

Episode 95: What a Day for Process Trusting

w/ Jody Avirgan

MIKE = Mike Schubert

ADAM = Adam Mamawala

JODY = Jody Avirgan

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

MIKE: Also the grammatist in me is going to make sure I take this right. And the social media is by Adam and me. It's not "and I" because I wasn't the subject of that sense.

Intro Music [0:08]

MIKE: 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'm joined by my trusted co host, the James Harden getting traded to the Ben Simmons getting traded, it's Adam Mamawala. Adam, how is it going?

ADAM: It happened and we hadn't already recorded. We're learning, we're evolving, we're progressing. Look at us.

MIKE: We intentionally scheduled a recording with our guest so that it would happen during the last hour of the trade deadline. So we could talk about anything big that happened. Something big happened before we even started recording and that takes up much of the recording. It was a wonderful conversation that we had with Jody. So we're going to kind of breeze through this first part, because we talk about a whole heck of a lot. So let's get right to the Teal Memorial Locker Room to center ourselves.

ADAM: With some new faces and [1:08]

MIKE: New faces, yeah.

[TEAL MEMORIAL LOCKER ROOM 1:09 - 4:16]

MIKE: And with that we can get into Full Court Press, get it like the news.

ADAM: Let's do it.

MIKE: All right, we're recording this on February 10th. This is happening at 3:12pm. We've concluded our interview with Jody Avirgan, which is a very fun interview that talks in great detail about the Ben Simmons - James Harden trade. But there were a bunch of other trades that happened and we're just going to rapid fire go through them and talk about them very briefly. Perhaps next Full Court Press we can talk about them more. But hold a spicy trade deadline for sure, wouldn't you agree?

ADAM: Oh, very spicy and it started early. It was like Monday or Tuesday was already getting pretty spicy with CJ McCollum.

MIKE: Exactly. So the early kind of pre-trade deadline stuff. We had the Knicks trading for Cam Reddish we discussed. Then on the 19th you had the Nuggets traded for Bryn Forbes from the Spurs. Spurs kind of blowing it up a little bit in that, they are just trying to retool more towards the future. But yes, big one happened on February 4th. The Portland Trail Blazers basically got rid of most of the people on their team in the span of four days. So that they could try to build a new team around Damian Lillard? Or at least that's what they're saying. So first off, the Blazers traded to the Los Angeles Clippers Norman Powell and Robert Covington. In return, they got Eric Bledsoe, Justise Winslow, Keon Johnson and a 2025 second-round pick. This is a bit strange because the Blazers gave away a good amount of players and picks in order to get Norman Powell and Robert Covington on their team. So to trade those away for not a whole lot is kind of disappointing. But then they later did a trade with the New Orleans Pelicans where they traded away CJ McCollum, Larry Nance, Jr. and Tony Snell. Basically the remaining good players on their basketball team that aren't injured for the rest of the year. In exchange for Josh Hart, Tomáš Satoranský, Nickeil Alexander-Walker, who they then traded to the Jazz, a 2022 protected first-round pick, a 2026 second-round pick swap and 2027 second-round pick. So the basic plan is tried to blow it up so you can sign a bunch of new people to put around Dame in the future. We'll see how it works. But Portland is kind of looking incompetent.

ADAM: Yeah. Yeah, I I have nothing to add. Yes.

MIKE: This is a weird one where I also don't exactly know why the Pelicans traded for CJ McCollum. I think it's they really want to make the Play-In Tournament, but I think they're going to, their teams doing pretty well. So I don't know exactly why you have to trade for CJ,

ADAM: I think probably further incentivizing Zion to stay.

MIKE: I guess, except Josh Hart been playing really well. So I don't know why you get rid of him. But we'll see. I think CJ McCollum makes more sense in theory of a basketball fit around Zion because he's a better shooter. So maybe that's what they're going for. But he is older and makes a lot of more money. So not exactly sure. But we'll see. Maybe maybe it's something that they felt would work better around Zion, and Zion hasn't played a lot this year. So they're kind of thinking of future fit stuff. That was a definitely a big one, but an interesting one. Then another big interesting one is the Pacers also kind of blowing it up a little bit as expected. They traded away Caris LeVert and a second-round pick in 2022 to the Cleveland Cavaliers in exchange for Ricky Rubio. But really just his contract because he's out for the rest of the season. A 2022 first-round pick, a 2022 second-round pick, another 2022 second-round pick. And then the Pacers also in what is got to be the steal of the deadline. They traded away Domantas Sabonis, who it was pretty sure they were going to get rid of. And Jeremy Lamb, Justin Holiday and the 2023 second-round pick. And in return, they got Tyrese Haliburton, Buddy Hield and Tristan Thompson. But like Tyrese Haliburton like was the Kings. And I am, I was floored. And apparently so was the entire league. A big report was, a lot of teams going, wait, we didn't think you guys were gonna be ridiculous enough to trade Tyrese Haliburton, we would have offered some stuff.

ADAM: Right, and Kings fans were understandably not happy. We'll try to find a link to this. But there was a great Kings Reddit stream that was just complete chaos and people being like, we can't do this anymore. We can't, we can't follow this team. We have to boycott.

MIKE: I have to thank the Kings because no matter how bad the Knicks are, and no matter how disappointing they are, we'll always have the Kings. There will always be the team that messes

up things worse. And what's so wild about this trade is that, the Kings had a home run with the Tyrese Haliburton pick. He went way too low in the draft. I really wanted the Knicks to take him at number 8, in addition to a couple other players. But he was high on my list of please take this person instead of Obi Toppin and then he turned out to be really good an absolute steal. And that is the kind of thing that can revolutionize a franchise. The Bucks getting Giannis at 15.

ADAM: Uh-hmm.

MIKE: The Nuggets getting Jokić in the second-round. The Raptors getting Fred VanVleet undrafted, when you really outperform a pick, that changes your franchise. And Tyrese Haliburton showed a lot of upside. He's not necessarily better than Domantas Sabonis right now. So the Kings are getting "better presently". But he's only in a second year, and he's been playing really well. And he's been getting better every single year. And he's a nice kid that a week prior in a press conference said I want to change the culture around the Kings that everyone thinks that we're this bad franchise. I want to do it. You have someone who looks like he wanted to make this team better and stick for the long haul and you trade him away?

ADAM: And the kings are like, someone who wants to change our losing culture, get him out of here!

MIKE: Exactly. It's so strange. But you got to applaud the Pacers because that is incredible.

ADAM: I mean, for the Kings though, it's like borderline malpractice. What are we, what's happening?

MIKE: It is so strange. They are just hell-bent on making the Play-In--

ADAM: Why?

MIKE: --for this year just to end their historically long streak of not making the Playoffs. But who cares? You're not fooling anyone, and Tyrese Haliburton so much future promise. Ohh!

ADAM: Right, you don't, I, as you know, we have somehow made it to this point in the episode after already recording the interview without me shoehorning in a baseball reference.

MIKE: Yey!

ADAM: You don't bet the farm to get into the one game wildcard. It is not good business.

MIKE: No. Because if you get into the Play-In, that is not making the Playoffs. You have to be one of the top eight after the Play-In to brag that you made the Playoffs.

