

# *Lakers Research Paper*

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**Abstract:** The head coach, Phil Jackson, significantly contributed to the Lakers' success between 2005 to 2015. They were able to win two NBA championships in 2009 and 2010. This paper analyses the importance of Phil Jackson, Kobe Bryant, and Lakers' manager had for the Lakers as a team. This work also analyses the issues and challenges that the Lakers faced between 2005 to 2015 such as aging line ups, bad trades, management philosophy conflicts, and etc. Lastly, this paper analyses how Lakers' successes and failures reflected their performance and overall revenue as a business.

**Keywords:** Lakers, Kobe Bryant, Phil Jackson, NBA

## **1. Introduction**

The head coach, Phil Jackson, significantly contributed to the Lakers' success between 2005 to 2015. They were able to win two NBA championships in 2009 and 2010. His management philosophies had a vital impact on the players, but not on the management decisions of the team. The Lakers were successful between 2005 to 2015 because of the contribution of Phil Jackson, instead of the management decisions by the team.

## **2. Phil Jackson's Zen Philosophy**

As a coach, Phil Jackson believes in Zen and applies it to his management of the teams. He realizes that no one would listen to him if all he does is try to set authority and control the players. He tries to give out power and only keep the fundamental authority because it frees him up from all the trivial matters and gives him the chance to focus on the bigger planning for the whole team. He wants everyone on the team to have the will and ability to become a leader; therefore, everyone on the team can take up responsibilities when needed and the team as a whole would be harmonious. He wants to build a strong team so that the players can play for the same goal, which is why he said, "play to win". He worked with this philosophy throughout his career to help him to manage the teams.

### **2.1. Sportsmanship and Warrior Culture**

Another great influence that he had on the players was that they need to respect their opponents and play their best to beat them since they help his players to become better athletes. This relates to the warrior culture of the Lakota Sioux tribe, and also links to the Latin origin of the term competition – con petire, meaning to search together (that is for excellence in self-fulfillment) [1]. His management philosophy helps the team to be strong and the players to stay together and united.

## **2.2. Player Development**

Phil Jackson encourages players to think independently. Usually, other coaches will call a time-out when the team is losing in order to change their strategies and find a way to come back, but Phil Jackson does not do that. Players can only think of ways to resolve the problems themselves, therefore; the players continued to develop a better intelligence for playing.

## **2.3. Line Up Decisions**

Phil Jackson has a unique philosophy of choosing active players. He would not choose all the best players to play at once, instead, he would choose one player to be the substitute because the main lineup can have a rest, and also, that player can lead the second line up to play an offense that can change the game. If the opponent team's main player returns early, then they will not have enough energy to play until the very end. If not, then they have to play against the main lineup while being behind in scores.

## **2.4. Purchase Strategies**

Phil Jackson also likes to purchase older players to play substitutes. While the key players of the team are all strong and young, the fact that they do not have enough experience with the game might become a problem. Therefore, the older players can help to teach the younger players to play. Also, the older players tend to have a lower salary, which would be a great deal since they are cheap but can help the key players to grow.

## **2.5. Phil Jackson's Retirement and Its Impact on the Lakers**

Phil Jackson retired in 2004, The Lakers did not do a good job of evaluating and chose Rudy Tomjanovich as their head coach. The results of that season were horrible, the Lakers did not even make it to the playoffs, and Tomjanovich resigned. It shows that the Lakers did not have a good evaluation of how they are going to play. The management philosophy was to find a replacement for Phil Jackson, but they were unable to accomplish that goal.

## **2.6. Player Communication**

Phil Jackson recognizes players that are straightforward and appoints them to communicate with other players directly. When he was with the Lakers, the player that he chose was Derek Fisher. Fisher knows how to communicate and persuade Kobe. Whenever Kobe wants to play as an individual instead of a team, Jackson would ask Fisher to persuade Kobe to come back to the team. For example, in Game 7 of the 2010 Finals, Kobe was not in his best playing mode. After Fisher talked to him, he stopped being paranoid and began to contribute to the team with assists and rebounds. Kobe grabbed a total of 15 rebounds in that game as a guard. They lost the semifinals that year.

