

Bird Watching

On Playing and Coaching the Game I Love

by Larry Bird with Jackie MacMullan

[Fertig notes]

- All the great ones have an underlying subtext to them. You don't always sense it from their exterior public persona, but it's there. It's something totally unique that lies underneath, and drives them to exceptional accomplishments.
When you are striving for the same kind of greatness, you develop a lifelong respect for your adversaries, even though you rarely articulate it. I have always admired the level to which Larry Bird would go to fulfill his commitment to winning, the game, and his teammates. His commitment was sacred, and he made sure yours was too. If you wanted to play for rings, both teammate and opponent had to surpass his commitment.
The truly good coaches and players always observe those they compete against. All good coaches have the knowledge, but it's their disposition and attitude that sets them apart. Bird's team rose to the occasion every night because he made them. It's obvious that his players respect and trust him and draw from his completeness as a former player, present coach, and honorable fair man. They know Larry Bird has no agenda other than to win and make them better. Pat Riley
- On August 18, 1992, I announced my retirement from the Boston Celtics. It was one of the happiest days of my life. I was in pain all the time. I can honestly say I hated basketball at that point. It really wears you out when you are in constant pain.
- Dan said, "Larry, you should quit right now. Your back is unstable. Every day you go out there, you are risking further damage. It's over. You have to stop playing." I knew Dan was right, but I couldn't see quitting in the middle of the season. I promised myself I wouldn't do that, because people had bought season tickets that year thinking they were going to see me play. I didn't want to let them down.
- Some players get really protective about minutes, or when they are on the court and how much credit they're given, but not Robert [Parish]. He was a true pro. He really didn't care how much he played, or when, as long as it worked for the team. That's why that year was so great, because it was all about winning. In the end, Robert knew his team respected him, and that's all that really mattered.
- There was nothing I hated more than talking about my injuries. It never helped them feel any better, and to me it always sounded like an excuse.
- The worst part about it was that my back prevented me from practicing, and without all that time in the gym, my skills were deteriorating. I loved to practice, and I needed to practice, and my game really suffered when I didn't. That played a part in my decision to retire too.
- I played some of my best games when I had a muscle pull or I was sick. You come in that night figuring you can't feel any worse, and when you finally get out there and run around a little bit, you tend to forget about what was bothering you.
- One thing I've tried to understand as a coach, though, is that everyone handles pain differently. Some people know how to play through it. Others just can't. You have to be realistic. My whole thing is, if you don't think you can play, then don't. And if

you can, then go out there and do it, but don't spend a whole lot of time talking about it. Nobody else knows your pain threshold but you.

- One time when I was in the lobby I watched Magic getting ready to go out. I was thinking about telling him about the side door, and then I realized he wasn't interested in that. Magic would never go out a side door. The whole time in Barcelona, every time he went somewhere he'd bring along four guys with machine guns and walk right out front. That draws even more attention, but that's how Magic liked it. That's the difference between him and me. He would march out there and people would go crazy, and he would love it. Me? I was just happy nobody found out about my little secret escape.
- It was a terrible trade. Todd Day was a selfish player who thought about only one thing – how to get himself a shot.
- From day one I knew there was no way that one would work out. Dominique was at the end of his career, only he didn't know it. He still had a superstar's mentality. He thought he was good enough to run the show, but his skills had deteriorated and he just didn't have the same mobility or lift that he had in his prime. But what bothered me most about that signing was that Wilkins wasn't a Celtics kind of player. A true Celtic is a guy who's going to do everything for the team. Dominique was always one of those guys who wanted to do it all himself. You can't win that way. There's no question he's a terrific basketball player, but I always felt we could beat his teams, because one guy can't beat five guys, and Dominique always died trying.
- When the game was on the line, Kevin McHale and Robert Parish and I never worried about who was going to take the shot. We just made sure it was the best possible one we could take.
- We had all these houses – one in Indiana, one in Naples, one in Boston – but we never really had a home.
- I used to turn on the Miami Heat games, but I hardly ever followed the players. I was watching their coach, Pat Riley. Mostly I just watched the decisions he made during the course of the game. He was so excellent at motivating his guys, and it fascinated me. No matter what Miami game we were watching, it seemed like their players were always at the right spot. He spread the court very well, and the guys played very hard for him. Even when his players went down with injuries, he always seemed to find ways to win. To me, that's unbelievable.
- As a player, I totally dismissed Riley to the media. I never had anything good to say about him, even though in my heart I knew he was a very real threat to our championship hopes. He was one of the few coaches who could make me alter my game.
- Riley's Lakers teams always had something ready to throw you off. They were constantly changing up. I knew even back then Riley was different.
- It's a sign of a good coach when you play both ways, both finesse and the physical game. That's what I made up my mind I wanted to do if I did get into coaching.
- Donnie Walsh has never lied to me, and he's never going to. I knew that two days after I met him. You don't find that very often, especially in this business.
- I laid it out for him right then and there how I would handle the team. I told him I would stress conditioning, and being on time. I told him I thought they had a real chance to win the championship if they could get their players they could beat