ADAM: It is the Play-In--

MIKE: Exactly.

ADAM: --not the Playoffs.

MIKE: Exactly. So, very strange trade for the Kings, not not a big fan of that. The other ones as we mentioned earlier, Nickeil Alexander-Walker and Juancho Hernangomez went to the Jazz. The Blazers in exchange got Joe Ingles, which is sad because he just had a season ending injury. So the Jazz just kind of did a, we have to trade him for a person that can play.

ADAM: I hope they resign him. I think they might.

MIKE: I really do too. It's just sad because Joe Ingles has been with the Jazz for 8 years. And he was this great story of he was on the Clippers, and he's from Australia and his wife was flying from Australia to see him play in his game. And he got waived while she was on the plane. And then he got picked up by the Jazz and had this great career. And he's such a nice dude. And he even said publicly, I will understand if they trade me it'll be sad, but it won't be angry. And it sucks. But yes, hopefully he comes back because to see him playing another team would be very, very strange. And then the Spurs got Tomas Satoransky, and a second-round pick. The

Raptors traded away Goran Dragic and a 2022 lottery protected first-round pick for Thad Young, Drew Eubanks, and a 2022 second-round pick. I think it makes sense, Goran Dragic was not playing for the Raptors at all. I also don't know if he'll play for the Spurs but--

ADAM: No, apparently, it looks like he'll be released and then some other team will scoop him up. And the Bulls are amongst the teams that are--

MIKE: Ahhh.

ADAM: --considering him.

MIKE: Well that can be very fun. Well then yes, at least the Raptors trade away a player who's not playing for them for someone who might. Then there was a 14 trade, a 14 trade. Which is cool, because that is the most you can do. The Sacramento Kings, back at it again. They receive Donte DiVincenzo from the Bucks, and Josh Jackson, and Trey Lyles, both from the Pistons. Given that they only gave up Marvin Bagley, I think that's pretty good. Those are good players. The Pistons receive Marvin Bagley which I do not understand because they have a couple of big guys on their team already. So I don't know why you do this. The Bucks get Serge Ibaka, and a 2022 second-round pick, and a 2024 second-round pick. Pretty solid for the Bucks as well.

ADAM: Uh-hmm.

MIKE: Because they need depth at that position. And they get some more picks that they traded away and pass deals. And the Clippers get Semi Ojeleye, and Rodney Hood. I don't exactly know what the Clippers are doing here. I don't know what the contract of Serge Ibaka was. But I I don't think they really want either of these two players. So I don't know what they're doing. But they got in the mix. And that was a 14 trade which is very fun.

ADAM: It was a very eventful deadline.

MIKE: Yes, it continues. The Wizards traded away Aaron Holiday for our favorite player in the league cash considerations. And then the Wizards traded Spencer Dinwiddie and Davis Bertans. Spencer Dinwiddie, who is all right. Davis Bertans who've been very disappointing for Kristaps Porzingis and a future second-round pick. So surprising, didn't think this is going to happen. The Knicks didn't make a trade at the deadline. But this is a big win for the Knicks. Because it just makes us look even smarter for a trade that we were left out the door for, for making for getting rid of Kristaps. So I'm happy that this happened.

ADAM: And the wild thing about this is we didn't even mention all of the trades just now.

MIKE: No.

ADAM: If you need to see the full list, go follow Woj on Twitter or go to [nba.com](https://www.nba.com) or whatever you'd like to do. But yeah, there there was just a absolute slew of activity.

MIKE: One last trade that did happen. The Celtics traded away, Dennis Schroder, Enes Freedom, and Bruno Fernando in exchange for Daniel Theis from the Rockets. The Rockets are doing this to that Alperen Sengun can get more playing time. He's a very fun basketball player. I highly recommend just watching him be a silly person out on the court. He's he's a phenomenon of basketball. But notably, Bulls didn't make a trade, Lakers didn't make a trade, Knicks didn't make a trade.

ADAM: Yeah.

MIKE: Jerami Grant still on the Pistons. So a lot of these big things of these things are certainly going to happen, didn't happen. And the whole, oh my goodness, is it gonna actually happen, did happen in Harden-Simmons, which we'll talk about soon.

ADAM: Yeah, man, what a week.

MIKE: So much happened. A lot of WNBA free agency also happened. We will discuss that next week. But it's less time pressing because the WNBA doesn't return until the summer. So we'll get to that in the future. But it wasn't just a wild basketball week. There was some wild stuff happening in the WNBA as well. It's February has been fun, I like this month. It's a good one in terms of basketball related sports news, plus my birthday. What's not to love February's a good time.

ADAM: And the All-Star game is coming up.

MIKE: Right. Not only is the All-Star Game coming up, but tonight, we're recording this on February 10th. The All-Star Game draft is happening.

ADAM: Whoo.

MIKE: So--

ADAM: Nice.

MIKE: --you have team LeBron and team Kevin Durant drafting their teams. Kevin Durant is not even playing in the All-Star game because of his injury. But they very much like playground style, get to pick their teams. And now some interesting trades have happened. [14:59] it's just spicy week. Let's get right to the interview with Jody Avirgan, returning guests, wonderful person, very smart, accomplished podcaster of all sorts. It's a good talk, we talk a lot about the Sixers and the trade and just what it means culturally. We get into a little bit of the basketball, but a lot of it is just around the non-basketball of it, which is very fun. And then we end by talking about a really cool project that he worked on since the last time we had him on the show. So we'll cut to that interview now.

[Jody Avirgan Interview 15:26]

MIKE: Hello, we're here with a very special interview. We're recording this on Thursday, February 10th, at 2:02pm. We did this intentionally as a, haha, wouldn't it be fun if while we recorded an interview with our very special guest, Jody Avirgan? What if we did it during the last hour of the trade deadline? Because what if some big news happened and now 1:28pm, baby James Harden and Ben Simmons are actually traded, it really happened. We wanted to get the raw as possible reactions possible.

JODY: Wait, we're not talking about the Celtics acquiring Derrick White?

MIKE: Ohoho, I didn't even do that.

JODY: In in exchange for Romeo Langford and Josh Richardson--

ADAM: You know, I think, I would assume a professional podcaster wouldn't bury the lead like that Shubes, but here--

JODY: Yeah, no.

ADAM: --we are.

MIKE: Yeah, no, we're here to discuss KZ Okpala--

JODY: Uh-hmm.

MIKE: --for a protected second round pick and lightning of protections on a previous pick that's traded. No, we're going to talk about a whole lot of stuff. But we're here with Jody Avirgan. Jody, how's it going?

JODY: It's going well. And I'm a Sixers fan. And this is quite a moment one, I've sort of played it in my head many, many, many times. And, you know, the top line is I'm intrigued and happy and you know, also, like, willing to delude myself in this moment. Why not into thinking, gosh, maybe this is one of those traits where everyone wins and everyone's happy. But you know, it does feel like maybe that's the case.

