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The Last Season: A Team In Search Of Its Soul



Synopsis

For the countless basketball fans who were spellbound by the Los Angeles Lakers' 2003-2004 high-wire act, this book is a rare and phenomenal treat. In *The Last Season*, Lakers coach Phil Jackson draws on his trademark honesty and insight to tell the whole story of the season that proved to be the final ride of a truly great dynasty. From the signing of future Hall-of-Famers Karl Malone and Gary Payton to the Kobe Bryant rape case/media circus, this is a riveting tale of clashing egos, public feuds, contract disputes, and team meltdowns that only a coach, and a writer, of Jackson's candor, experience, and ability could tell. Full of tremendous human drama and offering lessons on coaching and on life, this is a book that no sports fan can possibly pass up.

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Customer Reviews

Jackson's chronicle of his final season as the coach of the Los Angeles Lakers moves as crisply as a well-executed fast break. Under his direction, the Lakers won three NBA titles, but failed to reach the championship round in 2003. Determined to make another run at the finals in the 2003-2004 season, the Lakers added Hall of Fame players Karl Malone and Gary Payton to a team that already featured superstars Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant. But instead of producing another ring, the Lakers were crushed in the finals by the Detroit Pistons. That the Lakers even reached the last round of the playoffs was a feat given the turmoil that surrounded the team (involving the animosity between Shaq and Bryant, and Bryant's rape charge). Jackson briefly critiques the Lakers' biggest games of the regular season and analyzes each playoff

performance, providing fresh insight without boring readers with play-by-play accounts. He peppers the narrative with pungent observations of his stars'and it's no surprise that he saves his sharpest criticisms for Bryant. While Shaq could be difficult to deal with, Jackson contends, he was ultimately a team player. And although Shaq and Bryant reached a truce in the season's final months, Jackson sees Bryant as the epitome of today's selfish player, a "callous gun for hire."Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

While the book is a hoot for basketball fans, Jackson's experiences also offer lessons for anyone dealing with chaos. ("Time")

We really enjoyed listening to this book on CD as we drove across the Nevada desert. It was a very educational experience for me, a new basketball fan. My husband remembers the specific plays he calls out in the book and anticipated Fish making the winning basket. Great fun!

Coach Phil Jackson gives his account of his final season as coach of the Los Angeles Lakers which included his juggling act in handling the egos of NBA players. He provides us with details of the tension filled rivalry between superstars Shaq and Kobe Bryant along with the tension involved in the quest for another championship. I found it interesting that Jackson was frustrated with Bryant to the extent he wanted to trade him during the season. At seasons end Jackson asked Bryant whether his being with the Lakers or retiring have any influence on his decision to remain with the Lakers. Jackson hoped Kobe would say something to the effect that he will be best as a player if he (Jackson) is with the team. Instead Kobe said Jackson's being with the team should have no effect on his decision to remain or become a free agent. Since Kobe had his prime years ahead of him it would be Shaq who would be dealt since the two could no longer co-exist on the same team. The Lakers, of course, didn't achieve their goal of another championship since they were derailed in the finals against the Detroit Pistons. I got the feeling Jackson was relieved to be out of the NBA pressure cooker although he didn't rule out the possibility of returning as a coach somewhere in the future. I don't feel the book is a classic by any means, and I'm sure the author didn't intend it to be. I based my three star rating on my interest in the subject, although I know the students at our local high school will enjoy reading it.

Phil Jackson recollects on the 2004 Lakers' title pursuit. A team teeming with all-star talent,

accompanied by controversy from start to end, shocked the world by overcoming obstacles only to fall to the most unimpressive "David" to their "Goliath", one step away from glory. But you probably already know all this. Having read Jordan Rules some time ago, I found this book very similar. A year's worth of inside material on one team, sprinkled with player anecdotes to explain actions and attitudes. Somehow it just didn't feel as interesting as the other book. My reasons are: 1. Maybe I just weren't as interested in these players. 2. Phil Jackson's coaching style is boring. Although the book gives occasional insight into coaching, Phil mainly talks about "leaving them on there and hope they work things out. And it worked" Over the years, his hands-off and psychological approach is well-known among fans (notorious, if you're a Lakers fan). 3. He also repeats himself too much. Malone was injured. Payton couldn't figure out the triangle. Kobe and Shaq want to more money and hate each other. The front office was vague about giving Phil an extension. That's about all that happened. 3. Too focused on Shaq and Kobe. Of course those two were the center of attention. But the individual struggles of role players and how they played into the feud would have been interesting. Phil offered very little of this. 4. The last part on retiring now carry little emotional weight, since we know he reunited with Kobe for 2 championships. On the bright side, the book does contain some interesting facts that help an NBA fan understand the game better. For instance, if Payton, an all-star veteran, failed to grasp the triangle offense, how could the Timberwolves run this offense with rookie and journeyman point guards?