Michael Jordan. To me, that was going to be one of the biggest problems. Jordan had become bigger than life. Everyone in the league seemed to be afraid of him, or intimidated by him. Even the referees! Somehow the Pacers needed a new mindset, one that would convince them Jordan was human and Chicago was not untouchable.

- I wanted to keep things simple, and for all of us to be focused on the same issues.
- I never liked it as a player when guys socialized with the opponent. When the Lakers played Detroit, Magic Johnson used to kiss his friend Isiah Thomas, who played for the Pistons, before the game. I couldn't believe it. I hated that. That's against everything I believe in. I tell my guys, "Hey, this is a game. If you want to hug and kiss those guys, you do it afterwards."
- I wanted the players, not me, to be the focal point of the team. Coaches don't score a single point out there. They don't play hurt, or take a charge. In the end, the players determine who wins and who loses, and the last thing I wanted was a situation where I was expected to be an attraction.
- I wasn't worried about whether I would succeed. I knew I'd work hard enough to be good at it.
- Rick Carlisle didn't have all the talent in the world, but right away, even as a rookie, he knew he shouldn't come in and try to beat people out, but try and come in and make the people who were already there better. That's a big difference.
- To me, coaching is a "we" thing. It shouldn't be the head coach running the whole show himself.
- It was all so public. That's one of the worst things about being a professional athlete. People think everything that happens to you is their business too.
- I do sometimes wonder what it would be like to be just another person. Most of my close friends aren't famous at all. They're working people, and they enjoy life as much as I do. There's a part of me that wishes I never became famous. Maybe that's why I enjoy the private time I have.
- Coaches overreact too much in this league. I knew as a player there were times when we'd go through a couple of rough minutes, but if the coach stuck with us we'd straighten it out. Sometimes calling a timeout just draws more attention to the fact you are struggling. It can get guys thinking too much about what they're doing wrong, instead of what they are doing right.
- I can still remember the first time I sat down and talked to Dick Harter. It was during his interview for the job. He started telling me about defense, and he was trying to be professional and all, but the more he talked, the more fired up he got. I don't know how badly he wanted the job, but I was impressed with his passion for the game. When you love what you're doing, you don't care how long it takes to get it right.
- One thing the three of us agree on: how valuable the tape can be as a learning tool. When I was a player I used to go home after a game and watch it all over again on tape. It wasn't so much to watch myself. What I'd do is zero in on plays where I had the ball, and see where my teammates were positioned. That way I could tell if I could have made a better play, or if there was someone who was open that I hadn't noticed on the floor.
- Coaches can talk and talk and talk about something, but if you get it on tape and show it to them, it is so much more effective.

