



“Continuing to move the game forward @KingJames. Much respect my brother.”

KOBE BRYANT

HIS LAST TWEET, ROUGHLY 15 HOURS BEFORE THE CRASH; CONGRATULATING LEBRON JAMES FOR OVERTAKING HIM AS NBA’S THIRD-HIGHEST SCORER OF ALL TIME



KOBE BRYANT | 1978-2020

ENTREPRENEUR, OSCAR WINNER, COACH...

**2003:** Signed a deal with Nike, thus becoming part of an elite group of NBA players who signed with the brand that year, including LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony. It helped the apparel giants solidify their position in the basketball world for the next couple decades following Michael Jordan's 2003 retirement.

**2013:** Broke into the investing world. He co-founded venture capital firm Bryant Stibel along with Web.com founder Jeff Stibel. The firm now has more than \$2 billion in assets, with investments in technology, media and data companies. According to CNN, Bryant Stibel claims at least 10 successful exits, including Dell and Alibaba.

**2015:** Worked with China's Alibaba Group to release his documentary "Kobe Bryant's Muse". The deal also involved Alibaba working with Bryant to create a new social media platform. The company also sells a number of Kobe-branded products on its retail platform.



**2016:** Founded Granity Studios, a media firm that focuses on creative storytelling around sports. The star player wrote and narrated a short film called 'Dear Basketball', which won the Oscar award for best animated short film in 2018. Granity has also released a set of books, including Bryant's autobiography, 'The Mamba Mentality: How I Play.'

**2017:** Nike partnered with Los Angeles Boys and Girls Club to launch a youth basketball league, called the Mamba League. Bryant later created the Mamba Sports Academy to provide broader athletic and lifestyle training to competitors at all levels in a number of sports. He was on his way to a Mamba Sports Academy game on Sunday when the helicopter crashed.

MAMBACITA, THE CHILD PRODIGY

Gianna 'Gigi' Bryant's life came with all the pressures of being a star kid in the Instagram age, and then some. Look her up on Google and the autofill algorithm suggested "stats", "playing basketball" and "fadeaways" suffixes. Perhaps it was that fateful night of 2009 NBA finals when the 3-year-old Gigi, decked out in the Lakers yellow and purple along with her victorious father, first caught the basketball bug. While elder sister Natalia drifted towards volleyball, Gigi became a regular fixture at Lakers games. Gigi was also instrumental in defusing any supposed feud between Kobe and the current NBA megastar LeBron James. For it was her daughter that prompted a jaded Kobe to start turning up at basketball games again. Videos of Kobe breaking down the game to her daughter courtside started doing the rounds. It was in November that Kobe christened her daughter 'Mambacita', a play on his Black Mamba nickname. The 41-year-old posted a video of her daughter finishing a solo dribble with the fadeaway swish. The University of Connecticut Huskies was already earmarked as her next stop, and Gigi eventually aimed to reach the WNBA. Kobe too believed her daughter will carry his legacy. Last year, in an interview, Kobe said: "...fans will be like, 'You gotta have a boy to have somebody carry on the tradition, the legacy.' And (Gigi) is like, 'I got this!'" he said. "That's right. Yes, you do. You got this."

Kobe Bryant, who died with his daughter Gianna in a helicopter crash, was an unquestioned basketball great, but his legacy is not so straightforward

MARC STEIN  
JANUARY 27

KOBE BRYANT, who made the leap directly from high school to a glittering 20-year career with the Los Angeles Lakers that established him as one of basketball's all-time greats, was among nine people killed in a helicopter crash on Sunday north of Los Angeles. Bryant was 41.

The crash also killed Gianna Bryant, 13, the second oldest of Kobe Bryant's four daughters with his wife, Vanessa. They were traveling from the family's base in Orange County, California, to Thousand Oaks, 30 miles northwest of Los Angeles. A budding star herself, Gianna was scheduled to play an afternoon game with her travel team, coached by her father, at Kobe Bryant's Mamba Sports Academy.

