

NBA All-Star Technology Summit

Friday, February 16, 2024
Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Bob Costas

Hall of Fame Broadcaster

Larry Bird

NBA Legend

INDIANA GLORY: BOB COSTAS INTERVIEWS LARRY BIRD

AHMAD RASHAD: You know what, I used to work with a guy who was always late. He's sitting right over here.

Hey, welcome back. There aren't many people who can say they've beaten Magic Johnson in the Finals and acted with Bugs Bunny in a blockbuster movie. There aren't many people who have the word "Legend" in their nickname.

But then again, our next keynote conversation features someone who is far from ordinary, basketball Hall of Famer, the Legend, Larry Bird.

(Applause.)

LARRY BIRD: Thank you.

AHMAD RASHAD: And here to interview him is a legend in his own right, one of the greatest broadcasters in the history of sports television, my main man, Bob Costas.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: Thank you, Ahmad. Ahmad and I haven't thrown it to each other since 2002, when the NBA left NBC. So great to be back with Ahmad, great to be here with Larry.

We realize this is a tech summit, but this is kind of a relief from all that stuff. So the only way I could think of to tie this in: How many technical fouls were you assessed during the course of your career?

(Laughter.)

LARRY BIRD: I don't know. Enough. You know, back



then they weren't as much money as they are now. So I really have no idea.

BOB COSTAS: This is the first time the All-Star Game has been in Indiana since 1985. That's the prime chunk of your career, three consecutive MVP awards. And, of course, the state of Indiana means a lot to you.

LARRY BIRD: Absolutely. Love this state. So happy to have the All-Star Game come back. Means so much to all of us. I always say there's so many volunteers. I mean, we do this a lot. So many people give up their time to come out and help, and they're all over the place. They're happy, and they're willing to do whatever they can to make everybody's weekend enjoyable.

So I'm very proud of this state, and we're happy to have this NBA game.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: I should advise the folks that TNT's coverage of All-Star Saturday Night begins at 4:30 Eastern Time tomorrow with "Basketball Stories: Indiana Glory." That's on TNT.

If you grow up loving basketball, as you did, in French Lick, Indiana, you know all about it. You know all about the University of Indiana, Bob Knight's team, which you were with for half a second, and Muncie winning, you know, the "Hoosiers" based on that. There's an Indiana thing about basketball that people who don't live here or never played here don't quite understand.

LARRY BIRD: You know, Bob, the one thing is, even probably now, but back in the '80s when I was playing, you could drive through the country, anywhere, and you always see a basketball hoop. And back in the day when I'd be out in these country roads and I see a little kid playing, I'd get out, shoot a couple of shots, get back in my car and take off. Have a story of a lifetime. But he had no camera, no pictures, nobody was around.

BOB COSTAS: You're right.

LARRY BIRD: So I used to love to do that.



But basketball is big. And I remember playing in high school, our town, French Lick and West Baden together, it's probably 2,800 citizens. But our gymnasium, the capacity was 2,700. So a lot of people came to our games.

BOB COSTAS: So 100 people who were citizens of French Lick were shut out.

LARRY BIRD: Well, more than that because there would be a few come from the surrounding areas.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

LARRY BIRD: But it was fun. And but basketball is our heritage here, and we love it. And I'm just glad to be a part of it this weekend.

BOB COSTAS: Obviously, you played at Indiana State, took the team to the final, unbeaten until you ran into Magic and Michigan State. And your playing career was with the Boston Celtics, but people need to be reminded: You coached the Indiana Pacers for three years, late '90s, early 2000s.

LARRY BIRD: Absolutely. And the reason I coached them is only one reason: Because I wanted to hang around with Reggie Miller for three years.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: In '98, again, it may seem like ancient history, but in '98 you came this close to ending the Bulls dynasty, and in 2000 you came this close to stopping the three in a row from the Lakers before it ever started.

LARRY BIRD: Well, if they had a good coach, they would have won it, you know. But there's some things during that first game in '98 that happened. One of them was I think they outrebounded us, like 19-1 on the offensive boards. We had a six-point lead with four or five minutes to go, and we had a jump ball, it should have been I called a 20 second or a timeout because my guys wasn't lined up right.

