

Eleven Rings

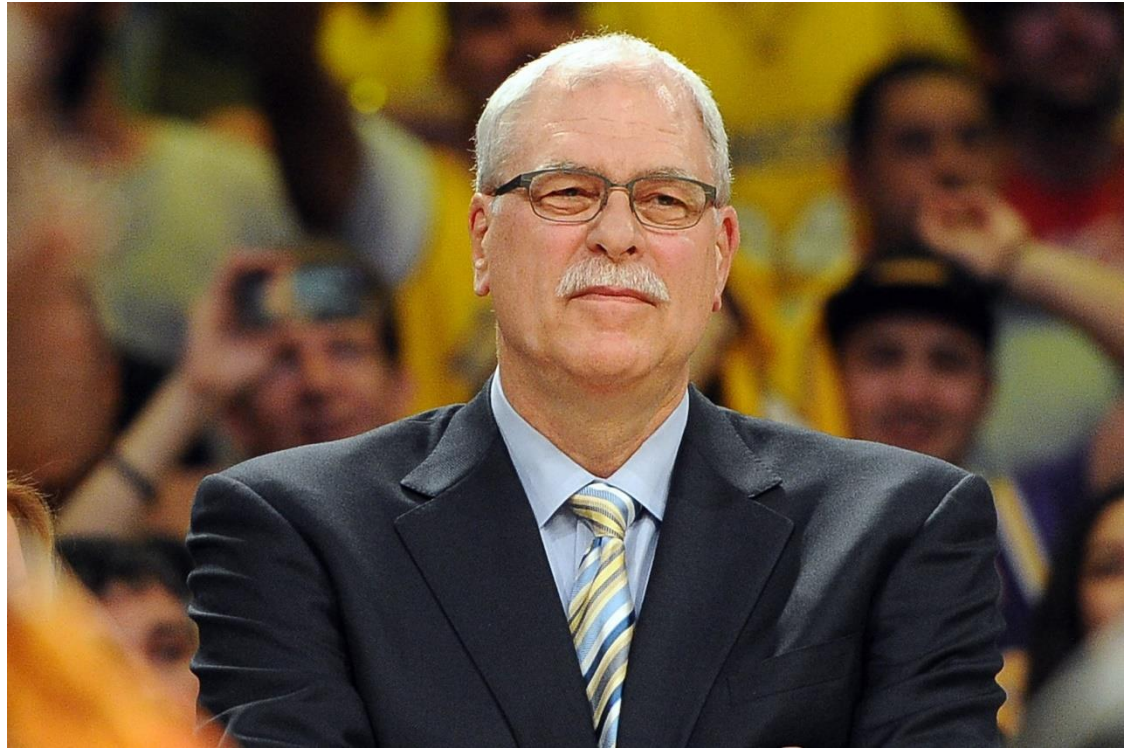
The Soul of Success

Brady Wilyman

The Playbook

Table of Contents

Phil Jackson.....	1
Playing Career.....	2
Coaching the Bulls.....	3
The Bulls Dynasty.....	4
Holzman and Winter.....	5
Coaching the Lakers.....	5
Laker-Time, Act II.....	7
Key Points.....	7
Relationships.....	7
Critical Evaluation.....	8
Discussion Questions.....	8
Connections.....	8



Phil Jackson in action as head coach of the Los Angeles Lakers (Bleacher Report)

Phil Jackson

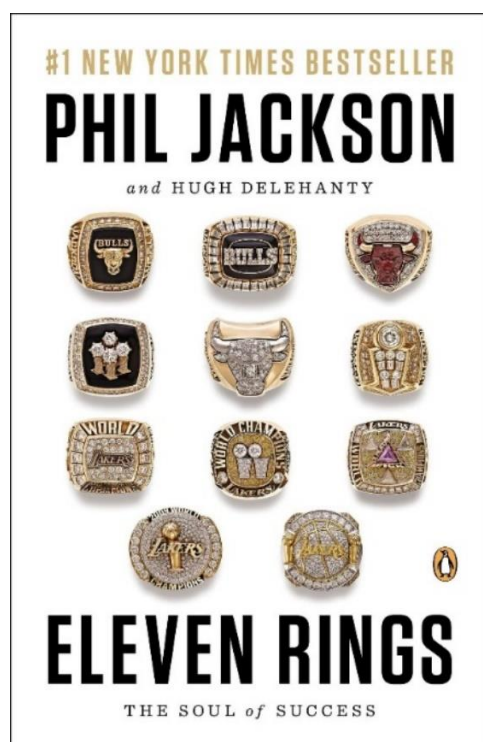
About the Author

Phil Jackson is known as one of the most successful NBA coaches of all time as he led his team to championship eleven times over his storied coaching career. *Eleven Rings, the Soul of Success* is a detailed behind the scenes look at the journey Jackson took from small town North Dakota to player to coach.

Jackson was born in Montana and grew up in a devout Christian household with his parents and three siblings. Jackson's parents were heavily involved with the church. His father would give sermon on Sunday mornings while his mother would give sermon in the evening. Although Jackson grew up in a Christian household, believing he would grow to be a minister, he would turn to spirituality from many different cultures, primarily Buddhism and Indigenous cultures. But, Jackson claimed basketball was his real saviour.