News of Bryant's death predictably rocked the N.B.A., which is filled with players who grew up watching Bryant as he won five championships with the Lakers and scored 81 points in a single game. Fueled by a seemingly endless reservoir of self-confidence, Bryant was an mammoth figure almost from the moment he arrived, at age 17, as the 13th overall pick in the 1996 N.B.A. draft.

The son of the former N.B.A. player Joe "Jellybean" Bryant, Kobe Bryant was drafted by the Charlotte Hornets on behalf of the Lakers and did not try — at all — to hide his ambition to surpass the accomplishments of the legendary Michael Jordan. Charlotte had agreed going into the draft to trade Bryant's rights to Los Angeles in exchange for the veteran center Vlade Divac.

Over the next 20 seasons, Bryant earned 18 All-Star selections, a regular-season Most Valuable Player Award in 2008 and two N.B.A. finals M.V.P. awards to go with his five championship rings. Amid all of that, a sexual assault allegation against him in 2003 would change how many people saw Bryant, though he remained hugely popular among N.B.A. fans and especially Angelenos, for whom he increasingly became synonymous with the Lakers — the only team, despite a trade demand in 2007, that Bryant ever played for.

The trade that made Bryant a Laker was engineered by the team's general manager at the time, Jerry West, who was instantly smitten by Bryant's fearlessness and prodigious talent. A standout at Lower Merion High School in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, outside Philadelphia, Bryant had auditioned for the Lakers in a predraft workout featuring a series of one-on-one drills against the former Lakers defensive ace Michael Cooper, then a 40-year-old assistant coach.

Only a few high schoolers had gone straight to the N.B.A. at that point — and Bryant would be the first guard to do so. But West left the workout early, declaring that he had seen enough. "He's better than anybody on our team right now," West famously told fellow Lakers staffers of Bryant's performance.

As West envisioned, Bryant indeed helped restore the Lakers to glory — albeit with no shortage of turmoil along the way. He did so first alongside the Hall of Fame center Shaquille O'Neal for three consecutive drama-filled N.B.A. championships in the 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02 seasons, then as the team's unquestioned fulcrum for two more titles in 2008-09 and 2009-10. With a drive to rival Jordan's and an ability to tune out critics



Kobe Bryant, 41, and his daughter Gianna, 13, were among nine killed in a helicopter crash in Los Angeles on Sunday.

who at times assailed his ball dominance and shot selection, Bryant was the central and enduring figure in one of the most gripping soap operas in modern professional team sports.

By the time he walked away from the N.B.A. in April 2016, after an unforgettable 60-point farewell game against the Utah Jazz, Bryant had built an unmatched legacy that persuaded the Lakers to retire both jersey numbers he wore over two 10-season stretches: No. 8 and No. 24. In perhaps the ultimate Bryant flourish, that 60-point game on the final day of the 2015-16 regular season — in which he hoisted 50 shots — upstaged the

defending champion Golden State Warriors, who had defeated the Memphis Grizzlies on the same night to secure the best single-season record in league history, 73-9.

Bryant is widely expected to be inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in late August, the first time he is eligible. He led the league in scoring twice and finished his career with 33,643 points in the regular season, which put him at No. 3 among N.B.A.'s scoring leaders, behind only Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (38,387) and Karl Malone (36,928) until the Lakers' LeBron James passed Bryant on Saturday night in

Philadelphia. Bryant tweeted his congratulations to James on Saturday night, some 15 hours before the crash, writing: "Continuing to move the game forward @KingJames. Much respect my brother."

As Bryant began his climb up the scoring charts, O'Neal nicknamed the brash teenager "Showboat," but the term was not meant to flatter. Veterans on that Lakers team tried in vain to keep Bryant's rookie ambitions modest — with O'Neal particularly determined to make it clear that he was the team's true alpha.

