

Episode 60 - Millionaires Should Pay \$20 For Coffee

w/ Sophia Benoit

MJS = Mike Schubert
AM = Adam Mamawala
SB= Sophia Benoit

If there is a mistake or mis-translation in this transcript please feel free to reach out for clarification! (horsehoopspod@gmail.com)

AM

Does the G in GQ also stand for gets? Or is that just the G in Jimmy G. Buckets?

SB

I was trying to think if there's another word for Jimmy Butler, Jimmy with a G.

Intro Music

MJS

Sup nerds, it's basketball. Welcome to Horse, a basketball podcast about everything except for the wins and losses. My name is Mike Schubert and I am joined by my trusted co-host, the LeBron telling Jimmy Butler, "You're in trouble," at the end of the first half to Jimmy Butler telling LeBron James, "You're in trouble," after they are about to win in the fourth quarter, it's Adam Mamawala. Adam, how's it going?

AM

It's going well. I, I have to be honest. I was hoping you were gonna refer to me as the Tyler Herro snarl.

MJS

Ooh.

AM

But you can't have everything.

MJS

Well, the problem with the Tyler Herro snarl is that he didn't have a very good game.

AM

Right.

MJS

So, I mean maybe it could be the Tyler Herro snarl to the irrational confidence and not paying attention to the fact that I'm shooting six of 18 tonight, Adam Mamawala.

AM

Are you aware that Halsey is a big basketball fan and has her own NBA Twitter?

MJS

Yes, it makes me upset that people like that are just like, “Oh, I'm gonna start caring about basketball now.” And, now, a lot of people is just like --

AM

She, she seems to know what she's talking about. I mean --

MJS

She does. You know what? Honestly, I shouldn't be upset. I guess I'm just mad that she got a verified Twitter account really easily just because – she was like, “I set up this new account.” Boom. It's verified. It's like show us some love.

AM

Well, I was merely alluding to the fact that I think she – and you'll appreciate this as the host of Potterless – alluded to Tyler Herro as some sort of, like, bitch ass Draco Malfoy.

MJS

Yeah, I mean the man has so much confidence. I saw a great tweet that said, “I knew Tyler Herro was the real deal. He came into a cigar shop, bought \$300 worth of cigars, and left.”

AM

What the hell?

MJS

What a guy? So, we have a lot of basketball fun stuff to discuss. And, in order to get prepared to talk about all these fun basketball things, we have to center ourselves and find our inner Drishti in a place that we like to call the Teal Memorial Locker Room. Teal is loving life right now.

AM

That's good to hear. What are we – what are we finding? Our inner what now?

MJS

I heard this once I took a yoga class because one of my coworkers was studying to be a yoga teacher. And, if you went to do classes with someone who was in training, they were either free or \$5.

AM

Oh, wow.

MJS

But then they said all of those, like, annoying empty yoga things where it was like, “Find your third eye.” And the one that always stood out to me the most was find your inner Drishti. And I've no idea what that means at all. And not – no, no concept of it. I – it even could be like an offensive appropriation thing that this yoga studio did.

AM

Mmm.

MJS

And I'm sorry if that's the case, but I just thought it sounded so funny. I – like, the biggest exercise I did in that yoga class was my ab workout of holding in all of my laughter of hearing my engineering coworker say stuff about like, “Find your peace and stuff.”

AM

So, you're saying we're not going to put our hands in the middle at the end and repeat that phrase?

MJS

No, but I would appreciate talking about the end of things. At the end of these hot yoga sessions, they would put, like, a hot towel that was – somehow, it smelled like fresh lavender.

AM

Wooh.

MJS

And they would end these hot yoga sessions by putting a really nice lavender smelling hot towel on your face.

AM

Don't hate that.

MJS

So, I'd be down for us to end horse episodes by doing that.

AM

Oh, that sounds great.

MJS

Let me just place this hot lavender towel on my face. 3, 2, 1, aah. So, let's head to the Teal Memorial Locker Room and thank some people who are making the show possible.

[Teal Memorial Locker Room 3:20 – 6:46]

MJS

Ah, wow. Bang, bang, bang. Incredible. What a perfect way to end the Teal Memorial Locker Room and move into our first segment, which we like to call Full Court Press. Get it like the news?

AM

I sure do.

MJS

So, for this special edition of Full Court Press, we are joined by a special guest and I will just be reading the, the tweet that inspired this segment. And, again, your words, not mine, "I need to have a basketball podcast. We're missing the slut perspective in basketball journalism," it's a writer, Sophia Benoit. Sophia, how's it going?

SB

Good. Thanks so much for reading that tweet.

MJS

You know, I felt like I just wanted to truly give explanation to exactly what brought you here. And I think there's no better place to start this little interview than asking, in, in your terms, what is the slut perspective in basketball journalism and, and how are we missing out on it? Is it just Jimmy Butler in crop tops or is there more?

SB

There's way more. And I know that because how I watch basketball is definitely from – I'll say it's from the slut perspective. Like, every time I see Al Horford play, he very much frustrates me as a Sixers fan. I've been very disappointed in him. However, he has the most beautiful eyelashes I've ever seen. And I spend half of the game commenting on his eyelashes. That, to me, is the slut perspective, where you're like, "Look, I love the game of basketball. I'm here for the game of basketball, but there's more to it, you know."

MJS

I appreciate it. I like it. How long have you been a basketball fan? Is it a recent thing? Have you always been a diehard Sixers fan? Where does your fandom lie?

SB

Okay. So, I am a diehard Sixers fan plus Jimmy Butler. As an ex Sixers, he's always going to be in my heart. But it started when I was in college. I played hockey growing up. I watched hockey growing up. My whole family is a hockey family. I'm from St. Louis. There's no basketball there. So, when I was in college, there was the hockey lockout and all of my friends were basketball fans. Some of them were Lakers fans. Some of them were, I guess, Wizards fans. There was, like, a bunch of different fandoms. And, so, we just watched a ton of basketball.

AM

Who the hell is a Wizards' fan?

SB

It's the last one left. He is the last one. They're like, "Congratulations. You've held that for so long." He will, someday, probably get to get a handshake for the last, like, Sacramento Kings fan. No. But, so, it was, like, such a fun game. And I, I love hockey. I love – I mean it's, like, somewhat similar. So, I feel like I got it pretty quickly unlike baseball and football, which makes no sense to me. I can watch them in person, but I'm like, "I don't really know what's happening." But, so, in college I watched for a little, loved it. Then, after college, I started dating a guy who was a Sixers fan and I did the classic trope of adopting your partner's team. But it was so much fun. And I came in right when they had just gotten Joel Embiid and

Simmons. I came in being like, "I love this team. They win a lot. This is so great." And my boyfriend's like, "Don't you dare. I've been in this for, like --

AM

I've been trusting the process for 20 years.

SB

Yeah, I think right at the end when it was so fun. And I was like, "This is great. And I love being a Sixers fan." And he was like, "Just wait. Wait a little longer."