But Michael was jumping against Rik Smits, which is 7'4". So Michael jumps into him, moves his arm and tips it to them, they hit a three-pointer, and all of a sudden they're on a roll. It's the little things.

BOB COSTAS: In the seventh game in Chicago in the first half you're up by 12.

LARRY BIRD: Right. But we had a good lead going down the stretch. I thought if we got the -- as bad as we were on the offensive boards, if we got that jump ball, I think we

would have won that, that series.

BOB COSTAS: You and Magic are almost connected at the hip when people talk about that era of basketball. And they wonder how, given the fierce rivalry, both in college and Celtics and Lakers, you became such close friends. But the beginning of that was when they shot a Converse commercial in French Lick, right?

LARRY BIRD: Right. But, you know, I shot commercials with Earvin before, and I played with him on some All-Star teams in college.

I mean, we got along all right. I mean, it wasn't -- I didn't -- I always looked at him as unbelievable player because he played the game like me, and I thought he was a little bit better. And my goal was always to do the things -- he was young, younger than me.

But I can remember in college my senior year at the beginning of the year, they had the Russians playing against Michigan State on Home Box Office. Remember that, Home Box Office?

BOB COSTAS: Mm-hmm, yep.

LARRY BIRD: A lot of my players, teammates was over at my place, and we was watching them. And they were unbelievable. And I told them. I said, "That's who's going to win the NCAA tournament this year." That's how good I thought they were. Well, it's just too bad it was against us.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. So close, the final game in '79, but also '84 you beat them, '85 they prevail, and '87 -- you and I have talked about this before. I don't know if you remember. But after Magic makes the baby hook in '87 in Game 5, there's still a couple of seconds to go, and you took a leaning three-pointer from the sideline that spun out; otherwise, the whole series is different.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, blame me for it, yeah, of course.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: No, I mean, it was a -- if it had gone in, it would have been incredible!

LARRY BIRD: I know. I did get a good look. And I was leaning. I didn't know at the time. Because you shoot a lot off-balance shots. But I got a great look. I couldn't believe it when I got -- when Worthy overplayed me, I was cut to the corner, and he threw it.

And a lot of times when I shoot a basketball, I think it's going in, especially on the line that was going. But just

barely hit that back of that rim. If I miss, that's usually where I miss at. And I was surprised I missed it. And that sort of changed the series.

You know, playing them Lakers, that was my favorite. I want to play against the best every night, and they were good. They were really good.

And we beat them one time, they beat us a couple times. But going into them games, you know, that damn Magic, you know, you knew he was going to do something, and he had the quality players around him like I did, and you just want to do your best.

But you knew you were playing against the best, so you better be ready to play.

BOB COSTAS: In between those two Finals in '85 and '87 against the Lakers, you guys win it all in '86. Bill Walton is out here somewhere in the audience, and he was sort of at the tail end of his career.

But when he was healthy, both in college and the pros --

(Applause.)

-- there was nobody like him. Nobody played center quite like him. And he really had an appreciation. When he got to the Celtics, even though he wasn't playing 40 minutes a game anymore, he had a real appreciation of what you and that team was about.

LARRY BIRD: That's right. And he brought a lot. He brought enthusiasm. Red went and got him, and Bill came in and first thing Bill did when he got in town, he went to Robert Parish's house, said, "Hey, I'm not trying to take your minutes. I'm just trying to give you a break."

It was awesome. It was absolutely awesome having him on our team. Bill only missed two games that year. He got his nose broke in Washington, and I don't know why he didn't come back out. Then the one time he --

(Laughter.)

And one night in San Francisco, he hung out with the Grateful Dead after the game. I knew he wasn't going to play the next day.

(Laughter.)

So, but having him on our team was awesome.

You can laugh at that, Bob.

BOB COSTAS: I did, I laughed.

(Laughter.)

So the NBA has changed so much since the time you entered it in the early '80s.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah.

BOB COSTAS: What do you see that you like about it now, and what would you like to tinker with a little bit?