- When it gets down to the end of the game, I don't mess with players. If Mark Jackson sees something he thinks is going to work to win us the game, then it's his call all the way.
- You have to show these guys you are human. When I get into that locker room, I ask them to do stuff, I don't tell them.
- Bill Fitch was the best coach for me at that time, because I had no clue what I was getting myself into. He would put me through those grueling drills just to get a reaction out of me, but he never did get one. The truth was, I loved it when he worked us like that. He kept me hungry. He never let you know where you stood, so you kept on working so you could impress him.
- All those guys respected Bill Fitch as a coach, but they had trouble not taking his comments to heart. The things he said to them when he got them in a corner, that's all part of coaching, but they couldn't separate that.
- I truly believe three years is the max for any coach with one team. Things get stale to players real fast, even more so today, and they need a fresh look at things.
- Right from the beginning K. C. said, "I don't care what you guys do off the court. When we throw the ball out there, it's time to play, and you better be ready." That's one thing that stuck in my mind. We only needed to give him two hours a day, so get to work.
- If one of my guys is doing something I don't like, I pull them aside and say, "I need a better screen from you. Don't set a lazy pick. Set a good one." And, if they don't do what I ask, I call them over a second time and say, "This is the last time I'll tell you. If you can't set a good pick, I'll go out and find myself someone who can."
- All the turmoil we had during that 1989-90 season took its toll. It made me realize how lucky I was before that to be on clubs that had good team chemistry. And now as a coach I am really aware of it. You can notice it from the sidelines, when guys make little remarks to each other on the court, or what they say to their coach when they come out of the game.
- If somebody was hurt and couldn't practice, they were expected to spend the whole workout on the exercise bike, which isn't much of a break, especially the way Riley expected you to ride that thing. I'm sure some of his players get tired of all those tough practices, but if you notice, he hardly ever yells at his players during a game. It's rare that you'll see him get mad at one of his guys on the sidelines. My guess is he takes care of that stuff during practice.
- If your team is losing, you have to realize they aren't going to play great every single time. So as long as they are giving me an effort and playing hard, I'm not going to go in there and go crazy on them.
- I've always felt that the third quarter is the key to the game. If you do it right, you can come out after halftime and change the whole complexion of the game. That's also when conditioning starts kicking in. Well-conditioned teams start showing themselves in the third quarter.
- There's been a lot of talk about Phil Jackson and his Zen and meditation, which all sounds like a bit much to me. You can get away with a lot of that stuff when you've got the best player in the league on your team.
- It's the little things that are major in this business.

- Everybody asks me how I developed my coaching philosophy. Most of it comes from the things I did as a player that worked for me. The most important thing was to develop good conditioning habits.
- When it came to a regular game, I never got tired. There's no excuse for any player to say he's tired.
- The governor of Indiana came out and said we should win 50 games. I said I'd make sure we won 50 games if he could get us a balanced budget.
- Have you ever seen anyone compete as hard as Mark Jackson? I know he doesn't have all the ability in the world, but I didn't either, and what set us both apart is the way we competed.
- I would not tolerate anyone being late. To me, it's disruptive and disrespectful, and it was the one thing I would not change my position on.
- One thing I believe in, and I told these guys, "As much as you hate the defensive drills, you've got to get through them."
- I was asking them to have an edge, and that's not always an easy thing, because in some cases it's not their nature.
- One thing I told my guys from the very first day of practice was if you have an open shot, you better take it, 'cause if you don't, you're coming out of the game... What good is it to have a shot if you don't feel confident about taking it?
- Practicing your shooting is so important. I used to take hundreds of shots a day. So much of it is all about repetition. I got to the point, at the peak of my career, when I could hit sixty or seventy shots in a row, without any trouble. You don't see as much of that today. I think it's because players seem to spend more time on jumping and dunking than working on their jump shots.
- The rules were the same for everyone. Reggie Miller used to get to places forty-five minutes early. I told the team, "If Reggie can do it, why can't you?"
- I was playing ten guys. I thought I showed enough confidence in those ten guys so that if I went to them in a crucial situation later in the season, they'd be ready. You like to play guys who have worked all year. They've earned a chance at some time. That's not to say I didn't sweat out some of those early substitutions I made.
- I would never get on one of my guys if he went hard after an offensive rebound. To me, it's one of those plays that is devastating to the opponent. If you get caught once in a while, well, that's the price you pay.
- I was hardly ever quicker than anyone I guarded, so I had to compensate in other ways and make up for it with smart team defense.
- One thing I never had a problem with as a player was preparation. I was a self-motivated person, and I didn't need anyone kicking me in the rear to get me jump-started.
- When you call out a play, everyone has to be in a certain area at a certain time or it doesn't work. It's the coach's job to make sure everybody understands exactly what is expected of them, and to make sure they are ready to play.
- When I first started doing commercials, even coming from a small town, I didn't want to do anything for a shaky company. I never did an ad for something I didn't respect.