But Bryant could not be harnessed.

After some notable playoff failures, Bryant broke through as a champion in his fourth season, forming a devastating partnership with O'Neal under the coaching tutelage of Phil Jackson.

"Kobe didn't care about night life or anything else," Del Harris, who coached Bryant for his first two N.B.A. seasons and the start of his third, told The New York Times in December 2017. "He only had one interest. His only focus was to be the best that he could be. And in his mind that meant challenging Michael Jordan. People can argue how close he actually came, but there's no question that he fulfilled pretty much all of his dreams."

Bryant scored 81 points against the Toronto Raptors in January 2006 to register the second-highest scoring output in league history, behind Wilt Chamberlain's 100-point game in 1962. But Bryant's reputation was more complicated than all his accolades would suggest.

Complicated reputation

He was charged with felony sexual assault in 2003 stemming from an incident at a Colorado hotel in which Bryant was accused of raping a 19-year-old woman who worked at the property as a front-desk clerk. Prosecutors eventually dropped the case when the woman told them she was unwilling to testify. Bryant later issued an apology, saying he understood that the woman, unlike himself, did not view their encounter as consensual. A lawsuit the woman brought against Bryant was later settled out of court.

In the closing stages of Bryant's career, well beyond the days of "Showboat," Bryant began giving himself nicknames, such as "Black Mamba" and, later, "Vino." The frequent helicopter rides he took to games at Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles — to avoid traffic and maximize time at home — only added to his mystique.

In addition to making his name as one of the sport's most relentless competitors, Bryant was known for a special ability to play through injuries. The one that managed to stop him was a torn left Achilles' tendon late in the 2012-13 season. Of course, stubborn as he was, Bryant did not want to accept the on-court diagnosis he received from Gary Vitti, the longtime Lakers athletic trainer. "I told him it's ruptured and he's done," Vitti told The Times in December 2017. "He said, 'Can't you just tape it up?'" Given the intense focus that governed Bryant's playing career, many league observers questioned how he would cope outside the game, without an outlet for his uber-competitiveness. But Bryant was flourishing in retirement, entering the world of storytelling and winning an Academy Award by transforming a poem to announce his retirement into an animated short film ("Dear Basketball") that he wrote and narrated.

He had also been drawn back to the N.B.A. by his daughter Gianna's love for it. On Dec. 29, Bryant sat with her courtside at Staples Center to watch the Lakers play the Dallas Mavericks and take pictures afterward with Luka Doncic, the Mavericks' young Slovenian star.

"My friend, a legend, husband, father, son, brother, Oscar winner and greatest Laker of all-time is gone," Magic Johnson, the Hall of Fame Lakers guard and Bryant's boyhood hero, wrote on Twitter. "It's hard to accept."

NEW YORK TIMES

SIGNATURE SHOT

GAURAV BHATT

FOR SOMETHING called 'fadeaways', they sure do stick in your memory.

Michael Jordan's was supremely athletic. Hakeem Olajuwon's variant, the Dream Shake, was visually aesthetic. Dirk Nowitzki's one-legged was straight-up reliable. Kobe Bryant ticked all those boxes.

There's a reason why 'Kobe-ing' became a phenomenon. Jump up, shoot and yell "Kobe!"; be it a solitary game of hoops or a crunched up paperball hurled towards the waste basket. If it went in, all the better.

The same reason why within 24 hours of his death, the internet was littered with petitions asking for a Kobe Fadeaway to be immortalised as the new NBA logo. The run-up, the jumper shot and the follow-through was a ritual, repeated thousands of times over 20 years. The 6'6 Bryant would whistle past bodies, come to a screeching halt, take off, release the ball and fall back. Limbs stretched forward, the oversized yellow-

purple jersey billowing, the hangtime unending. The entire thing was too... feline.