LARRY BIRD: Well, the first thing is, when we started in '80, I didn't know much about the league, but I was in it. And some older players, they'd tell me, "Hey, they might have trouble paying some players this year on the other teams." I go, "What?" Of course, then we just had, what, 21 or 22 teams in the league.

Well, I think it was in '83, David Stern took over, and after that period you could tell we got on prime time instead of tape delay in the Finals. CBS was doing a lot of our games. They were always in Boston on Sundays, always the Celtics, Knicks and Lakers and whoever. And the game was growing. And then Adam Silver took over it, and this league has taken off through David and Adam and their staffs of what they've done.

The players are always going to be great. The players are the players, and they'll adjust to anything. But now the game has changed where there's more three-pointers, and the midrange game is not as valuable as it used to be.

I like it. I think the more points you score keeps everybody happy. And, I mean, our fans love it; so I like it.

BOB COSTAS: Michael Jordan's last game in '98, the final score was 87-86, last game as a Bull. He scores 45 of the 87 points. 87-86 is an end-of-third-quarter score now.

LARRY BIRD: Right.

BOB COSTAS: 130-125, nobody bats an eye.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, but we scored a lot of points back in the day too against certain teams. If we went on the West Coast, it was more open, more up and down. And we can get in there in the 130s, 140s sometime.

But in the East, it was more of a slowdown game, more inside and out, a lot of pick and rolls from 15 foot instead of, you know, out.

You know, back then, we didn't even guard guys at three-point line. I never practiced three-pointers.

Until the 3-Point Contest came. I had to shoot a few.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. We'll get to that in a second.

(Laughter.)

Back then there weren't that many guys that really could shoot a three except in desperation --

LARRY BIRD: Well, we never shot them.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

LARRY BIRD: We never practiced.

BOB COSTAS: Now you got guys that can hit 45 percent, close to 50 percent from three.

LARRY BIRD: Well, every time I go to a Pacer practice, all they do is shoot threes and free throws and floaters. They don't shoot no midrange. They'll spend an hour and a half out there -- I watched Haliburton practice one day last summer; he had to shoot close to 6-, 700 three-pointers and probably 50, 60 free throws. That was his workout.

We never did that.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. 3-Point Shooting Contest is part of your legend when you basically told the guys, "Who's playing for 2nd place?" Wasn't that the quote, "Who's playing for 2nd place?"

LARRY BIRD: Who's coming in 2nd? That was my first one in Dallas. And I walked in the locker room, and, you know, nobody is talking to each other, nobody is saying anything. And they're all sitting there, and they sort of put their heads down. I said, "Hey, I'm just looking to see who's coming in 2nd."

I just did it for a joke.

BOB COSTAS: Right.

LARRY BIRD: But they -- they didn't like that very well, Bob.

(Laughter.)

Then, when I win it, they're all over rooting against me, you know, "Somebody beat him."

Well, I was fortunate enough to win it the next two years. And then I said, "I'm done with this."

BOB COSTAS: You are a legendary trash talker.

LARRY BIRD: That's what they say, but don't believe it.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: It's all a myth?

LARRY BIRD: It's --

BOB COSTAS: Uh, I've had a million guys tell me. Maybe not a million. But a lot of guys tell me you would, like, coming off a timeout, like, in front of their bench: "This is what I'm going to do. I'm going to take the inbound pass, I'm going to go to the corner, I'm going to shoot it in your face, and this is what's going to happen," and then you did.

(Laughter.)

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, I used to have some fun out there, but...

(Laughter.)

But it was never malicious. But you remember Xavier McDaniel?

BOB COSTAS: Oh, sure.

LARRY BIRD: God, I loved that guy as a player. I wish I could have played with him. He always beat me up. I mean, he would forearm me, everything else.

We were playing in Seattle one time. And X was standing there, and they called timeout, and I said, "X, I'm getting this ball."

He goes, "Oh, I know you're getting it." He said, "I'm going to be right up on you."

I said, "It doesn't matter. I'm going to shoot a fadeaway and hit it."

So I hit the shot. And I'm standing there looking, I go, "Oh, they got a chance to win this. Two seconds on the clock." X walked by, I go, "I should've never left that two on, X. You got your chance now."

