

Best Seat in the House

by Spike Lee

[Fertig Notes]

- The Sixers aren't going anywhere. Dues to pay. They don't know what it's about yet. It's one thing to play thirty games a year, two or three a week, twenty-minute halves, against less talented twenty-year-olds who are sitting in passive zone defenses. It is quite another thing to play one hundred games a season against the best ballplayers in the world every night; hard men defending the basket, their means in life; playing four forty-eight-minute games in five nights on the road, or six in eight days. You are going to hit the wall.
- Webber still shows aftereffects of coaching himself in college at Michigan.
- Michael Jordan says, "*The young kid, Kobe. He's got some skills. He's got a lot to learn, though.*"
- Rare is the rookie who can help you in the playoffs.
- *I think Larry Brown gets tired. He gets complacent with what he has to work with. He wants to change. He's a man of change. When he stays in one place too long, maybe he wears out his welcome a little bit. But I like him. I would play for Larry Brown in a heartbeat.*
- I think being pigeon-toed gives you character.
- I had learned what the Game is all about: relationships.
- Starks is not the most talented two-guard ever to come down the ramp, but he has a huge heart, no fear. He doesn't even call it playing. He calls it "putting in work." His determination, optimism, zeal, and heart, that's partly the reason why he acts crazy sometimes. It comes with the package when you have to play over your head.
- "As a player you have to sit back and think about your career and realize what's important to you," Starks told me. "The one thing I don't have is a championship. With Allan here, my minutes might go down, but my production will go up."
- Ideally, you need a mixture, a blend of youth and experience.
- Those [huge] hands, and what's going on inside his head, are Jordan's secrets.
- Jordan said, "*When Allan's shot is going great, he's fine; when his shot is not, then you may lose him on the other end as well.*"
- "Michael Jordan has a heart of a lion. With him you have to compete every single night, or he's going to put you to shame," Starks said.
- It's always much better to have company when you see something amazing.
- That's the beauty of it. The people with the best individual players don't always win. The people who play best as a *team* – they win. Hoop is unlike football or baseball in that way.
- The Game has always danced in the blood of New Yorkers. And in the city, we know that when the Game is played both creatively and well, it can become an art form.
- Some people are born old, or have an old soul. Russell's like that. Had an old man's laughter, a cackle, and an old man's look and approach, was difficult to follow in the way his mind worked.
- The most electrifying play in pro hoops is not the dunk. It is the *blocked* dunk.
- Kids growing up today like whichever team is winning because they can see every team play on television. Sportscenter, 24-7. But back in the day, you only saw your local teams on the news, so there was much more loyalty to the team you grew up with.

- The day we moved, we got called nigger a couple of times, but halfheartedly, and we were only kids, and kids call each other everything under the sun and then forget about it. I don't recall any adults doing it at the time, although you know they did behind closed doors or the kids wouldn't have learned it.
- There is something about a new pair of sneakers that makes a boy feel he can run faster and jump higher, and they also made a fashion statement not so different from how it is today, although there's much more to covet in this day and time.
- As far as money went – we didn't have much. We were rich in ideas. In talents. Our parents made sure we sought them out.
- Walt Frazier's game drew me in. I wanted to emulate his cool professionalism and style. I admired everything about him. He made me see that producing while making it look easy was the epitome of skill.
- Dick Barnett told Bill Bradley he would never be mugged because he dressed as if he'd *already* been mugged.
- There is an axiom in sports that you can never lose your starting job to an injury. You can only lose it by being outperformed. Bradley and Cazzie turned that around. Neither outperformed the other, but both generally outperformed the opposition.
- Whatever differences the 1969-70 Knicks had as individuals, you never saw them revealed in their play. They put differences aside for a higher purpose. They were a team. They were the best. The best *team*, I'm saying. They were the best not because they had the most talent but because they had great chemistry.
- Bradley said, "You always think it's going in. If you get the ball in the last minute and you don't think it's going in, you're not a shooter."
- Willis was deified for coming out for the seventh game. Never does a man's head much good to be deified. Some measure of resentment seemed to be brewing between him and Frazier. It was Frazier's team, to me and many others. Just that little bit of dissonance was enough to make the difference.
- You can be just as creative and not have it be detrimental to the team. When it's your turn in the logical progression of play, in the playing of the improvisational composition of the game, then you can create. But there are times when creativity should be stifled for the sake of efficiency, especially if the object of the game is to win.
- If he were playing today, imagine the ego Dean Meminger could display compared to some of these young boys who come into the league now thinking they're supposed to get shoes named after them and TV commercials and movies because they got their game off of other teenagers. They have no idea, some of them. Rare is the talent of a Ken Griffey Jr. in baseball or a Tiger Woods in golf, a Jordan in basketball. They come along once or twice in a life span. But now, every year during the NBA draft, you've got twenty-eight guys sitting behind a curtain, insulted if they get drafted too low. They have no concept of humility, of sublimating their game to the needs of the team.
- Meminger took one for the team – took a backseat because he was a rookie, because it was expected, and mostly because it was fair.
- "It was the drama," says Bradley. "That's the difference. That's why the fans remember that one most memorably. Willis's injury, appearance, and shots in the seventh game is Bobby Thomson hitting the home run for the Giants in the '51 playoffs against the Dodgers. It's one of those moments that lives in the minds of the fans forever, because it had all the elements: human drama, courage, competence, excellence, team play, overcoming great odds."