## **3. Lakers' Early Performances**

How chaotic were the Lakers in 2004-2005? Except for Kobe Bryant, Lamar Odom, and Caron Butt, the rest of the team were no-ones. They only achieved a dismal record of 34 wins and 48 losses throughout the season, and they did not even make it to the playoffs. The management of the Lakers did not want to sign younger players to play for future championships because they only wanted immediate success by signing the star players. However, no star players were able to see the chance of winning the championship with the Lakers. They have not only disappointed their fans, but also the players that might want to join the Lakers.

### 3.1. Early Losses

In 2005-2006 season, the Lakers were able to make it to the playoffs but lost in the first round of playoffs. The same thing happened in 2006-2007 season; the Lakers were able to make it to the playoffs again but lost in the first round of playoffs as well.

### 3.2. Kobe's Interference

In those years, the Lakers didn't want to win the championship at all, and they didn't expect Kobe Bryant to be able to burst into such a competitive level. The Buss family only thought about saving money when trading O'Neal. Kobe was only meant to be an attraction for the fans in order to sell tickets. In the summer of 2007, after Kobe Bryant got upset, the Jerry Buss arranged a trade in the middle of the season to appease Kobe Bryant.

### 3.3. Kobe and Lakers' Dilemma

Kobe cares about wins and championships, he has no absolute desire for personal honor. The relative personnel changes in that era were much smaller, and even a bad team was unlikely to have the situation of changing more than ten players in a season. Star players fight on their own, and after establishing the status of the team, they will not easily make rash words to join forces with others, even if the transactions are generally mostly exchanged for players of the same level. Lakers only cared about the direct goals of winning the championship title by signing players that seemed good. They did not really care about drafting and signing young players. Due to the aging lineup, of course, the team had no future and lost more games.

## 4. Yao Ming's Appearance

As the number one player in the Asian basketball world, Yao Ming has made remarkable achievements in the NBA. Although there is no championship in his NBA career, he has reached the height of being the No. 1 center in the NBA at that time, which is already a historic breakthrough. At that time, because the contradiction between O'Neal and Kobe cannot be reconciled, the Lakers can only leave the team's future Kobe. O'Neal traveled east to Miami in the summer of 2004. After O'Neal traveled east, the Lakers failed to enter the playoffs in the 04-05 season. In 2006 and 2007, they suffered a round trip for two consecutive years. This result was unacceptable for Kobe, who was eager for a championship. Therefore, Kobe forced the management of the Lakers to strengthen the team. If Yao Ming can join forces with Kobe, the Lakers will surely become the most competitive team in the league, and this is exactly what Kobe wants. Therefore, Kobe has expressed his desire to join forces with Yao Ming more than once and has made it public many times to recruit Yao Ming to join the Lakers.

### 4.1. Lakers' Management Decision on Yao Ming

But looking forward to joining forces with Yao Ming is just Kobe's personal wish. The Lakers management did not have a strong desire to introduce Yao Ming, at least from the price they gave Yao Ming. Yao Ming was already the No. 1 center in the NBA at that time, but the Lakers only offered Yao Ming a mid-level contract, which was an insult to Yao Ming. On one side is the 5-year 75 million max contract offered by the Rockets with the maximum value allowed under the league's new collective bargaining agreement [2], and on the other side is the mid-level contract of the Lakers. This multiple-choice question does not need to be considered too much for Yao Ming. Therefore, Yao Ming chose to stay with the Houston Rockets. Except that the contract offered by the Lakers to Yao Ming obviously did not match Yao Ming's worth, the chaotic environment and the extremely

poor lineup configuration of the Lakers at that time were also one of the reasons why Yao Ming rejected the Lakers. The Lakers' lineup at that time was obviously not as good as that of the Rockets

## **5. Development and Changes of the Lakers**

In 2008, Kobe Bryant applied pressure on the Lakers. They signed back Fisher to stabilize his anger. Then, Ariza was traded to the Lakers in exchange for Brian Cook and Maurice Evans and proved his ability of defense. Gasol was signed, and the Lakers were Rising. The Lakers' managers made a huge accomplishment this year, they recognized Kobe Bryant's need and made a winning team. This shows that their philosophy is to make sure that the star player, Kobe Bryant is satisfied and build a team based on that.