(Laughter.)

But he was a good player and -- but, Bob, you know, you play so many games, which I loved when I was healthy, I loved to play as much as I possibly could, you get a little bored out there sometimes. You got to do something to liven it up.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. Makes sense to me.

LARRY BIRD: Well...

BOB COSTAS: You mentioned David Stern and his great influence and taking the league to new heights, and especially taking it global.

LARRY BIRD: Right.

BOB COSTAS: A huge percentage of the players in the league now are not American-born players. The linchpin of that is the '92 Dream Team. And even though you're toward the end of your career, you got a bad back, just being with that collection of players, they tell me that the scrimmages were the greatest games in the history of basketball.

LARRY BIRD: Well, I think that's a little overdone. But I tell you, there was so much talent on that team. Bob, if we was together another week, that thing would've imploded like you wouldn't believe.

(Laughter.)

There's guys bitchin' about their playing time. I said, "Man, we're in the Olympics. If you step on the court, you're a winner." You know? So as it went on, guys wanted more playing time. So I'm glad it ended when it did.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: There were guys from other teams knowing they're going to lose by 60 that just wanted -- I don't know if there was such a thing as a selfie then, but they just wanted a picture with you guys.

LARRY BIRD: Oh, I know. And it's a little weird playing against a team that's saying, "I want your picture, I want your jersey." Whatever, man, we're going to bust you up anyway, so...

(Laughter.)

But, you know, one of the great things about the Olympics, when I got out there and stepped on that court, man, I felt it. You know, I really felt it, and obviously when they're playing the national anthem and you get your gold medal.

But in Portland, before we got there, I was -- my back was acting up, so I didn't play in, like, three games. But I sitting over there, and Oscar Schmidt from Brazil, big-time player, he wanted to play against me so bad. And he come over and said, "Larry, please come in the game."

"Okay," I said, "I'm going to hit a jumper on you."

And sure enough, Magic heard me. He threw that ball to me, I hit a jumper on Oscar Schmidt. Oscar loved it. He loved it!

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: Of course he did.

LARRY BIRD: Oh, it was awesome.

(Laughter and applause.)

BOB COSTAS: How about even though they knew he was about to become their teammate, Pippen and Jordan decided they were going to lock Toni Kukoc down.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, that was rude.

BOB COSTAS: Very.

(Laughter.)

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, they -- they took turns. And I feel sorry for Toni. And Toni was on a good team, but he wasn't on that team that night.

(Laughter.)

Scottie and Mike are two of the best defenders in the league. And, you know, the best -- the one thing that they could do -- you had to watch them all the time because they closed that passing lane so quick, you know, their length and the quickness.

And poor old Toni, he couldn't get the ball, and when he did, they -- you know, they'd double-team him or they'd act like they're going to him and come back.

So he was really confused, and I think he -- he was upset a little bit because he knew he was going to be their teammate, "Why are they doing this to me?"

But they did it, and they -- I don't know what they proved, but -- Toni's a good player.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. Hall of Fame player.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah.

BOB COSTAS: He's in the Hall of Fame. And he was a tremendous addition to those Bulls teams once he got out of therapy following the Olympics.

(Laughter.)

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, I guarantee you.

(Laughter.)

Took him a while.

BOB COSTAS: So this is a tech summit, and so we'll tip the cap to it just a bit here. Analytics, so much more important than ever before, in all sports, in all sports, including the NBA. And the analytics say you can take 60 three-pointers in a game.

LARRY BIRD: Right.

BOB COSTAS: Maybe that works for winning the game. There's some people who love the game and love the three-pointer.

My first job out of college was in the ABA with the Spirits of St. Louis. That's the league that invented the three-point shot. It's an exclamation. It's a punctuation. It's an exciting part of the game, exciting part of strategy.

Can you overdo a good thing?

LARRY BIRD: I think so at times. You know, it's whatever the fans like, you know? I mean, the players will adapt to anything.

Like I told you earlier, there's a lot of people like to take away the corner three.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

LARRY BIRD: I don't think they should do that. But they're going to do whatever they want to do anyway.

BOB COSTAS: When you say "take away," you mean legislate it out, not take it away defensively.