MJS

They'll eventually come and break your heart. So, Jimmy Butler, specifically, did you like him before? Or was it purely just it was a Sixers thing, he came on the team, you fell in love with him, and you just hated to see him go on to bigger and better Miami-related things?

SB

So, I loved him starting from when he did that practice where he was like, "I'm gonna take the second stringer and kick all of your asses." I just loved that practice so much because, even though so many people were very upset about, like, the ethics of doing that or, like, the sportsmanship of doing that, to me, it's this drive within him that is like, "I want to win. And, by god, I want everyone in my team to want to win. And, if you don't want to win, I will humiliate you because this is what we're here to do." Like, he didn't bring his girlfriend and kid or wife and kid. I don't know. But he didn't bring his wife and kid to the Bubble because he was like, "I'm on a business trip." Like, what – what mindset is he in?

AM

Well, the practice thing, like, that's some Jordan shit right there. That's like, "I'm going to wear you down and embarrass you because I want it harder than anybody else." And, like, I'm a – I'm a big Bulls fan. And getting to see Butler go from a guy who didn't even get any minutes to being one of the best players in the NBA is – it's really cool because, like, they keep alluding to it in the finals. But, like, he was the last pick in the draft. Nobody really expected much out of him. And I think, at that time, Tom Thibodeau, once he recognize how hard Butler was willing to work, which I imagine he saw in practice was like, "Oh, this guy's legit."

SB

Yes. And, like, he had a great GQ interview. That was a little heartbreaking because he did admit to being friends with Mark Wahlberg, which is iffy. But, but, outside of that – but he had this great GQ interview where he was just talking about how he was like, "I am not more talented than anyone else in the NBA. I definitely have some ability that I'm born with. But I'm not this, like, talented guy. The only difference is I want it and I work for it more than anyone else," in the corniest like sports movie kind of way. I love that shit. Like, this is the reason I watch, like, Miracle every year and I'm like crying all the time because it's like that's what sports are. It's not – like, I think it's amazing that LeBron James can be, like, 35 and still just, like, incredible, beast mode, amazing. Like, that's still its own cool thing. But Jimmy Butler's like, "I don't actually have talent. Don't worry about you it, you guys. I'll figure it out." I love that for him. As soon as he did that and was kind of mad at his team for not wanting to win enough, I was like, "Okay. I love this." And then they were, like, he's coming to the

Sixers. And I was like, "I'm gonna go outside and scream at the sun. I'm so excited." And then he came there for a year and it was amazing. And he and Joel Embiid are so funny. Like, both of them are funny and so happy. At the end of like every play, they're just laughing. They're just, like, having a nice time. They're like, "Hey, we're here, having some fun playing Bball." It was a pure joy to watch. And then he had to leave, which was depressing. I didn't think I would ever be back in love with him again. And then the Bubble happened and I'm like, "Oops, I'm back in."

MJS

Now, something that specifically about Jimmy Butler is both lovable and shows his incredible drive and determination, like you said, is, in the Bubble, he started Big Face Coffee Company, where he brews his own coffee and then charges people \$20 a cup, which is either funny or the classic, like, rich people don't know how much things cost situation. But I think it's a true innovation. People do say very nice things about the coffee. How do you feel about him bringing this whole new entrepreneurship in addition to his basketball dominance in the Bubble?

SB

I love it so much because also there was an interview he did about it. He was like, "Everyone here is a millionaire. I don't give a shit." Like, he was just straight up like, "They're millionaires. They have this much money," which is true. And I think every millionaire should be charged \$20 for a cup of coffee every time they go anywhere. Every millionaire should always pay \$20 for coffee. And I think Jimmy Butler knows that and recognizes that. Like, that is exactly his level of playfulness, which is I'm having fun making Big Face Coffee and making fun of you guys for having to pay \$20 for coffee. But I'm also going to capitalize on it. Like, he is also making money off of his teammates. I think it's great. I think it's wonderful. And I love the merch. Like, some celebrities come out with merch that is really hideous and kind of embarrassing for them.

MJS

Mhmm.

SB

But he came up with merch that I was like, "I actually want that outside of it being a Jimmy Butler merch situation."

AM

Now, do we know if Tyler Herro is allowed to drink coffee? Or is it gonna stunt his growth?

SB

Poor Tyler Herro. I mean he's actually doing great. I shouldn't say that. He's, like, the youngest person ever to start in NBA Finals game. So, he's having – someone had a tweet. And I wish I knew who it was. But somebody had a tweet that was like, "In a normal year, he would be, like, going out –

AM

Yes.

SB

-- after getting set off or something like that." And I think about that every game. I'm like, "This poor man is in Disney World for the week of his life that he could be getting, like, the most --

AM

Yeah, the, the tweet was after that huge game in the conference finals where he put up, like, 37. It was like, "In a non-COVID world, Tyler Herro would be out on the town in Miami having one of the wildest nights of his life. Instead, he's in his hotel room eating a Nature Valley Granola bar."

SB

Yes. Yes, exactly.

MJS

People did point out, which was an astute observation, that not waiting for him in his hotel was a granola bar. But it was an Instagram model with a lots of followers. So, he had something more exciting than oats and honey crumbs all over his bed to go home to. But, yeah, it's a little different. I do just like the visual of going in and checking into your hotel room. Like, "Oh, wow, I just scored 37 points. Oh, man, my key card's not working. I gotta call the front desk."

SB

It must be so weird to celebrate after these games. And I also do feel like one of the things that's made the Bubble so interesting and so variable is that, like, there's no travel, and there's no going out, and there's no wild nights before a game. Like, Dennis Rodman would have already left the Bubble by now.

AM

100 percent.

SB

And, like, skydive.

AM

He would have gotten more than wings if he left the Bubble.

SB

Oh, my god.

AM

Well, the funny thing about that is that, when I saw that tweet and it was blowing up and then some of the like buzz kills in the replies were like, "He's only 20. He couldn't even get into a club." It's like, "Oh, you don't understand how the world works. Do you think Tyler Herro is not getting into a club in Miami after dropping 37 points?"

SB

Like, like, big club owners of Miami are being like, "Excuse me, Mr. Butler. Can I please see your ID and check your date of birth?" That's not happening. That man is getting his dick sucked in, like, any room anywhere in Miami he wants. Like, he could go to anywhere. Wendy's, an industrial park, it doesn't matter. You're in Miami. You're fine.

MJS

The cereal aisle in Publix, it's all available.

SB

You don't have to be in the NBA for them to not ID you in Miami. If you're just having a good fun, they will let you in.

MJS

Oh, that's good. I like it. I like it. I do have to point out. Talking about the Big Face Coffee, have you heard about the new competitor startup Little Face Coffee that has popped up in this week?

SB

No.

MJS

So, the Heat's assistant athletic trainer, Brandon Gilliam, has launched a Little Face Coffee, where he's not charging as much. But he's brewing the coffee.

AM

My man is trying to get fired. You can't – you can't just undercut the star player and expect there to not be repercussions.

SB

Jimmy Butler's gonna make him go to practice and play him one on one. Just break that man's ankles. Like, I swear to God, that's – Jimmy has a plan.

