

NBA Legends Awards

Sunday, February 18, 2024

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA



(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: No, please, sit down.

(Laughter.)

What a thrill to be here again this year. It's 20-something years I've had the honor of emceeding this event. Thanks to the Retired Players Association for allowing me back.

It's been described in any number of ways. It's like a box of basketball cards come to life when you look out here and you see all these legends. And it's just always special for me. So thanks for having me here.

One of the things about this day, one of the highlights of the program, look, my father was my biggest influence as teaching me how to be a husband and a father and a professional and as a broadcaster, but the guy I always looked up to when I got in the business was Bob Costas.

And to have Bob here, and he's going to be --

(Applause.)

-- leading a roundtable on the old ABA, and that's going to be priceless. So it's just one of the things that's something to look forward to on this morning.

Now, if you've been here before -- and how many have been to the Legends Brunch before?

(Applause.)

All right, good. Means the rest of you haven't, but -- so I like to start the day with some poetry. And I've done that every year. And poetry in a very loose term. Actual poets, leave the room when I say this is what's about to happen.

But as I wrote this year's poem, and it's always tailored to the host city, it had a little bit of a rhythm to the rhyme. And the more I thought about it, I said this is going to be more than me reciting a poem.

I think it's well past time that we had a 67-year-old father of six and grandfather of five bring you a low-key rap to start the Legends Brunch.

So let me say this: If this is a career ender, it's been fun.

(Laughter.)

Could I get a beat?

Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's going to work. Yeah. Here we go. So as we get things started, let's be perfectly clear, some of you might just be saying it's a pity that you're sitting here, gripped in fear, fixin' to hear from the biggest square in the circle city. So good to be back here where hoops reign supreme, where we've got esteemed Hoosiers and friends. From the NBA crop we've gleaned the cream tonight seen through the TNT lens. It's been quite a while since the city played host, it was 1985, that's the last one. It was M.J.'s first appearance but a guy in the post was the most valuable, Ralph Sampson. The Fieldhouse tip is still hours away; in the meantime we'll honor some greats. Every year it's respect that we pay on this day, sipping coffee and cleaning our plates. So here's how it works. It's a breeze to explain. The main thing is if I single you out, when your famous name is proclaimed would you deign to remain standing while we all cheer and shout.

A champion MVP and winner of gold, of her greatness I'm a believer. Her style, class and grace are a joy to behold. Tamika Catchings, she was the Fever.

Tamika.

(Cheers and applause.)

He finished his career here, could board and shoot from deep, the kind of teammate everybody approved. All he did he did while he was always looking half asleep, Sam Perkins, you can call him Big Smooth.

(Cheers and applause.)

The Pacers are his, as they have been for ages. You talk about contentment on investment, what he's meant to this city would fill countless pages, Herb Simon's a gem, that's my assessment.

Herb.



(Cheers and applause.)

Played over 400 games in the Pacer uniform, a Fab Fiver never scared to take a stand. His work in the community is way beyond the norm. Jalen Rose, he's the Renaissance man.

(Cheers and applause.)

Man, could he shoot it, as I think we all know, a Pacer for all 18 seasons. A Hall of Famer who knew how to put on a show, here's Reggie Miller for obvious reasons.

(Cheers and applause.)

He grew up just 100 miles from here in French Lick, became legendary. In his day I would say he had hardly a peer, there will always be only one Larry.

(Cheers and applause.)

So now settle in, sit back as we get going, you might cheer or laugh or cry at what's in store. It's the Indy 500 of brunches that's worth knowing, it is All-Star 2024.

(Cheers and applause.)

Thank you, all. Appreciate you.

And now it is my pleasure, and it seems it is my mission here, to introduce to you our friend and buddy, our Commissioner.

ADAM SILVER: Ladies and gentlemen, Ernie Johnson.

(Applause.)

You could start my music now.

(Laughter.)

I was going to say Ernie's poem, but I'm going to correct that to Ernie's rap, is always one of the highlights of All-Star Weekend. And that was incredible.

But I want to thank the Retired Players Association for hosting this brunch. There are roughly 150 legends here in town who have participated in events and other activities over the past several days.

Thank you to all of you, and I'd love you to stand up, all the legends who are here.

(Applause.)

Thank you, guys.

What an incredible weekend it's been so far. I say "so far" because, of course, we still have the All-Star Game tonight. And it's been a focus of ours to restore that game as the pinnacle of All-Star Weekend like it was when many of the former players in attendance today were still playing.

And there's no better place than Indiana, the heartland of basketball, to return to our traditional East v. West rivalry.

One thing that I learned recently was that nearly a century ago, the inventor of basketball, Dr. James Naismith, came here to Indiana to watch a high school state championship game. He said while he was here: While the game was invented in Massachusetts, basketball really had its origin in Indiana, which remains the center of the sport.

All these years later, Indiana remains the epicenter of basketball. And it's due in large part to the leadership of Herb Simon.

(Applause.)

I know Herb is probably getting tired of me saying this, but it's worth repeating. He is the longest-standing governor in NBA history. He's owned the Pacers for 41 years, which is quite remarkable.

(Applause.)

He's been the chairman of the NBA's Board of Governors, he still serves on our Executive Committee, and he's been a mentor and a friend to so many of us in the NBA community.

And just this Friday, this past Friday, he was announced as a finalist for the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.

(Applause.)

Congratulations, Herb. And thanks to you, your son Steve, Rick Fuson, your partner Steve Rales, and your entire family and the Pacers organization for being such wonderful hosts this weekend. Thank you all very much.

(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: All right. Let's jump into these awards.

Here to present the Pioneer Award, an NBA legend who is probably the proudest parent in the room today, please welcome Harvey Catchings.

(Applause.)



HARVEY CATCHINGS: Good morning, ladies, legends, and gents. I'm here to present the Pioneer Award to an incredible player who spent her entire 15-year career playing here with the Indiana Fever.

I won't say her name right now because then you guys will know who I am because people keep telling me that I'm Tamika's father. So now you know.