LARRY BIRD: No. Get it out of there.

Do they take too many? Probably. When I watch a game, if they miss five or six in a row, I'll say, "Come on, man, get it inside."

But, Bob, I was really worried 15 years ago that there was no place for a 6'3" point guard because they were getting bigger and stronger. Then all of a sudden now I'm worrying about the centers. If the centers can't shoot a three-pointer, they can't play in our league. So it's really changed over the years.

But I'm like everybody else. I think the league is in good hands. I think the players do an excellent job to come every night and play.

I just hope Sunday that they will compete a little bit because there's nothing worse going to a basketball game when guys are, you know, opened up, parting the sea, come on right down and get a dunk.

If they do that this Sunday, I'll be gone by third quarter.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. Well, one of these days, if this keeps up, the winning team is going to have 200 points.

LARRY BIRD: Well, I think what they should do is, if you lose, you got to give charity \$100,000 each, or maybe 200,000 now. Then, after the next contract, maybe a million.

But you got to be competitive. You know, you got the best players in the world here, all in one place. Wouldn't it be nice to see them go out and compete against one another?

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: Well, there used to be a thing, a real thing, East-West.

LARRY BIRD: Used to be. Oh, yeah.

BOB COSTAS: A real thing.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah.

BOB COSTAS: Doesn't feel that way anymore. We're not -- we're not knocking the league. The talent is incredible.

LARRY BIRD: Oh, the talent is incredible. I mean, but the All-Star Games the last few years has been, you know, eh. "All-Star Game was on. Did you watch it?" "Nah, I didn't watch it." Another guy said, "I didn't watch it. You know, why watch it?"

You got to compete. And that's what this league was built on. And, well, even if Magic was on the other team, I didn't care. I was going to compete against his teams and try to beat him. But that's just the way it was.

So the league is incredible, like you said. I love the players. I love what they're doing. But I hope tomorrow or Sunday that we can get a little better All-Star Game.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: Smattering of applause. Because Adam Silver is somewhere in the house. And before he cuts our mics, let's move on to a different subject.

(Laughter.)

Let's go one by one through some -- we can't get to everybody. LeBron.

LARRY BIRD: Well, I never say that this guy is the best or this guy is the best, but he's about as good as I ever seen. The guy is incredible, absolutely incredible.

There's a lot of people that complain about LeBron. I don't know why. But I've enjoyed his game for 20, 21 years. I just think he's incredible.

BOB COSTAS: Incredible, the totality of his game.

LARRY BIRD: Right. He does everything.

BOB COSTAS: The ability to pass and to shoot the three and at his size and his strength, I mean, you're not going to body him out of position very easily.

LARRY BIRD: No. And he's gotten a lot better at shooting the ball. When he first come in, he struggled a little bit. But his ability to get to the basket and free-throw line and everything else.

But he's been incredible to watch. I don't know if we'll ever see another one like him for a while. There's always going to be somebody. But he's just been a joy to watch.

BOB COSTAS: Steph Curry.

LARRY BIRD: Unbelievable. Probably the -- I ain't going to say the greatest shooter ever, but he's one that -- he's one that messed this league up by shooting a lot of threes.

(Laughter.)

You see a lot of little kids, you know, firing up threes from everywhere.

But incredible talent. Just watching his teams play a few years ago when they were winning was a joy to watch because of him. He'd stretch them out, then guys can move and cut and get layups and hit threes.

That's one team that -- now, this is a few years ago, but I could sit and watch all day play. Klay Thompson has always been one of my favorite players. What an

incredible shooter. I seen him here in Indianapolis score 60 points in I think it was 30 minutes. I mean --

BOB COSTAS: Yeah, he did. Yeah.

LARRY BIRD: -- unbelievable. Took eight dribbles. How do you do that, Bob?

BOB COSTAS: Well, if --

LARRY BIRD: How do you do that?

BOB COSTAS: If they're doubling Curry, you might be open. You might just catch and shoot, right?

LARRY BIRD: Why would they leave him open?

BOB COSTAS: That's a good question.