- Frazier says, “Anything that’s first, like your first love, you remember more than the second.”
- If white men can’t jump, it must be something they came down with lately. Cowens could definitely sky.
- Clyde always responded the way a true champion responds. Which is, don’t divert my energies into this stupid personality conflict, *mano a mano*, but let me beat your brains in and then walk off the floor laughing, and you’ll have lost, trying to figure out what happened. Yeah, you were the toughest guy on the block. But I beat you, so what does that make me?
- One day I heard Hubie Brown, the Hawks’ coach, cursing out John Drew. I never knew it happened. I was shocked when I found out it happened. Later, after watching Rick Pitino and John Thompson operate, I remembered. They could curse left and right too, but you could tell they were teaching. It wasn’t vicious. Hubie was vicious.
- Frazier said, “Dean was headstrong. He had his concepts, always tried to get coaches to utilize plays, always suggesting. Not all coaches were like Red. Some may have resented it.”
- Denver was attractive because of David Thompson. David became the most wasted talent – in a marketing, creative, aesthetic sense – the NBA has ever had.
- “I want to think through the next chapter of the American story – the need for economic transformation, the need for racial healing,” Bradley told me. “Search for something that’s deeper than the material in people’s lives. Some people can’t understand that, they can’t compute that, and yet other people understand perfectly how giving up power is a form of power. I’m learning to use that power.”
- John Thompson’s a strong, authoritative man, and it’s no secret that people, especially within the ranks of the majority media, have problems with strong black men, especially when they are as physically imposing as 6-foot-11 John Thompson.
- The Georgetown Hoyas back then played like they’d rather win first, talk about the rest later.
- When you destroy a people, what you get is destroyed people who aren’t dead yet.
- Larry Bird never tried to enter the conversation about any black-and-white issue, even though the press was on him, and I’m sure they were pushing that stuff and it would have been easy for him to portray himself as a victim. Bird was not giving any legitimacy to that mess because he was concentrating on what he had to do. He never tried to ride that wave. He was all about ball, trying to win. It wasn’t about marketing or mythology. It was about trying to get the easiest shot, the last W. Beat Magic. Beat the Lakers. Win. He regarded the rest as garbage and trash. Which it was.
- Jim Riswold wanted to pair Mars with Michael Jordan. Would I play Mars Blackmon and direct the spots? Nike bit, and then they approached Michael. Jordan had no idea who I was at the time, had not seen the movie, and could easily have decided to say, nah, let’s get a hot shot Madison Avenue director, but he gave me a break. If Michael had said he wanted the next man instead, that would have been it for me, but Jordan decided to give a young brother a chance. I’m still in his debt for saying yes.
- I truly believe those commercials, going to Knicks games, having the best seats in the house, have given me more visibility than I got from being a filmmaker. It wasn’t my astuteness. It was an accident. I had no idea at the time what would happen to Michael.
- One of the things that happens in families is that parents take different roles when they raise children. My father’s approach was hands-off. Mr. Freedom: “Best way to

raise kids is to let them make choices.” Ultimately, the other parent – in this case, my mother – is going to be the bad cop, the one left to be the disciplinarian. Believe me she had to do that or we would’ve run amok. He loved us. She raised us.