Let me just give you some of her accolades. She was a 10-time All-Star, WNBA MVP, Finals MVP, five-time Defensive Player of the Year. That was my game. She was also a four-time gold medal winner in the Olympics.

Growing up in a household that was very competitive was not easy for her because her brother and sister were great athletes as well. But as she was willing to do whatever it took to be the best, I remember times when Kenyon, Tauja, Mika, and I would go play in the driveway or go to a gym. We would spend many hours going over drills and fundamentals and everything.

And finally after we finished, tired, getting ready to go, she'd walk up to me with them pretty brown eyes, and she'd say, "Daddy, can we play one more game?"

I said, "Wow." I said, "Sure, Mika, okay." I said, "Okay, we'll play to 5."

She said, "No, Daddy, we're going to play to 11."

Now I think back, and one of the things about it is that she never won. I never let her win a game. And she would always say -- now, you guys may think, you know, that's cruel. But you have to understand, when Mika was growing up, she had a hearing issue, she had a speech impediment. And at that time she was having issues with her eyes.

So I knew that the world could be very, very cruel. So I told her. I said, "You have to always do your best. You have to be the one that sets the standard. No one's going to let you win. You have what it takes to be a winner; you just have to do it."

Look at her now. She's just incredible.

(Applause.)

I told her one day, "You're going to be one of the greatest players" -- let's take away gender -- "to ever play this game." And here we are.

(Applause.)

Now, we're going to look at this video on her, and I'm going to step aside. Get a chance to take a look at that video.

(Video.)

(Applause.)

Boy, that's tough. Ladies and gentlemen, welcome my baby girl, Tamika Catchings.

(Applause.)

TAMIKA CATCHINGS: Wow. I remember my dad bringing us to the Legend Brunch when it started in the beginning. And I will be honest. There's a lot of legends out here, 150, as you heard. But I remember coming as a little girl and thinking, Why do we have to go and sit with the old people?

(Laughter.)

And now my nephews are here wondering the same thing.

(Laughter.)

But what a blessing. I never could have imagined standing up on this stage and being considered a legend, let alone a pioneer, and being able to represent basketball. Because, as you heard Sabrina say last night, whether you're a boy or a girl, if you can shoot, you can shoot; if you can play, you can play.

(Applause.)

If you're a champion, you're a champion. It does not matter.

I'm blessed today because there's so many people here that I want to thank. There's so many people here that I love. And we all know, when you're a part of this, the sisterhood, the brotherhood of being in the WNBA, the NBA, you think about the ABA, the WBL, there's so many other leagues that came before, specifically from the women's side, they are legends.

I stand here on behalf of all of my sisters that have come before me that have allowed me this opportunity. I come standing here today because of all of you and being able to watch my dad and emulate.

And while he was in practice, we'd be back there, and I was Dr. J and I was Harvey Catchings and I was the late Bob Lanier. Larry Bird, come on now. I got to be all of you guys.



And the thing that I most appreciated over the course of the years and having these opportunities to emulate your game, I formed my own game.

And everybody knows my favorite player of all time, outside of my dad, of course, is the one and only Alonzo Mourning.

(Applause.)

But as I started watching them do their game, the one thing that I loved, that you could shoot, you could play defense. Looked like a great, great teammate. Rebound. All of the skill sets. And so my dad always said, "If you want to be great, you can't just be great at one thing. You have to be great at multiple things."

So I had players that I could follow and that I could watch. And that was the goal: To not be the best compared to anybody else, but to be the best compared to myself. You guys helped grow me.

My family's here, absolutely amazing, and for my nephews to be able to have this opportunity as they grow in their own -- their own trajectory, in their own journey.

Yeah, my dad now is Tamika's dad, and right now I am the aunt, but one day I will be their aunt. They'll be saying their name. Oh, you're related to -- aren't you that one person? Yeah, that's me.

Thank you, guys, for this honor. Thank you for this award.

Being able to get drafted to Indiana and being here, to Mr. Simon, you are absolutely amazing. Thank you for the patience, Sports Entertainment, Rick, Kelly Krauskopf. Steve is here, Steve Simon.

It has been a blessing to be here in Indiana and to call this my home.

Thank you, guys, for coming to Indianapolis for the 2024 NBA All-Star Game. We have been preparing for this for a long time. But welcome home. Thank you, guys. God bless.

(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: So that was one of those moments that makes this morning special. I mean, when you see Harvey Catchings with the honor of introducing his daughter, and they -- their eyes lock and then she comes up, and I just saw the "Thanks, Dad," it was, man, very cool. And congratulations to Tamika Catchings.

Now the Bob Lanier Community Impact Award. To hand this out -- again, another cool part about this morning is I'm backstage hanging with guys I grew up watching. I was fortunate enough to watch Dave Bing play. And Dave is going to come up here now, seven-time All-Star, All-Star Game MVP, Hall of Famer, and introduce the Bob Lanier Community Impact Award.

DAVE BING: Good morning to all. And I'm here to do something that's very special to me.

The Bob Lanier Community Impact Award recognizes an outstanding legend who has shown unparalleled commitment to make a difference in the lives of the members of their community.

The award is named in honor of my dear friend who's no longer with us, my teammate for about six years, Big Bob Lanier.

This year's recipient is someone I've known literally all of his life.

Jalen Rose had a 13-year NBA career and in 2000 was voted the NBA's Most Improved Player. That was also the year he established the Jalen Rose Foundation to create life-changing opportunities for underserved youth in his hometown of Detroit.

In 2011, the Jalen Rose Leadership Academy was established. And I was fortunate to have been mayor of Detroit at the time as Jalen made his decision to do something that was in his heart, and that was establish an open-enrollment, tuition-free, public charter school.

Now, Harvey was here talking about his daughter. Jalen is the closest thing to being a son for me. I've known him since he was born. His dad and I played the back court together for Detroit. And I followed his career as a youngster, then as a young man, an NBA star and legend.

But the thing that has impressed me most about Jalen is his heart. He cares. He didn't have to come back to Detroit. Born and raised there. Saw the problems that so many of our young people were having from an academic standpoint and decided he wanted to do something to make a positive change.

