

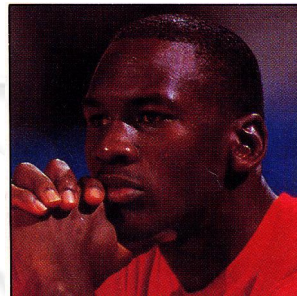
## SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN

**SPORT: BASKETBALL**

**COMPETITIVE ERA: 1984 - 2003**

**Michael Jordan** (born February 17, 1963, in Brooklyn, New York) is a former American National Basketball Association player, and is considered by many to be the greatest basketball player of all time.

<b>NBA Championships</b>	6
<b>League MVP's</b>	5
<b>MVP Triple Crowns</b>	2
<b>Olympic Golds</b>	2



A remarkable force at both ends of the floor, Jordan ended a career of fifteen full seasons with a regular-season scoring average of 30.12 points per game, the highest in NBA history (ahead of Wilt Chamberlain's 30.06).

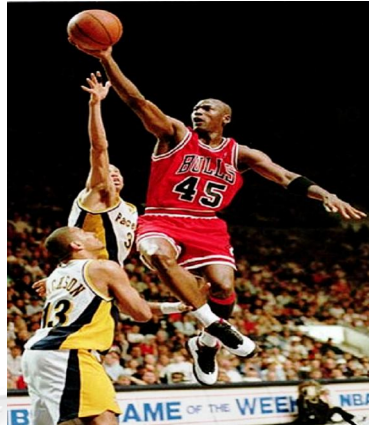
He won six championships, notched 10 scoring titles, and was league MVP five times. He was named to the All-Defensive First Team nine times, and led the league in steals three times. Since 1983, he appeared on the front cover of *Sports Illustrated* a record-49 times, and was named the magazine's "Sportsman of the Year" in 1991.

In 1999, he was named "the greatest North American athlete of the 20th century" by ESPN, and placed #2 on the Associated Press list of top athletes of the century. His leaping ability, vividly illustrated by dunking from the foul line and other feats, earned him the nicknames "Air Jordan" and "His Airness." These and other achievements have persuaded many fans and several basketball legends that Jordan was the best ever to play the game.

Jordan earned a basketball scholarship with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. As a freshman, Jordan was an exciting but not dominant player. Nonetheless, he made the winning shot in the 1982 NCAA championship game against Georgetown, led by future NBA rival Patrick Ewing. He was selected by the Chicago Bulls in the first round of the 1984 NBA Draft as the third pick overall.

Jordan played 14 seasons for the Bulls, generally as a shooting guard, but his height 6 ft 6 in (1.98 m), skills, and physical conditioning also made him a versatile threat at point guard and small forward.

## SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN



Jordan's awesome vertical-jumping ability was one of the keys to his success.

He won six NBA Championships (1991-1993 and 1996-1998) and was league MVP five times (1988, 1991, 1992, 1996 and 1998). He was also named Rookie of the Year (1985) and Defensive Player of the Year (1988), and won the Finals MVP award every year the Bulls reached the Finals - a feat not likely ever to be duplicated.

He also earned the elusive MVP triple crown (league, finals, all-star game) twice when he won All-Star MVP in both 1996 and 1998 (he also won in 1988). Only Willis Reed (1970) and Shaquille O'Neal (2000) have won all three MVP awards in the same season. In 1997, he also recorded the only triple-double in an All-Star game.

Jordan's coach for most of his career was Phil Jackson. He had the following to say about Jordan:

*"The thing about Michael is he takes nothing for granted. When he first came into the league in 1984, he was primarily a penetrator. His outside shooting wasn't up to professional standards. So he put in his gym time in the off-season, shooting hundreds of shots each day. Eventually, he became a deadly three-point shooter."*

In July 1993, two months after the Bulls won their third consecutive championship, Jordan's father James Jordan was murdered. While returning from the funeral of a friend on July 23, 1993, he pulled over onto a rest area off of Interstate 95 near Lumberton, North Carolina, for a nap.

Two local criminals Daniel Green and Larry Martin Demery killed him and stole his Lexus, a gift from Michael. The perpetrators made several calls from James' cell phone and were quickly captured. James' body was found on August 3 in a swamp, and not identified until August 5. Jordan was devastated by the sudden and senseless death of his father. Two days before the 1993-94 NBA season, he announced that he was retiring from basketball. The Bulls retired his #23 jersey.

## SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN

Jordan spent the next year pursuing a childhood dream: professional baseball. He had an unspectacular professional baseball career for the Birmingham Barons, a Chicago White Sox farm team, batting .202 with 3 HR, 51 RBI, 30 SB (tied-5th in Southern League), 11 errors and 6 outfield assists. He led the club with 11 bases-loaded RBI and 25 RBI with runners in scoring position and two outs. He was never called up to the majors.

Jordan, who cited his father's love for baseball as his motivation for trying the sport, was criticised by journalists and other observers for his foray. Some felt that his below-average performance tarnished his legacy as an NBA superstar, while others argued that Jordan had used his influence with Bulls and White Sox owner Jerry Reinsdorf to take a spot on the Barons that could have been filled by a trueqminor-leaguer.