- Whenever the two of us did a commercial, he'd always shoot my scenes first. One day Michael said, "How come Larry always gets to go first?" and Pytka answered, "Because he's always here first." My sentiments exactly.
- I was near the end of my career and Kareem was telling me to really step back and enjoy it. He said he didn't realize or appreciate how much the fans liked and respected what we do until after he was done playing, and he wished he could go back and do it differently. In retrospect, I don't think he the kind of relationship with the fans that he would have liked. He told me to play as long as I could, and to savor the moments. It was good advice, and I took it.
- I know the world I live in is mind-boggling, but I can go back to sleeping on floors if I have to. It's just the way I am.
- I always thought the whole idea of being paid to play pro basketball is ridiculous. I mean, think about it. You are taking that ball, running down the court, and you've got somebody on you. You've got four guys out there on your team, and five from the other team, and some people on the bench, and you look up and the place is packed, and all you are trying to do is make that ball go through the hole. It's just crazy to me.
- I would never have dreamed, when I was a kid, that anyone would pay money to watch me do anything. And no matter how much money I ever have, I'll never take it for granted.
- I've always been careful to save my money. Don't get me wrong, Dinah and I haven't suffered. We live a great life. We didn't run out and spend all our money because we knew there would be a time when it was over, and I wanted to have options on what we could do with our future. Some of the guys who made far less than me bought the \$7000,000 homes, and the Rolex watches, and the big luxury cars. I used to tell them, "You're crazy, you should be saving your money." They'd just laugh and make jokes about me stashing my money away. But I could see what they were doing. They were throwing away their future. So many of them were living for today, and not even stopping for a minute to think about ten years down the road, when their playing careers were over and the money stopped pouring in. And by the time they realized what I was telling was true, it was too late. I can't tell you how many ex-teammates have asked me for money. It's heartbreaking for me to say no, but I do, because I warned them. I told them to save.
- It kind of gets to you – all the waste. If you are going to make all this money, I feel like you should give some of it back.
- The bad part is, every day, I have to say no to somebody, and that's tough. People don't understand the demands on our time.
- You have all these people who call themselves friends, and they figure, "Hey, Larry's rich, what's a couple hundred bucks to him?" and expect me to give them whatever they need, just because I have money. What those people have forgotten is I've worked for everything I've earned. Nobody handed me anything. I had to go out and prove I was worth it. It's pretty easy to spot a guy who wants something from you, as opposed to real friends who don't want a dime. The guy who never asks for anything is the one I'm going to end up helping out.
- I never watched any basketball on TV. All I was concerned about was my game, and how I was playing. I can remember being in fifth and sixth grade, looking up at the

clock in school and wondering if it was ever going to move, because I couldn't wait to get out there and play ball. When I got older, my high school coach, Jim Jones, would give us drills to work on, and I'd work on them all day, until I got them right. But the older I got, I noticed the drills seemed to come a little easier to me than to some of my friends. I was moving along a little quicker, whether it was a pick and roll, or shooting drills, or whatever. I could just tell I was improving a lot faster than my friends. I guess that's the first time I realized I might be different from them.