And for those of us in Detroit who know him, know what he's about, know how many lives that he has touched. He allowed me to be on his board for a short period of time, and I learned a lot about his leadership academy.

So in just a second we'll be bringing Jalen up to the stage,



but I'd be remiss if I didn't say something because, as I look out into this audience and I reflect on what it was like at our first brunch, boy, this is something else. I want to thank the other founders of the Retired NBA Players Association. I haven't seen him since I've been in town, but he was my idol and my role model as I came into the league, your own Oscar Robertson.

(Applause.)

There were four guys, and Oscar, who had an idea years ago to kind of get this off the ground. Archie Clark, I know that you're here. Archie was one of the founders.

(Applause.)

Dave Cowens was another founder who couldn't be with us today, but he is here in spirit. And the guy that I first played for as my coach as a rookie was the other founder who is no longer with us, Dave DeBusschere.

(Applause.)

With that, I like to bring Jalen to the stage so he can get his due.

(Video.)

(Applause.)

JALEN ROSE: I want to thank everyone.

(Applause.)

For anybody that knows me, what makes this moment so tough, because if you met me, you met my mother, Jeanne Cassandra Rose.

(Applause.)

And you guys know life hit different when you're born without your father's name. And watching Tamika and her father -- and thank you very much, Dave, for your love, your support, always being there in my life -- I just remember late '70s, sitting in the back of my mother's Chrysler Cordoba. She was working in the day at Chrysler and then working at the Shabo Lounge [phonetic] on Livernois in Detroit.

And I was in the back seat of the car, and I moved the mat. And I could see the ground, and it was like the Flintstones. And I'll never forget saying to my mother: "I'm going to make it to the league. I promise. I'm going to be Dr. J. I promise." And I started writing that on my school papers every time, fourth grade, fifth grade.

And now Dr. J knows my name. He knows who I am.

(Applause.)

And he has a grandson named Jalen.

My mother created that name. And for those that don't know, the number one pick in the 1967 NBA draft, Jimmy Walker, that's my biological father, Dave's teammate that he was talking about. My uncle Leonard took her to the hospital to give birth. That's where the name Jalen actually comes from.

So, Ma, as you look down from heaven, you made Jalen a common name, and I'm grateful to carry it in your honor.

I just want to thank the Pacers. I want to thank the NBA. I want to thank my family. I want to thank my kids. I want to thank Coach Watson, like a father figure to me, showed me how to be a man.

I'm sorry.

(Applause.)

I want to thank -- I want to thank Reggie Miller for showing me how to be a pro. I never really got a chance to thank him on a stage like this. But I was mad when I got traded. And when I played against them, I took it personal.

And we never really got a chance to break bread like we supposed to, because you're an all-time great, you're a competitor, and I had my best days with you. And I'm forever grateful for you, brother. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

And also got to thank the Legend, Larry Joe Bird.

(Applause.)

Larry believed in me at a time in my life where my career could have gone either way. And I thank you forever, Coach, because without your influence in my life, I wouldn't be wearing these nice suits and eating steak and lobster the way I am. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

And since this award is about philanthropy, I want to thank the city of Detroit. I want to thank my right hand in philanthropy. Please give it up. If you've ever emailed me, text me, or ask me to do anything, you had to go through one person: Michelle. Please give it up for her.



(Applause.)

Thank you for everything. I love and appreciate you.
Thank you for you and your kids being here.

In all honesty, I never thought that I wouldn't average a triple-double like the Big O. I had one in my career. I wasn't the Big O, but I was like, I'm going to be a Big O. I'm going to be a Magic. I'm going to be a Isaiah in the community.

And so even though I wasn't good enough to make an All-Star Game, this is my first Legends Brunch. Hey, Ma, we in the Hall of Fame for philanthropy and giving back to the community.

(Applause.)

And I'm forever grateful for the love that you guys have given me, and it just don't stop. And if you guys are ever in Detroit, please, pull up at the school. We at 15000 Trojan. We open enrollment. We're tuition free. We public charter.

We are a 9-16 model, which means that we influence young people in high school but also, once they graduate, in secondary education. That's two-year college, four-year college, trade school, military, whatever they decide to do. JRLA and our foundation is here to support them.

And so, again, it's an honor to be standing in front of so many people that I admire, that I looked up to, that I appreciate, that influenced me.

My partner, Angela, is here. My family, my kids are here. My youngest daughter, Gracie, is somewhere dominating, playing volleyball. I want to thank their mom, Mauri, for doing a great job of raising them.

And, again, when you make a commitment to the community and you make a commitment to sports, you sacrifice a lot. And I missed a lot of time with my kids. I missed birthdays. I missed games. I missed a lot of stuff.

So I thank you guys for being patient with me and still loving me the way that you have, even though I've missed a lot of time. But the beautiful thing is I'm going to be here another 75 years, and we got a chance to make it up.

Love everybody, and enjoy.

(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: Straight from the heart.

Let me ask you to do something real quick. There were a lot of folks who got up really early to get into this big, old room and set it up and put all this food out for us and bring us everything, and it's just a tremendous job to us.

For everybody who woke up this day serving, thank you very much.

(Applause.)

And to a man named George DeFotis, who every year produces this and knows he's going to have a room with thousands of people in it and wants to put on a product here that brings moments like you've seen already today, George, thank you very much.

(Applause.)

And now an NBA All-Star, four-time NBA champion, Finals MVP, and the Acting Executive Director of the National Basketball Players Association, just turned 40, but doesn't look it, at least in my mind, Andre Iguodala.

(Applause.)

ANDRE IGUODALA: Good morning, y'all. How amazing is it to be in front of excellence? And as I enter the stage after one of my favorite players of all time, how fitting and how much of a blessing it is to -- I have an easy speech now hearing one of my favorite players of all time, the reason why I play basketball.

He spoke about Julius Erving knowing his name. When I was in the fourth grade, bought this Michigan jersey, No. 5, blue and gold -- blue and maize. And for four years I wore it every week.