- I believe the ads for Air Jordans that we shot were not aimed primarily at inner-city kids. Even today the most hard-core Bad Boy and Death Row rap albums sell best out in the suburbs. And NHL hockey jerseys and Timberland boots sell best in the inner city. So it’s not all cut-and-dried.
- There’s a world of difference in being a celebrity or being a leader on a professional ball club and leading an entire race of people. Can they do more? Probably yes. Can I do more? Yes. Any one of us should answer that question the same way. But no athlete or entertainer is going to stop young brothers from killing each other, no matter what. The makeover on environmentally induced self-hatred must be done from inside.
- *“Well, winning back-to-back championships is tougher than anything because you’ve got to sustain, and stave off complacency,” Jordan said. “I mean, it’s relatively easy to sit on your laurels. You’ve got players who never experience this, then they’ve got to try and experience it twice. They lose some of that edge. You lose that hunger, and then it’s up to the veterans who have gone through it many times, know what it is to fail, to kind of refresh these young players about just why we are playing – that, hey, we still have got something that we can win here.”*
- *“I don’t mind if we lose, if we put forth the effort. But if we’re not putting forth the effort and we’re getting our asses whipped, then that’s when I lose my temper.”*
- *“You’ve got to go out there and play the game and play it with the intention of playing it with your head first, not with your skills first. In this game, what separates the good and the great players is how they apply their skills in certain situations. And that is all mental.”*
- John Thompson and Georgetown might not have invented defense, but they damn sure made it popular.
- How many times had I gotten excited by a new Knick on the roster or a rookie in the league, only to have Jordan’s eyes begin to glow as he asked me: “But, Spike, tell me this – who is he going to guard?”
- Of all the sports, basketball is the most difficult to re-create, so that’s the reason why there have been so few satisfying basketball movies.
- When I watched Patrick Ewing at Georgetown, I knew that was someone who was a warrior, who would do anything possible to win.
- The learning process that goes along with being an NBA rookie – it’s so far above college-level hoop that it’s ridiculous.
- Bradley says, “It sounds so simple – play team ball. But what happens is, guys’ egos get out of control, and they make the mistake of thinking they’re going to get a big contract if they average 20 or 18 points a game as opposed to 15 points a game. But if you win the championship averaging 15 points a game, you’re going to get a contract as if you scored 18 a game, and the damage you do to the team in trying to score 18 a game, if you’re a 15-points-a-game scorer, is in the end, self-destructive.”
- I think that the honesty and integrity of the effort is what attracts people to my films; to them it’s not about whether they agree or disagree with the content.
- Woody Allen said, “I was there the night they booed Walt Frazier at the Garden, and I couldn’t believe that either, because these people do miraculous things for them night after night, if not year after year, and then they do something wrong, miss a couple of foul shots, have a bad game or two, and when they need the support, they don’t get it.

I love the game because I think it's the one sport where the personal expression of the individual ballplayer comes across best. Each individual guy's style is so clear and pronounced. It's so individually expressive, there's no similarity between Magic Johnson and Isiah Thomas and Walt Frazier. Each one of these guys is an artist. It's so individually expressive, so that's great.

"It's more fun to watch the finesse players.

"When he first came up, I thought it was all press hype. As the years went by, I realized, 'Michael never disappoints.' It wasn't like you go into the Garden and then come out saying, 'Gee, I caught a bad Michael Jordan night.' There are so few bad Michael Jordan evenings. He just never disappoints.

