

SPORTING LEGENDS: KARL MALONE

SPORT: BASKETBALL

COMPETITIVE ERA: 1985 - 2005

Karl Malone (born July 24, 1963 in Louisiana) is a former professional basketball player. He was nicknamed in college as the Mailman for his consistency ("a Mailman always delivers"), and was arguably the greatest power forward ever in the NBA.



Karl played for three years at Louisiana Tech University. He was ineligible to play his first year because of low grades and he worked hard to raise his average to qualify. This became the hallmark of Karl's career. He was seldom the most talented player, but always went back to his strong work-ethic to make up the difference.

Karl Malone was chosen by the Jazz in 1985 out of Louisiana Tech with the 13th overall pick in the draft. After his rookie season, the Jazz saw in him the potential to be the corner-stone of their offense. So, they traded star forward, Adrian Dantley, to the Detroit Pistons and decided to build around him.

Karl's work ethic features prominently in his formative years in the NBA where he raised his free throw shooting percentage from below 50% to 75% in a few years. He also added a long range jump shot which made him virtually unguardable.

At the same time, reserve point guard, John Stockton, was winning the trust of the coaching staff. By 1987 Karl was the foundation of the offense and Stockton was the floor general and both had all-star seasons. That season was also the first for head coach Jerry Sloan. The three would be inseparable for 16 seasons. It was also at the end of that season that the Jazz as a team rose to national prominence after an amazing playoffs series against the Magic Johnson-led Los Angeles Lakers.

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Malone's long range jump shots were a great attribute to his attacking game.

For many years, he and Stockton played together on the Jazz, forming one of the most productive guard-forward combinations in NBA history. Playing Jerry Sloan's scrappy and tough style and perfecting the pick and roll to a maximum degree of efficiency, the Jazz became a staple to make it to the playoffs and to have a winning record in the regular season.

Karl was a very physical player. He liked to draw contact and put other players in foul trouble. As a result, he would lead the NBA in free throws made seven separate seasons (an NBA record). He was also a physical defender and rebounder. He was widely thought of as one of the dirtiest players in the league and was sometimes accused of intentionally trying to harm other players. Some of those who suffered collisions with Karl include Isiah Thomas, David Robinson, and Steve Nash.

By the mid-90's the Utah Jazz had risen to power as one of the top five teams in the league and had started to knock on the doors of the NBA Finals. They finally got there in 1997 and 1998 but were defeated both times by the Michael Jordan-led Chicago Bulls.

In 1999 (the year after Jordan's retirement), the Jazz were the favorites to win, but instead started a gradual decline that was a reflection of the aging of their two superstar players. Eventually, Stockton would retire at the end of the 2003 season.

Karl stayed for one more season, joining the Los Angeles Lakers to try and win a championship, the only major achievement that had eluded him in his career. His bid failed as the Lakers were defeated in five games by the Detroit Pistons in 2004.

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Very few NBA stars had the ability to out-muscle Karl Malone!

Although several NBA teams sought his services for the 2004-2005 season, Malone decided to retire as a player on February 13, 2005.

Karl Malone wore number 32 for the Utah Jazz. He wore number 11 for the Los Angeles Lakers (number 32 was retired honoring Magic Johnson) and also for the Dream Team (the players wore 4 to 15 to adhere to FIBA rules).

Stockton and Malone shattered many NBA records while playing together. Stockton holds the NBA record for most career assists and steals, while Malone holds the records for most free throws attempted and made, as well as being second all-time on the NBA career scoring list, behind only Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Both he and Stockton were selected to be a part of the Dream Team, the legendary 1992 U.S. Olympic basketball team that was the first to feature professional NBA players. They are two-time Olympic Gold medalists, having won one in 1992 and another 1996 in Atlanta.

Both hold many records of longevity, having faced very few long term injuries in their careers and having played for 19 seasons each. Between them, they hold almost every major statistical record for the Utah Jazz franchise.

Malone received the NBA Most Valuable Player Award twice while playing for the Jazz, in 1997 and 1999 seasons. Voted in 1996 to the NBA's 50 Greatest Players list. Voted to 11 All-NBA first teams, two second teams and one third team. Voted an All-Star 14 times. MVP of the All-Star game in 1989 and co-MVP in 1993 with Stockton.

Played in 1476 games, averaging 37.2 minutes, 51% shooting from the floor, 74% from the free throw line, 25.0 points, 10.1 rebounds, 3.6 assists, and 1.41 steals per game.

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Scott Burton's Final Thought

Karl Malone's scoring record in the NBA over the years is the stuff of legend. His partnership with John Stockton is also an integral part of his success story.

He is the best power forward I ever saw play the game, and his ability to outmuscle his opponents had to be seen to be believed! He was tall, lean and extremely agile for a big guy. It was very hard to stop the guy without actually fouling him!

Back in the early 90s, video arcade games were huge, and arguably the popular game for my generation was a game called NBA Jam. I remember almost all of my friends choosing to play as the Utah Jazz, knowing that they would have the skills of Malone and Stockton at their disposal! That speaks volumes about Malone's reputation.

It is a shame that he never won an NBA Championship Ring. Even his solitary season with the Lakers and Phil Jackson in 2004 couldn't quite make the mark. However, Karl Malone's NBA legacy is assured, no matter what. He was the Mailman, and in my humble opinion, he truly did deliver.



The statue of Karl Malone is a fitting tribute to a truly outstanding player.