And when I got to the eighth grade, I started to grow. And you know how evil -- as Mr. Catchings said, you know how evil your peers can be.

And two weeks into the eighth grade, all my friends said, "Take that Jalen Rose jersey off. We are tired of seeing it."

(Laughter.)

And what a blessing and what a privilege to say that Jalen Rose knows my name.

(Applause.)

I believe that speaks to what our legends are here for. Spoke about sacrifice, spoke about responsibility, speak about duty. And one of the things I live by is once you've mastered something, it is your duty to teach it.

And with all our legends, and with all our young players today, I tell them all the time, "You don't understand that each and every time you go on a practice court, each and every time you go on the game court, each and every time you go to a community service event, you don't realize that you're teaching, and it is your duty."

So with the NBA Players Association and our vision to involve the legends, it's to help future legends and be a part of their journey as they transition into legends. And as we go forward, we will build a stronger bond, we will build a stronger brotherhood, and we will care for one another.

And somehow Jalen Rose has figured out this hair thing.

(Laughter.)

So as he says he has another 75 years, I believe him.

(Laughter.)

So as we extend our lives, as we figure out this AI thing as we talked about a few days ago at the Tech Summit, we have a long time to go. And we will build this brotherhood together, and we will make sure that we create the next legends and we create this path of greatness, excellence, and duty.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: I know you meant to reference me when you had talked about guys who have the hair thing figured out, too, Dre. I appreciate that.

Look, we're here to celebrate the legends whose contributions, both on and off the court, have created indelible memories. We're also here to honor the memories of those members of the NBA family we lost this year.

Each of them left their individual mark on the game and on us all. They're missed, but never to be forgotten.

This year, to help us honor their memories is someone who grew up right down the street from here.

Kenny Edmonds, or as his mom would call him, that's what his mom would call him, went on to become a 13-time Grammy award-winning recording artist, songwriter, and producer. You may have even taken the Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds Highway to get here today.

Please welcome Babyface.

(Applause.)

("In Memoriam" video with Babyface live performance.)

(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: Just beautifully done. Thanks again. Really appreciate you.

(Applause.)

And now the president and CEO of the Retired Players Association, please welcome Scott Rochelle.

SCOTT ROCHELLE: The members of the National Basketball Retired Players Association represent the very best of the game, and it is only fitting that we have been able to host a record number of players here in the state of Indiana with such a rich basketball history.

Supporting former players in their transition remains at the forefront of our mission. However, our work transcends basketball, with so much of our impact being prioritized within our communities.

This week we had the honor of hosting our Full Court Press Jr. NBA clinic at the storied Crispus Attucks High School, where our founder, Oscar Robertson, and his teammates made history as the first African American high school to win a state title in the state of Indiana.

(Applause.)

We celebrate this legacy and so many others because, without them, we would not have the strong, vibrant, and growing community that the NBRPA is today.

The legacy of our founders, Oscar Robertson, Dave Cowens, Dave DeBusschere, and here with us today, Archie Clark --

(Applause.)

-- and Dave Bing --

(Applause.)

-- is dutifully carried out by a hardworking board of directors.

This week we welcome Spencer Haywood, Rushia Brown --

(Applause.)

-- Eddie Gill, and Bob Elliott to our Board of directors.

They joined our chairman, "Choo" Smith, who I work very closely with and I appreciate tremendously because the work that we do is daily for the benefit of the players, and I will tell you no one cares more than our board, but the leadership has been extremely strong. Thank you, "Choo."

Vice chairman Shawn Marion, treasurer Nancy Lieberman
--

(Applause.)

-- Secretary CJ Kupec, Mike Bantom, Dave Bing, Chucky Brown, and Caron Butler.

Transitioning off of the board are directors Grant Hill, Johnny Davis, Jerome Williams, and Sam Perkins.

Thank you for your service to the NBRPA. We are better because of you.

(Applause.)

Thank you to the NBA and the NBPA for your commitment to the former player community. The historic advances in pensions and healthcare for former players is unmatched, and it sets us apart from other player organizations and sports.

For this support, we are so very appreciative and look forward to continued growth in our partnerships. Looking at you, Andre.

There is much more to celebrate this weekend, and on behalf of the National Basketball Retired Players Association, I thank you for joining us in honoring our legends.

(Applause.)

(Video.)

(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: Oh, the stories these guys could tell, and you're about to hear a bunch of them.

Here to moderate this panel is a man I mentioned before: 29-time Emmy Award winner and the voice of the Spirits of St. Louis, please welcome Bob Costas.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: I guess I'll go this way.

Earlier Ernie referred to me as someone he's always looked up to. The last time anyone ever said that to me in an NBA setting, it was Muggsy Bogues and Spud Webb. So I appreciate it.

(Laughter.)

Spent a lot of time around the NBA in the '90s and early 2000s. Was talking to Ahmad Rashad the other day; it's been 22 years since I did anything directly connected with the NBA. But it left us with so many memories during that spectacular era, and it's great to be back in an NBA setting again.

But my career actually began in the old ABA, as Ernie said, as the voice of the Spirits of St. Louis.

The ABA was an incredible league, an incredible experience, and we're about to bring up four people who are attached to that league.

Our first panelist is a two-time ABA champion, a prolific dunker and a player who reportedly taught Dr. J how to make his Afro more aerodynamic, Dr. Dunk, Darnell Hillman of the Indiana Pacers.

(Applause.)

In his only ABA season, this man -- think about this -- he was the Rookie of the Year, he was the league MVP, he was the scoring champion and the rebounding leader, and he was the MVP of the ABA All-Star Game, averaging 30 points a game in his rookie year for the Denver then Rockets. Please welcome Spencer Haywood.

(Applause.)

Up next, a five-time ABA All-Star and multi-time NBA All-Star as well, ABA Rookie of the Year, ABA champion with the Kentucky Colonels, ABA Playoffs MVP, ABA League MVP, six-time NBA All-Star, known as the "A-Train," Hall of Famer Artis Gilmore.

(Applause.)