As a child, one of Jordan's favorite teams was the Oakland Athletics, who, like the Bulls, have held the distinction of winning three consecutive championships in their league. The A's won the World Series in 1972, 1973, and 1974.

Jordan's underwhelming performances in baseball, and the professional baseball player's strike of 1994, prompted him to consider rejoining the Bulls. On March 18, 1995, Jordan announced his return to the NBA through a two-word press release: "I'm back." The next day, he donned jersey number 45 and took the court with the Bulls to face the Indiana Pacers.

Although Jordan was on a two-year absence from the NBA, he played well in his return, including a 55-point performance against the New York Knicks on March 29, 1995. He led the Bulls to a 9-1 record in April of that year, propelling the team into the playoffs.



Critics may have savaged Jordan's short-lived baseball career - but his 2-year absence from the NBA only served to heighten his appetite for more success with the Bulls.

## **SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN**

During this drive, Jordan incurred fines from the NBA by again wearing his own number, 23. He would wear the number for the rest of his basketball career. The Bulls advanced to the Eastern Conference Semifinals, against the Orlando Magic. Jordan averaged 31.5 points a game against the Magic, but Orlando prevailed in six games.

Freshly motivated by the playoff defeat, Jordan trained aggressively in preparation for the 1995-96 season. That year, the Bulls dominated the league, finishing a record of 72-10, to date the best regular season record in NBA history. Jordan won the league's regular season and All-Star Game MVP awards. In the playoffs, the Bulls lost only three games in four series, defeating the Seattle SuperSonics in the NBA Finals to win the championship. For his performance in the series against Seattle, Jordan was named the Finals MVP.

In the 1996-97 season, Jordan led the Bulls to a 69-13 record. The team again advanced to the Finals, where they faced the Utah Jazz. The series against the Jazz featured two of the more memorable clutch efforts of Jordan's career. He won game 1 for the Bulls with a buzzer-beating jump shot. In game 5, with the series tied 2-2, Jordan gamely scored 38 points despite suffering from a stomach virus that had rendered him feverish and dehydrated at the start of the game.

The Bulls won the contest 90-88 and went on to win the series in six games. For the fifth time in as many Finals appearances, Jordan received the Finals MVP award. Jordan and the Bulls compiled a 62-20 record for the 1997-98 season. During that year, he led the league in scoring with 28.7 points per game, securing his fifth regular-season MVP award. Jordan also received honors for All-NBA First Team, First Defensive Team and the All-Star Game MVP.



**When airborne, the sight of Michael Jordan seemed to defy the laws of gravity!**

## SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN

The Bulls won the Eastern Conference playoffs for a third straight year, moving on to face the Jazz again in the Finals. However, because the Jazz had beaten the Bulls in both of their regular-season matches, Chicago would not have home-court advantage for the series.

After losing the first game, the Bulls won game 2 in Utah to capture the advantage, and seemed poised to win the championship after victories in games 3 and 4. But Utah prevailed in game 5, sending the series back to Utah. Chicago now had to beat the Jazz once more on their home court to claim the series.

Jordan, however, refused to allow the Bulls to fail. In game 6, he trumped his performances in the 1997 Finals with a series of plays that may compose the greatest clutch performance in NBA Finals history. With the Bulls trailing 87-84 and less than a minute remaining in the game, Chicago called a timeout. On the inbound, Jordan cut to the basket, received the inbounds pass and laid the ball in, trimming the Utah lead to 87-86. The Jazz brought the ball upcourt and fed the ball in to forward Karl Malone, who was set up in the low post.

As Malone cradled the ball, Jordan sliced in front of him and swatted it out of his hands for a steal. Jordan then slowly dribbled upcourt and paused at the top of the key, eyeing his defender, guard Bryon Russell. With less than 10 seconds remaining, Jordan started to dribble right, crossed over to his left (so abruptly that Russell lost his balance and fell backwards, though many felt Jordan helped him aside with a shove), pulled up, and fired his shot. The two-point jumper went in with 5.2 seconds left. After a desperation three-point shot by the Jazz missed, Jordan and the Bulls had won their sixth NBA championship. Once again, Jordan was voted as the Finals' MVP.



Jordan was arguably the crown jewel in the USA's so-called Olympic Dream Team

## SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN

Jordan's Game 6 heroics seemed to be a perfect ending to his career. Uncertain whether the Bulls would fire his coach, Phil Jackson, or certain of his teammates, such as forward Scottie Pippen, and in the latter stages of an owner-induced lockout of NBA players, Jordan retired again on January 13, 1999.

In 2001, Jordan, then a president with the Washington Wizards, stepped down from the front office and out of retirement. His skills were noticeably diminished by age. Despite an injury-plagued 2001-02 season, he still averaged nearly 23 points per game. Playing through pain, especially in his knee, he was still an important player for the Wizards.