MJS

I feel like he's gonna do something incredibly work around but also really specific because this guy's the assistant athletic trainer. I feel like Jimmy Butler is gonna, like, single out someone on the team and, like, cross them over so bad that they have to get a lot of massages. And he knows that Brandon's gonna have to give that person a massage and he's like, "Yeah. Like, I crossed up Duncan Robinson because now I know that Brandon has to do extra work on his ankle."

AM

I'll tell – I'll tell you what he did for any of our listeners who like Curb Your Enthusiasm. This dude opened Spite store.

MJS

Mhmm.

SB

Jimmy is really motivated by spite and pettiness like Jordan. So, I think, if someone else does it to him, it's only going to escalate. And, if we see Jimmy Butler married to this man's wife in a year, we wouldn't be shocked.

AM

Jimmy Butler is gonna be holding an iPad laughing at it going, "I took that very personally."

SB

Exactly. It's gonna be his own wedding to that man's wife on the iPad. Jimmy was just like, "That's what happens."

MJS

Aah.

SB

I can't wait for the Jimmy Butler Last Dance documentary. I will make all of my children, in 2050 or whenever it comes out, watch it every day. And they'd be like, "Mom, not again." I mean, like, sit down. It's Jimmy Butler documentary time.

AM

Instead of the Last Dance, it's going to be called the Last Pick and it's gonna be very inspiring.

MJS

Oh, that's really good. Let's make it right now. We, we, we need to get in on it and make this happen. I mean it's gonna be good. I – also, one of my favorite things about Jimmy Butler is his love of country music, which started as a joke in a way to troll his teammates. And then, now, he just genuinely enjoys country music. You gotta love it.

SB

That's like so him though in general. It's he takes a situation that he doesn't like. He does something to be petty and funny. And then he ends up doing a really great job at it, and loving it, and having so much fun that he keeps doing it. Like, that is Jimmy Butler beginning to end. He's doing half of the things out of spite and he's having so much fun doing it. He has this, like, vibe of a seven-year-old on, like, so much sugar at a party. Like, he's like, "Let's go."

MJS

Yeah, he's the eight-year-old that just chugged some Mountain Dew Code Red in the year 2004 and he is wired.

AM

No, he's the kid who makes the, the little kid Long Island Iced Tea where you just pour a little bit of every soda flavor into one cup.

SB

Yes. Absolutely, yes.

MJS

Oh, man. Well, I hope nothing but the best for Jimmy Butler. I hope nothing but the best for Big Face Coffee. It's merchandise. It's coffee sales. I love that Jimmy Butler had an incredible game. I hope he continues on having success. And the, the biggest thing that makes me sad about the Heat injuries happening – we're recording this as Game Four is happening later today. If the Heat pulled this off, like, Jimmy Butler would never shut up until the end of time and it would be perfect. So, I think people aren't understanding how great the world will be if this Heat team wins, solely from Jimmy Butler's future endeavors. And I just hope they pull off this upset because now it'll even be even more satisfying. I really want it.

SB

I want it so badly. I maybe want it more than my Sixers winning because this is just amazing. Pandemic. Everyone's injured. You guys made it so far. No one saw Jimmy Butler in the finals. I'm ready.

AM

Yeah.

SB

I'm amped. I'm ready to go.

AM

And, by the way, congrats on Doc Rivers. And I guess a belated congrats on your St. Louis Blues last year. I'm sure you were very happy.

SB

They went from last place. Then they won the Stanley Cup for the first time. No team has never done that before. So, they're kind of like the Miami Heat of – not that the Heat were in last place, but they turned it around. They turned the season around. And that's what the Heat are doing right now. I can't wait to see them win. I hope they win the finals.

AM

I'll tell you what. This episode is going to drop this coming Monday. So, six days from now and nothing would make me happier than the NBA Finals still existing at that time because that would mean we're going to a Game Seven.

SB

So, the Heat win in four, then five, then six. It only makes sense for it to end in in seven.

AM

Nice.

MJS

Ah, the conspiracy theories, I like it. I like it.

SB

But I know basic math. And that's one of the things I know. It's that, after six, come seven.

AM

Right. And you know what? The longer the series goes, the more tired these guys get. And what helps you when you're tired? Fucking coffee.

MJS

Coffee. Oh, amazing. Well, Sophia, thank you so much for joining on. If people want to see your lovely comedic basketball tweets throughout the rest of this finals run, where can they go?

SB

They can find me on Twitter [@1followernodad](#), the number 1.

MJS

Great handle.

SB

It's ridiculous. And they will see all of my tweets. And they will see a lot of Jimmy Butler in a crop top and a lot of me Photoshopping myself into photos of Jimmy Butler in a crop top.

MJS

It's perfect. It's what we all need right now. Well, thanks so much for joining on.

SB

Thanks.

1, 2, 3, 3, 2, 1. 3-on-3

AM

So, for my 3-on-3 today, I will admit I did something a little more basketbally than I usually would. Given that this is, in fact, a basketball podcast, not really about basketball. But it seemed like the perfect time for it. And, today, I have for you the three best and three worst NBA finals of my lifetime.

MJS

Wooh. All right. That's fun. It's very topical. I appreciate it.

AM

Yeah. Now I'm a little bit older than you. So, my first basketball memory is Chicago Bulls, John Paxson, great Bull, terrible General Manager --

MJS

Yeah.

AM

-- hitting a game winning three over the Phoenix Suns back in 1993 when I was just a young lad of six years old living in the Greater Chicago land area. So, these selections are from the years 1993 to the present.

MJS

All right. All right.

AM

Now, my criteria for assessing this was how competitive the series was, what storylines were at play, and memorable games from that particular series. Now, what this means, more often than not, is that the longer a series is, the more competitive a series is. So, you'll notice that sweeps are in the worst category. And six and seven game series are in the best category.

MJS

I love it.

AM

So, I'm going to start out with my third worst. I always like to start with worst and end with best. My third worst and I'm very sorry to start off this way because I know this might be a little triggering for you. Number three on my list of worst NBA Finals in my lifetime was the 1999 NBA Finals, in which the San Antonio Spurs beat your New York Knicks four to one. I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

MJS

We were just happy to be there, you know.

AM

Yes.

MJS

We're the eighth seed. We're just happy to be there.

AM

Exactly. And that's – I was gonna start with that. Now, I don't want to gloss over the most important detail of why the Knicks were so overmatched in this series. And it is they were the eighth seed, which is super impressive. The Knicks beat the Heat in an epic first round series and became just the second number eighth seed to win an opening round. Now, this was just a weird season in general. We were coming off of Jordan's final year with the Bulls. Don't worry. You know, I'm gonna get to that series at some point. And a labor dispute caused a lockout, which forced teams to play a shortened 50-game season. In the finals itself, the Spurs won the first two games in San Antonio. The series then moved to the iconic Madison Square Garden, where the Spurs lost Game Three and then won games Four and Five. Now, if you want to know how much the NBA has changed in the past 20 years, Mike, take a wild guess at how many points the Knicks scored in Game Two of that series.