Last but never least, a five-time ABA All-Star, 11-time NBA All-Star, ABA Slam Dunk champion, Hall of Famer, naturally, we could go on and on, but please welcome the signature player of the ABA and one of the greatest of all time, any generation, any league, "Dr. J" Julius Erving.

(Applause.)



In the limited time we have here, and I think anybody can jump in on this, the ABA was vindicated almost right away. A lot of people said: All right, the ABA -- red, white, and blue ball; three-point shot; a few good players; not up to NBA caliber.

The first All-Star Game after the merger, 10 of the 24 players in the game had played in the ABA. The Finals was the 76ers against the Trail Blazers. Half, 5 of the 10 starters for the two teams, had just played in the ABA.

So even though you had NBA careers, all of you, you look back on the ABA as a point of pride, right, Artis?

ARTIS GILMORE: Well, no question about it. It was just an incredible time for the ABA just being competitive with the NBA. So a number of things was happening, especially in the financial world, between the two organizations and the entities.

It was just that there was a really huge struggle, especially in the media market, I mean, there was just only, you know, little small black-and-white TVs back in those days.

But the ABA was in just an incredible major struggle just to survive.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah, it was kind of hanging by a thread, but eventually -- go ahead.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: I'll follow up a little bit on what Artis is talking about. Thank God for the ABA, for me and for the guys right here and then the other guys who were a part of the ABA. One thing in terms of transitioning from college in all cases, because there weren't any high schoolers going into the into the ABA -- Spencer was the closest thing with one year at Detroit -- but, you know, it gave us a home.

It was -- it was one for all and all for one. And, you know, you got three guys sitting up here who had the biggest afros in the ABA. He was No. 1, he was No. 2, I was No. 3. And we had such a good relationship with one another.

And it was not -- it was not necessarily my experience in the NBA. Our relationship in the ABA -- you know, Darnell used to tell me how to do my hair: You got to get that fork and you got to get it standing up.

So we'd just laugh, and then we'd go out and play and try to break one another's neck, you know, out there on the court.

So there was a camaraderie that I didn't feel once I got

over into the NBA after five years in the ABA. But that was a project for us to try to work on the NBA and give it a little bit of the ABA feeling.

BOB COSTAS: Darnell, let me put this to you, then. How do you think the ABA affected the NBA once the two leagues essentially merged? Four teams got in -- the Nets, the Spurs, the Nuggets, and, of course, the Pacers.

DARNELL HILLMAN: Well, I think you would have to -- you'd have to look at the ballplayer himself and look at basketball set skill. The ABA, we had big guys going out to the three-point line, facing the hoop, driving to the hoop. The NBA, the big guys had to post up in the middle and play in the paint.

Exciting to watch the ABA ballplayers because they had a lot of different skills; but more than that, their dress attire and how they used to dress up for ball games and how we'd carry on.

And the last thing I'd like to say about the ABA, is different from the NBA, was when I came to the Pacers, this wasn't just a basketball team, but we were a family. We were on the court together and more off the court together.

We'd go on a road trip for two weeks and come back and right now get off the plane and heading out to go hang out with the guys, and the wives are like, "Where are you going? You've been with them for two weeks. When are you going to spend time with me?" So it was a big difference then.

BOB COSTAS: Being here in Indianapolis, we should say that really the Pacers, both historically and certainly at that time, were the flagship franchise of the ABA. The ABA existed for nine seasons. The Pacers won three of the nine championships. Artis, you and the Colonels faced them twice in the Finals and split those two Finals.

That team included Coach Bobby Leonard, Hall of Famer; Mel Daniels, late Mel Daniels, a very great player; the late Roger Brown. I think Bob Netolicky may be in attendance. I don't know for sure if he's here. I do know for sure that one of the greatest ABA players of all time is here, and most of his career was with the Pacers, Freddie Lewis.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: Spencer, just one year in the ABA, but what a year: 30 points per game, sweep all the awards. What are your recollections of the ABA?

SPENCER HAYWOOD: My recollection in the ABA was I was an experimental player because of the fact that I was

the first to leave college and come into a professional league.

And so the ABA said, If you can get 10 points and 7 rebounds, this gambit would work. We will be able to go out and get young players to come in early, and this would be our way of paving a way into the NBA and being comparable to the NBA.

So I went out and got 30 points, 19.5 rebounds per game. And I was telling my daughters. My two daughters are here. They don't know much about my ball. But I was telling them about 54 years ago, Doc, I was here in Indianapolis where I was the MVP, and I was 20 years old in Indianapolis, 54 years ago this week.

(Applause.)

BOB COSTAS: You know, to what Doc was saying earlier, it really is a fraternity. It was only two years out of my life, right out of college. But anytime I'm with any ABA guys, whatever their role is, a person could be a trainer or a broadcaster, player, whatever it is, that immediately bonds us, don't you feel, A?

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: You know, the ABA was also a path for the undersized guys. You know, I mean, there were a lot. Like the NBA pretty much had a standard. All the players that you watch in the NBA, they're generally 6'1" to 7'1" or whatever, but there's some 5'8", 5'9", 5'10" guys, the Billy Kellers of the world and the -- who got their shot in the ABA because of the three-point shot and because of the up-tempo style of play.

BOB COSTAS: Go ahead.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: One more thing. After the merger, when the merger took place, the NBA took everything that you see today, the three-point shooting, the Saturday Night events, everything was from the ABA.

The only thing they left us with was?

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: The ball.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: The ball.

BOB COSTAS: But it's still the last ball on the rack --

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Still the last ball on the rack.

BOB COSTAS: -- in the 3-Point Shooting Contest.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: If you want to go for the money.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah. Well, Doc, lots of guys could dunk before you, but you made the dunk to a broad audience artistic. You won the first Slam Dunk Contest with the foul line dunk in Denver last year of the ABA, and then you carried over into the NBA. And that kind of freewheeling style that some old-school people frowned upon, that improved the game.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Yeah, I don't -- I don't think they frowned upon it a whole lot for very long. And I think that was the ingenious of the Nuggets organization to create the Slam Dunk Championship. Artis was in there as one of the competitors -- oh, no, you weren't in it. You weren't in there, were you?