"In filmmaking, the companies, everybody thinks the priority has to be the clock. I never thought that. I always think the most important thing is your life. To me I would never miss a basketball game I wanted to see for shooting. I just wouldn't do it. So I schedule around it. I go home early. I knock off early all the time because it's too important. I'd never miss a game I wanted to see for work."

- Jerry West once said nobody could re-create the mood of a losing locker room of a good team that's given its all and lost.
- Talent alone is not enough; even talent and work ethic is not enough. There is also will. The will to keep trying.
- Toward the end of Riley's run with the Knicks, I came to think that Pat was too much of a dictator. Every coach has belief in his or her system, but the game is about adapting, making adjustments, making changes. His ego was getting in the way.
- Bill Bradley said, "When he was a Knick, Phil Jackson knew his role. I knew my role. Everybody knew their roles. Why don't [other teams] know it now? Beats me. It has to do with maturity."
- Championship-level basketball is the collective realization that no one player can be as good as all five can be collectively. But it has to be a collective realization. If one of the five doesn't realize it, the composition is ruined, and the goal is eventually missed.
- You look at things through your own eyes. Most of us don't have the gift of being in someone else's shoes, looking at other people's lives from their perspective, to see why they see things the way *they* do, and maybe that's unfortunate.
- You know, people think only of coke, heroin, and nicotine as drugs, but fame can be a drug too. The roar of the crowd, being the focus can be a drug. Being in the spotlight 24-7 can be a drug. Some people become junkies for it; they can't go cold turkey because they have withdrawal symptoms.
- Money changes everything.
- "I really believe players set the standard in this league, when you have competitive tough guys," Larry Brown said. "Your kids with talent are great, but you gotta have guys who are pros, who've been through hard times, tough times. Guys who know what it is."
- In some ways home court advantage is highly overrated in pro ball. It's much more important to the media and to the fans than it is to the players.
- Larry Brown said, "I used to play all the time down at the Brownsville Boys Club. That's why I love city kids. They go to the goal, they know how to play, and they have a toughness."
- The Bulls had lost to the Magic after Jordan made a critical turnover, losing the ball to Nick Anderson on a move to the middle. "*That was a bad year,*" Jordan told me. "*I was unprepared for basketball. I thought I could live off my reputation and the*

Game proved me wrong. The Game taught me a lesson. It wasn't Orlando that taught me, or New York. The Game taught me the lesson. You can't leave and think you can come back and dominate this game. I will be physically and mentally prepared from now on. I promised myself that. I mean, if I do that, and things don't go my way, then I can respect that. I will say, Hey, somebody got the best of me. It was the Game itself that humbled me, Spike."

- Players back then were much less selfish than the guys now, because there's so much more money to be made, and the more points you score, the bigger the endorsements, the bigger the shoe deal, the bigger the playing contract, just like Bill Bradley said. So I feel people really wanted to win more back then than they do now, and that's a by-product not just of the basketball players but of society as well. It's just more about "me" and "getting paid" nowadays. Whatever its merits might be, that philosophy doesn't make for winning basketball.
- The thing about Michael is, he's never been, probably never could be, paid what he's worth.
- They may help us win one day if they develop a collective understanding that five can always beat one if they play like one.
- Put the sphere through the circle. Anybody can do it. Put it up there soft two or three times, and it will go. The difference comes in when you *need* to do it, consistently, under extreme duress, while being watched.
- If your stomach is growling, it's going to win a philosophical debate with your conscience.
- Temple lost in the final seconds. I went into the locker room. It was very still. The air was thick. Thick with the warmth of heated bodies. Thick with emotion. And dead quiet. People had their heads in their hands. People were crying. You could feel their dismay, but you could not be as sharp about the feeling as they were; if asked what the feeling was, it would be hard to try and describe it. You could best describe it as indescribable. I don't know if you can reproduce that, capture it. Jerry West might be right. To send or take somebody there, into the losing locker room of a good team that has worked its hardest, given all it has, and still lost the game in the end. No one can capture that kind of emotional crucifixion from outside, because you have to know the people involved, you have to have seen them work in practice, have gone through their late-night cramps, their disappointments, their small victories. You have to be a Coach John Chaney or one of his assistants, or maybe one of the parents, roommates, friends, even instructors or tutors, to understand what it is the players on a good team that lost are feeling. It is about as far from acting as humans get. They have given so much to the Game, and in a time of loss, seemingly great loss, they begin, however briefly, to question their own worth, their own existence. Why am I here? You're here to try. Be assured only of that. Times like this begin to make the facts of life painfully obvious to young people.
- If it's competitive, teams are evenly matched, then you have a story. That's what I enjoy – competition, the story. I think that's what makes sports great. Competitive games and stories can be found on every level.
- I wanted to get back to Adolph Rupp. "Spike, he was a great man," Pat Riley said. "He was a staunch disciplinarian. He was a military type of coach. Everything was 'Yes, sir' and 'No, sir.' I mean, there was just an ultimate respect you had for him because he was a great leader and a great teacher. He was a hard man, you know. But he had the biggest influence on me because of how organized he was, and how repetitive he was in his drills."
- Sometimes you have to talk about the unpleasant aspects, so maybe you can become more aware of them, and, if you want to, you can work them out. Great coaches like