- I knew one thing: I loved to compete.
- I spent hours making up drills to make myself better.
- My off-season conditioning, when I played for the Celtics started real early in the morning. The first thing I'd do every day is run two and a half, three miles. From there I used to do my sit-ups, anywhere from 300 to 500 of them. Then I'd start working on the court on ball handling drills, and start my shooting, and then do some suicide wind sprints, and then mix it all together. Then I'd go lift weights. A lot of times I'd get on my bike and ride through town, about eleven and three-quarter miles, and I'd always try to make it back home in forty-three minutes.
- Once I started having really bad back problems, Dan Dyrek put me on a special program, and it was absolutely brutal. He had it set up so one day I'd run for distance, then one day run sprints, but for some reason I always felt I still needed to run my three miles first, because that's what I had always done. That would get me loosened up for my basketball drills. Dan had me lifting, too. It would take me a good two hours just to finish my lifting. It wasn't a lot of repetitions, but it was three sets of twelve on every exercise. One of his drills was one of the best exercise I ever had. I'd be on a stationary bike, and I'd take ten pound weights, and ride the bike, and alternate trying to lift these things over my head while I'm trying to keep my form. I'd do that for five minutes and I'd be dying. Then I'd get off the bike and jump rope real fast for two minutes, then hop back on the stationary bike and start over. Dan had me do that three times in one set. Then he'd have me run these 440-yard dashes, which I always tried to do in seventy-five seconds or less. Once I finished all my conditioning drills, then I'd go play basketball. The basketball would last as long as I felt I could play that day, usually one and a half to two hours. I never scrimmaged but I concentrated on drills. When someone like Rick Carlisle would come up to Indiana to work out with me, I'd change the routine a little. We'd still run, and we'd still ride the bikes, and we'd lift and play some one-on-one. I liked it when guys like Rick came out, because he wanted to work.
- I never felt like I needed somebody to push me. I understand some players do, and a lot of my players are doing programs with personal trainers and strength and conditioning people. I'm all for that. It's like I told my players: "I don't care how you do it, but I want you coming in here at the start of each season well conditioned."
- Mom was the best coach all of us kids ever had, because she was the first one to teach us discipline and hard work.
- I've said over and over no coach should stay in one place longer than three years. You stay longer than that and you get stale. The players don't listen as closely.
- If I had one or two guys who didn't care about winning, it wouldn't make it worthwhile for me. Too often these days it seems the NBA has a group of guys with

too much going on. That's what people don't realize. If one guy is off, it can affect the whole team.

- I've always said you find out more about a player when things are going bad than when things are going good. Anybody can keep it together when you're winning every night.
- As far as leading them, I told them, "Don't worry about me. I'll handle all the bull. This team should just focus on playing basketball. If you guys want me to lead you, I'll lead you. I can't score any baskets, but I'll have you prepared to score those baskets."
- My biggest concern about our guys coming in is who would emerge as a true leader for us. After a couple of months it became obvious to me that our leader was Mark Jackson. He wasn't the most talented guy on our team, but guys responded to him.
- People think it's an easy thing to be a leader. It's not. You have to earn the respect of your teammates. You have to be willing to challenge them as well as support them. And you have to prove you are willing to do whatever it takes.
- You take a guy on our team like Rik Smits. You never really used to see Rik dive for loose balls. But last year I saw him flying all over the court. These guys bought into the fact that that kind of effort would win games for us. The one thing I have to say about these guys is that they truly know I believe in them, so they listen.
- Mark Jackson understood right away what I was trying to do with this team. He saw a coach who was willing to let him be whatever he wanted to be, as long as he put in the work and the effort.
- He was playing great, and that's when he started doing that shimmy thing, and I just wanted to deck him. The next morning we had a breakfast meeting. I just laid it on the line to him. I felt he had put us in a position to lose that game, and I told him that. I wanted Mark to feel bad, because I wanted him to make it up to his team. He did too. In Game 5 of that series, he recorded the first playoff triple-double in Pacers history, and it was because of him that we won the game. Not long after that I asked him, "Do you want to be remembered by doing that shake, or do you want to be remembered as the guy that came into New York and knocked off the Knicks and got a triple-double against them?"
- After he got that triple-double, I made sure we got him a ball and painted it up real nice for him. We did the same thing whenever a rookie scored his first two points in a regular-season game. I think that's something every pro player should remember. I know how important stuff like that can be to players, to be recognized.
- Rik Smits is like most of the guys on this team, one of the nicest people you'd ever want to be around. Truthfully? That's not what you really want. You want guys who are nasty, who have an edge, that killer instinct. You need to find somebody who, if your opponent is coming in for a layup, every once in a while is willing to knock him down. That's just the way this league is. Guys don't like to be hit. You get a couple of them on the ground and it makes a difference, especially if you're in the game.
- Chris Mullin was a guy I would have loved to play with. He's one of those guys who understands the game. You can tell by the way he passes the ball, and is always in the right spot for the rebound, and by the way he drills his shots. I remember being impressed by the way he handled himself on the Dream Team. We never really had