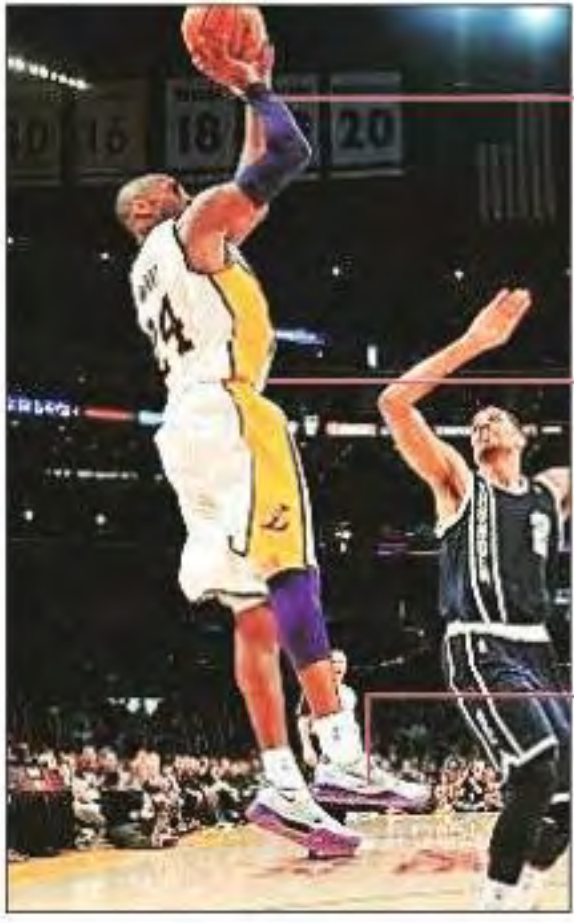
Does it surprise you then that it was an actual cheetah that inspired the shot?

In an interview, Bryant explained how he increased the efficiency of the shot. "When you watch me shoot my fadeaway jumper, you'll notice my leg is always extended. I had problems making that shot in the past. It's tough. So one day I'm watching the Discovery Channel and see a cheetah hunting. When the cheetah runs, its tail always gives it balance, even if it's cutting a sharp angle. And that's when I was like: 'My leg could be the tail, right?'"

Bryant would often be credited for reviving the pull-up jumpers of the 70s and 80s, something the LA Lakers legend himself considered a "lost art".

"It's like chess, each move sets up the next move," Bryant once said.

The fadeaway jumpshot was used when there wasn't enough room for Bryant to elevate and shoot. When he was smothered by longer defenders or being double teamed. It



ANATOMY OF THE FADEAWAY

The forearm was slightly bent towards his shooting eye. The release was dominated by his index finger to avoid shooting sideways. Years of toil meant the middle knuckle on that critical finger was later debilitated by arthritis.

The elbow, shoulder and hip would all be in line with the basket, ensuring the ball flies straight towards the basket. If he was in a tight position with his shooting side away from the basket, he would whip his leg around to force his hips and shoulders to rotate.

The alignment was created by his feet, usually turned towards his non-shooting side. The wide base and knees pointing inwards helped get him altitude. Knee surgeries, however, forced him to alter his shot form.

needed strength to get enough altitude on the body, but it also needed a set-up.

The beauty was in the execution, and the process. Bryant's bread-and-butter play started with the jab step to protect the ball, followed by the spin and the drive. If needed, he would break out the jump shot fake to make the defenders go up, making it easier to pivot or spin away to create a shooting lane. Bryant would change trajectories by raising his elbows more. The degrees and directions differed depending on the defenders. If they were too athletic, Bryant would do away with the fadeaway altogether.

The shot's beauty was also in the fact that while it was a go-to move, he didn't rely singularly on it like Olajuwon or Nowitzki.

Statistics, analytics and injuries are not kind to Bryant's legacy. The later years were affected by his mangled fingers, creaking knees and betraying instincts. But the fadeaways remained almost flawless. And on nights when the 'Mamba Mentality' took over, you could remove the almost from that.