I bought this book because I am one of those Laker haters for the same reason I am also one of those Yankee haters; I root against teams that win all the time and that are favorites to win a world championship year after year. Before the 2003/04 NBA season, I grimaced when I first heard the Lakers were getting Karl Malone and Gary Payton. I thought it was the rich getting richer and a lot of sports analysts thought so too as they were almost giving the NBA title to LA before the season started and some believed this Lakers squad could challenge Phil Jackson's Chicago Bulls' regular season win record. I was disappointed that Malone joined the Lakers. After spending one of the longest and most successful careers in Utah (a place in which a lot of players wouldn't want to stay), he jumps on the wagon that appears to be on the fastest, easiest route to a championship (again, the rich get richer). That seemed like an almost traitorous way to win one's only title, so I'm glad it did not happen. I bought Jackson's The Last Season to savor in the Lakers' "demise" (well, they did get to the finals which, after game 2 of the San Antonio series, a lot of people, including myself, did not think was possible, so spoiled Laker fans shouldn't be too bummed). Right on the first page, Jackson writes that he "didn't want this book to be about the small petty gossip that makes up a lot

of the NBA world" (p. 1). Don't worry, there is plenty of gossip in this book. He does not bore the reader with X's and O's, although there is some strategy explained when discussing different match-ups. A lot of this book is about Jackson's relationship with owner Jerry Buss, general manager Mitch Kupchak, opinions on such NBA spokesmen as Dallas Maverick's coach Mark Cuban, Rick Fox and Karl Malone's frustration over injuries, Gary Payton's tantrums about the triangle offense, and, of course, the on-going feud between Kobe and Shaq. The book is written like a journal but is very comprehensive and flows very well. I was fascinated by the behind-the-scenes look at the Lakers organization. Their preparation for games I found to be very interesting. At one point in the season, Jackson exposed his players to an aspect of his Buddhist beliefs with a meditation session (Jackson admits he does not think it affected most of the players). He also had clips from the movies Shrek or Miracle on Ice inserted in their film sessions (p. 191). Jackson is candid about Kobe's ball-hogging tendencies and Shaq's abysmal free throw shooting. During the Houston series in the playoffs, Shaq practiced shooting free throws from a foot back which Jackson thought was less than constructive (p. 162). Often, Jackson compares his Laker teams unfavorably to his Bulls teams in terms of preparation and attitude towards the game. Jackson's complaints throughout the book on everything from game start times (p. 95), fines (p. 96), and foul calls (many pages) made me think the coach of the Sacramento Kings wrote the book. Of course, Shaq and Kobe is the draw to this book, and Jackson does not disappoint the readers. A lot of the petty squabbles are described here. Some of the high lights include Kobe and Shaq only wanting certain photographers (the opposite for each) filming them during practice (p. 110). The Lakers helped pay for Kobe's flights to Colorado for his hearings and Kobe complained the plane was not luxurious enough (p. 32). One of the bad omens in the Detroit series was Shaq blowing up at 82-year-old assistant coach Tex Winter (pp. 232-33). Then, in the end, Kobe tells Jackson he no longer wants to be Shaq's "sidekick" thus completing the stage for Shaq's exit (p. 258). Jackson visited a therapist to help him deal with the Shaq/Kobe factor. Of course, Jackson probably only covers the tip of the iceberg, but it still makes for fascinating reading. Check out this eyebrow-raising line: "This was another example of the basic difference between him [Shaq] and Kobe. Ask Shaq to do something and he'll say: "No, I don't want to do that." But after a little pouting, he will do it. Ask Kobe, and he'll say, "okay," and then he will do whatever he wants" (p. 38). After reading this book, I cannot believe the rumors that Jackson will return as coach of the Lakers. No way. But, then again, after reading Terrell Owens' book, I never would've guessed he would fire his beloved agent and seek a new contract with Philly, so one never knows. Whether you are a Laker hater, a Laker fan, or are just fascinated with the personalities of the NBA, I definitely recommend this book.

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