LARRY BIRD: But, you know, he also scored, like, 39 points in the quarter.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

LARRY BIRD: Bob, how do you do that?

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: Unless you're Wilt Chamberlain in 1962.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, that's pretty incredible to be a jump shooter.

BOB COSTAS: Which brings this to mind: Who was it -- when you broke into the league, and they're not necessarily playing anymore, but they're around -- Oscar, Jerry West, Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Russell -- who did -- who gave you goose bumps, like, man, I can't believe --

LARRY BIRD: Well, Oscar does every time I see him.

BOB COSTAS: Really?

LARRY BIRD: Because he's from Indiana, and I know his history. Never seen him play. Jerry, I love Jerry, a good friend. Wilt, met him on occasion a few times.

I mean, I would've always liked to compete against them guys, and I'm sure they would've liked to compete against the players of today and in my era too.

If you're a competitor, you want to play against the best. And they were the best.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah, you know, Wilt has the quality of



mythology because not everything was on TV then. Not everything was recorded. His 100-point game in Hershey, Pennsylvania, there's only a scratchy radio broadcast of the fourth quarter. That's all there is. But he scored 100 freaking points.

LARRY BIRD: I know.

I did that in grade school one time.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: How tall were you in grade school?

LARRY BIRD: About 7'2".

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: So there's shrinkage.

LARRY BIRD: It's incredible stats. I mean, they always compare, you know, who's the best, who's that?

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

LARRY BIRD: Well, Wilt still holds most of the records of everything. And they didn't even keep blocked shots back then, you know? It's incredible. I mean, what a talent.

BOB COSTAS: Back to some of the current guys. Luka Doncic had a 73-point game the other night.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah. I never thought that he'd be able to score like that when he got in the league. But what an incredible player. Can see, pass, rebound, controls the ball real well.

I mean, these Europeans come over, they're some of the -- well, some of the best players in our league.

BOB COSTAS: This is now the standard wisdom, and I don't know if it's true, but people say, look, the European players grow up in kind of a different environment, and the way the fundamentals of the game are taught.

And so they come into the league -- Nikola Jokic, another one, obviously, is a unique talent. They're not all cookie cutter.

LARRY BIRD: Sure.

BOB COSTAS: But there's something about the background that enhances them.

LARRY BIRD: Well, they teach them fundamentals over

there. They usually practice twice a day. And it used to be -- I don't know if it is now -- if you're really good in basketball at a young age, you go to another city with other kids coming in. And it's really a fundamental thing.

So if you watch these players play, they're really fundamentally sound. Over here, it's a little bit different. It's running and jumping and working on your shot.

So they've caught up. And they caught up because -- and Dave Gavitt, a guy that used to run the Big East and was the head of the Celtics for a while, a good friend of mine, he told me that after the Olympics, you're going to see a change. The European players are going to get better. They're embarrassed by what happened. They take pride in their basketball. And he was 100 percent right.

So you go from '92 up to, you know, 2010, 2015, all of a sudden an influx of Europeans come in, and it's really helped our game.

BOB COSTAS: Sometimes people wonder, whether it's coach in basketball or football or a manager in baseball, if a guy is an all-time great, they say he can't relate to his players because he's better, he was better, than any of them, and therefore he doesn't understand their shortcomings or the player doesn't have quite the will that he had.

Was that a hurdle for you?

LARRY BIRD: No, because I played with some of them guys, you know, that wasn't as good, maybe, and it can do certain things.

When I coached, I had a veteran team. They'd been around. They knew how to win games. We just had to get the right combinations together.

The biggest move that Donnie Walsh made was bringing Chris Mullin in because they were double-teaming Rik and face guarding Reggie, and we had another shooter.

Then, if you remember, we had a young kid named Jalen Rose that's sort of been around and really not -- didn't get to play much. I really like Jalen. I liked him as a player in college. I knew he had a lot of talent. They were trying to play him at point guard all the time. I didn't think he ever was a point guard.

But once he started coming on a little bit, we could put him in the post, and he can make plays. And he was very valuable for us.

But we had a veteran group. And me, I knew they were



good. We just gave them directions, some plays, and we really got on them about being in condition and on the defensive end. Because you know in this league, you can run and gun all you want, but if you don't guard anybody in the playoffs, you're not going to win.

