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Thanks to Kareem and His Unbroken Line

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Abstract
[Excerpt] For those of us who are Donald Trump's age, there is a special pleasure in Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's 16th season in the National Basketball Association. Scoring, rebounding, passing off, Kareem is leading the Los Angeles Lakers to another division championship and playoff appearance. There's nothing new about that. More important now is the unbroken line to our youth that Kareem represents. I was upset when the Rochester Royals left my hometown, but get this: A guy my age is still starring in the N.B.A.!

Keywords
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Comments

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By LANCE COMPA

Abdul-Jabbar, class of '69, one of our own, is still a star in Michael Jordan's game.

I was a 5-foot-8-inch playmaking guard for McQuaid Jesuit High School, the diocesan championship team in Rochester in 1964 and 1965. Like most high school athletes, I got windowed out in college and moved on to other things. But I stayed a fan, kept playing pickup ball, and now, although I can still turn an occasional nice move like a driving, double-pump, hand-switching layup, I mostly settle for perimeter jump shots. It is clear why professionals have had it in their late 30's: idea is still there, but the legs fail to answer. And yet, there's Kareem, a guy my age, still turning it on in the N.B.A.!

Abdul-Jabbar is the only N.B.A. player who finished college before 1970. That means a lot to the tens of thousands of us who were high school syndrome in the early 60's. I can name the starters and recount the comeback story of '69, one of our own, is still a star in Michael Jordan's game.

At this point in our contemporaries' lives— at least, those of us who prefer a good pickup basketball game to an hour on the square court—a such a shot is a surgeon's skill. Kareem's shot is the most attractive part of Kareem's game. In our late 30's we reach the top of our own careers in the working world—writing briefs, analyzing balance sheets, drafting proposals, managing operations and the like. We still need some youth and vigor for judgment. But Kareem's skill have learned to get to the heart of a problem and skip the unnecessary. That is the essence of Kareem's game now.

As for many of us, Kareem's success did not come out of that protective bubble, even with his natural advantages. He didn't complain when he was dunked on by Wilt Chamberlain in 1968. He could not have forced a move to Los Angeles or New York. When he was with the Milwaukee Bucks, he couldn't have done it in the N.B.A. media boost. Instead, he went to Milwaukee and led them to a championship in two years. (He did move to Los Angeles and New York, of course, in a concession to economic reality that we all make at some point.)

Kareem has played through broken noses and cracked fingers. He has come down with the flu (like a hockey goalie). He has suffered personal woes—a failed marriage, lives lost in a community home he owned; his possessions destroyed in a mysterious fire.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and his classic sky hook.

Pros: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and his classic sky hook.

The New York Times