MIKE: That's the thing is it could work. This is a rare trade deadline in that. Usually you will have a player or a couple that is just generally thought of as, for example, even this trade deadline, Jerami Grant will get traded but no one has like a trade lined up. This is the rare case where it wasn't just people thinking James Harden would get traded or thinking Ben Simmons will get traded. People were thinking this specific trade will happen. And it was hyped up because it just made too much sense. And everyone thought at least I thought there's no way it's actually going to happen because it makes too much sense. We can't have nice things in the world.

ADAM: The report this morning was so funny because it was basically like, James Harden wants to be traded to the 76ers, but doesn't want to officially say it. Because he doesn't want people to think that he's being a jerk.

JODY: So instead, he's gonna do the thing that he did in Houston, which is just like--

ADAM: Right.

JODY: --not give a crap, which is basically gonna make people think he's a jerk anyway. So yeah, I mean, it is one of those strange things, but you know, these things become self fulfilling prophecies. And it's one of the like, I like these reminders that like, at the end of the day, what we're talking about are like human beings who get on the phone and like, make awkward, awkward, small talk, and then kind of like circle around the thing that they really were going to talk about all along. And like, they feel the pressure and, you know, it's like you think of these, I mean, some GMs are idiots. But you know, I think like capable GM, do you think of them as like, very rational and very whatever. And it's still like, no, it was gonna come down to just feeling the pressure of the deadline and the like, chicken of who's gonna sort of say the number first. But yeah, I was always gonna, I don't know, I felt like it was always gonna end up like this. Because the default, as it was a few hours ago was just untenable.

MIKE: Right. So the full details of the trade at least as of 2:05pm Eastern Time, according to what I have seen on the internet, is that Ben Simmons and Steph Curry and Andre Drummond, in addition to a unprotected first-round pick in 2022, and a protected first-round pick in 2027. Those are all going to the Brooklyn Nets and the 76ers in return are getting James Harden, and Paul Millsap. Which I think, I think is a pretty fair trade. I'm excited to see your interest here, Jody. Because I did talk to two other Sixers fans before. And both said, some iteration of, it hurts to give up Andre Drummond in the trade--

JODY: Ohh.

MIKE: --which I was floored by.

JODY: Where I'm at too, that's what I'm--

MIKE: Really?

ADAM: He's on my fantasy team, I'm hoping to get some more minutes now.

MIKE: What? It's Andre Drummond, I--

JODY: [19:06] someone who takes the 12 minutes when [19:08] needs to rest. So there's that. But also I think, that assessment, which is where I'm at to say much more about I think we're Sixers fans are with Curry.

MIKE: Uhm.

JODY: Which was just like, so disappointed.

MIKE: To see him gone?

JODY: No, no.

MIKE: Oh, with his performance?

JODY: That how how he's been like I've just been you know, really, you know, my whole thing with the Sixers has been, you need more than one player who scares the opponent. And the Sixers this year have only had one player who scares the opponents. You know, people do not freak out. And they should but people do not freak out when Seth Curry is alone. So I've just been disappointed with him. And so I think when Sixers fans want to evaluate this and find a little part of it, that hurts their heart. They're not going to turn to Seth Curry, because I think he's been disappointing. It's like fine, whatever. And then the only other person left is Drummond and those picks. And Sixers fans need to start getting accustomed to prime picks, leaving the building as opposed to flowing in. But yeah, and who knows? I mean, so often I feel like with trades, it's the picks that you give up five years later that you look back, you're like, oh, that was really, we didn't know it at the time. But that was really the thing, but you know.

MIKE: But as a Sixers fan, are you just happy to have James Harden on the team? Because I knew even that was divisive amongst some fans.

JODY: Yeah, I mean, it to me just checks. I mean, you know, I'm not the most sophisticated sports analyst of basketball, you know. But like, it just checks some very straightforward boxes for me/ Which is, you know, one yes, we have another player who scares the opponent, which I think is really important. And like, his skills do not overlap with Embiid that much, they're complementary. And at some basic level, it's like, finally, there is someone who, the opponent is going to freak out about more than 15-feet from the basket. Which has just been what the team has missed. And, you know, I'm like, I really think since JJ Reddick, we haven't had that.

MIKE: I think that's valid.

JODY: And I think like when we made that big run, and we you know, we just we lost to the Raptors in that heartbreak [20:58], I mean, to me, it was just like, the fact that JJ was there, and often hit the shot. But even so when, when he was in the corner, and the ball swung to him, two or three people just like shifted towards him. Because they were scared of what he could do. That felt like one of the key ingredients, and we just have not had that since and we were hoping that Seth Curry could do it. We were hoping that others could do it. And now I think if the big question is if Harden is who he is, but if he is, he's just someone when the ball goes to him, two or three people on the opposing team, get a little scared, and I like that.

ADAM: Right. I I do have to say while I am intrigued to see the Harden-Embiid combo, there is a part of me just as a basketball fan, not even thinking about how it impacts my Bulls. Like it's kind of a bummer that we never really got to see the big three in Brooklyn be what they could have been. Like, I think Kyrie Irving not playing for most of the year has a hell of a lot to do with that. But it is kind of a bummer that we never got to see that triumvirate to use one Shube's words never got to be in the, in the Finals

JODY: In the Finals. But last year's Playoffs. I mean, there was an injury that sort of got in the way of that. But I mean, for a while there, it was cooking, and they were doing really, really well, right?

ADAM: Yeah.

JODY: But yeah, I agree. Like that's, I think Brooklyn would have thought, oh, gosh, this is the next four years, you know, we're going to be in two of the next four Finals. And this is going to be great. And obviously, it didn't work out for a bunch of reasons. And it's also like, to state the obvious. It's a real bummer, we didn't get to see Simmons and Embiid really do what they do best. Though, I also think people weirdly forget that we did have some of that. And I have like, I'm not necessarily a Simmons, you know, fanboy or whatever. But I think people will like the story of what Ben Simmons got worthen like, I think in a really unfair way in terms of his play. Like I think, even in that series last year, where he collapsed, and it was obvious collapse. But there were games like literally in that same series, there were games where you were like, oh, this is the Ben Simmons we've been waiting for. I remember watching that, like in game two of that series. You know, I was like, oh, Ben Simmons, like, run up down the court. He's doing everything we did, this is amazing. This is what we're waiting for long. And there's like two games later, he has that sort of mental breakdown. And then obviously, it writes the story, but I just think and same thing with Harden. Like there were times even this year, were Harden was like carrying that team. And people forget that and they write the story of just like the last couple weeks or they'd like to write the sort of story of how this person's a failure or bust or whatever.

MIKE: It's an interesting trade in that both of these players James Harden and Ben Simmons have great records in regular season Play-In. And even Ben Simmons last season made an All-NBA Team I'm pretty sure.

ADAM: Exactly.

MIKE: So it's not like these guys are bad players. But they both have historically bad Playoff performances. James Harden more famously just having not great games repeatedly, always falling short until like the series is gone. And then having a really good game when you're down 3-0 or 3-1. Ben Simmons, kind of fine, but really just the free throw collapse of this year, just really leaving a sour taste. Both of these players do well in the regular season. So it will be interesting to see how they play for their respective teams going forward.