DARNELL HILLMAN: Well, knowing the ABA, you had to be selected to the All-Star team to be able to participate in the contest.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Oh, okay. Yeah, yeah. Otherwise, he probably would have been the winner.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Hey, Doc --

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: This guy could dunk with anybody.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: One question. What would it be like if our current players, some of the top, top players, like we used to do back then --

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Competed in the Dunk Contest?

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Competed in the Dunk Contest.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Oh, I think -- I think there was only --

(Applause.)

Right there. Let's go. They should -- they should answer that, not me, you know, because I think the fans would like to see --

SPENCER HAYWOOD: They would love it.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: -- the bigger-name players --

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Yes.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: -- out there.

And it's with all due respect to the guys who are --

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Yeah, for sure.



JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: -- in the Dunk Contest.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: But we would never lose --

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: The big names are in the three-point shootout.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Yeah.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: The big names are in the Skills Competition. So to get them back into the Dunk Contest, I think it --

BOB COSTAS: How great was that last night with Sabrina and Steph in the 3-Point Shooting Contest? That was -- that was tremendous.

(Applause.)

Tremendous.

Artis, you were about to say something. Go ahead.

ARTIS GILMORE: Well, I was just going to mention the fact, you know, we're celebrating the month of February, Black History Month, was every month is about history.

But back in those earlier days, that's when basketball, especially the ABA, the mixture and the blend and the challenges that we were experiencing in the entire country, across the country.

And, you know, I was just thinking about just a few short years earlier I was in college, and Martin Luther King was assassinated, in 1968.

So all those things, combination together, was sort of a blend and developing the two leagues. And as Spencer indicated earlier, you know, the league were allowed -- the ABA were allowed to draft the underclass young players. And so that allowed them to catch up and be competitive with the NBA and over the years.

And that's one of the major marks the ABA has left their imprint in the game of basketball.

BOB COSTAS: Absolutely right.

Go ahead, Spencer.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Bob, one more thing. I'm just looking over at Larry Bird here, and I'm thinking, you know, we should have a 3-Point Legend Shootout or something.

(Laughter.)

What do you think, Larry? Hey, Larry. You see what I'm saying?

(Applause.)

Scott, I mean, what --

BOB COSTAS: He's good with it. He raised his hand. He's good with it.

ARTIS GILMORE: I played with him and I watched him win the three-point shootout.

BOB COSTAS: That's a great idea, by the way. Adam Silver, take note.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Larry would go into the locker room and tell everybody they shooting for second place.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Shooting for second place.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: That's what Larry would do.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: He would go in the locker room and tell everybody, "Don't worry about first. You're shooting for second place."

BOB COSTAS: We got to wrap it up, but I'm going to turn to you, Doc, signature player of the ABA. I saw Bill Walton sitting over here. You had a zillion dunks. But some of them are among the most memorable, over Walton in the '77 Finals.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Yeah, they don't show the time he blocked my shot. And he'll talk about that.

(Laughter.)

But I think, for me, I mean, the dunk shot was a big part of my game. I listened to you and Gervin on the podcast. You said, you know, Doc scored a lot of points, did a lot of dunks, but he didn't have a jump shot. And I scored like 30,000 points. I was like --

(Laughter.)

I'm a little pissed at you guys. I'm pissed at you and Ice. I wasn't shooting --

BOB COSTAS: Must have gotten carried away.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: I'm sorry that I got away from your question.

BOB COSTAS: The "Rock the Baby" dunk, Michael Cooper --

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Yeah.

BOB COSTAS: -- defending you, right, against the Lakers in the Finals.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Yeah, that's one of the all-timers. And Michael, you know, we both coach in the BIG3, Ice Cube's league. And, you know, he's sitting in the hallway a lot of times when I come down the hall, and he said, "You know I ain't scared of you. I ain't scared of you."

(Laughter.)

And then he says, you know, of all the people who he's defended, for that play to happen and for him to get posterized by me, who else would be better to be on a poster than me and him versus him and some unknown guy dunking on him.

BOB COSTAS: Exactly. Exactly.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: So we're behind -- we're beyond that right now.

BOB COSTAS: You increased his profile.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: We don't have a problem with that right now.

BOB COSTAS: Right. And the last thing, it wasn't a dunk, but it's one of the great plays in NBA history. If you were confined to ten plays on a highlight reel across all the generations, one of them would be the baseline move in the "Up and Under" also against the Lakers in the Finals.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Again, against the Lakers again.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Yeah.

BOB COSTAS: And Kareem had to be somewhere in the vicinity.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Because it was in the championship series and it was on a Sunday afternoon and, you know, a lot of people saw it over and over and over again.

And, you know, here we are, all these years later, you know, it still comes up every now and then. And thank God

it's in color as opposed to black and white.

BOB COSTAS: Yeah.

DARNELL HILLMAN: If I may share with you, they don't talk about this dunk, and I have yet to see it, but playing against Julius in New York, battling in the ball game, he comes down the floor, he's on the right-hand side of the foul line, and he takes off. The Pacers bench is right there. He takes off with the ball in one hand, and he's waving the ball at the bench as he's flying to the hoop and he throws it down.

We go down to the other end and I asked him very politely, "Julius, please, don't embarrass us anymore like this. Give us a shot, man." Unbelievable.

(Laughter.)

BOB COSTAS: Julius could palm a basketball as if it was --

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: That didn't happen.

DARNELL HILLMAN: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: That did happen.

BOB COSTAS: Wish we could continue --

SPENCER HAYWOOD: (Indiscernible) would be nice, wouldn't it?

BOB COSTAS: It would be. By the way, you threw out a great suggestion.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Yes.

BOB COSTAS: The Legends 3-Point Contest is a great suggestion. And "Larry Legend" is all for it.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Larry is, Larry is --

BOB COSTAS: Right there. He's all for it.

(Applause.)