MJS

Game Two, I'm gonna say 68.

AM

67. Excellent guess.

MJS

Aah. I know a little bit about this series. I know a little bit about this team because it was just such a weird season with the lockout. And the Knicks just happened to be really good at the end. And they just had a ton of momentum. And that's what catapulted us forward.

AM

Well, yeah, that's what's wild about it. It's that they were very close to missing the playoffs. And, at that time, there was a lot of talk about Jeff Van Gundy, who have – and maybe you're listening to the finals now and know him as a, a commentator. There was a lot of talk that he might be fired. Obviously, it didn't end up happening that way. But, yeah, the Knicks scored 67 points in Game Two, which is, like, a first half now.

MJS

Yeah.

AM

It's – it's very strange. Now, the series almost went to a sixth game, but Avery Johnson hit a game winning shot to put the Spurs up by one in Game Five. And the Knicks, in typical Knicks fashion, didn't even get a shot off before the buzzer sounded.

MJS

Sounds about right. Sounds about Knicks.

AM

It's safe to say that the Spurs were winning and grinning while the Knicks were failing and flailing.

MJS

Oh, Clyde Frazier always makes me feel better. So, that's okay.

AM

I'm sure he was wearing only the finest of suits during that entire series. Now, number two of the worst Finals, the 2002 Finals in which the Lakers swept the New Jersey Nets.

MJS

Mhmm.

AM

Now, it was just – it was an absolute romp. The Lakers won their third consecutive NBA championship. And, granted, if you're a fan of the Lakers or a fan of complete and utter dominance, maybe you enjoyed this series. But, other than that, it was a real snooze feast. Now, this was Shaq and Kobe at their absolute peak. And, believe it or not, other than a Game Two blowout, the other three games actually ended within 10 points. So, the Nets did their best, but, like, it was never really in question. Shaq was the clear MVP, averaging 36.3 points and 12.3 rebounds in the four games.

MJS

Absolutely ridiculous.

AM
Right.

AM
Ridiculous.

AM
Because this is the wild part. Kobe, in that series, averaged 26.8 points, 5.8 rebounds, and 5.3 assists and Shaq was still the clear MVP.

MJS
Yeah, I mean Shaq was just dominant. And I remember being a kid when these playoffs were underway. It was just this well-known acceptance that whoever won between the Lakers and the Kings in that conference Final was just going to murder the Nets. Like, it was the most – not even anticlimactic but just, like, everyone knew the series was going to be boring before it even started.

AM
Right. There was a year the Lakers were 16 and one in the playoffs. Like, it just wasn't even close.

MJS
Yeah, these Lakers were just unfair. It was cheat code basketball.

AM
And, to give a little teaser for something coming up on our next episode, we actually had the opportunity to interview Jeff Pearlman, who wrote a book about that era of Lakers basketball. And one of the things that we talked about was the fact that NBA fans now don't really understand quite how good Shaq was.

MJS
Mhmm.

AM
And this series is a perfect example of just how dominant he was at his peak.

MJS
Yes. So, if you've heard us talk about how wonderful Shaq is as a personality on this podcast for the past few years. With this episode and next episode, now, you get to understand how obnoxiously dominant he was at the sport too. Hooray.

AM
Yeah, he, he was always a lot of fun. I think now people know him mainly for the fun and less for the basketball. But, man alive, just like a singular talent. And the kind of athleticism that he had as someone that size, it, it almost doesn't make physical sense.

MJS

Mhmm.

AM

Now, the Nets would end up going to the finals again in back-to-back years. They lost to the Spurs the following year. And, in those two NBA Finals, the New Jersey Nets were a dismal one in eight. It was a very West heavy time, which is not something that's altogether unfamiliar these days.

MJS

Mhmm.

AM

Number one on my list of worst NBA Finals in my life, the 2007 NBA Finals, in which the Spurs swept the upstart Cleveland Cavaliers, led by a 22-year-old kid from Akron named – and let me try to pronounce this correctly – I believe it's LeBron James. Did I say that right?

MJS

That is – that is exactly how you pronounce it.

AM

Okay.

MJS

Yes.

AM

Now, to use a football term, the Cavs really outkicked their coverage this season. Like, absolutely no one expected them to get to the Finals. They had shocked the Detroit Pistons, who were a dominant team of that era in the conference finals. And Game Five of that series was the moment for a lot of us that people realize how truly great LeBron was and could be. And, again, I, I imagined this is kind of more towards the beginning of your, your interest in basketball. But LeBron scored the Cavs final 25 points of the game. The Cavs won by two and ended up winning the series. And LeBron's stat line in that game, again, as a 22-year-old, was 48 points, nine rebounds, and seven assists.

MJS

I feel like, at 22, when I was first starting my first engineering job, I was happy if I, like, answered all my emails in a day. For him to, to go on that dominant of a performance, it would be like if I invented a new wind turbine or something.

AM

Right. Yeah, a triple double for you as a 22-year-old was like, "All right. I answered all my emails. I didn't miss any calls. And I didn't take a nap during work."

MJS

I only slept through two of my seven alarms to get to work.

AM

Now, again, though, this gets us to the Finals. And, the point being, LeBron didn't have anyone supporting it. Like, the next best players on that team were Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Larry Hughes, who were perfectly fine players but not the kinds of people you would expect to be your number two and number three options on a team that gets you to the Finals.

MJS

Yeah, again, it was one of those we knew the Spurs were just going to destroy the Cavs in the moment thing. But it's weirdly become this looking back on it thing. People are mad at the Spurs for beating the Lakers because we would have had a Kobe-LeBron Finals.

AM

Right.

MJS

But I think these people are definitely doing some revisionist history because that also would have been very boring. The Lakers would have destroyed them. Like --

AM

Yeah. No, 100 percent.

MJS

It wouldn't have been any better of a Finals. It just would have been like, "Ah, Kobe and LeBron, I guess." But, you know --

AM

Yeah.

MJS

-- it's not the same at all.

AM

And, as, as much as it was kind of a foregone conclusion, the Cavs actually did do their best to hang in there. They lost Games Three and Four by a combined four points. But they -- I mean they never really stood a chance. And, by the way, speaking of old school NBA alert, the final score of Game Three was 75 to 72. Whoof.

MJS

And, you know, they know they stopped at halftime in that game.

AM

Exactly. And this may come as a surprise to you. It was not Tim Duncan, who was the MVP of that series. It was your boy, Tony Parker.

MJS

Yeah, Tony Parker, in the late 2000s, was just a monster. I mean, I guess, it was because he was starting his French rap career at that time. But, yeah, he was a -- maybe the power of dating Eva Longoria just fueled him.

AM

It – I think it must have been. He – in that series, he averaged 24.5 points, five rebounds, and 3.3 assists. And that's a hell of a series for a point guard.

MJS

Very good. Viva ala France. Ala Tony.

AM

So, those were our worst and that brings us to our best. Always more fun.

MJS

Mhmm.