Adolph Rupp at Kentucky and Bear Bryant at Alabama tried to avoid a changing world. But it was too big – even for those giants.

- So what Stefon Marbury has to watch out for now, in the NBA, ain't so much other players, but leeches. He has got to get rid of the leeches. Buy me this, get me that. See, they got used to doing it like that when Stef was being recruited, because he was – is – the gravy train. So they were like We're gonna be rich. We got it like that now.
- “If I was going to pick one player to begin a franchise, I'd pick Bill Russell,” Bradley said. “I think he's the ultimate winner, and he's also the big man. Russell controlled the game with his mind. Wilt tried to control the game with his body. Russell would do enough with his body to be able to control the game with his mind. It was uncanny.”
- Billy Cunningham said, “Bill Russell would not accept defeat.”
- Earl Monroe and Pete Maravich changed ball. They brought *functional* showmanship. Pearl always spun toward the basket. Pete had magical ball handling designed to get the ball in the hole. They outwitted and outskilled defenders more than they out-quickened, out-jumped, or out-muscled them – but fooled them going to the goal.
- Magic Johnson and Larry Bird together changed ball. They took responsibility and mental control of a game. They didn't have positions, per se. They just played. They changed ball in the manner Oscar did, only taller. Magic *needed* to be in the arena, but he couldn't play forever. Athletes can't play forever. Except in our memories. Time goes on, generation to generation, the players come and the players go. We all grow old, even our gods – the athletes.
- Athletes were by nature disciplined, had to be, to train themselves to become world-class. They have to learn to be disciplined in their non-athletic lives.
- As of 1997, five Michael Jordans would beat five of any other ballplayer who ever lived, or probably ever will live, in their prime.
- How you play and how you look as you play depends on who you are and where you come from. There's something to be recognized, something unique that African-Americans bring culturally to music, to dance, to sports, to literature, to photography – whatever the medium is. This creativity shows in this game, basketball. Basketball allows improvisation, and black folks have changed the game.
- I don't think this is a black-white thing, but nowadays guys make a whole lot of money and there's very few players out there whose fans really believe they want to win anymore,

Everybody wants to win on Saturday afternoon or Sunday afternoon when the game begins and the cheerleaders are out there and everybody tunes in. But the games are won in the preparation – are they willing to do what it takes to win before the game ever starts? Seems like some of them are just making so much money that they don't care. Not playing hard, that's almost criminal. Not caring is criminal. Not trying to be the best ballplayer you can be is criminal.

“The pride and desire to be the best, to keep improving,” George Gervin said.