### **5.1. Kobe's Power**

Paul Gasol was traded to the Lakers in 2008. At that point, things looked dire for the Lakers, and Bryant asked a superstar to play with him. Under pressure from Kobe Bryant, the Lakers completed one of the greatest trades in Lakers history. Despite the high price paid, the investment can be said to be immediate. In his second year with the Lakers, Gasol helped the Lakers win their first championship in seven years. In the following season, they did it again. It shows the management philosophy of the Lakers because it shows the significance of Kobe Bryant to them. It is unusual that a player has so much power over the team, but the managers made a compromise with Kobe under this pressure. The managers of the Lakers must have seen Kobe as the most valuable and important player to them, which was probably why they made that trade for Gasol. However, the Lakers was defeated by the Celtics in the championship finals.

### **5.2. Aging Line Ups**

After winning the championship in 2009, they let go of Ariza. They were unable to respond to the aging lineup in a timely manner. This shows the Lakers were too confident with their championship lineup, which is reasonable for not making the adjustment to it. Despite that, the Lakers were able to win the championship in 2010 again.

## **6. Lakers' Downfall**

In 2011, the Lakers were defeated in the semifinals; in 2012, the Lakers were defeated in their first round of finals.

### **6.1. A Big Contract With Unexpected Results**

In 2013, the Lakers officially announced a two-year extension with Kobe Bryant for a contract value of \$48.5 million. Although Bryant is still the league's highest salary, but compared to the 2013 season of \$ 30.45 million, Bryant is still a salary cut of 23%, which also leaves room for the operation of the Lakers next season. Salary and the draft of the Lakers are equally important to Kobe, which was why he was willing to sacrifice his salary in order to have a get the Lakers more budget for their lineup. Despite Kobe's sacrifice, the Lakers did not make the playoffs from 2013-2015.

### **6.2. Kobe's Retirement**

The Lakers retired No. 8 and No. 24 of Kobe's jersey. In this league, many players' jerseys have been retired, but no player has retired two numbers on the same team. Even Jordan once wore No. 45, No.

23 and a No. 12 on the Bulls, but The Bulls also only retired Jordan's No. 23 jersey. What the Lakers do is enough to show that Kobe's contribution to the Lakers is worthy of such an honor.

## **7. Commercial Values**

It was a difficult thing to make a direct choice between O'Neal and Kobe, but in the end the Lakers chose Kobe. Not only because Kobe's personal ability has begun to show and bring hope to the team, but more importantly, the commercial value he brings to the team.

### **7.1. Kobe's Value as a Rookie**

Looking back, before the start of his rookie season, Bryant signed a six-year, \$48 million contract with Adidas. At the same time, Coca-Cola's Sprite, basketball brand SPALDING, sports entertainment publishing company UpperDeck, and Italian chocolate company FerreroSpA's peanut butter brand have all found Kobe for business cooperation.