AM

Number three on my list of best NBA Finals in my lifetime is the 2010 NBA Finals in which the Lakers defeated the Celtics in seven games. Now, this was Kobe's fifth and final ring. And what made this particularly special for me was that this was the year after I graduated from college and two of my best friends in the world were enormous Celtics and Lakers fans respectively. So, what we did, since we all had a ton of time on our hands, is watch all seven games together. So, that friend group that I'm still really close with to this day, we watched all the Lakers home games at my Lakers friend's house and all of the Celtics home games at my Celtics friend's house. And, also, when I say their houses, I'm obviously talking about their parents' houses. Who am I getting? Now, this was one of those classic back and forth series that, at various times, was tied at 1-1, tied at 2-2 and tied at 3-3. It goes back and forth the whole time. And what also made this special was that this was the end of an era really of Lakers basketball. The Lakers had won the previous NBA Finals easily over the Dwight Howard lead Orlando Magic, who were also kind of a team that, like, no one really thought they would get that far and then they surprised everyone and got their asses kicked.

MJS

And that Magic team is again the same thing. People were mad that the Magic beat the Cavs that year because the Cavs were at least better --

AM

Right.

MJS

-- and could have put up some sort of fight. But, again, people point to that finals as another, "Ugh, I'm so mad at the Orlando Magic for beating the Cavs. We could have had a LeBron-Kobe finals." So, people just love doing it.

AM

No, then that – it would have been cool. I think, that year more than the Spurs year, it would have been cool.

MJS

Yes.

AM

You know, as LeBron is really coming into his own and Kobe is still --

MJS

Mhmm.

AM

-- a dominant force and not like, you know, the Kobe of 2016.

MJS

Yeah, I love that Magic team though. They were so much fun. Them and the Suns were the first teams to truly embody shooting threes and stuff. And it was like looking into the future. I love that Magic team. They also had cool uniforms. And I liked Jameer Nelson.

AM

They were. Yeah, that was something that I considered as one of the worst NBA Finals. It was that -- it was that one. This would be our last chance to see Kobe in the finals. We didn't know it at that time, but Kobe was the MVP of the series. He average 28.6 points. And Game Seven was a perfect example of Kobe stepping up when it mattered the most. Now, he had a rough game. And Game Seven was one of those games that, like, it makes me appreciate Bubble basketball because these guys are not as tired as they usually are at the end of the season. Both teams were just, like, dragging up and down the court. Kobe had a bad game in Game Seven. He shot six for 24, but 10 of his final 23 points came in the fourth quarter and the Lakers barely pulled it out. They won by four points. And, in general, looking back at it and I had some fun looking at this, like, the names in that series are just outrageous. Like, you've got Kobe and Pau Gasol against Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce, Ray Allen, and Rajon Rondo, and a coaching matchup of Phil Jackson versus Doc Rivers. Like, that, that is everything the final should be.

MJS

Yeah. And, also, Ron Artest had one of the best moments where, after they won Game Seven and they were doing all the celebrating on the court and stuff, Ron Artest thanked his therapist on national TV.

AM

Hey!

MJS

And that was a fun time.

AM

Shout out to mental health

MJS

Always good. He was an early advocate and you love to see it.

AM

You absolutely love to see it. Number two on my list is the 2016 NBA Finals in which the Cleveland Cavaliers defeated the Golden State Warriors four to three. It feels ridiculous to characterize this as a David versus Goliath matchup when the underdog has the best player in the world. But the Cavs were huge underdogs coming into this series. Now, for some context, the Warriors had broken the record for regular season wins going an absurd 73 and nine that season. They played an entire NBA season and didn't lose double digit games.

MJS

Ridiculous.

AM

Side note, the final night of that NBA season continues to be one of my favorite nights as a basketball fan ever.

MJS

Oh, yeah, that was the Kobe one. Yeah. Yeah.

AM

Exactly. The Warriors broke the regular season win record and Kobe dropped 60 in his final game. Like, just absolute chills. So, early on in the finals, things went very much as expected. The Warriors destroyed the Cavs, winning the first two games by a combined 48 points. It was actually kind of similar to this year's finals in the sense that most people, after the first two games, were like, "All right. This is gonna be a sweep. This is just going to be a complete laughter." And, in Game Two, the Cavs were fully embarrassed. They lost 110 to 77. That's a 33-point loss. Now, amazingly, the Cavs came out hot in Game Three back in Cleveland in front of their fans winning by 30. And I didn't look it up. But that 63 point swing from Games Two and Three has to be, like, the largest ever.

MJS

It's got to be pretty large. I also know the referees came out really high in Game Three.

MJS

Yes. No, there – there is some talk of that. They're like – actually, when you Google the series, one of the top results is was the 2016 NBA Finals rigged.

MJS

This was a tough one. I was rooting for the Warriors. I had just finished living in Oakland for, like, seven months at this point. And I started rooting for the previous Warriors because they were, like, fun. That was the first year that they were really good. I was living there. The Knicks weren't worth watching. I went to a bunch of games. So, I wanted the Warriors to win this one even though they were the clear favorites.

AM

Right. So, the Warriors come back strong in Game Four. They win by 11, take a commanding 3-1 lead. Again, everybody was like, "All right. The series is over." But the most important moment in the series came in that game when Draymond Green took a swing at LeBron and hit him in the groin. Draymond was suspended for Game Five and most people cite that moment as the time where the series swamped.

MJS

Yeah, LeBron kind of put his nuts in Draymond's face.

AM

Yeah.

MJS

And then I remember there was a back and forth where LeBron said that Draymond Green, like, insulted his manhood or his fatherhood. There was a whole like, "I'm a father of three."

AM

Yeah.

MJS

It was LeBron in this, like, weird high horse about Draymond. But, yeah, the thing is Draymond had gotten so many technical fouls over the course of the playoffs. There's a rule where, if you get a certain amount, you get suspended, which made him miss the next game. So, if he was there for that --

AM

Right.

MJS

-- next game, they probably would have won.

AM

Yeah. And that sucks too because it almost feels like it's on a technicality.

MJS

Right. The bigger thing -- because part of Draymond's game is yelling and getting fouls. Like, his feisty nature is part of what makes him [\[Inaudible 34:42\]](#).

AM

He was the Rodman of that Warriors team. He just got under people's skin.

MJS

Yeah. But the most egregious thing was that he just, like, tackled Michael Beasley for no reason in one of the games against the Rockets earlier in the playoffs. That's --

AM

Right.

MJS

-- that's what people point to more often than the nut punch because, yeah, LeBron kind of put his nuts in his face. I was upset about that because I think nuts in someone's face, pushing them out of the way is a normal reaction for a human to have.

AM

I suspect that Draymond may have said something about LeBron's hairline.

MJS

I'm a father of three.

AM

And my hair is all natural. So, the Cavs win Game Five against the shorthanded Warriors team to force a Game Six. But here's what makes that impressive. Even though Draymond was out, the Warriors still have Steph Curry and Klay Thompson --

MJS

Right.

AM

-- and a slew of other players who are very talented. But the most impressive part is that game was at Oracle Arena, which I know you've been to in Oakland which is one of the hardest places to play in the world.