any serious practices, but Chris was always working on something anyway. He was a real pro, just working and working.

- Dale (Davis) is a real good guy. You love having someone like him. My guess is basketball isn't the most important thing in the world to him. He'll do everything you ask him to do. He just won't do more. You look at that body, pure muscle, and you wonder about the possibilities.
- There are times when Derrick (McKey) will really frustrate you. He's got so much talent, but what can you do? He has to want to get the most out of it. I can't talk him into that.
- Once we get into the thick of it, you have very few days off, which means fewer days of practice, and you are traveling all over the country. That's why when guys get hurt they get behind so quickly, first because their conditioning goes, and second because they don't have enough practice time to catch up with everyone else.
- Of course you develop relationships with certain guys. Coaches are lying if they tell you that they don't. But you have to remember that it's a business.
- Guys like Mark West helped develop this league, not because he was a star but because he worked his tail off and made his team better. Then you see all these players with natural talent and you want to kick them in the rear because they are wasting it.
- Hard work does make a difference.
- I tell them, "Check it out. You've got nice wives, or pretty girlfriends. You've got fancy cars, and you live in expensive homes, and you travel all over the country in luxury jets. Just think about that, because in a few years you'll be out of the league and you aren't going to have this lifestyle anymore." They nod their heads, but the truth is they all think they're going to play forever. I knew better. I always knew what I had. Once in a while I'd look at the nice house I was living in and I'd say to myself, "Here I am in Boston, playing basketball in a city where they love us. What would I be doing if I wasn't playing ball?" And that would bring me right back down to earth.
- I don't care where we stay. We're not going to be there that long. All you have to do is lay down for a while, then get up and play. I never stayed in a fancy hotel until I came to the Pacers. Why do we need to stay there? There was one point during our season when I thought our guys were getting soft. I thought it would have been a great thing if we had made them fly commercial for the next ten games. For one thing, it would stop guys from showing up two minutes before takeoff. The problem with these guys is they think they're hot stuff.
- I want these guys to like coming to work. I don't want it to be miserable. That's why one of the things I wanted to do was develop a kind of family atmosphere around our team.
- Really, what it's all about is being reasonable. I want these guys to be comfortable. Every once in a while the guys will come to me and ask something. If it's within the realm of the team and what we're trying to do, I don't have a problem with it.
- The league goes by so fast, your careers are gone before you know it. At the time you are playing, it seems like a million other things are more important. But then your career is over and there's nothing to do. You go from this pace of driving to practice

and rushing to airports and getting treatment to ...nothing. At that point, you'd do anything to go to dinner with all your teammates.