Jackson would eventually play high school basketball in Williston, North Dakota. In his senior year he was named MVP and led his team to a state championship, earning himself a scholarship to the University of North Dakota. It was at North Dakota where he grew spiritually through his studies, but also as a player on the court. His success at North Dakota led to him being drafted by the New York Knicks in 1967. Jackson was a defensive threat for most of his twelve-year career, often coming off the bench. Winning a championship in 1973 as a player was a valuable experience leading to his coaching career.

Jackson's true success came as a coach. Working with some of the NBA's greatest players ever, he was challenged with managing a variety of differing personalities, from the bold, alpha-likes of Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant, to the laid-back demeanour of Scottie Pippen and Shaquille O'Neal. His ability to create cohesive locker rooms is one of the biggest reasons Jackson became the coaching legend he is.



The cover, a look at all eleven championship rings Jackson earned as a head coach. The eleven championships are the most all-time by a head coach, passing legendary Red Auerbach in 2009.

Michael Jordan

Bulls (1987-1993; 1995-1998)

"It took me awhile to calm down. Maybe I had to look at myself in the mirror and try to understand what Phil was saying. And I imagine he did the same thing. Every time we had one of those encounters, our mutual respect grew."

Page 97

Kobe Bryant

Lakers (1999-2004; 2005-2011)

"Letting my children develop at their own pace and not trying to force them into doing something they're not really comfortable with but just nurturing and guiding them along. I learned that all from Phil."

Page 317

Derek Fisher

Lakers (1999-2004; 2007-2011)

Although we had a lot of talent, we still hadn't figured out a way to maximize our potential. So when Phil and the staff were hired, it brought everybody to attention and got us to focus in a way I hadn't seen in the first three years we played together."

Page 210

Jackson's Playing Career

His Lesser-Known Success

While Jackson is known as a legendary coach, many forget that he had a respectable career as a player as well. After being drafted by the Knicks in 1967 in the second round, Jackson began his career as a bench player. He noted at this time the Knicks were a good team with some great players, so he accepted his role as a bench player as it was good for the team. This team first philosophy became a constant of success for Jackson in both his playing career but also his coaching career. In the NBA, Jackson continued to be relied on defensively as he had been in college, mainly due to his offence not being at a high level compared to other NBA big men.

Jackson would injure his back during his second season which would require surgery forcing him to miss a year and a half of basketball. He spent the 1969-70 season on the sidelines doing some commentary but also as an informal assistant coach to the man he calls his mentor, Red Holzman.

The Knicks would end up winning the championship that season, and they honoured Jackson with a ring even though he was out of the lineup. For Jackson, this season was important in two ways. He learned extremely valuable experience, but it drove him to win a ring as a player on the court. He did not have to wait long as the Knicks again won the championship during the 1972-73 season and this ring felt that much better. For much of his career, he continued as a defensive role player until his eventual retirement in 1980.

His career as a player was not as illustrious as a coach, but many of the experiences he had transformed him into the coaching legend he became. He saw the transformation of great players playing as individuals become self-less players and champions.

Of course, the biggest lasting impression on Jackson was that of Holzman. His influence on Jackson became a foundation for his own coaching philosophies that helped lead him to eleven more championships as a head coach.



Jackson driving the lane with the Knicks (Basketball Network)



Phil Jackson posing for a photo at the University of North Dakota (University of North Dakota Athletics)

University of North Dakota

Growing into his own

At UND, Jackson continued to grow, both literally and as a player. Reaching the height of 6'8", Jackson claimed he was able to sit in the backseat of his car and open both front doors without leaning forward. It was this massive wingspan that helped him develop into a first team All-American in his junior and senior seasons. While playing at UND, he was coached by Bill Fitch. Fitch was hard-nosed, but Jackson liked playing for him because he was "tough, honest, and always pushing him to do better." What he also liked was that Fitch used the triangle offence, the offence Jackson used as a coach in the NBA.

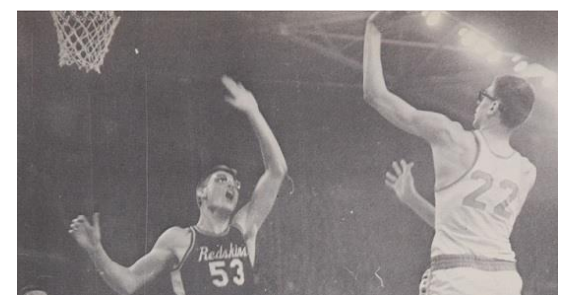
While at UND, Jackson did more than just grow as a player, but grew as a person. Growing up as a devout Christian, his eyes were opened early in his studies and decided to enroll in psychological classes and religion classes. He was intrigued by spirituality from around the world, both East and West. Here he learned about Indigenous spirituality, notably Lakota culture, as well as Zen culture, which later on earned him the nickname "The Zen Master."