MJS

Mhmm.

AM

And the Warriors, to that point, combined during the regular season and playoffs, were 50 and three at home.

MJS

Wild. Just wild.

AM

So, the Cavs somehow pull it out with the momentum of that Game Five victory. They go back to Cleveland. They win Game Six to force a decisive Game Seven, where, of course, anything could happen. We're back in Oakland. And, in a game that goes down to the wire, Kyrie Irving hits the game winning three to seal the deal for Cleveland, aka BelieveLand. And LeBron wins the MVP of the series, averaging 29.7 points, 11.3 rebounds and 8.9 assists per game. And J. R. Smith would never again wear a shirt.

MJS

The last time J. R. Smith was ever seen wearing a shirt.

AM

And, honestly, I mean LeBron's numbers during the finals right now -- as we're recording this, the Lakers are up 2-1. I, I would assume his numbers are about the same as that. Just like ridiculous triple double.

MJS

Yeah, just obnoxious numbers.

AM

The difference being, in that game against the Warriors, LeBron actually stayed on the court until the game was over. Number one and this should be no surprise to anyone, although, honestly, I feel I deserve some credit for not just choosing the Bulls for all three of my favorite NBA Finals. We have the 1998 NBA Finals, in which my beloved Bulls defeated the Utah Jazz. Now, for anyone who's watched The Last Dance, you know all about the series and the season that led up to it. For anyone who has not watched The Last Dance, literally, turn off this podcast and clear your schedule for 10 hours. What the hell are you doing?

MJS

It's on Netflix.

AM

It's on Netflix.

MJS

It's on Netflix. And it's also on ESPN for free.

AM

I beg you. Please watch it. In any case, this was Jordan's final year on the Bulls and we thought in the NBA at the time. This was Phil Jackson's final year coaching the team. It was not a secret. Phil Jackson had handed everyone a binder on the first day of training camp that said The Last Dance. Like, everybody knew this was it. Now, what made this series special compared to the previous two seasons was that, in 1997, it was pretty obvious that no one was going to beat the Bulls. They're just, like, it was not going to happen. So, as a Bulls fan, it was great. But there wasn't the same kind of suspense. In 1998 though, between injuries to Scottie Pippen, Dennis Rodman disappearing to Las Vegas various times, Jordan getting older, and constant tension with the front office, the Bulls almost didn't make it to the finals. Like, in a wild Game Seven against Larry Bird, the coaches, Indiana Pacers, the Bulls battled back from a 15-point deficit to win the series and that Reggie Miller is your Kodak moment.

MJS

Aah.

AM

Nevertheless, this was a matchup of dominant teams. The Bulls and Jazz had both finished number one in their conferences with identical 62 and 20 records. The Bulls lost a dramatic Game One in the Finals in overtime, came back with a big victory in Game Two to tie the series, and won Game Three 96 to 54.

MJS

Pew.

AM

One of the all-time strangest games in NBA Finals history. Just this weird anomaly, where, in those two years that the Bulls played the Jazz, every game was close. And then there's this one strange outlier where the Bulls just beat the crap out of them. So, they win Game Three

big. Game Four, they actually win on some clutch Dennis Rodman free throws, which is like saying Dwight Howard free throws or Shaq free throws. It just didn't happen. And everyone thought it was over. The Jazz obviously had other ideas. They hung on to beat the Bulls in Game Five in Chicago. And, in Game Six, the final game, Jazz were up by three with less than a minute remaining on a huge John Stockton three. Jordan came down, scored an easy layup, came back down, stole the ball from Karl Malone, and the rest is history. And I would love to insert the Bob Costas clip from after that shot. But Bob Costas, after that famous shot goes --

BC

Who knows what will unfold in the next several months, but that may have been the last shot Michael Jordan will ever take in the NBA.

AM

Jordan finished the game with 45 points, disappeared into the sunset, you know, for a year or two, but we won't go there.

MJS

Oh, man. It's great. I, I appreciate your restraint of only including one Bull series in here. But that one was truly fantastic and makes sense of why they made a whole documentary about it, basically.

AM

Totally. I mean there -- there were a lot of really good finals to choose from. And I'm hoping that the NBA Finals that we're watching currently will get to that point. I, I don't think they will, but, you know, we'll see.

MJS

I don't know. Who's to say Jimmy Butler went Super Saiyan. Maybe, maybe with people hopefully coming back from injury tonight, it'll get a little more interesting.

AM

One can only hope, but that is my worst three and best three NBA finals of my lifetime.

MJS

Amazing. So, Adam, for this That Actually Happened, it's something I've wanted to cover for a while. And, now, it feels like the perfect time to do so because it's no secret that the two of us would rather the Heat win the NBA Finals. So, I think what better way to give bad juju vibes to the Lakers than to talk about the time in 2002 that the refs definitely rigged the Western Conference Finals to make them advance --

AM

Yeah.

MJS

-- to the Finals.

AM

Tokyo shit.

MJS

So, this is 2002 Game Six in the Western Conference Finals, one of the most infamous basketball games ever. And this was between the Kings and the Lakers. And this is where the Kings probably should have moved on to the NBA Finals where they most likely would have beaten the New Jersey Nets, but the referees and the NBA at large? had other plans.

AM

Bump, bump, bump.

MJS

Bump, bump, bump, indeed. Do you remember this game happening? Do you remember being around? I remember, being a youngster, the hullabaloo surrounding it and only intensifying when the whole Tim Donaghy scandal six years later came to light.

AM

Oh, I remember it well. I was – I was in my chubby phase in middle school.

MJS

Hmm.

AM

And I was watching every damn minute of this series eating pizza bagels or something.

MJS

I remember especially liking the Sacramento Kings team as well. They were fun. They had funky uniforms. Hedo Türkoğlu had dyed frosted tips.

AM

Yep.

MJS

There – there were so many things to love about the team.

AM

That may have been part of the reason that Shaq have called them the Sacramento Queens.

MJS

Yeah. So, there was a lot of animosity between these teams throughout the season. The regular season had the Kings being better than the Lakers, which is the first time that had ever happened. There's already some regional animosity because Sacramento Kings and the Lakers are both in California. The Lakers are always better. It's this big brother-little brother thing, but you finally have this one season where the Kings are better and people think this is finally it. This is where we defeat the Lakers. And there was fights and stuff in the games throughout the regular season. And, in the playoffs, it got feisty as well. There was even during the series some conspiracy theories. Kobe Bryant got food poisoning before Game Two in Sacramento. And people thought that this was, much like we talked about with

the Michael Jordan pizza situation in Utah, people thought that someone had poisoned Kobe's food. This whole series had so much drama going into it.

AM
Yeah.

MJS
And then, yes, as you mentioned, before the series started, Shaq made the not great joke of saying that he's not worried about the Sacramento Queens. I – yeah, I guess, it's 2002 when, you know, calling someone a queen will seem like a cool diss --

AM
Yeah.

MJS
-- and not – painfully, not a great thing to say.