- There's nothing better than being part of a team. Especially when you win.
- I know the game inside out and I know how the league works, and although I had never coached before at any level, I felt my instincts would help me in crucial situations. As for the things I wasn't sure about, that's why I had Dick and Rick.
- When I took this job, I promised my players I wouldn't holler or scream at them. I don't think it's a good way to communicate with your players. I hated it when my coaches did it, and I determined not to lose my cool like that. But there were a couple of times when I needed to get through to these guys, even if it meant raising my voice.
- It bothers me a lot when these guys don't give the effort.
- When I get mad, I get real mad, but it doesn't happen very often. I guess what it comes down to is, I pick my spots.
- Someone asked me once if I could ever coach Dennis Rodman. I don't care how many different shades of green his hair is. If he plays hard and performs, he'll always have a place on my team. The only crap I wouldn't put up with is him showing up late for practice and games. That might be where we'd part company.
- Truth was, I wasn't really sure I could trust Jim Gray. I knew his job was to get information, so I figured he'd be snooping around as much as he could, trying to get the upper hand on a scoop. I don't mind having television people around, as long as they understand the boundaries. Truthfully? I'd do a lot more for those guys if they would come to me instead of snooping around. It's the one thing I can't stand. I don't like it when one of these TV guys grabs one of my players and says, "Go in there and tell me what the coach says to you before the game." I know Jim Gray does that. If they want to talk about it after I finished saying my piece, that's fine. But don't send somebody in there to spy. You won't get very far with me when you pull that crap.
- My team was convinced they couldn't beat the Bulls as long as Jordan was there. I spent the rest of the season convincing them it wasn't true.
- Michael Jordan played the mind game better than anyone. He really knew how to get inside people's heads. Plus, I believe he had the second best player in the league playing right next to him in Scottie Pippen. You take Michael off that team, and Scottie moves down to fifth. But when Michael was out there with him, they were the two best in the league.
- In that 63-point game, he was just hitting everything. Everything. But in the end we got the win. I walked out of there thinking what I always did when I saw a great individual performance like that: one guy can't beat a whole team.
- If I didn't play at the same time as Magic Johnson, I might have won a couple more championships, but I don't know if they would have been nearly as worthwhile. I wouldn't have traded that rivalry for anything.
- What separate Michael right now is he did it over a long period of time. The thing is he did have injuries, but he's one of those players who played right through all that. People don't give him enough credit for that. He had sprains and muscle tears and all that stuff, but he went in, he got his rest, he got his treatment, and then he went out

and played. That's the difference between Michael Jordan and a lower-level player. The best players just lace 'em up and go.

- Magic was bad for basketball in one way. He made all these great passes, and then everyone else started trying to do it. You have to be special to thread the needle the way he did, or fire off those no-look passes. Magic knew how to do it. Most players don't. I tell my guys, "Just make the play." The best passers, like John Stockton, make the pass that gives you the highest percentage shot.
- Magic handles a crowd better than anyone I've ever seen. He just charms people to death. That's not something I was ever very good at.
- If my guys want to say something to someone else out there, that's fine. There were a few of our guys talking junk. But it's like I tell them: "If you're gonna talk it, make sure you can back it up."
- Even Jordan doesn't hit every shot. But if you give him an opening early on, he's going to go for the kill.
- There's no question the referees have changed since I was playing. I've always felt the referees have tough jobs. Just let them do their jobs, and if you really want to get upset about something, then realize you can get away with more by just talking to them. Cursing and swearing at them doesn't work. The problem now is that the referees let their egos get into it a lot more than before. They carry themselves differently. They want to be part of the show.
- As a coach, I know guys are looking at me to see how I react a lot of the time, so they don't need me jumping around. Somebody's got to be calm.
- I know people are surprised that I did so well coaching. I wasn't surprised. I wouldn't have done it if I didn't think I could succeed. The one thing I always felt was that I was a leader, and with the career that I had, if I picked the right team and the right players, they would listen to me. And that's what happened. I've got a group of guys who respect me, and if I have something to say, I say it, then I get out of there. I don't need to elaborate on it for two or three minutes. It's funny. I'll give them a talk before a game, after the game, in the huddle, whatever, and all eyes are focused on me. You watch other coaches talking, and you'll see one guy wiping his leg or fixing his socks. I picked this team because I knew this group would give me the respect you need to get the job done. After one season, I can't tell you much I've respected them in return.
- I will say this: I learned more about the game of basketball in one season of coaching than in all my years as a player. As a player, everything I did was based on reaction. And once I learned the fundamentals, I could see how to improve my game by practicing. In coaching, I learned through other people, whether it's the coaches or the players.
- I can't say coaching gives you the same thrill as a player, but it's pretty close.
- I'm not a schmoozer. If that's what it takes to win, count me out.
- To me, the NBA has become the MTV league. There's more hype than there is game, and the sport can't possibly live up to that. It's not if you win, or how you play, but how you look when you play, or where you play.
- I can understand all the marketing. That's how we all make money. I always felt they did a fantastic job of promoting the league, but somewhere along the way it got bigger and bigger, and then the NBA went corporate. What I loved was when you