ADAM: There are always those butterfly effect sliding door moments in the NBA and in life. That just everything would be different, if something falls like a little bit a different direction. Like you brought up Jody that Conference Finals a few years ago when the Raptors ended up winning the championship. If Kawhi Leonard shot is short by another inch, we might be looking at a completely different world right now. It's always very interesting to think about how those singular moments impact everything else that follows them.

JODY: That shot by the way. The first time I had cried over a sports result.

MIKE: Wow.

JODY: Since the 1993 World Series when Joe Carter beat the Phillies and it--

ADAM: Oh, no.

JODY: --was like very young, but my parents let me stay up late and I watched that like, yeah, a shot that bounce three times off the rim. It's like what are you gonna do but anyway, I will not be shedding tears over this trade.

MIKE: Now what is interesting because you are a Sixers fan. This trade does have emotion in it. Because I feel like people have very strong emotions about Ben Simmons and what he did this season. The season has been such a strange roller coaster in that you think Ben Simmons might come, you think he might play a little bit and try to trade him. Then he's not going to play at all, then you think, okay, we're gonna just not be able to trade him until the offseason. So this is kind of a wash year, are we wasting a Joel Embiid year. And then Joel Embiid decides to play out of any expectations ever, like complete video game numbers, and now it's switch. And I think that's why they made the straight is, if we get someone to fill the zero that has been Simmons, we have a legitimate shot. What do you think and how did you feel? And how do you feel now going through the whole roller coaster of emotion that the season has been and now for the trade to actually happen and for Ben to be gone?

JODY: I you know, it hasn't been a roller coaster necessarily for me and that I never really. I just thought Ben is going to get traded from basically the beginning of the season or from the offseason. I just didn't see a way or any behavior that indicated that like, oh, you know, there's going to blink and get to it. And yeah, like I was like, Kyrie's gonna get vaccinated before Ben Simmons comes in play. You know, I'm just like, I just didn't think it was there. You know, so it hasn't been a roller coaster in that, like, I've been following the twists and turns of like, all this betting on a comeback or, or whatever. I think it's mostly just been like, what are we gonna, what are we gonna do with this? And is he gonna find a home where he can be a really good player in the way that he should be? And people weirdly forgotten that he is, as you were pointing out. But you know, in a in a sort of larger sense, like, I do like Ben Simmons, and I really like and I think he does, some of the things I like most in basketball. You know, I just, I just like, I think, really good defense is like one of the most satisfying things in the world to watch. And so some of my favorite moments, I've just been watching Ben Simmons, just like and you know, and like, really good transition play. And so like, I just, I enjoyed watching him. And then like a lot of other Sixers fans was just like totally heartbroken and baffled by what happened at the end of last season. And you know, the big question, or one of the big questions for me in the like, Simmons-Harden trade, other than like skill sets, and yada, yada is is also like, what kind of emotional components are we trading here? And in some sense, we are trading two people who have a big question mark over their heads about like, how much do they really, really deeply want it? And I think the best case scenario for the Sixers right now is that you cannot be in Joel Embiid's orbit right now, without getting wrapped up in just caring more than anything in the world. And hopefully, that pushes James Harden the way that hasn't happened. I don't think maybe since he was with the Thunder, that hasn't happened for him, you know, to really push him to care.

ADAM: I tell you something, the ratings of a Net-Sixers Playoff series are going to be pretty good.

MIKE: Even the regular season game, they play next month.

JODY: Yeah, yeah. And did you see Joel's tweet just now? Where he kind of like the the funeral tweet. I mean, he he did this, that meme from the guy at the funeral who was like really stone faced and kind of like there to there to watch his enemies get buried, you know? So I'm like, yeah, like, what's gonna happen the first time that Simmons drives to the basket and Embiid is there. I think the blood is is not good.

MIKE: Agreed. I think what will be interesting, and I'm very glad that I have this record on the podcast is, I think in the first episode we did before the season started. I predicted Joel Embiid MVP, purely writing the vibes of not playing with Ben Simmons anymore. And I wonder if him being gone, will now even take Joel Embiid's absurd, ridiculous numbers to the next level.

JODY: But you predicted that from a basketball sense or like a vibes--

MIKE: No, personality perspective.

JODY: --personality, just like--

MIKE: It was 100% just Joel Embiid revenge tore, it has nothing to do with basketball fit or the team shake up [28:32], it's purely just out of anger. And whenever Ben is gone, good riddance to this person I did not enjoy.

JODY: And so how does that now play in with a big question, which is, you know, is Harden going to be comfortable being an alpha, but number two, you know, an alpha two?

MIKE: I think he will, because I listened to a fair number of basketball podcasts. And a couple of the ones that I was listening to, most notably, The Lowe Posts, Zack Lowe's reporting was that part of the reason that James Harden was so upset with the situation in Brooklyn, is that he thought that it would be a situation where he wouldn't have to be the guy again, just because he's getting older. And now we're starting to see some injuries happen. And he's not had a very big career of injuries. He's a pretty sturdy player, and usually doesn't miss a lot of games. So I think from what I was hearing, that he's kind of upset that he was forced to. Because people forget the second half of that season, when KD and Kyrie were out, James Harden was the Nets. And he was putting up absurd numbers. So I think he was kind of mad that he had to be Houston James Harden again. Because he's like, I'm getting old and I can't be this James Harden again. So weirdly, I think even though all the narratives people like to say, oh, it's not his team anymore, blah, blah, blah. I think he's actually going to like that, because he doesn't have to do as much and maybe for the first time in his career, he can conserve energy for the Playoffs, and then go beast mode if he has to.

JODY: And he's never played with a real classic big man like this, right?

MIKE: Only Dwight Howard, but Dwight Howard was refusing to adapt to James Harden skill set and because Joel Embiid is so versatile, I could see the two of them working. It's a little different because Joel Embiid does not a traditional rim runner which James Harden likes to do with Clint Capela for example, in the Rockets tenure. It was fantastic, their pick and roll mojo was perfect. And Joel needs a little bit different but I mean he's Joel Embiid like I think it's gonna be okay. He's, if Joel Embiid could basically make things work with Ben Simmons who is a very very specific player that needs very particular circumstances around him. I feel like more flexible Joel Embiid and more flexible James Harden can figure something out.

JODY: This strategy talk is making me realize that we can now finally refocus on the real conversation that we need to have as pessimistic Sixers fans which is how is Doc Rivers gonna fall short yet again? It's it's weirdly skated by this whole time but now we get to finally see what he can cook up.

MIKE: I do feel like that is a trend of Sixers fans is that there is always someone to be upset at now that Ben Simmons is gone, is Doc Rivers the person to be upset at?

JODY: That's every franchise.

MIKE: It's every team for sure, but I think it's Sixers fans particularly.

JODY: So Adam, what, what team are you a fan of?

ADAM: I'm a Bulls fan.

JODY: Okay, so can I ask you? What do you think of Sixers fans? And just like the last few years and like do you feel like I mean, it's very hard when you're in the bubble. But it feels to me like the NBA revolves around Sixers drama basically. And you know, are you aware of that? Do you feel like, oh gosh, this random team from this random Mid Atlantic City is just dominating the conversation way too much?