AM
Joke's on you, Shaq. Queen is fucking awesome.

MJS
Yeah. So, there was also a game earlier. So, in Game Four, was this iconic Robert Horry game winning shot. And, in the postgame interview, they asked Vlade Divac, the center for the Kings, about it. He said it was a lucky shot. Robert Horry said, "That wasn't a lucky shot. I've been doing this my whole career." And Robert Horry, in an attempt to try and sound cool but not, he completely flubbed the delivery. He was like, "Maybe Vlade should a, a read, read a newspaper or something."

AM
Oh, god.

MJS
Just a very – a very poor delivery on what was supposed to be an intimidating statement from Robert.

RH
It wasn't a lucky shot. I've been doing that for – all my career. So, he should – he should know. He better read a – read a paper or something.

MJS
And then the next game, like, Bibby had a basically game winning shot after a questionable call in Game Five. So, we now arrive at the game at the heart of this discussion, Game Six of the Western Conference Finals. Now, the Kings are up in series 3-2. This game was in Los Angeles. And, if the Kings win this game, they move on to the finals. If they lose, they go back to Sacramento to try to win Game Seven. Now, the biggest reason that people think it was rigged is because of the refereeing of this game. Do you have any idea how many fouls were called against the Kings in this game? How many free throws were taken by the Lakers?

AM

Off the top of my head, no, but I know that it's like overwhelmingly in favor of the Lakers.

MJS

Right. So, up until this game, the Lakers shot an average of 22 free throws per game. In Game Four, they shot 40 free throws. So, almost twice as many. The Kings in this game only shot 25.

AM

Ugh.

MJS

Now, even more ridiculous than the 40 free throws is that, just in the fourth quarter, the Lakers shot a record setting 27 free throws. So, well over half of the free throws in the game for the Lakers happened just in the fourth quarter, which feels especially suspicious if you're trying to make one team win a game and another team lose that game.

AM

Oh, man.

MJS

There are just a slew of questionable calls. We'll put links to YouTube videos on the website for the episode here at horsehoops.com. It's just a lot of little ticky-tack fouls that you wouldn't think would be called. And, even if you break down every single play individually and you see some of the merits of like, "Oh, that could have been a foul. I see why they call that, et cetera," it just seems like, every time the Kings had an opportunity to be called for one of those either way it could go calls, it went against the Kings and for the Lakers really not so much. There was bad calls throughout the game. It's not like there weren't any bad calls against the Kings. It just really felt like, especially once you got into the fourth quarter, nothing was going the Kings way.

AM

Right.

MJS

An added wrinkle to this is just officiating Shaquille O'Neal is very hard to do. He's just a giant massive a human. Like, you just can't defend Shaq without probably doing things to him on defense that would be considered foul on a lesser mortal. But it's – regardless, it was just the stuff that was called was just so ticky-tack and stuff you don't want to see in a playoff game. You want the players just to play it out. You want the game to be decided by the players, not by the referees.

AM

Yeah.

MJS

The most egregious situations came in the final three minutes. The Kings were up by two points. And Chris Webber, power forward for the Kings, has the ball. And he does a triple move, kind of has a bit of contact with Robert Horry, not much. Robert Horry does an egregious flop, just acts like a truck hit him. And Chris Webber makes the shot, but the shot is called off. It's called an offensive foul. So, instead of getting a four-point lead, it's just a two point lead. The Lakers get the ball back and end up tying the game. Then there's a play later on where Kobe is going in for a layup and he kind of gets into a position where he's under the basket. So, he doesn't have room to go, jumps up for a shot. Doug Christie's, like, kind of near him but not really. And Chris Webber makes this ridiculous block Matrix style where he jumps and moves his body out of the way so that he doesn't hit Kobe, but he cleanly blocks the shot. But then they call the foul on Doug Christie. And then the most egregious – are you familiar with the Mike Bibby play that happened in the final seconds of this game?

AM

I haven't seen it recently. No.

MJS

Okay. Let me – let me just pull it up because I would love for you just to give a description for our audience about what happens here. Now, the title is going to give it away.

AM

The, the title of this clip is Kobe Bryant elbows Mike Bibby in 2002 Western Conference. Oh, boy. Oh, okay. I had not remembered that play. Egregious is the perfect word for it. I mean, when you're talking about the, the Draymond incident, the elbow to the groin or whatever, like, this was Kobe fully throwing an elbow into Mike Bibby's jaw.

MJS

Mhmm.

AM

And not really disguising it particularly well either. Directly in front of the ref.

MJS

Yes, that's the most ridiculous part of it. It's the referee is right there. There are 12 seconds left in the game. The Lakers are up 103-102. The Lakers are inbounding the ball and Kobe tries to make it look like he's doing a little swim move to get by. But it looks very intentional. Like, he's just trying to elbow Mike Bibby in the face. And then what's great about the camera view – we'll put this clip on the episode page – is it just slowly zooms out. And then you can see the referee standing right there staring at them and then just doesn't call anything even though Mike Bibby gets elbowed in the nose.

AM

That's the most amazing part. It's that usually, when you get away with something like that, it's because the refs didn't see it. Like, Kobe might as well have gone up to the ref, tapped him on the shoulder, and be like, "Hey, pay close attention to what I'm about to do," and then elbowed Mike Bibby in the face. Like, that's the only way I could think of it being more obvious.

MJS

It's ridiculous. And, when you think about the ruling, that would have been a flagrant foul – at least, a flagrant one. The Kings would have gotten two shots and the ball back. So, they go from being down one to being up one. And then they have the ball. They'd probably win the game.

AM

But, in fairness, I think, in that era of the NBA, you would never see a flagrant foul on, on a call like that.

MJS

At the very least, it would have been a technical foul and they would have got one shot and the ball.

AM

Right.

MJS

So, at the very least, they would have tied the game. And this play is easily the most egregious of all of the calls. And you can't necessarily say that one call shows that the entire game, maybe series, was fixed. But this is just like the cherry on top of the shit sundae that was served to the Sacramento Kings in Game Six. So, when this happened, in the moment, people immediately jumped on and said that the refs horribly officiated this game. People already had rumors that the Lakers were the more favorite team for the NBA to see in the Finals. The Lakers were, obviously, the bigger market in LA. They were going for the three-peat. And, if you have a King's-Nets finals, it's not going to be the most exciting. But, if you have a Lakers-Kings Game Seven plus then the Lakers in the Final, it's gonna do a lot better for TV viewership numbers, advertising numbers, ticket sales, a lot of different things where the NBA, if they were looking through dollar signs, especially because ratings were going down in, in this particular year, then, you know, you could see why they might want the Lakers to win this one.

AM

Could you say that again but higher?

MJS

Now, you can see why the – like, the NBA might want the Lakers to win this one. So, right away, people thought this was ridiculous. The Kings go on to lose Game Seven. It was a really close game. They lost in overtime, unfortunately. But the dust kind of settles. Until 2008, this gets brought up again in the Tim Donaghy scandal.

AM

Oh, yeah.