SPENCER HAYWOOD: Reggie Miller is over here. I mean, come on, guys.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: So you know the sum total of all this is that we really loved our time in the ABA. And, you know, we enjoyed our time in the NBA as well. And, you know, that's what our legacies are all about, how we finished up, not how we started.



But, you know, coming in that side door into the ABA kept us motivated all the time. There was this spirit of esprit de corps, one for all and all for one. When one guy got publicity in a Sports Illustrated magazine or Sport magazine or whatever, you know, the whole league reveled in it because he was representing us. So that was a part of our lives that we'll never forget and we will always cherish.

BOB COSTAS: Spencer Haywood, Artis Gilmore, Indiana's own Darnell Hillman, and "Dr. J" Julius Erving, folks.

(Applause.)

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Thank you, Bob.

BOB COSTAS: Thank you.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: Bob Costas. Yeah.

(Applause.)

DARNELL HILLMAN: Thank you.

JULIUS "DR J" ERVING: I guess we go that way, huh?

BOB COSTAS: And now back to one of the best to ever do it, Ernie Johnson.

SPENCER HAYWOOD: The best. The man.

ERNIE JOHNSON: Thank you, Bob. Thank you, guys. Great stuff.

One of the great things that NBA Cares does, and they do a lot of great things, but one of the great things they do with this Legends Brunch every year is reserve a few tables for the Make-A-Wish kids who come from all over the country.

(Applause.)

And I know a bunch of us have had the chance today to go and visit. And it is so great to have you with us this morning as part of your All-Star experience.

And I know there are just things that happen during the weekend like they didn't expect it yesterday, but then they met Steph Curry right out of the blue, and then they'll be at the arena tonight too. So welcome, kids, and it's great to see you, as always.

Now my pleasure --

(Applause.)

-- to introduce Big Smooth, as referenced earlier, here is Sam Perkins.

(Applause.)

SAM PERKINS: Thank you. I'm going to go off script for a little minute, and you'll get what I'm talking about because it's very warranted.

Before it was Dame Time, it was Miller Time. Before there was Deng Deng, there was Boom Baby. And it's very warranted because this man that I'm about to introduce for your Hometown Hero Award is this year's honoree, Reggie Miller.

(Applause.)

But you can't talk about the Pacers basketball without Reggie Miller. He spent his entire 18-year career here with the Pacers. One of the greatest shooters in the NBA history. He's one of only five jerseys retired by the Pacers.

Now, before I introduce him, I got here, I came here to play with him. And I respect all the players that I've played with, especially on Indiana's team.

And I'm going to tell you a story. I've been debating whether I should tell you this. I don't even know if he remembers. But we're playing against Utah, and we call a timeout. And there's Rick Carlisle and Larry Bird as my coach.

And they drew up a play for Reggie Miller, and they were supposed to get the ball to him, because we didn't have a comfortable lead, but we needed this bucket. So it was drawn up for Reggie.

All right. Timeout is over, and I'm walking out with Reggie, and he says, "You pop out." And I'm like, for a second, for a minute, I'm thinking like this man wants me to make the shot. And all of a sudden I'm like, Do I listen to my coaches who just wrote up the play, or do I listen to Reggie Miller?

Obviously, I listened to Reggie Miller.

(Laughter.)

Because he knows best.

But the thing about that is he made my day. I did pop out, but he made my day because he had the faith in me that I



could make the shot.

And the thing about Reggie, he was a consummate player I thought of at that time. Now, the guy down the street was taking all the oxygen. I thought he would have the face -- he should've been the face of the NBA at the time.

But I respected him a great deal, not only because of that, but because of his tenacity in his workouts and how he approached the game every time and every day I was there with him.

I mean, he was there, even there two hours before the game. I don't even know. He might have slept, you know, after the shootaround there. But the thing is, he was a guy that we all respected and we wanted to support.

So let's take a look at his career as Reggie Miller.

(Video.)

Will you please welcome your Hometown Hero, Reggie Miller.

(Spike Lee enters stage with award.)

SPIKE LEE: Reggie Miller, what's up, baby?

(Laughter.)

What's up, Larry?

I just want to say this is my brother.

REGGIE MILLER: You better be careful, now.

SPIKE LEE: No, it's --

REGGIE MILLER: You better be careful, now.

SPIKE LEE: It's all love, peace and love. Come here. I asked -- when -- several years ago I asked Reggie, "Do people ask you about our relationship?" And what'd you say?

REGGIE MILLER: We're linked together.

SPIKE LEE: And happens to me. Me, we love each other. That thing happened almost 30 years ago.

(Laughter.)

We are friends. We love each other. And as I get older, I've understood that grudges, you gotta let that stuff go.

(Laughter.)

Let that -- Larry, you know what I'm talking about.

(Laughter.)

You got to let that stuff go. Life is too short.

I love this guy. Thank you.

REGGIE MILLER: Thank you, Spike. Thank you.

(Applause.)

And if there was going to be any problem, Dale? I got my other half of my Davis boys over there, Dale Davis. He's always ready. He's always ready to scrap.

(Applause.)

Thank you, Big Smooth. How good would Sam Perkins be in today's game, right? A big man that can pick and pop and shoot like Big Smooth?

I'm floored and honored to be here and to look out, number one, to see all these unbelievable legends. I'm shaking because I don't consider myself a legend, not amongst the people that are in this room.

But to see the love and a lot of my former teammates, to come back home, it's -- it's humbling because when you're put in a position, like a lot of us are in this room, playing a game that you love, it's kind of ironic to be a hometown hero because you're doing what you love and you're supporting the people that you love and you're helping out a community and a fan base that supports and actually loves you.

So to become a hometown hero, you're doing what God put you on the planet to do. And to me, that's help other people. I think that's why we're in this position --

(Applause.)

-- is to be like a Jalen Rose and help other people.

Jalen, iron sharpens iron, my friend. You know, I always go back to that Game 1 versus Philadelphia when we were the first set of teammates to get 40 plus. And I remember third or fourth quarter when we were killing A.I. and the Sixers, and we're coming up, "You take them."

"No, no, no, you take them."

"No, you take them."



Iron sharpens iron, my friend.