ADAM: I have kind of a skewed view on that because despite having grown up in Illinois as a kid and being a Bulls fan. I largely grew up in Central New Jersey and went to college in Central New Jersey and a place where it's like very divided between New York and Philly sports. So I've always kind of felt like Philly fans in general are not my favorite, no offense, but I've I've seen it and experienced in person. So living on the East Coast, I feel like it's kind of normal that the Sixers are in the the mix the way that they are. But I don't feel like they used to be such a drama filled franchise. So I do feel like regardless of where you're following the NBA from it has been noticeable especially over the past I don't know year or two that it just seems like sheer chaos in Philly at all times. Whether it's like personnel changes with the coach and and GM getting shifted around the the Simmons saga. I feel like has been other than Kyrie not getting vaccinated by far the number one storyline in the NBA this year. But I also think of the Sixers as being and and Philly in general as being like a fairly major sports market. Like you talk about Harden being like the alpha 2, like Philly to me as a city. And as a sports sound. Isn't that like alpha to sports city range so.

JODY: And I mean, the Sixers have also like, the path of their franchise for the last 5--10 years has reflected I think lots of the NBA is kind of like, you know. They were the process team when the conversation around the NBA was getting a little more analytical and nerdier and sort of whatever. And then they turn, and then they picked up I think like some of the drama stuff right at the time when like basketball Twitter was becoming the, you know, the driving force they

[33:13]--

MIKE: The whole colangelo thing.

JODY: Yeah, exactly. So it's a little like chicken and egg. But I do think like they've weirdly like had their finger on the pulse, or they've been right at the right at the pulse of like, whatever the may dominant conversation the NBA was going to be at at that time anyway. And then obviously the you know, it's just, it's just good drama period. This, you know, this last year or so.

MIKE: Well as a, as a Sixers fan, if you can answer this, like prior to an hour ago. What was your realistic expectation for this team? Had they not made any moves at the deadline? And now having done so, what is your expectation of this team this year?

JODY: Oh, I mean, it's definitely shifted. I mean, I think my expectation was, you know, second or third-round. I mean, like, I just think like, at some point, you're gonna run into a team that had, again, two or three truly scary players, or just felt complete. I mean, you know, it's funny, I'll even pinpoint it more specifically like, like all of us have been watching Joel and just been in awe. And felt like, wow, we're you know, and we have been really really good. And just been like wow, we can we can do this, we're really good team as constructed without batting and withdrawal playing this way. And then just earlier this week, we played the Suns and it was just incredible to just watch that and be like, oh, right, that's what a complete team is like. That's what a team that has people who play their role who have two or three people who on the floor at any given point who make the opponent worry and you know, we were up like 15, 20 points and then just

whittled it away. And you know, I think when you see the Suns, the Bucks you know, the Bulls even to some extent, the Heat who are just like sitting there ready to get healthy. I wasn't looking at those teams, and feeling like we were we were that and now maybe, maybe we are. Maybe we are.

MIKE: At the risk of spoiling this moment, unless I mistaken, you only get Harden until the end of the year, right? And then it's a, [35:03]--

JODY: No, well he is apparently [35:04], and these are all like tweets. But he has apparently pledged to, no, this is what, this is one of my favorite little tidbits Shams, I think reported this. But sources say that 76ers start out, new 76ers star James Harden, has pledged to opt into his \$47.3 million contract for next season. Which i,s I just love, It's like, I'm doing such a huge favor, check this out, you get to pay me \$47.3 million.

MIKE: Yeah, so he's got a player option that he can extend. There were lots of rumors that he was not going to accept it so that he could go into free agency. I don't know if this has one of those ramifications where it's smart for him to leave, because then it's a 10 year mark, and you can get more money thing. But it seems like now, yeah, he'll he'll probably opt in for one year, see how it's going in Philly. And then either resign with them or leave again, as he's seeming to do with his most recent teams. But I did think and and talking about like the interesting things of tweeting, and we we talked about the tweet earlier that Woj put out, where Woj basically said, "Before the trade happened, James Harden wants to be traded to the Sixers. But he doesn't want to say publicly at a fear of retribution." Which it's just such an interesting dynamic into how Woj works. Because clearly someone from one of the teams told Woj that.

JODY: Or James Harden told him that.

MIKE: [36:16]

JODY: Yeah, yeah.

MIKE: But I feel like it's someone from the team going, okay, we got to get this deal done. And the only or at least one of the roadblocks is James Harden, not wanting to be direct about it. And what's fun is this could be someone from the Nets, it also could be someone from the Sixers, it also could be James Harden. But just it's just such a weird thing, where if you told someone from 15 years ago, that a guy who just tweets news, 15 minutes before it becomes widely reported and official, would have serious ramifications on how trades happen in the NBA is wild.

ADAM: Yeah, you would have been like, what's a tweet, right?

MIKE: What a weird concept that even us as basketball fans now fully just understand, yes, this is what Woj and Shams do, they sometimes spark the fire of a trade and then tweet PR about a trade to make teams feel good about themselves or whatever. But if you take yourself out of it for a second, it is such a weird concept that a guy who just tweets things a little bit ahead of time, can push a trade to happening.

JODY: Wait, can I ask a question? I'm so--

MIKE: Of course, of course.

JODY: --I think about this all the time, whenever there's a Sixers moment or whatever. But you know, it is the perpetual question, which is, is this the end of the process? Or has the process ended? Has process ongoing? You know, and and what are the, what are the ways in which you decide to evaluate that question? So you have some thoughts?

MIKE: Jesse is anyone listening is unaware, the process was when the Sixers intentionally and I do think this plays into why people are so invested in Sixers' drama? Is I think the process just made everyone aware of what the Sixers were doing, and it was very public. But they basically decided when Sam Hinkie was in charge, we're going to be bad on purpose for five years to get a bunch of picks. And then some of those draft picks will hit and then we'll be really good. And some of those picks worked. Some were interesting things but you had players like Nerlens Noel, you had players like Joel Embiid, Ben Simmons, you had Markelle Fultz. So some working out well, some not working out well.

JODY: You know, the underlying idea being like in basketball, the way that you level up is not through incremental change, but it's through finding two or three generational talents. And to do that you have to place as many bets as possible through draft picks, and hope.

ADAM: Right. Because you might get an Embiid and you might get a Nerlens Noel, you just don't know.

MIKE: Exactly, exactly. And the reason it's called trust the processes, that's what they put on their promotional materials for one of the seasons to try to convince fans to come to see horrible basketball players.

JODY: Intentionally horrible basketball players and players who were out there basically to just accumulate salary that then they could flip or trade for picks.

ADAM: Right. It's it's very, it's very much like the Sacramento Kings slogan, we're so so sorry.

MIKE: Oh, God. What are they doing?

ADAM: But no, I think to answer your question, Jody, real quick, from the perspective of an outsider, not not a fan of any team in that division. I think this is the culmination of the process. It just took a hell of a lot more roadblocks than anyone expected to get to the ultimate destination. Which is where they are now competing for a championship which in fairness, they kind of were a couple years ago as well. I think the whole trust the process thing implies that you're largely going to be centering the team around a couple draft picks that hit. But in this case, a couple of them did. And then you flipped one of them for another generational talent, who is presumably going to get you pretty damn far later this spring.