Williston High

A State Champion

Jackson was an exceptional talent on the basketball court and it was evident as he excelled for Williston High. He found that basketball was his saviour, and in basketball he found a release from the stiff lifestyle his parents demanded of him. After a growth spurt, his game began to improve and he became a force. In his junior year, they lost in the state finals. As Jackson emphasized as an NBA coach, you tend to learn more from failure than you do from success. As a senior, he once again led his team to the state finals, but this time they succeeded. He fell in love with basketball because you needed to be in sync, not just relying on one player.

High school basketball was valuable for Jackson off the court as well. Because of the travel schedule, he was able to spend some time away from the church and have some new life experiences, opening the door for new beliefs in his college years.



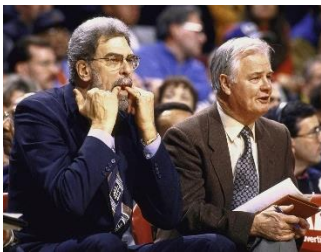
Phil Jackson puts up a shot in high school (Stateline Sports Network)



Jackson drawing up a play for Jordan and the Bulls (NBA.com)

Coaching the Bulls

Building a Legacy



Jackson seen with Tex Winter, his assistant coach with the Bulls and the later on with the Lakers. Jackson and Winter developed a bond over their love for the triangle offence which Winter mastered as a college coach. (Sports Illustrated)

Jackson returned to the NBA as an assistant coach with the Chicago Bulls in 1987 in a role that had him travelling on scouting trips for upcoming games. In his second season, 1988-89, the team's general manager, Jerry Krause, asked Jackson to spend more time at practice and games. Jackson had a good relationship with players and they needed positive connections as tensions between players and current head coach, Doug Collins, were starting to rise. Collins wasn't committed to the triangle offence that Tex Winter had implemented as an assistant coach, but didn't put another system in place either. After another playoff exit without a championship, the Bulls made a change that made Jackson the head coach.

"My goal in my first year as head coach was to transform the Bulls from a stage 3 team of lone warriors committed to their own individual success (*"I'm great and you're not"*) to a stage 4 team in which the dedication to the We overtakes the emphasis on the Me (*"We're great and you're not"*). Jackson referred to this as a tribal mentality. This is a reoccurring theme in Jackson's coaching journey, and this iteration of the Bulls would be the easiest to accomplish this with. The foundation of the team was already in place, led by the likes of Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen, and Horace Grant and they had been together for a few years now. What brought this group together was the defeat they had felt as a group before. It was a bond they wanted to overcome together.

One of the challenges Jackson first encountered was getting Jordan to buy into the triangle offence. After another playoff exit at the hands of Detroit, Jackson knew MJ needed to be a part of the system or it would break down the locker room cohesion that had been built. "In general, I tried to give Michael room to figure out how to integrate his personal ambitions with those of the team." MJ agreed stating that the scoring title was important to him, but he wanted to achieve this without taking away from what the team did

"As a coach, I tried to convey to each player that I cared for him as a person, not just as a basketball factotem."

- Phil Jackson

The other key contributor was Scottie Pippen. A humbler player than Jordan, Jackson was able to tap into Pippen's unleashed potential by creating a special role for him, "point forward." This role allowed Pippen to share the role of moving the ball up the court and dictate how the offence ran. Pippen claimed this shift turned him into the NBA player he had always envisioned. With two MVP caliber stars operating within the triangle offence, the Bulls became a powerhouse in the NBA. With their stars buying in to an offence that supports the whole team, and the locker room becoming "a tribe" as Jackson said, the Bulls finally overcame the mountain they had been climbing. In 1991, they finally hoisted the championship trophy. This was a great moment for the core group who had felt defeat together for years prior. The next challenge was building a dynasty.



Jackson (far right) and the Bulls pose with their six championship trophies on parade day. The end of a dynasty. (Chicago Tribune)

The Bulls Dynasty

Six Championships in the '90s



Jordan (left to right), Pippen, and Rodman on the court together. This was the core of the second 3-peat of the 90s for the Chicago Bulls. (Basketball Network)

In sports, winning a championship is special because it never comes easy. Jackson knew the team was good enough to win multiple titles, but it was going to get harder each time. Jackson recalled a quote from former UCLA coach, John Wooden who said, “winning takes talent, to repeat takes character.” Jordan said “success turns a bunch of we’s into me’s” and Jackson knew he was right. Each year they would win, Jackson had to manage the new egos that would come with winning. Later on when he coaches the Lakers, it was evident he valued former champions who understood the sacrifices it took to win. This included leaving your ego at the door. In their run to their second title, Jackson was a peacekeeper of all the personalities. This included Krause who was upset that someone spoke to an author about Michael Jordan and his lifestyle off the court. But, this is what made Jackson so exceptional was his ability to defuse situations and make the team even stronger. In the 1992-93 season, their third championship in a row, Jackson found that their biggest enemy was boredom. Jackson said that players had to find their spiritual freedom. He was subtle in showing them how to be spiritual knowing many would resist. The team would have short meditation sessions or Jackson would share a book with each player that he specifically picked out for them. None of it was mandatory, but more took part than not. Steve Kerr claimed, “it delivered us from the mundane,” and that in created a stronger bond because they were doing it together.