Jordan returned for the 2002-03 season newly-fitted with orthotic insoles to help his knees and, healthy, averaged 20 points. He played in his 13th and final NBA All-Star Game in 2002-03. The 2002-03 season was heralded from the beginning as Jordan's final goodbye to his fans and he retired for the third time at the season's conclusion.

At the beginning of the 2001-2002 basketball season, Jordan donated his \$1 million salary to help the victims of the September 11 attacks. Out of respect for Jordan, the Miami Heat retired his #23 jersey on April 11, 2003, even though he never played for the Florida team. It was the first jersey the Heat retired in their then-15-year history, and it was half Wizards blue, half Bulls red.

Philadelphia was the setting for MJ's final game, on April 16, 2003. Playing limited minutes, Jordan still managed 15 points despite the eventual Wizards loss. He would also leave fans with one final moment to remember when, with 1:44 remaining, he sank his last two free throws prior to exiting to a standing ovation, which would last over three minutes.



Jordan's career swansong with the Washington Wizards may not have yielded any NBA Championships, but it still resulted in some memorable jump shots and jams!

## SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN

Jordan played on two Olympic gold medal-winning American basketball teams: as a college player in the 1984 Summer Olympics, and in the 1992 Summer Olympics as a member of the original Dream Team with other legends such as Magic Johnson and Larry Bird. It is often rumored that Jordan kept guard Isiah Thomas off the roster due to personal differences. Nonetheless, it was a star-studded roster that cruised through pool play and the medal round, restoring America to the top of the basketball world.

Jordan's basketball talent was clear from his rookie season in the NBA. His breathtaking dunks, tenacious defense and apparent ability to score at will amazed fans and opponents. After Jordan poured in 63 points against the Boston Celtics in a 1986 playoff game (still a playoff record), Celtic superstar Larry Bird famously described him as "God disguised as Michael Jordan."

Still, many critics refused to consider him as good as the two great players of the 1980s, Bird and the Los Angeles Lakers' Magic Johnson. Jordan, it was said, was nothing more than a spectacular scorer who could not elevate the play of his teammates, as Bird and Johnson had. These critics pointed out that the Celtics and Lakers had immediately become playoff-calibre teams upon the arrival of Bird and Johnson, while Jordan's Bulls wallowed in mediocrity throughout the mid-1980s. But the rise of the Bulls dynasty in 1991 and Jordan's maturation as a player quelled many doubters.

Jordan loved proving critics wrong. In a game against the Utah Jazz, Jordan dunked on guard John Stockton, whereupon a Jazz fan yelled "Dunk on someone your own size!" On the next possession, Jordan dunked it over 6'11", 285-lb. center Melvin Turpin, then asked the fan, "Was he big enough for you?"

Even as he rounded out his game, Jordan's strengths remained scoring and defense. He led the NBA in scoring 10 years, tying Wilt Chamberlain for consecutive scoring titles with seven in a row, but was also a fixture on the All-NBA Defensive Team, making the roster nine times. By 1998, the season of his famous Finals-winning shot against the Jazz, Jordan was feared throughout the league as one of the game's best clutch performers. In the regular season, Jordan was the Bulls' primary threat in the final seconds of a close game; in the playoffs, he was the only one the team wanted to have the ball.

Some players who have been tagged as the "next Jordan," include LeBron James, Kobe Bryant and Grant Hill. Jerry Reinsdorf, chairman of the Chicago Bulls, once said regarding Jordan's jersey number, which was number 23, these words, "For what Michael has meant to the NBA, this number could very well be retired in every arena in the league." (Jackie Robinson's No. 42 has been retired by every Major League Baseball team, and all NHL teams have done the same with Wayne Gretzky's No. 99.)

Jordan was ranked #1 in SLAM Magazine's Top 75 NBA Players of all time in 2003.

## SPORTING LEGENDS: MICHAEL JORDAN



### Scott Burton's Final Thought

In my opinion, Michael Jordan is one of the greatest athletes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. When you consider the all-round attributes he possessed, and how effectively he applied them over almost 20 years - it is absolutely phenomenal.

His combination of athleticism, agility, strength, endurance, speed and skill were the best of his generation. Very few athletes from other sports could boast such physicality.

When you look back over his career, he was remarkably consistent with this scoring. His 3-pointers, jump shots and dunks were weapons you could almost always rely on. Yet much of the credit for shaping Jordan's game must go to coaches Phil Jackson and Tex Winter (Chicago Bulls), who integrated Jordan into a tactical formation that allowed team-mates like Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman and Horace Grant to flourish.

Athletes like Michael Jordan don't come around very often, sometimes just once every generation. His achievements, endorsements and general likeability all summarise the career of one of the best-liked athletes in the history of professional sport.

I personally believe that Michael Jordan's contribution to the NBA is best summed-up by the honour of having his #23 jersey retired, not just by his beloved Chicago Bulls, but also by other teams as well. That is a sign of the highest respect, and something that happens very rarely. The point here, is that no-one could ever be expected to follow in the footsteps of the great man. Not now, and possibly - not ever. A class act.



Not even the ~~King~~ King Of Pop had the agility to steal from the ~~King~~ King Of The Courts!