JODY: Yeah, I mean, I, you know, there's a way to evaluate the question in terms of drawing those skipping stones back to draft picks. And so then you can say, you know, James Harden is a product of drafting Ben Simmons, who was a product of the seven other picks that didn't work and they flipped them and so forth. You know, if that's the case, though, then I think there's an argument that when they signed, Toby Harris, who was just like, pure free agent from nowhere, and just brought in not by just flipping assets, or whatever. That may have been the end of the process, because like now we're just behaving like a regular franchise. That's just using our money to bring in people. The other way to answer this question is obviously, the more like on the court one, which is, you know, have they reached that moment where you can just sort of, say, this era of the Sixers was successful? Was it knocked? And I just, and I feel like that series against Toronto felt like it was starting to do that. And then it was like, okay, well, this team is either going to fall short a few times, or they're going to win one. And then we'll know. And then the Ben Simmons thing just like threw this weird wrench just in terms of narratively into the whole thing. And so now, I I I genuinely don't don't know. But you know, if you take a step back and say the goal of the process was to land generational talent, I think saying we got to a place where we have Joel Embiid, and James Harden, that feels like a nice Capstone.

ADAM: Yeah. And I and I think fundamentally, what you're trying to accomplish is being a championship contender for a particular window of time. Whatever happens in the playoffs happens in the playoffs. It's a crapshoot, this is the case in any sport. Basketball, I think, sometimes a bit less. So just because of how long every series is. But yeah, you don't, you don't know. But I think that the Sixers very much are in the mix to win the championship this year. And that was not the case two hours ago.

JODY: Yeah.

MIKE: Uh-hmm.

JODY: Yeah. I like, I like hearing those words.

MIKE: I think if you're writing an outline script of the history of the Sixers, I think the James Harden trade makes you go from a subheading to a new heading. If the process was Roman numeral, whatever. And then all these other moves, like getting Jimmy Butler and getting Tobias Harris were A, B, C. I feel like trading Ben Simmons for James Harden makes you go to the next Roman numeral because this is just a completely different thing from the process in that you have acquired, established veteran through a trade, not just through assigning, but just straight up through a trade and you have traded the goal of the process. Which was get someone drafted onto the team, because that's the easiest way to make your team successful. Because there's so many contract incentives that make it easier to retain players as opposed to bringing in new ones. So to trade someone like that for an established star in the twilight of their career, at least being at a very high level. That to me feels like a different structure of a team.

JODY: Well, I appreciate you putting it in sort of narrative terms, because one of the ways I've really thought about this question is I wanted to do it as a 30 for 30, in inevitably, would run up against that question. Yeah, but what's the last act? Like what's the answer at the end, you know, and I mean, narratively, and personally, the best would have been they win a championship two years ago, or whatever. Or they fall just short and break up the team. And instead, there's just been this weird stasis. And so both from a basketball perspective and, you know, sports journalism perspective, it's like, I want that arc to like, I want that arc to close a little bit.

ADAM: Why I think we might we might be coming to it. I mean, also, I I have to say, I liked that you refer to Tobias Harris as Toby I feel like you can like only call him by a nickname if you're a Sixers fan.

JODY: Yeah, yeah. I mean, I really like that guy. I mean, he's also last year, he gave me a lot of like, disappointment. This year, he's finally is who he is. You know, and and that's been the frustrating thing, too, is like Seth Curry, I think last year was playing like, oh, this is Steph Curry, like, you know, what people say like the best three point shooter of all time, you know, and this year, they sort of switched. And I was like, gosh, we can't just ever have everyone kind of clicking and and wanting it and sort of in that way that that really good teams just they find a way that box did it last year. The Suns are doing it this year, you know.

MIKE: I think that's something that's underrated about adding James Harden to the team is that I feel like because he garnered so much attention, like you were saying so many people are scared when he has the basketball or even just just on the court. That I feel like it's gonna make everyone else's job easier. It's one of those people in a group project that just raises everyone else's performance because now there's going to be less pressure on Tobias Harris. He's been

playing very well recently. But now his life is much easier because you're going to pay more attention to James Harden than Tobias Harris. He'll get more open shots. Matisse

Thybulle is gonna get even more open shots and he can focus more energy on defense. Tyrese Maxey's life gets easier. Everyone else's life gets easier when you have someone that is just a very high priority for the defense to focus on, on the court. I think everyone else around Joel Embiid, Joel included think everybody could play better by having James on the court as long as he doesn't just dribble the ball for 20 out of 24 seconds every possession.

ADAM: Now does that analogy imply that when James Harden was growing up in school when he was, when he was doing group projects, if he didn't like the group, he wouldn't officially ask to leave the group. But he would just kind of like, be sad. And then people would infer that he wanted to leave the group?

JODY: It was this weird thing. He would just start eating like and drinking juice boxes and just eating all the snacks and just like get really fat and lazy and everyone, oh man, this group project. Yeah, I mean, that's obviously the worst, the worst side of this is when the flipside of what you're describing, Mike, in which I think James Harden is capable of is you're on the court taking up space and not scaring anyone. And that's even worse, I would say than being like a neutral. You know, I mean, I would argue in general in sports, there is no such thing as neutral. You're either sort of contributing or you're being detrimental. But that's the worst part of it is this James Harden, you know, thinks he's still James Harden everyone and every great player. I mean, there's moments when LeBron looks that way, frankly. Like where it's just like, you're just occupying space, and it's making everyone's life a little harder. And then there's other times obviously, wouldn't everyone's life is a little easier.

MIKE: I think the prime example of that is what is happening with the Lakers and Russell Westbrook because he's never been a great shooter. But he's been especially bad this year. And also, like you raised with James Harden not necessarily buying into what would work because his quarter three numbers, at least until recently weren't too terrible, to where if he would have just been a corner, three baseline earner guy would have been okay. But Russ doesn't want to do that, because he never was that. And I think because of that defenses don't have to pay attention to him as much and then it makes everyone's life harder. If James Harden can buy into what is best for the team, I don't think that will happen. And that's another thing that has been widely reported a big reason why he wants to go to the Sixers is that Daryl Morey is the GM of the Sixers and Daryl Morey was the GM of the Rockets. And very much worked with James to build the team around James and put players around him that were custom tailored to what he wanted to do on the basketball court. And maybe James isn't going to be able to garner that same attention like he was in Houston. But maybe now it's the reverse where Morey is the perfect person to try and get James Harden to buy into exactly what the Sixers need, maybe a little less of the James Harden ISO ball and more of playing off of Joel Embiid and doing something to make them a truly terrifying threat as a duo.

JODY: I mean James Harden is one of the as a human being and as a basketball player just like a total enigma to me. I just like can't crack. What is this, what is this guy?

ADAM: The answers are in his beard.

JODY: I think that's right. By the way, my probably my favorite moment in recent NBA history was when James Harden showed up at the bubble, wearing a Punisher mask in the middle of the Black Lives Matter protests.

ADAM: Oh, boy.

JODY: I was like, what the fuck? And then one of James Harden's friends was like, oh, he didn't know what that was. He doesn't have the internet and everyone was like, yeah, that checks out.

