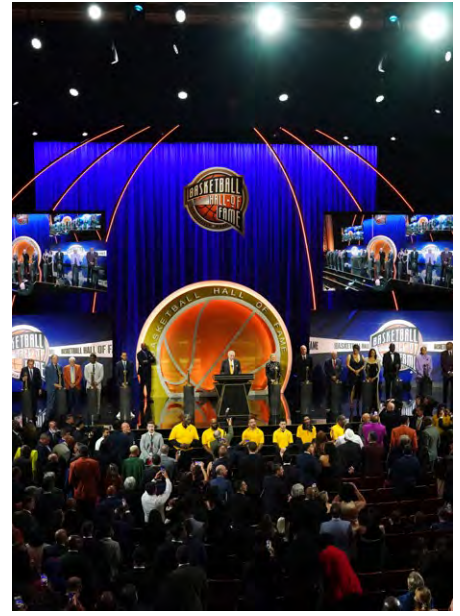


LEGEND SIGHTINGS

HALL OF FAME ENSHRINEMENT 2024

The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame Class of 2024 was officially enshrined on Sunday, October 14 at Symphony Hall in Springfield, Massachusetts. The Class of 2024 included Chauncey Billups, Vince Carter, Michael Cooper, Walter Davis, Bo Ryan, Charles Smith, Seimone Augustus, Dick Barnett, Harley Redin, Michele Timms, Doug Collins, Herb Simon, and Jerry West (now enshrined for an unprecedented third time). Basketball royalty and celebrity fans, including Michael Jordan, Spike Lee, Bill Murray, and countless others, gathered to celebrate the newest class of Hall of Famers. Congratulations to the Hall of Fame Class of 2024!







LEGEND SIGHTINGS

OLYMPIC GAMES PARIS 2024



PARIS 2024
OLYMPIC GAMES

For 3 weeks this summer, the world turned its full attention to the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris, France to watch the top athletes from around the globe compete. With the support of their fans and countless basketball Legends in attendance to cheer them on, USA Basketball continued its dominant reign of the Olympic podium and earned gold for both the men's and women's teams, bringing home their 5th and 8th consecutive gold medals, respectively.





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