After winning their third title in a row, the team began to change, most notably the retirement of Michael Jordan. Losing arguably the best basketball player of all-time is a blow to any team, but the Bulls were deep and continued to have high expectations. Unfortunately, they lost to the Knicks in the second round and lost more pieces the following offseason. In the 1994-95 season, Jordan would return from minor league baseball. The team had changed, and he did not have a great relationship with many, and they lost in the playoffs once again.

“You’d think it would get easier the second time around, but that’s not how it works.”

- Phil Jackson

A key to the next 3-peat was the acquisition of Dennis Rodman, who was eccentric to say the least. From his tattoos and piercings to the wildly coloured hair, Rodman played by his own rules. And Jackson gave him the space he needed. He talked to the team explaining that Rodman would help them win, but he was different. The rest of the team had the goal of winning in mind and accepted Rodman and his antics. This was a foundational piece to winning titles in '96, '97, and in '98 during *The Last Dance*. During the '98 season, there were plenty of off-court issues that could have become distractions. Jordan, Rodman, and Jackson all had expiring contracts, and Pippen was going to be traded in the offseason to start a rebuild for the Bulls. Players and Jackson had lots of tension with Krause once again, but Jackson kept the team focused throughout the season. Any time a player began to drift from the goal, Jackson had a way of connecting with them and having them refocus.

Red Holzman

Jackson's Mentor



Holzman as coach of the Knicks (Getty Images)

Jackson first met Holzman when he was recruiting him to come play for the Knicks, but Jackson did not know that Holzman would become his mentor until he was signing his contract. Holzman, like Jackson, was not your prototypical head coach. He was highly respected by the players in the locker room and gave players a voice they did not have before. Jackson said in team meetings and huddles he would often ask the players if they had an idea.

Jackson claimed that “Red’s singular gift, however, was his uncanny ability to manage grown men and get them to come together with a common mission.” This gift allowed him to form positive relationships with the players, but also unity within the team. The relationships he built with the players was beneficial as the team would win two championships under his leadership. Specifically, he built relationships with the bench players. Holzman believed that bench players were equally as important to the team as the starters were. He had the ability to make each player “feel as if he had an important role on the team, whether he played four minutes a game or forty – and this helped turn the Knicks into a fast-moving cohesive team.”

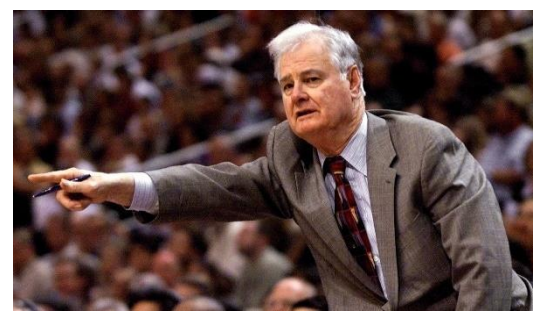
The lessons Jackson learned from Holzman were evident in his coaching tenure. Relationships with players, allowing players to have a voice, and having a group of men come towards a common goal. When Jackson earned his tenth championship ring as a head coach, he said it was for Holzman as this put Jackson atop the all-time coaches list, one spot ahead of Holzman’s rival, Red Auerbach.

Tex Winter

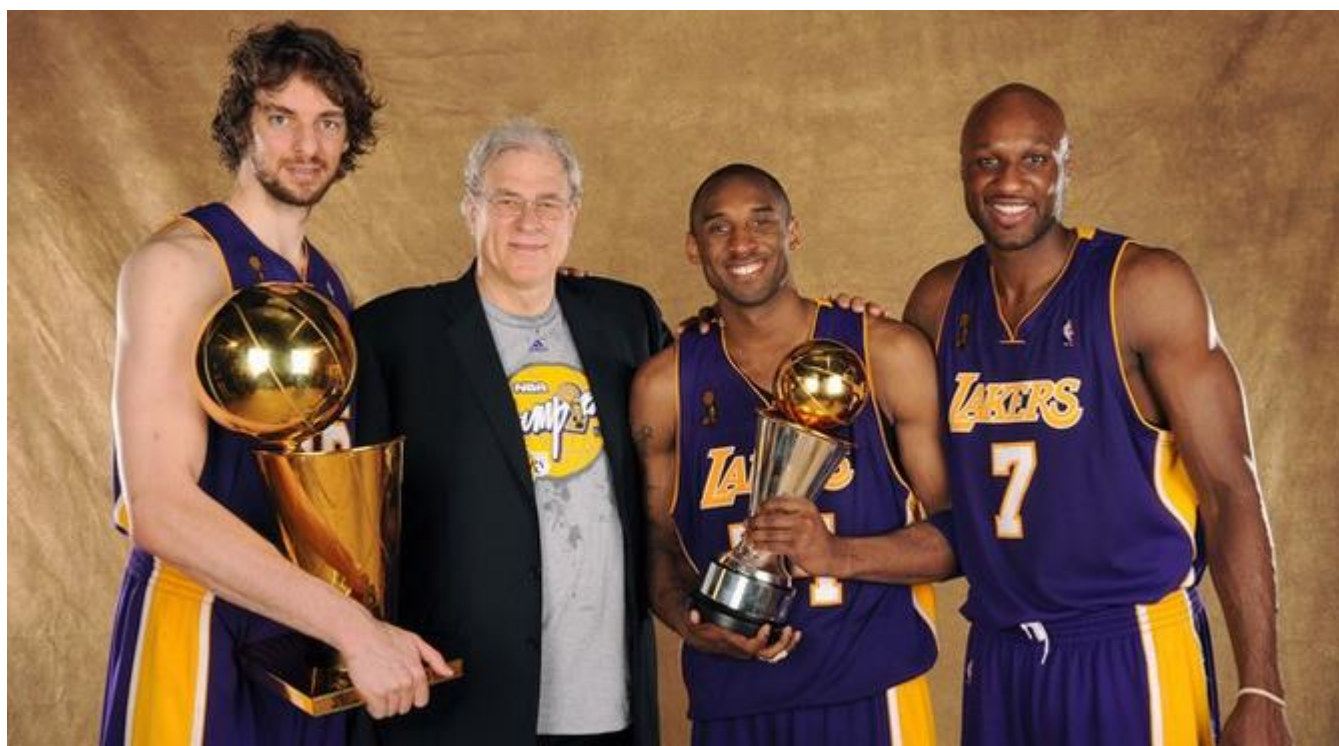
Jackson's Number Two

One constant for nine of Jackson’s eleven titles was assistant coach, Tex Winter. Winter was a successful NCAA head coach before transitioning to the NBA, but he was better known for his work expanding and teaching the triangle offense.

The triangle offense fit Jackson’s desire to have a selfless, ball-moving type offense as he had with the Knicks. Having Winter alongside was great for Jackson and the Bulls. His knowledge of the system gave Jackson full confidence in him to coach the players in practice, but also encouraged the stars to buy in as well. A key component to Jackson’s success in the NBA.



Tex Winter on the sidelines coaching (USA Today)



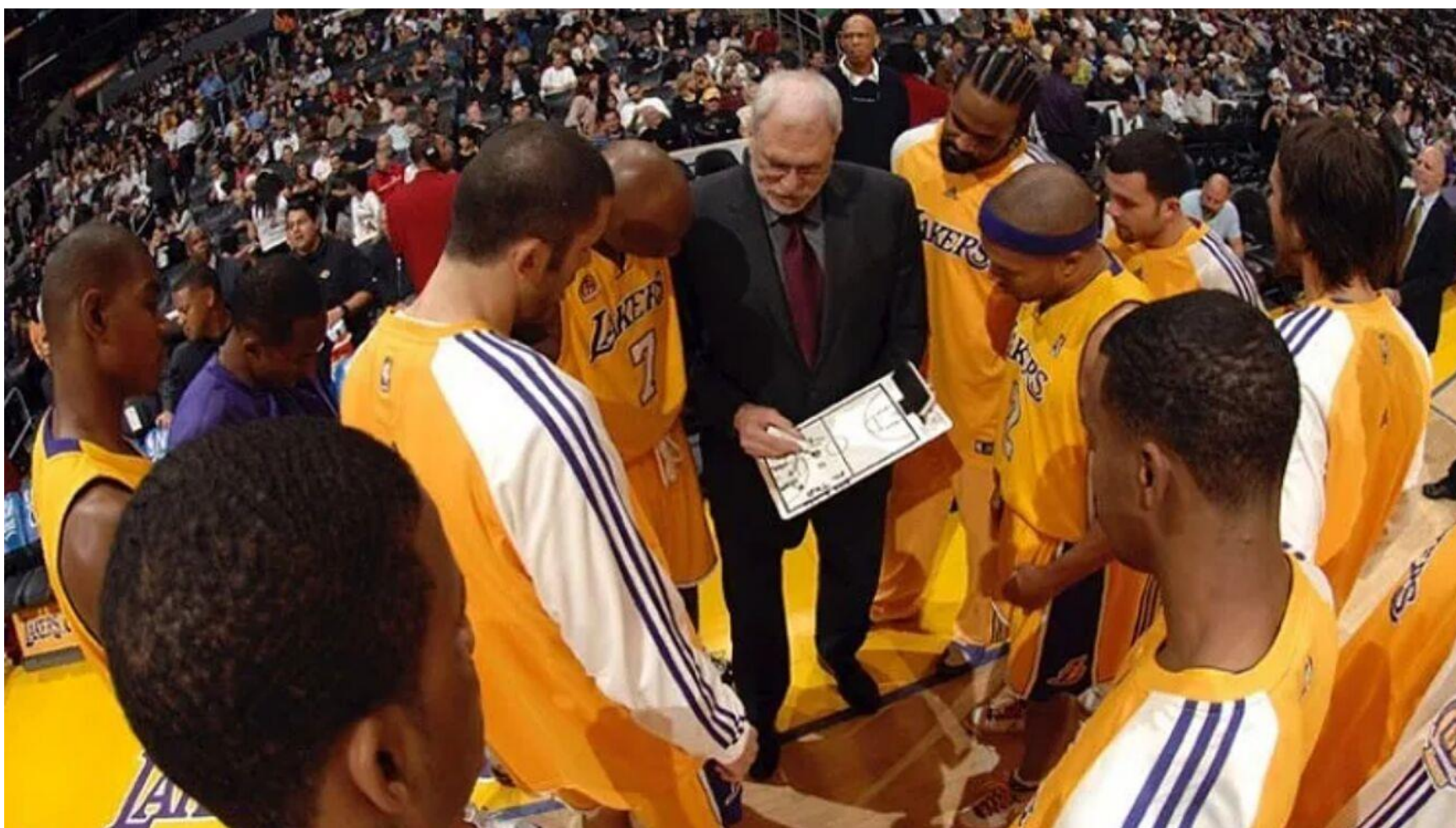
Gasol (left to right), Jackson, Bryant, and Odom pose with the championship trophy and Bryant’s MVP trophy (First Friday Book Synopsis)

Coaching the Lakers

Continuing the Legacy

After a year off from coaching, Jackson accepted the head coaching position with the Los Angeles Lakers. Similar to the Bulls, the Lakers were led by young superstars Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O’Neal. Shaq and Kobe had very different personalities, similar to Jordan and Pippen. Kobe was very driven and intense while Shaq was fun-loving and laid back. A challenge for Jackson was once again creating a locker room that came together as *We’s* instead of *Me’s*. Jackson claimed the Lakers struggled in playoffs due to “weak group chemistry, and the players lacked the mental toughness to finish off big game.”

In the beginning, Jackson found the team soaking everything in. They respected Jackson’s success and wanted to win as he had done in Chicago. He implemented a meditation program to combat the players’ short attention span and shared Buddhist principles with the team to help them understand why. He had hoped this method would shape the players into a team first mentality instead of the superstar mentality they were accustomed to. This was Los Angeles of course, from Kobe to the bench players, they were always greeted as superstars.



Jackson drawing up a play during a timeout with the Lakers. (Marca)

Coaching the Lakers

Five More Championships



Jackson and Kobe had a very up and down relationship. Early on they found a connection to win a championship, but as Kobe and Shaq clashed, Kobe and Jackson would clash. Later on, as Kobe matured, their relationship grew. This revival allowed Kobe and Jackson to win their fourth and fifth championships together. (Sports Illustrated)

Jackson always felt it was best to sit back and let teams solve problems on their own. He described the season as three acts. The first act he allowed players to make mistakes and see how they reacted. In act two he would take care of the players, nurture them, and keep them from getting bored. Finally, act three was just before players and he felt this was the time when he needed to be more hands on, taking a more assertive role he said. The Lakers players felt this gave them new confidence and a new identity that they did not have before. Because of the media presence in LA, Jackson built a respect among the players by often taking the heat himself, allowing the players to focus on the games and stay out of the spotlight.

The first regular season with the Lakers was a success for Jackson as the team cruised to the best record in the West. The playoffs had plenty of ups and downs, many of the tough times being caused by selfish play. In true Jackson fashion, he let the players sort it out on their own but would meet with individuals or small groups to find ways to refocus the team on the common goal. The move to hire Jackson proved to be successful as the Lakers won a championship in his first season. Lakers owner, Dr. Buss joked around saying, “why did you have to win in the first year and make it seem so easy? It’s making the rest of us look stupid for not doing it before.” Remember, the first one is easiest, it gets tougher every time.

Jackson was pleasantly surprised the team was able to win in the first season as he felt the team would need more time to gel into a cohesive unit. The next two championship seasons would be

much different though. Tensions between Shaq and Kobe rose as Kobe was growing restless with running the offence through Shaq. Often, he would go rogue and cause a riff in the locker room. In the first year, Kobe embraced the triangle offence, but in year two he was “building his resume at the expense of the rest of the team.” Jackson thought of the coaching profession as being a magician as it took plenty of magic to balance the egos of NBA players.

“Most coaches come into a season with an idea of what they’re going to do and impose that on the player, but I always felt that Phil came to the table with an open mind.”

- Phil Jackson

Jackson made attempts to bring Kobe and Shaq closer together, but Kobe was often against this and did not want to be Shaq’s “little brother.” Despite the spat, the Lakers were still winning games and eventually Kobe and Shaq were able to move on, but Shaq was lacking motivation. To get the most out of him, Jackson would push Kobe to new levels and Shaq would eventually join in. After the team won their second championship, Jackson looked back on the season and realized the craziness would be worth it in the end. “If we had tried to squelch the strife instead of letting it play itself out naturally, this young, growing team might never have come together the way it did in the end. Without the pain, the Lakers would not have discovered their soul. The team became stronger through the turmoil going on to win a third straight championship before the team would be dismantled a year later, all except for Kobe.

Laker-Time, Act II

Jackson's second stint in LA

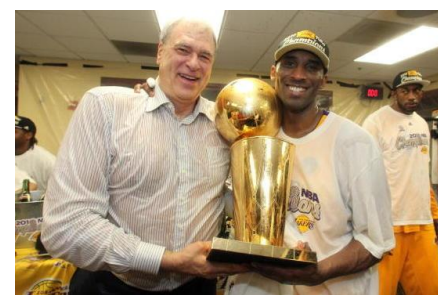
After just one season away, the Lakers brought back Jackson in 2005 after a tough season without him. Rudy Tomjanovich inherited a Lakers team that Jackson called a "no win situation" due to the lack of veteran leadership and Kobe's desire to play a one-man offence.

Jackson's second trip to Los Angeles wouldn't yield immediate success like the first had. The core of the championship rosters had moved on or retired, and Kobe was surrounded by an up and coming, youthful roster. The 2005-06 season continued to demonstrate Jackson's ability to adapt and get the most out of his teams in two ways. Firstly, because much of the team had not mastered the triangle offence and were not natural offensive threats, Jackson "let Kobe loose" which kept him happy but also kept the team in games. Kobe started the year on fire and had his best season points-wise. The other area Jackson adapted was how he treated the players.

Instead of using an authoritarian style of coaching as many do with younger players, Jackson looked to become a nurturer, more of a father figure. This was new for Jackson as many of the teams he coached had experienced players ready to win now.

The Lakers would not return to championship glory until the spring of 2009 after defeating the Orlando Magic in five games, Jackson's record setting tenth championship as coach. Jackson described the team, "not the most talented team I'd coached, nor the most physically dominant. But the players had a deep spiritual connection that allowed them, every now and then, to produce miracles on the court." This team grew up together, and this made the championship special. A year prior they had been embarrassed in the finals by the Celtics, another motivator for a championship hungry team.

In the 2010 finals, the Lakers got redemption on the Celtics. In the finals, Jackson speaks to Kobe's desire to win being so high he would abandon the triangle offence and force the offence on himself. The relationship he had with Jackson had grown, and Kobe finally trusted him. When Jackson spoke to Kobe about letting the game come to him and to use his teammates, he now listened instead of fighting him. This relationship between coach and his superstar, his leader proved successful as they won Jackson's eleventh ring.



Jackson and Bryant celebrating with the trophy (Bleacher Report)

Relationships

A Key to Jackson's Success

Jackson was a huge believer in relationships and team cohesion. It was the key theme throughout the book and was where he felt teams became successful or not. He worked with many strong personalities and developed relationships with all of them that allowed his career to be so successful.

Michael Jordan is arguably the greatest basketball player of all-time, and he brought an alpha mentality that Jackson had to learn to support. A key to their relationship was Jackson knowing that MJ would buy into a solution if he found the solution himself. Jackson could guide him to this, but MJ needed to have first-hand experience of a solution before he could solve the problem. Jackson knowing this allowed him to get the most out of MJ more often than not.

Scottie Pippen was a much quieter, more reserved personality than MJ. In his own, Pippen was a superstar but was more than willing to play a team game. Jackson created roles for Pippen to flourish and truly evolve into a superstar in the NBA. With Pippen, Jackson had to encourage him along, but rarely worried about his position in the locker room.

Dennis Rodman was the most unique player of Jackson's career, possibly in NBA history. Jackson knew that Rodman had challenges with ADHD and anxiety, and that he coped in different ways. Instead of giving up on him and trading him away, Jackson was understanding and supportive, even though he didn't always agree. He knew Rodman was a key piece for the Bulls in their second 3-peat.

Kobe Bryant idolized MJ, and in many ways, he was very similar. Extremely intense and demanding of his teammates, Kobe wanted to win at all costs, including his teammates. Jackson's greatest relationship challenge, he had to build trust over a long period of time. Jackson tried giving him space, but when he realized Kobe felt this was Jackson giving up on him, he changed his approach. Kobe responded positively and this was crucial in their relationship.

Shaq was an easy-going, fun-loving superstar that Jackson had a strong relationship with, but he had to constantly find ways to keep him motivated. He knew that Shaq wanted to be "the man" on the Lakers, so Jackson would rave about Kobe in the media knowing Shaq would raise his intensity and play.

Key Points

- Relationships- Strong relationships were key to locker room cohesion but also in Jackson's ability to work with players and staff
- Hearing the unheard- A Chinese story about being able to hear what's inside of a person. Being able to understand their emotional state helps leaders develop a strong bond with their team
- Autonomy within a system- Whether it was his modified triangle offence that opened up players' creativity, or his ability to define roles for his coaching staff and allow them freedom to work, giving autonomy kept people happy and motivated
- Learning from failure- Jackson always felt that he and his teams learned more from failure than they did success. His championship teams learned hard lessons from past defeats that helped them to succeed
- Stay true to yourself- Coaches in the NBA were often hard-nosed, my way or the highway type coaches. Jackson faced doubt with how his style would work with grown men, but his beliefs were important to him and they proved effective

Critical Evaluation

My Thoughts

Eleven Rings: The Soul of Success is a thought-provoking journey through the life of one of basketball's greatest coaches. Phil Jackson, with the help of Hugh Delehanty, articulates the ups and downs of coaching and managing some of the most successful athletes and teams of all time.

Jackson's story is more than winning championships, it is about creating cohesive and meaningful relationships with all members of an organization. Unlike many coaches before him, Jackson approached coaching with a more laid back, holistic style. But his management style focused on a team game instead of superstars and supporting casts, even though he coached some of the best players to ever play the game.

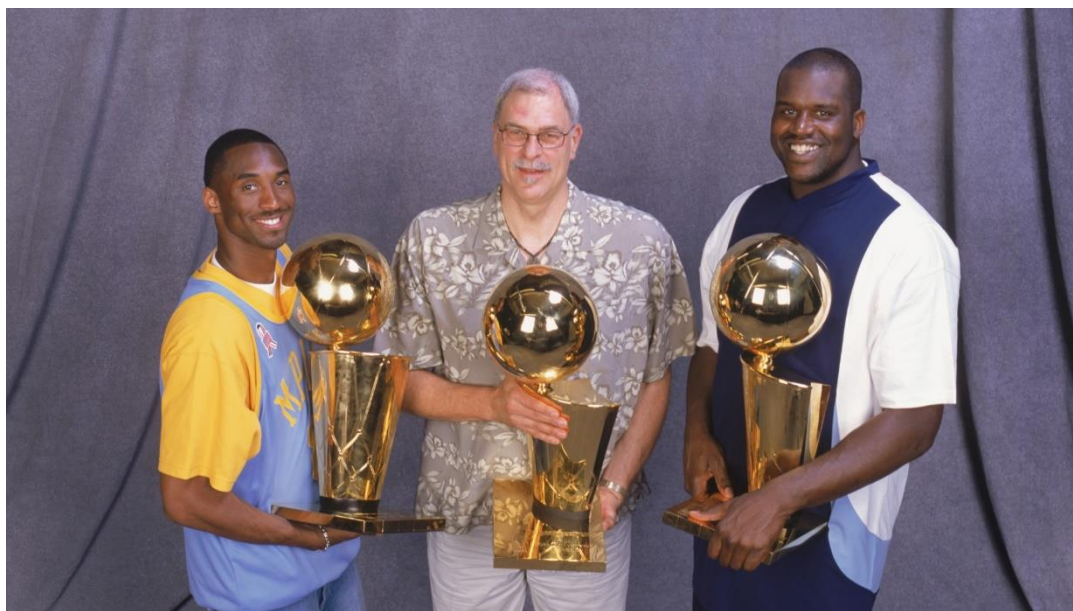
Anyone in a leadership position looking for positive results within their organization will find what they are looking for in this book. While creating a system of structure, Jackson always recognized the importance of autonomy for each individual. At times his message seemingly became repetitive, but there were subtle differences in each similar situation.

Another reason one might look to open this book is Jackson's ability to bring differing personalities together to work towards a common goal. He spoke to great volumes about how he used different approaches with each different type of personality on all of his teams. For some of the players, he needed to give them space and let them learn on their own.

For others, he had to use a bit more of a hands-on approach. This book has opened my eyes to different ways to lead an organization through the power of sports. It is a great read for anyone who is sports oriented looking to build their leadership skills.



Jackson with Kobe Bryant, who Jackson once claimed "I can't coach Kobe" before winning two more championships together. (The Guardian)



Jackson with Kobe and Shaq after the Lakers 3-peat. Possibly Jackson's greatest challenge was having Shaq and Kobe co-exist and not dismantle team morale. (Sporting News)

Connections to Education

A Practical Approach

Jackson was a master at having his teams come together with one goal and working together to achieve this goal. In education, our buildings have many different areas all working together. We have many different personalities that must come together to achieve our goals. Furthermore, as teachers we have similar roles within the structure, but we need the autonomy to work within our classrooms in ways that we feel fit.

Similar to managing a team of teachers, Jackson's views on relationships with his players can translate to a teacher's relationship with their students. Each student is different and there is no cookie-cutter formula when connecting with them. As Jackson did with Shaq and Kobe, finding unique ways in both situations, we can do the same with our students.

Discussion Questions

1. As a leader, how do you determine the level of support you need to provide to a member of your organization? How do you adjust this support as members grow professionally?
2. Conflict between team members is bound to happen. What strategies do you use to make sure both sides feel as though they are being respected?
3. As a leader, how do you enter a new organization and implement changes to fit your vision? How do you handle push back to these changes by longstanding employees?
4. How do you encourage autonomy within your organizational structure? How do you approach someone who may need more structure than autonomy?
5. Jackson often felt he introduced some of his beliefs in a subtle matter, such as offering reading to players or doing team meditation. Do you believe personal beliefs should be shared in a leadership position? Could this cause problems?

Reference

Jackson, P., & Delehanty, H. (2014). *Eleven rings: The soul of success*. Penguin books.