ADAM: Yeah.

JODY: I'll I'll buy--

MIKE: Not just a Punisher but a single blue stripe Punisher mask. Oh, like [47:21]--

JODY: A thin, a thin blue line, Punisher--

MIKE: Ooohhh.

JODY: --mask. Exactly right.

MIKE: Yeah.

JODY: Oh, he just thought it was cool. He doesn't have the internet. He just found it. And everyone's like, oh, I buy that. Anyway--

MIKE: Everyone collectively believed it.

JODY: It's amazing. Amazing, amazing. And we then we just like weirdly forgot that bullet. But can you answer this question, but at some fundamental level, what is James Harden want? What does he want to do on a court?

ADAM: I mean, isn't it still ISO ball step back three just less of it?

JODY: Maybe. Yeah.

MIKE: I that's kind of what it is. I think he unfortunately never enjoyed being a spot up shooter because he feels whether he feels he's better taking a shot off the dribble or whatever. One knock against him. It has been an octopus recent play in Brooklyn is that when he doesn't have the ball in his hands kind of just doesn't do a whole lot as opposed to someone like JJ Reddick. Like you mentioned earlier, who's running around all the time and Steph Curry is great about this. If Steph Curry has a ball he'll try to do all sorts of dribble moves to get his own shot. If he doesn't have the ball he's running around at a million miles an hour to try and get open and that man stamina is impressive. James Harden doesn't do the off ball stuff. So I in the less he starts to do that which I don't think is going to happen. I think it might be what Adam just said same kind of thing. I would just like to not have to do this every possession and that's probably okay because the Sixers have a lot of other threats. Whereas with the Rockets since that team was 100% designed around either James Harden ISO or James Harden pick and roll. No one else could handle the ball and whether you throw it to Joel Embiid in the post or you do something with like a Tobias Harris pick and pop. Like there's other things that you can do. Tyrese Maxey can play make. There's other people who can do stuff. So hopefully James Harden, at least for the Sixers sake doesn't just become a stand around and do nothing when they don't have the ball guy. But at the very least, I think what he wants to do is not have to do that as much, exactly what Adam said. And I think the Sixers are built to where he doesn't have to.

JODY: That's what's happening with Westbrook is you see that he feels like well, no one here is gonna just like put their head down and drive to the basket. Unless you know LeBron out here. And he's often not. And so then you see just Westbrook and he likes to do that. But also I feel like he genuinely feels like pressure to do that. Whereas we're on the Sixers like and I think Maxey's a big key to all this. I just, I like him a lot but you know he has a little that Westbrook like, whoa, you're a little, you're you're redlining here, what's going on? But like 5 or 6 times a game, if he's going to be the one who's going to put his head down and just like drive into the teeth of defense when James Harden doesn't feel like he needs to do that and maybe then kick

it out to Harden who can then do a step back or whatever like I just think there's more of that like pressure release or more different ways that Harden can find a new kind of mode for himself.

ADAM: Well in a big thing, it's just going to be, if he's happy?

JODY: But I don't know what a happy James Harden is.

ADAM: I don't know.

MIKE: Isn't the [49:59]

JODY: That's the more personality part of him that I just can't crack.

ADAM: Harden's contentedness is ephemeral.

JODY: Yeah.

MIKE: I also loved the report that said James Harden did not like living in Brooklyn, there was many reports about his grumpiness. And one of them was James Harden does not enjoy living in Brooklyn, which is like so strange to me because I feel like if you are a basketball player, you don't really live in any city. You're located in a city, but your life is so different than any other human's life. That you're not complaining about the subway lines don't connect as well in Brooklyn, as they do in Manhattan. Like that is not your life. But it is funny that he's going from Brooklyn to Philly.

ADAM: I mean, as someone who is fairly happy living in Queens on five figures, what is he complaining about living in Brooklyn on 20?

JODY: Exactly.

MIKE: Yeah. James Harden goes into a WaWa that could be a life altering situation.

JODY: Uh-hmm.

MIKE: And there's no WaWas in Brooklyn, there are WaWas in the surrounding Philly area. And as a New Jersey boy myself, like WaWa is a enlightening experience. Maybe that turns it around, maybe maybe it's just the vibe of the city.

JODY: I'm also on the WaWa versus Shit side, I'm on the WaWa side for sure. [51:05]

ADAM: From WaWa to wawa, the James Harden's.

JODY: Hohoo, very nice.

ADAM: And from just a human perspective, it's always fun to think about the NBA as a regular office job. But if in your regular office job, you had two very important people in the office that liked each other. And you were brought in to be on the same page. But they were clearly buddy buddy, and you were just kind of there. That's a little upsetting to be on the outside. We've all felt that in any walk of life. But also, what if you had a co worker that only worked two or three days a week like that, and it's not just a co worker, it's the Vice President or whatever. And and not only do they not show up all the time, but you actively have to do their work for them on the days they don't report.

JODY: I'm just realizing this now but did the Harden grumpiness in Brooklyn, kind of kicked to another level when Kyrie came back halftime?

MIKE: Yeah, I don't know.

JODY: He maybe he was like, okay, well, at least you know, Kyrie is not playing. I can put that off in a box over here. And then maybe their frustration really kicked in when it was like, what is this situation?

ADAM: Or maybe he just couldn't find a good coffee spot? We don't know these.

JODY: Exactly, exactly.

MIKE: Before we let you go Jody, we we do want to talk about some other not just--

ADAM: Yeah, what what it surprise you to know that there was a plan in which we were going to talk to you about your career?

JODY: Much, much, much happier to talk about [52:23] yeah.

MIKE: Since we last had you on the show, you worked on a podcast that I devoured in I think a day and a half, which was Death at the Wing, an incredible, an incredible basketball/current events/politics podcast, that really was I I always find it fun when creators make something that is a personification of themselves. And for you were given your background of working at places where it was either political or basketball or social, to put it all together. What was it like to create it, just working with Adam McKay and everything involved in it?

JODY: I mean, really, this is, you know, this is Adam, Adam McKay, who's, you know, longtime director. And, you know, this was the sort of first big podcast project and he's massive, massive basketball fan, I mean, like encyclopedic. And, you know, I think over the course of making, I just found the he and I sort of, are interested in the same things and sort of think the same way. And it was very satisfying in that way. And I was the sort of Executive Producer and editor of it. But, you know, to me, the thing that attracted me to that series was the audacity of the idea at the heart of it. Which is basically, that we're going to explain the Reagan Revolution, and how this country transformed radically. Top to bottom, in the 80s, through the lens of NBA players who died tragically in that era. And, you know, I mean, I just like, it's very different from other stuff I've worked on before, like, I worked on 30 for 30 for many years, and 30 for 30 is like, all about story. And it's just find a story that goes A to B to C to D, and just like ride that train and ride that momentum. And you know, trust that the like, ideas and the themes and stuff will kind of come in on top of that. And I really like that kind of storytelling. This was like, no, we're gonna start with just this really bold, weird, ambitious idea. And we're going to explore it and obviously find compelling stories and so forth. So it was just like a nice push for me, creatively. And then, yeah, and obviously, like, I think sports and politics are always talking to each other and intertwined and this felt like a really good example of that. So yeah, was just like very satisfying. I think, it was like biting off a lot and I think we mostly you know, did it successfully chewed it. But if I'm being honest part of it was like, we're just going to take a really big weird swing here and sort of see what happens.