MJS

So, Tim Donaghy was a NBA referee, who was under investigation by the FBI and the NBA for betting on games that he was officiating in and, thus, influencing the outcome of it. And he was getting to the point where he was going to serve a significant jail sentence. So, to

sort of lighten his sentencing, he started just trying to sing like a canary and tattle on the NBA and other refs and all this other stuff. And one of the things that came up is he said that this game in 2002 was rigged.

AM

Now, my understanding of it, at the time, was that largely what he was doing – not that this makes it okay – was something called point shaving, which is, like, you're trying to adjust the final score so that a team covers or doesn't cover the spread. But you're trying not to, like, intentionally change the outcome. Did he say that they specifically were told or that he tried to make sure that the Lakers won that game?

MJS

So, you are correct. What Tim Donaghy normally did was he knew the over under of a game. Meaning the over under of a particular team or the combined score. And then you do some foul calls at the end just for some free throws, especially if the game has already settled up, to make sure that the total score was in whatever range got him/the people that wanted to bet a lot of money on it money. But what Tim Donaghy said about this particular game is he said that there were two referees that were “company men.” Meaning that the NBA would put these referees on games that they had a vested interest in a particular outcome. And they knew that these referees would act in a way that benefited what the NBA wanted. The person that is most known to be called out for this and this one in particular was a guy by the name of Dick Bavetta.

AM

Oh, Dick Bavetta is a legend.

MJS

He's a legend for being a bad referee.

AM

Right.

MJS

He is someone that people thought sucked up to coaches and players. And he would give favorable calls to particular players, to particular teams. It always felt like he was trying to be in the spotlight. And what Donaghy said about Bavetta – he went on further about him in a 2009 book he wrote called, *Personal Foul*. He said that Bavetta prided himself on being this person that the NBA trusted in these games. And how Tim Donaghy interprets this is, if the NBA wants a particular outcome, they'll have Dick ref that game. And then they'll get what they want. So, yeah, Tim was just convinced too that Dick was going to act out the NBA's wishes, which was to have the more lucrative team play another game and then, hopefully, move on to the finals.

AM

Wow.

MJS

Now, of course, David Stern, commissioner of the NBA at the time, was very much on the offensive against Tim Donaghy saying that this was a bunch of crap. He said he was just singing like a canary. He was just trying to clear sense so he was just making up a bunch of lies. I don't know how much you can really trust David Stern here since David Stern also didn't know that one of his referees was betting on games and stuff. Who's the blame here? Like, yes, what David Stern is saying makes sense. But can you really just throw out all of what Tim Donaghy's saying, especially, like, does he really have anything to gain by calling out this game in particular?

AM

Yeah. I mean I'm not somebody who usually is on board with conspiracy theories in sports or in general. And, like, you know, some of the ones that we've heard about like, "Oh, yeah, they forced Michael Jordan to retire because he had gambling debts." Like, I don't believe any of that shit. But, like, this is one that I've always felt was fishy even at the time. And, now, knowing what we know in retrospect, it's, like, "Come on. There's very clearly – they were at least trying to manipulate it or to, like, push it a certain way." At the end of the day, the players still have to make free throws. They still have to make shots. But, if the officiating is clearly in the favor of one team, it's going to have a profound impact on the game.

MJS

Definitely. Of the conspiracy theories that we have covered, this one seems like the, the least stretch. For a game that was objectively officiated very poorly, it's not too much of a stretch to say, "Ah, I wonder if they wanted this one team that was much more lucrative to win."

AM|

Yeah.

MJS

Now, it's never going to be confirmed. We're never going to know 100 percent if it was rigged. I like to subscribe to the belief that, you know, at least, one or two of the refs could have wanted a particular thing to happen just with how ridiculous these calls were. We're not going to get a conclusion on the story because it's just going to be forever a question mark. So, instead, I'm going to end on two great notes. The first of which is a quote from Scott Pollard, who was the backup center for Sacramento Kings. They asked him about the situation and if he thought that it was rigged. About it, he said, "If it was proven that it was, that would hurt. That would hurt the league. It would hurt my feelings. It would hurt everybody." I just like that he said it would hurt my feelings.

AM

It's kind of very sweet and sad in a way.

MJS

Yeah. I mean he ends up going saying, "I don't want it to be found out that that was true. I would much rather live with human error than human interference," which is a pretty honest take on it. Like, it's a logical thing for Scott to say and it's true. Like, you don't want to have to deal with the what if of knowing that someone else intervened with that game. You don't want to have to think that someone screwed you over.

AM

Exactly. And I think what becomes tough about it is that the Kings, had they won that game and gotten to the Finals, almost certainly, would have won the Finals. They – they were the better team compared to the Nets. And, for all of those guys, like, you only get so many shots at getting close to a, a championship. And I think, you know, if you look at the roster, most of those players never won. I imagine that would be hard to get over if you felt like that was your shot and it was taken from you.

MJS

Definitely. So, the final note that I want to end the story on is by a character that I did not know played a role in this story until I was doing my research on it. But there was someone who tried to lead a charge on the NBA investigating this game and seeing if they could get something overturned or look into if there's any foul play by the referees.

AM

I don't know if there's any foul play, but there was definitely some foul play.

MJS

Hoo,hoo. It was Ralph Nader and, yes, that Ralph Nader.

AM

What the hell?

MJS

So, yeah, well, Ralph Nader was in between presidential campaigns in 2000 and 2004. He took the time to say, "Hey, this is a whole bunch of baloney." He wrote a letter to the NBA saying that they need to investigate Game Six. He said, "At a time when the public's confidence is shaken by headlines, reporting the breach of trust by corporate executives, it is important, during the public's relaxation time, for there to be maintained a sense of impartiality and professionalism in commercial sports performances. That sense was severely broken during Game Six."

AM

It is important, nay, imperative to restore the trust by the [Inaudible 55:28]. It reads like something from, like, the Declaration of Independence.

MJS

Unless the NBA orders a review of this games officiating, perceptions and suspicions, however presently absent, any evidence will abound, the letter said.

AM

And, so, I draft this Declaration of Interference with the following principles in mind.

MJS

Reveal that set of spies, the fans sense of fairness, and deters future occurrences would be a salutary contribution to the public trust that the NBA badly needs.

AM

BRB, you are going to go lose the 2004 election badly.

MJS

I can only assume here at the center on a scroll with a quill pen that Nicolas Cage tried to steal years after the fact. But I also saw a video of Ralph Nader basically saying this letter in video form. And he did deliver this emphatic message on a basketball court.

AM

Wow.

MJS

So, he specifically went to some outdoor basketball court that was near him and recorded this video where he was like, "This is outrageous and ludicrous."

AM

I agree with your take on Nicolas Cage because it sounds to me like Ralph Nader really is a national treasure.

MJS

Hey, yo, bang, bang, bang, bang. Well, yeah, that, that actually happened. The Kings might have gotten screwed out of a Western Conference Finals game and Ralph Nader got in the mix.

AM

That's great. Ah, I love it.

[56:39]

Transcriptionist: Rachelle Rose Bacharo

Editor: Krizia Casil