Rik Smits, the Dunking Dutchman.

(Applause.)

Man. Metta.

I'll call you Ron Ron because that's how I know you, as Ron Ron. You talk about a dude that could absolutely put the fear of God just by looking at you. And I'm glad he was on our side. Thank you, brother. I appreciate your love.

I wouldn't be here without the support, obviously, of my family. A lot of you know, just like Jalen going through his point person, Gail D'Agostino, who has been with me for the last 30 or so years, who sets everything up.

This is awesome.

The Simon family. You know, we see Mark Cuban and all these newer age owners all huddled up with the team and hanging out, trying to be cool. Herb Simon, Mel Simon, and the whole Simon family, they were doing that in the '80s and the '90s with us. They've been doing this for so long.

Congratulations to you, Herbie, and the Simon family. The best owners in any and of all of professional sports.

(Applause.)

Congratulations to you on a finalist for the NBA, Rick Fusion, Pacers Entertainment.

It's always good to come home. I don't get to come home very often, other than when we're working with Turner, but I get to see the faces.

I mean, this panel here, I mean, that's why I'm wearing my first uncle, the beloved Mel Daniels, God rest his soul.

(Applause.)

To hear these guys speak, and this is what it's all about. And, Adam, you should make it a mandate that today's players attend these brunches because they need to hear these stories from these men, from Spencer.

(Applause.)

The reason why a lot of these guys are making 30, 40, 50 million, Spencer Haywood, the sacrifice he made.

To hear Dr. J and Oscar, Dave Bing. This is awesome. To me, those are the real hometown heroes because, you know -- quick story. You know, I flew in on Wednesday, and on our flight was Oscar Robertson. I'm shaking. I had a mask on. He didn't know who I was. But to watch how people were coming up to him. And I wanted to go up to Oscar and say something.

That's how I look at you guys. That's how I look at the great ABA players and the -- these are legends. You guys are legends.

Did I go up to Oscar? I pulled down my mask. I don't know if he even knew who I was. But I didn't care. Because you know why? That's Oscar Robertson.

(Applause.)

And he earned that respect for me, for me to say, "Thank you, Mr. Robertson." I didn't call him Oscar or the Big O. It was Mister.

So thank you, guys. I truly appreciate being a hometown hero, but we all are, because this is what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to give back to our community, and we're supposed to give back to people that look up to us. To me, that's what a real hometown hero is all about.

So thank you.

(Applause.)

Thank you very much.

And now it's my privilege to present the Legend of the Year Award to "Larry Legend," Larry Bird.

(Applause.)

A 12-time All-Star, a three-time champion and two-time NBA Finals MVP, Larry won the league MVP in three consecutive years. He's also the only player to win the 3-Point Contest while still wearing his warm-up jacket.

(Laughter.)

While Larry's NBA playing career was in Boston, his heart never left Indiana. He joined the Pacers and was the NBA Coach of the Year and the Executive of the Year, becoming the only person to win those two honors in addition to NBA MVP.

(Applause.)

And if you guys want to know what pressure is, pressure is



playing for Larry Bird -- as Big Smooth, Jalen, they can attest to -- playing for Larry Bird and having to go to Boston and win those games in Boston for Larry Bird.

And by the way, we were 7-1 in those games, and I apologize, Larry, for losing that one game.

But those were pressure.

So let's take a look at the legend himself, Larry Bird.

(Video.)

(Applause.)

The man who I patterned my game after, the Legend of the Year, Larry Joe Bird.

(Applause.)

LARRY BIRD: Good afternoon. I have not hit a jump shot in over 30 years, and here I am. Come on. You know, on Thursday night we had the opening ceremonies, and had the privilege of shaking Freddie Lewis's hand. That touched me. I love Freddie Lewis. Played in the ABA. He was a point guard. Very good player.

See, I'm an ABA guy. I grew up with the ABA because that's all we could get on our TV. My dad would go out and tell me how to turn the antenna, and he'll holler at me, "Turn it back." That's how we got the ABA games.

But I was a big ABA guy, and still is. And I played against a lot of the ABA players.

But I just wonder, we have all these legends in here that paved the way for us, if we never got a college scholarship, would we ever be able to play in the NBA?

I don't think so. I think that scholarship that we got in college paved the way for us because we couldn't afford to go to college. You know, if I walked in and asked my dad for money to go to college, and he ain't got no money, he'd probably slap me upside the head and go, "Go get a job like I did."

But I know everybody in here that had an opportunity to get to college and paved the way, and I know for myself, that, once I got in the league, it was a blessing.

It paved the way for my family and I to have a great life, live a great life. I mean, it's just unbelievable of how things turned out for me.

I competed hard. I played the game the way it was

supposed to be played. I played injured. And I played with a lot of pride.

So I owe everything to the NBA and a lot of the players I played against, had some great teammates in Boston.

I also got to coach for three years some of the finest young men you could ever be around. We didn't win a championship, but we got there. We won a lot of games.

And after that I was very fortunate. Herb Simon let me come in the front office for over 20 years.

So I've been around a lot. I know what this league is all about, and I'm very proud of it. I'm proud of today's players. I like the game they play. It opened up for a lot of the players to be able to do some things and show their skills, unlike back in the '80s when on the East Coast we'd hold and grab and push and fight and whatever it took to win games.

But I like our game now.

The one thing I would really like to see is they play hard tonight, and it's tonight in this All-Star Game. I think it's very important.

(Applause.)

When you have the best -- the best players in the world together, you got to compete and you got to play hard and you got to show the fans how good they really are.

So I hope you enjoy your weekend. I'm enjoying mine. Have a good All-Star Game.

(Applause.)

ERNIE JOHNSON: So, was it as I described this morning?

(Applause.)

It's one of the things -- I refer to the job I have, and I've been at "Inside the NBA" for 35 years, it's a "get to" job, not a "got to" job. I get to do this, and I get to be here at All-Star every year and be a part of this brunch.

I'm glad you all were part of it too, and I wish you the best, the best of all possible days on this All-Star Sunday. And thank you much. Love you.

(Applause.)

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