MIKE: I think that worked. I obviously trusted the project knowing your password

ADAM: #TrustTheProject.

MIKE: I trusted it but I definitely when I was listening to it, part of me thought how how are they gonna do this? And then every episode of words, and there was not a single time across the episodes where I thought, oh, okay, like that stress--

JODY: Is a little much.

MIKE: Right, it all worked. And it was surprising how well it worked and how well you could tie the things together. And for the stories that I had heard of before, I got to learn more about their stories and players that I had never heard before. That I got to learn about, which was really cool. And I'm also here for any content that shows how terrible Ronald Reagan was as President and human. So it was perfectly in my wheelhouse as well.

JODY: Yeah. And I mean, that was where we maybe were, like, we got into a little bit of a, like, 14 minutes in, we say, and it was all Reagan's fault. You know, they were trying to avoid a little of that. That wasn't the intention, I think the tension was, you know, and there's, there's some really beautiful writing, I think, most, you know, from Adam, really in the first episode. But you

know, basically, like, we are all products of the big swirling forces around us. There is not when you look at a tragedy, or you look at any event, you know, there is not a clear, this person did it for this reason, and that led to this outcome. I mean, it's just, that's not how the world works. And so to take something that tried to be, I think, understand the swirl of politics and culture, and money, and sports, and race and all those things that were swirling in the 80s. And then also, this basic idea that I think Adam is really passionate about, and is at the heart of this, you know that I don't think we've really understand how much the 1980s changed this country. And how much the 1980s was a sort of end of one arc and the beginning of another. And that, that we're still living in now. And that really, so much of what we're going through right now is a product of the transformations of the night of the Reagan era.

ADAM: It's really trickled down ironically.

JODY: Yes, it really has trickled down or or mushroom up or whatever. But yeah, and so you know, that's really the heart of it all. And the NBA, of course, in its own universe, transformed radically during the 80s, in ways that were reflective of the way that luxury society was, was transforming.

MIKE: That's fantastic. As far as it coming together. Did Adam seek you out? Or was he looking for someone?

JODY: I left ESPN at the beginning of 2020, before I knew what 2020 was going to be, and you know, I started, I started making connections and talking with folks and so forth. But you know, I didn't know McKay before that. And McKay had this idea for a while. And I think they were kind of putting it into production or thinking about it. Because he had started a production company, and they'd had a podcast unit and a couple people doing podcasts. But it really, in many ways, was a product of the pandemic in that, you know, I think when the pandemic hit, it was like, well, you know, McKay's gonna be sitting around in his house for the next few months. Like maybe just like this project that was maybe third on the third backburner is not going to just move to the front. Because what else we're going to do, right? We're not going to go start shooting Don't Look Up. So it kind of got accelerated in that way. And then, you know, if I'm being honest, like the list of people you call when you're trying to make a narrative podcast that swirls politics and sports together, it's like, not super long, and I think I'm on that list. And so like, I think they just kind of naturally found their way, to me having a conversation. And then you know, it was like, it was like March 2020. All of us just in our, in our respective homes with just having like super long conversations about this idea and figuring out which players would, you know Adam from those guys, like I said, just, you know, real polymath on everything. And so like, editorial calls were not like, oh, this is interesting. I think I heard this thing, let's go do a little research. It was like, someone would say, oh, what about this, and then Adam would have like, five minutes of deep information about whatever we brought up and just sort of riff and swirl. You know, and big part of my job. My main job was, you know, many ways story editor was to really just focus and kind of try and shape it to say, like, well, each episode needs to connect to these different worlds that we're exploring in some sort of more clear way. And we need to find a story that was sort of feels like a, you know, every piece of journalism has to have a story at its heart. That's just how our brains work. And so you know, finding those stories, because sometimes we were working from ideas backwards. And then you know, sort of emerging and realizing like, okay, well, there's these categories of things we want to talk about. You know, we want to talk about race, we want to talk about guns, we want to talk about foreign policy, we want to talk about drugs.

And which one of these deaths in the 80s feels like it scans, best scans to that theme. And then it was just through the through 2020. And then he went off and recorded, Don't Look Up. And while that was happening, obviously, we're still recording a little bit with him. And then yeah, eventually we just we put it out. But yeah, it's very, it's very satisfying. And now we're trying to think about season two.

ADAM: Nice.

MIKE: Awesome. Well, I would definitely look forward to that. And I think it must be very refreshing when the person at the top of the project is knowledgeable in the subject. Because my wife is an Architect and in past projects, you'll have people who owned the buildings, ask for things that just like are not feasible. And a lot of their meetings are having meeting with the person who owns the building and then afterwards have to be like, okay, so we can't do that.

JODY: Yeah.

MIKE: That is--

JODY: Yeah.

MIKE: --impossible. What do we do?

JODY: Just as someone who likes to collaborate and thinks about good collaboration and all that stuff, I think like, I can't say enough great things about how he married that kind of like, he's an alpha. He's out of the game. He's really, you know, he's really busy and really famous and has big ideas. But also like, completely empowering and like, collaborative. And, you know, it comes from an improv background. And I just think like, those people are wired in a really special way, at some fundamental level to just kind of know that it's that everyone needs to feel empowered for something to work.

MIKE: Yeah, it's kind of like trying to get other people involved on the basketball court.

JODY: And all, and all--

MIKE: [1:00:38] and basketball guys. So it's just all overview of like, yeah, I very much understand when people like Chris Paul are like, oh, I want to get this guy shot. I want to get this guy shot. So they all feel so yeah, bouncing stuff off and making people feel like they're part of it, it's good.

JODY: Well, it's, it's what the Suns are going through right now. Like the Suns feel like an improv troupe that's just on the right wavelength.

MIKE: Yes.

JODY: You know?

MIKE: Yes.

JODY: Like they just--

ADAM: Zip zap, zapping around the court.

JODY: Yup. Everyone's having fun. Everyone's clicking. Everyone's being unselfish. Like, it's all the classic stuff of just like, people's main goal is to make other people look good. And when you can get people to that level to that place, even the star players, like it's just the magical thing happens. And that happens on podcasts. And it happens in offices, and it happens in relationships, and it happens on sports teams, you know.

MIKE: Amazing. Well, I think that's a beautiful end to a beautiful conversation. Jody, thank you so much for taking the time.

JODY: This is great, what a moment.

MIKE: What a moment. We recorded a historic recording. Jody if people want to find you doing stuff, where can they do so? Anything else you want to plug?

JODY: One of the main things I do now is I host a political history podcast with radiotopia, it's a few times a week. It's short, it's very, very fun, Sort of moments from the past small and big, that feel resonant, or just interesting to talk about. So that is called 'This Day in Esoteric Political History. You can find that wherever you get your podcasts. And I have a website jodyavirgan.com and I kind of keep all my latest projects up to up to date over there.

MIKE: Fantastic. Well, thank you again and best of luck to your 76ers.

Outro [1:02:03]

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