So they were a solid team, and it was really fun because they came to play, you know? It was fun.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah, that team had a lot of talent, and it was also an interesting team because it had texture to it, you know? The guys weren't, oh, this guy is like that guy. Dale Davis, Antonio Davis, even Sam Perkins --

LARRY BIRD: Sam is great.

BOB COSTAS: -- toward the end.

LARRY BIRD: Oh, he was great.

BOB COSTAS: Austin Croshere.

LARRY BIRD: Austin, yeah.

BOB COSTAS: Little Travis Best, like the little point guard, water bug guy.

LARRY BIRD: Yeah, awesome.

BOB COSTAS: And Mark Jackson. Your two point guards played entirely different.

LARRY BIRD: Mark Jackson is one of the smartest players that -- basketball IQ off the charts.

Like you say, Travis was here and there. You know, Travis Best, we played against Milwaukee in the playoffs the year we went to the Finals. And they had a great team, but he missed, like, his first five shots. But he had a corner three that he hit and put us up by two or one with about 10 or 15 seconds to go. And I was so proud of him because a lot of guys would have hesitated. He didn't.

BOB COSTAS: He's fearless. He was fearless.

LARRY BIRD: Fearless. Unbelievable.

I guess he got that from his coach.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. I would think so.

(Laughter.)

LARRY BIRD: I don't think so. I think he's just a good player.

But that team was pretty special. I enjoy that.

BOB COSTAS: Of your coaches, who had the greatest effect on you?

LARRY BIRD: Bill Fitch.

I was young. He was tough. He was relentless. He didn't care who it was. And he got fired after two or three years because my teammates couldn't put up with it.

I loved him. But you got to remember: The nicest man I ever met came in and coached me, K.C. Jones.

BOB COSTAS: Yes.

LARRY BIRD: Nicest man. And he was different in his style. But I think that was in '83, going into '84, we made the Finals I think four years in a row after that.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

LARRY BIRD: We loved that man so much, all of us, that we'd do anything for him.

BOB COSTAS: K.C. was pure class.

LARRY BIRD: Absolutely.

BOB COSTAS: And so we're not saying anything negative about him, but it's a story connected to you that there were times late in a close game, timeout, "All right, here, we're going to do this, going to do this," and you'd just say, "Hey, get me the ball."

LARRY BIRD: I think I did that --

BOB COSTAS: And K.C. would say, "Okay."

LARRY BIRD: I think I did that one time. He was talking about a play, and I said, "Case, you know, we don't need a play. I think I can beat this guy in the post."

He goes, "Okay, let's run the play."

So that's what we did. But, no, I wouldn't go over and tell Case what to do. I had too much respect for him.

BOB COSTAS: If there was a time machine and you could go back to any point in your life, where would you go?

LARRY BIRD: Probably my years in Boston. I had a great time in college, Terre Haute. ISU treated me great. But I was young and energetic, and Boston was a vibrant city. I

never lived in a big city. I absolutely adored it. We had great fans, and I loved to compete, and our fans wanted to win. And that was a great setup for me.

So I'd say my in my 20s, early 20s.

BOB COSTAS: Do you miss being actively involved in the game?

LARRY BIRD: Not really. I've done everything, Bob. You know, I like I said, I played, I coached. I was in the front office for a long time.

But not really. My time is really up.

I do a little bit of scouting for them and -- but no, it's time to move on. And I really enjoy my life. And basketball has gave me everything that I have. I live a nice little life. I'm very comfortable. I don't get out much. You know, I haven't done interviews for a few years. But I like my life, you know, and I'm pretty secure with it.

BOB COSTAS: Ladies and gentlemen, one of the greatest of all time --

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: -- Indiana's Larry Bird!

LARRY BIRD: Thank you.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: Thanks, Larry.

LARRY BIRD: Thank you, brother.

BOB COSTAS: That was good. Thank you.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: Here's Ahmad.

AHMAD RASHAD: Larry and Bob, fantastic.

It's time for our last break. We'll see you guys in a few minutes. Just hustle back.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports