



# Mannie Jackson : The Last Dance

by Mannie Jackson

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If we were all college students majoring in Leadership Studies, ESPN's "The Last Dance" would have to be part of the core curriculum. This two-hour weekly class provided countless lessons on everything from communication to conflict, veracity to victory. It has given us soundbites and snapshots of pain, perseverance and sacrifice that go into not just succeeding at the highest levels but becoming iconic. Above all, it's taught us that true champions are an eclectic group of talents and personalities who can endure strife along their journey but still perform at their peak.

Here are a few class notes taken from the Daily Coach:

- Courage is required to voice the uncomfortable truth
- Ultimately, winning resolves tension and social differences
- The things that divide us should never be greater than the things that unite us
- We dance to words, not music.
- Everyone has an opinion. Everyone has a critic
- A story well told lives forever
- Our lives must be lived forward and often understood backward
- There are 2 kinds of truth: hard and inconvenient
- Championship organizations are not built in silence
- Great leaders do not hide behind silence

We've now completed our five-week course, but the lessons "The Last Dance" taught us will live on. Cohesion, resilience, mindfulness, communication and above all else, handling the cold, hard, and honest truth. These are just some of the qualities it takes for sustained excellence at the highest levels. As we exit the classroom, let's go forward the way M.J. did, determined not just to have earned an accomplished past but to have left behind an indelible history.

I was fortunate to have met and known Michael Jordan. We were actually golf opponents; playing a few Saturday and Sunday matches against each other. My good friend and business partner; Richard Esquinas was more than a competitive match for Jordan.

Richard is a renowned international yogi- he once told me he had not missed a day in over 20 years meditating. For intensity and concentration, the weekend golf matches were great theater; just watching those two compete. The gambling matter, according to a June 6, 1993 news article in the Chicago Tribune said there was substantial amounts of gambling money won and lost in some of the matches. In fact, the Tribune reported that more than one million dollars changed hands. A couple of days before Esquinas' book was released, out of respect; Richard( who is a class act) and his wife flew to my hometown and asked how I felt about his publishing his version of the gambling debt story. I requested that our potential business partnership and my name not be included.

At that point, I knew Michael more as an opponent and competitor than as a person. He was in fact, always smart, gracious and easy to be around, but he was also one of the most competitive persons I have ever known in my life. It was clear, everything in his life was going to be done on his terms- as a former professional athlete myself and business executive; I could relate to and enjoyed both the psychological trash talk and the high-stakes used as a performance driver. (To this day I twitch over 3-foot putts).

Years later, I was Chairman of the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame when Michael was enshrined and I had the role of keeping those around him corralled; it was amazing to watch the guy I knew on the golf course in public; he had no privacy; everyone acted as if they were entitled to a piece of him; men, women, children would come after him from all directions. I watched his reaction, and the ability to remain pleasant and just slowly disconnect. He would become stoic and calming while looking through everyone and everything.

The other thing I'll add is that it is amazing that a documentary like "The Last Dance," allows the public to see and hear the most positive things about a human being you can possibly imagine. It was also kind of sad to realize there are sides of all of us, we wouldn't want put in a documentary. When the media shows only the upsides, life can be beautiful. The opposite happened with people of color years ago, no media would

publish anything that was positive about Black folks, we had no heroes; it seemed all that was visible were the negatives and seldom were there upsides. You seldom saw anything that was positive.

Wouldn't it have been great if someone had the courage, integrity and wisdom back in the '30s, 40s, '50s or 60s to document the positives of people like Fredrick Douglas and other people of color on video or movies, and glamourize them in the way television did Michael Jordan's sports life; it may have changed the course of racial history in our country. Last Dance is a great documentary for Nike shoe sales, great for the NBA, great for the city of Chicago, great for Michael's legacy and for the many players and staff who had a chance to come along for the ride.

But I'm saddened by the reality that media can manipulate feelings, memories and beliefs in such a cavalier way that may not always be accurate or for the greater good. Michael is legit, very smart and very competitive; however, I would offer that he is not as unique as the documentary would have the audience believe. The cool thing about our country, there are hundreds of Asian, Black, Brown, and Female professionals, who are educators, scientists, researchers, software professionals, etc. who have unique DNA alignments and academic preparation. All notable superstars.

I will conclude where I started; in my opinion, Michael Jordan is a superstar and a uniquely authentic human being; blessed with a keen sense of love, respect, and awareness. Let's hope this documentary will not be his Last Dance.