looked up during the playoffs, and it was hot and sticky, it was eighty-five degrees, and everybody was up there in tank tops and shorts. Those are basketball fans. But they're gone now. They can't afford the tickets, because the salaries are so out of whack, and the prices keep going up. So then it carries over to the players. They get used to certain standard. If you asked them to have roommates on the road, like we used to have, they'd be horrified. They fly chartered planes. It's just a whole different ball game now.

- I had a chance to leave school early for the pros, but I promised my mom I'd graduate from school, so that's what I did. I have never regretted that decision. If I had gone, Indiana State never would have gone to the championship game, and Magic and I wouldn't have had all that history.
- To me, the next great player is Shaquille O'Neal. He's sort of like Michael was early on. He hasn't figured it out yet, but he will.
- You look at these guys, and as talented as they are, it is still going to take them about four years. It takes time to become great.
- I think practice is the key if you plan on winning anything significant.
- The only difference between Allen Iverson and me, or Magic when he was on top, is Iverson is saying a lot of things we were just thinking.
- The guaranteed money is a good thing, but it makes guys soft. It makes them lazy. It happened when I played too. The only difference is now they're being lazy for millions, instead of hundreds of thousands of dollars. That's why I believe you need some guys on the end of your bench who are hungry, who are fighting for their lives every day, because they keep all your fat cats honest.
- What Spreewell did was wrong, there's no question about that. But it wouldn't have stopped me from taking him. I know that seems like a contradiction to some people, based on how I stress discipline and togetherness and all that. But I took a look at the group of guys we had, and I felt they would make him change. He would have to fall in line with our group. And if he didn't, we'd have to find someplace else for him to go. To me it was worth the gamble. When a guy messes up like that, he's either made a big mistake or he's got major problems. We would have needed to find out which one it was right away. And I never would have traded for him without going to Mark and Reggie and Chris and getting their opinion, which is what I did. I told them, "If you don't want him, it's your team. This is your chance to speak up."
- I know Spreewell has talent. That's not the issue. But is he capable of understanding that some nights, when he's really rolling, he might get 20 shots, but on nights he's not, he might be on the bench while someone else does it?
- A player gets injured. That will no longer mean he's sitting out. My feeling is that you should make it so miserable to be off the court that guys will be fighting like hell to get back on the court.
- Everyone felt sorry for Scottie Pippen because he was underpaid, but I didn't feel sorry for him. He signed the contract. If he was sure he was going to be that good, why didn't he put an escape clause in there? And suppose he got hurt? He wouldn't be complaining about the contract then.
- I'm all for the players earning as much as they possibly can, but the one thing I can't stand is when guys get paid before they earn it, and then they don't want to come out and play.

- Having been on both sides of it now, I think it's time to realize that things aren't going to be like they were before. It was time for both parties to agree on what is best for the league, not what is best for themselves.
- If I could do anything over again, I probably wouldn't have put so much pressure on them to win the championship. I think it got to them.
- You have to show up for every play, every night, if you want to win a championship.