### **7.2. Investments in Kobe**

In 1998, Nintendo launched a game called "Kobe in NBACourtside", which sold over a million game discs within a few weeks. In the second season of his career, Bryant became the youngest athlete in history to have his own name game. The game's sales led the Japanese company to launch "NBACourtside2: FearturingKobeBryant" in the second year. In the 2002-2003 season, 2006-2007 season, 2008-2009 season, and 2009-2010 season, Kobe's jersey sales ranked first in the league. Every time he came to China, he could arouse great repercussions and maintain a good interactive relationship with fans. This fully shows its huge market space and Kobe's business value. The Lakers' revenue has grown steadily from 167 million to 333 million. Media revenue was one of the biggest components that made the Lakers' revenue. The Los Angeles Lakers signed a television deal that helped propel them to the number two spot on the NBA's most valuable teams, with a worth of \$1.35 billion in 2014. They had entered the deal with Time Warner Cable in 2011 which would run for twenty years beginning 2012-2013. The agreement is worth \$4 billion over the twenty years which translates to about \$200 million per year for the team. The Lakers took home \$122 million in the 2013 season which was the highest amount in any United States league earned from a local television deal. Before the Time Warner Cable contract, the Lakers had a deal with Fox Sports West in which they were getting \$30 million per year in rights fees [4].

### **7.3. Staple Center**

Laker's Staple Center was named after the name of the company, Staples. The Staples office supply retailer bought the naming rights to the venue — which opened in 1999 — at the cost of \$116 million for 20 years [3].

### **7.4. Gate Revenue**

Gate revenue went from 85 million to 99 million between 2010 to 2015. However, On November 14, 2013, tickets for the Lakers' home game against the New Orleans Pelicans failed to sell out for the first time, and even the diehard upper deck had empty seats, ending a streak of 270 consecutive home games for the Lakers at Staples Center. The longest sold-out game in NBA history (320 games including the playoffs). After Phil Jackson left in 2010, the Lakers continued to lose more games, which disappointed the fans and caused this significant event.

## 7.5. Jersey Sales

The Lakers never had a jersey sponsor deal before the 2016-2017 season. The Merchandise sale was also a great factor that contributed to the Laker's revenue, especially when the Lakers had stars players like Kobe Bryant, Shaquille O'Neal, and Pau Gasol. This has always been one of the strategies of the Lakers. They always wanted to sign star players to attract fans, win games, and sell more merchandise.

## 8. The Management of Lakers

The management of the Lakers without Jerry West in power will always have a condescending attitude, eagerness for quick success, disdain to cultivate new talents, and only want star players.

### 8.1. Buss Family

Lakers owner has always been Dr. Jerry Buss from 2004 to 2014, but in the last year, it changed to Buss Family Trust. The General Manager has always been Mitch Kupchak throughout this whole time. I want to focus on the years that Phil Jackson coached from 2005 to 2011. Mitch Kupchak started working with Jerry Buss in 2004, so Kupchak became really involved in the Lakers' management decisions. Even though Phil Jackson helped the team to win many titles, there is only one person that gets to make the ultimate decision, which is Buss.

### 8.2. Phil Jackson Excluded

Since Mitch Kupchak and Jerry Buss have a good working relationship, there was not a place for Phil Jackson to have a say or be involved in the Lakers' management decisions. It was Jerry Buss who made the decision to hire D'Antoni, which I think is not appropriate because as a coach, Phil Jackson knows what a suitable coach for the Lakers looks like. Before making the decision of hiring someone as a coach, Both Jerry Buss and Mitch Kupchak should consult with Jackson to ask for suggestions and opinions in order to have hired a good coach for the team. Phil Jackson actually never had much power in the team's management decisions. He was not even part of Jerry Buss' final plan. It shows that Phil Jackson really had no influence on the team's decisions whatsoever, all he was able to do was manage the players that he had and make sure that the team will win.

## 9. Conclusion

Based on the analysis, Phil Jackson significantly contributed to the success of the Lakers between 2005 to 2015. The management of the Lakers did not do much during this era because they were so condescending toward other players. There were only a few remarkable trades that they accomplished, but other than that, the Lakers continued to lose and disappoint fans. Phil Jackson was able to develop the players to have the mindset of "play to win". If the management of the Lakers does not change their management philosophy, there is never going to be a future for the team. In Conclusion, the Lakers were successful between 2005 to 2015 because of the contribution of Phil Jackson as the head coach, instead of the management decisions that were made by the management of the Lakers. The potential of sports management is huge, both analysis of statistics and management are equally important.

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