“Many guys don't have it anymore. I don't know if it's upbringing – it's gotta be upbringing to some degree. The things I was taught when I was young – morals, principles, spirituality – I wonder sometimes do our young people have any of those values, if they are holding on to their humanity, not becoming objects. A guy really has to come to the understanding of what is important to him.” All basketball players have an Achilles heel – they want to play, and they want to play well – but some of them are getting this money, and I'm happy that they are, but some of them aren't working, and I ain't saying working for the money. I'm saying working to be

better. Work on your hook shot. Work on your going left and right. You gotta come out here and work. You've got to bust your butt. You've got to come in to practice, and come ready to work. This is what I did to be successful. Hard to motivate a guy who doesn't want to work. They're glad they've got the good job, reached the goal, can rest on their laurels, getting a good check, and will take everything else that goes along with it...but sometimes, when you take that word 'struggle' out from in front of you, then it's easy for a guy to quit getting better. You get that big check, the struggle is gone.

- To be a professional athlete and not care if you win or lose – to me, that's sacrilegious.
- Artists don't approach it that other way. They play what they feel. It was something inside of them. That's the way Michael Jordan plays. Same thing with Ali. Creative self-expression by mental control of human muscularity. That's what it all is, really, all the arts. You have guys who manufacture it.
- Michael has great will. In a competitive sense, and probably an artistic sense too, that's what gets him over. Forget about his great athletic abilities. What I most admire about him is his will to win. It is unparalleled. He just refuses to lose and a lot of times these guys are evenly matched physically. It's a matter of who wants to win it more and who can exercise his will within the context and confines of the problem at hand. The guy with the biggest heart won't give up, just keeps on coming and he makes the other guy quit. He makes the opponent believe as he believes, that if it keeps on going long enough, he is going to prevail because it is predestined, so he demoralizes the other guy, takes his spirit, and eventually makes him quit. Hesitate. Takes his heart. Makes him doubt.
- Jeff Van Gundy told me, "I think Jordan is consumed with winning and I really admire him for that, because so much of this league is now about 'me' and the stats and all that...if everybody was perfect, they'd all be Jordan."
- Somebody asked if Coach Thompson was concerned about Iverson; sure, he had talent, but didn't he lack discipline? "What you are calling discipline might in fact be physical limitation. For it's one thing to bring the ball out and run the offense if you know you can't beat your man. That's not discipline so much as limitation. It's another thing to know you can take your man and go to the goal and probably score, but you bring it back out anyway, because the coach tells you to, in order to run the offense. That's a different kind of discipline. I'll tell you what, in a couple of games we ended up losing, I wish I *had* let him go."
- You have to make a distinction between being a good person and being a winner. A lot of people, when they think of Michael Jordan, the word they use always is "assassin." He's a cold-blooded killer. Now would you use those words to describe a nice person, a good person? No. But we're talking about athletes engaged in competition. The desire to win. If somebody wins, that means somebody has to lose. To win means you may not have to be nice. There's the conflict of being democratic, Mr. Nice Guy, that's okay, you messed up. Winning is not a democracy. It's not for everybody. Somebody has to take charge. You have to make a distinction between what you do in an athletic arena, a competitive setting, and at home, a social setting. It's different from one's natural persona. But some people say there is a carryover; you can turn it off and on.
- "With Penny, as good as he is, I'd have done anything I could to keep that group together," Larry Brown said. "Coaching those kind of kids is, number one, a great responsibility. Sometimes I think when a coach sees they're gifted, they don't keep teaching. With them, as young and as good as they were, with so much ahead of them – yeah, it *would* have been fun to coach them."

- Work ethic is a large component of being a great player. We're at a point in history where athletes want to sing, they want to rap, they want to act in movies, have their own talk shows, they want to shoot commercials with Pytka and Singleton and Spike and whoever. When a professional athlete neglects his craft in order to take advantage of broader horizons, that's self-defeating. Even doing other things, you have to be more selective. You can't just do a movie because somebody wants you to do a movie. Be selective. What image does this show, not only of me but of everything else around me? You want to talk about keeping it real? Does this vehicle allow me to become better as an actor? Can I act in the first place? Does the role or the video take advantage of my strengths?
- "That's the real difference between today's ballplayers. Back in my day, the late '70s and early 80s, I really feel we were more skill oriented," Ice Gervin told me. "Today the players are more athletic, can jump better, strong, big, but their skills are diminished. Guys don't work as hard on their skills. And it *is* a game of skill. Hard work means production...Now it's dunking and that's it. So then I start wondering about these college coaches. What are you teaching them? You send these kids out here one dimensional."
- All this has to do with being true to your craft. Everything has to come out of that. The Havliceks, the Magic Johnsons – these guys got better as pros. If there was a flaw in their game, they worked hard all during the off-season. I have to believe there's more satisfaction for the craftsman in doing something like that than in looking amateurish in some rap video or half-baked film.
- As the Iceman said, one difference between 1970 and 1997 is that now there may be better athletes who jump higher, run faster, and are bigger and stronger. But mentally, maybe they're not as strong as the older guys were. Today some of these guys just want to get a dunk and they're satisfied. If they can shatter a backboard, they think they've done something. And the media lets them think it. Why? Because that play will be seen across the country for weeks. And on *Sportscenter*?
- "We ought to have programs with mentors like Doc, myself, a lot of us, where these young guys have to come in and talk to us," Gervin said. "You still need some guidance and professional direction. Only way you're gonna get it is from guys who've been there.
"This game is all about relationships. You've gotta have a certain kind of relationship with teammates and coaches to be successful. The NBA needs a mentor program. Sooner or later someone will get a hold of these young guys, and we're going to straighten them out, so they will want to do something with and for themselves on a deeper level."
- I have empathy for and with an athlete who doesn't have necessarily the greatest talent, but tries. The great sin is someone who has great talent and wastes it.
- Larry Brown said: give him the guy who's been through hard times.
- John Starks said, "I respected Riley so greatly, man, because he was about winning. He's hard on you, and he pushes you to the limit, but his whole purpose is about winning, and as a player I can respect that. Some players might not like it, but growing up, that was the type of environment I had."
- A lot of people have great talent, but if they have no chemistry, no willingness to be unselfish, to sacrifice some of their personal stats and fame and riches for the collective good, then the team has squat, and the individual also has squat. They have no athletic life worth living. They have press clippings, some trappings of success, and little else. They don't even have love. Not real love, true love, because it very hard to love somebody selfish like that. You'd have to be a masochist. If people have their own agendas and are not really coming together and aren't going to

sacrifice for the greater good of the team, then it's hopeless. If they won't have the right mind-set, then you can keep 'em. I'd rather take the scrubs who are going to sacrifice than the superstar who has all the game but only cares about himself. That's what made that first Knicks World Championship team in 1969-70 so great. That was the epitome of teamwork. All they wanted to do was win, and they didn't care how, and they didn't care who. It's very rare in any sport today to see that type of mentality.

- Chris Webber was the coach at Michigan, and they paid for it. He paid for it. Jalen Rose paid for it. Juwan Howard is paying for it.
- It's supposed to be a team game. Yet I know the human ego is inflatable, deflatable. It's just more about "me," and I think in many ways, that ends up being sad. Even tragic. "It *is* sad, and it happens," Starks said. "Not being motivated to play. Not giving the effort. I have pride in my team. Go out and exhibit that kind of enthusiasm. The true player is going to put forth the effort night in and night out."
- Pete Carril who used to coach at Princeton, used to rate his players. He said he could get by with a player who came from a one-car garage home; he could make do with that even though he didn't have the same fire and drive, and therefore accumulated ability, as the player who came from a third-floor walk-up or a housing project. Carril said a player from a family with a two-car-garage would be iffy, and a player from a family with a three-car garage – forget it. He wouldn't be able to play competitively in the fire of Division One or the NBA. I mean, these guys came from there, and that's the last place they want to go back, the last place they want to go, and to me that's so very sad.
- Jesse Jackson said, "When champions win ball games, the people put them on their shoulders. But when heroes win, they put the people on their shoulders."
- Larry Brown said, "When you put a priority on something, it's different. If you don't ask players to do something, sometimes they don't. If you make that a priority, and they see the chance of winning, there's a lot of things these guys can do."