

# [***Dreams of his basketball court: Obama sees All Star hoops at his presidential library***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BKV-DRT1-JBSS-S00H-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; The hoop and change president is enshrining his love for basketball in his presidential library.

The Obama Presidential Center that will rise in Jackson Park in Chicago will feature an athletic complex with a full-size court that the ex-president describes in a new podcast. Its unorthodox inclusion in a presidential library complex will underscore how Obama's love for the game was a key part of his image, his appeal to younger voters and a useful political tool.

"It will also be the first presidential center in which there will be multiple All Star games on there," Obama said on the new "Ways to Win" podcast hosted by his brother-in-law Craig Robinson and University of Kentucky coach John Calipari.

But the youngest living former president won't be lacing them up himself once his court is inaugurated. The shot clock runs down for everyone - even for ex-commanders in chief. Obama, 62, confessed on the podcast that he no longer plays the competitive games of pickup he used to blow off steam as president after seeing friends of a similar age popping their Achilles tendons.

"I have hung 'em up," Obama said. "I played all the way through the presidency," before adding, "the last time I played was November of 2016, so just two months before I left office. Man, I played great that day. I was raining down threes, and had this spin move, finger roll for the win. I was just firing on all cylinders."

Presidents and sports

Almost every recent president has enjoyed a round of golf, including Obama. Ex-President Donald Trump, who used to slam his predecessor for the time he spent on the links, was an obsessive player on his own courses while in office. And President Joe Biden, who has kept his love for the game somewhat quieter, is reputedly - alongside President John Kennedy - one of the best presidential golfers. President Bill Clinton, meanwhile, was a famed jogger.

But it's rare for a president to play a team sport. And since the sitting president is 81 and the presumptive GOP nominee is 77, it's unlikely to happen again soon.

These days, Obama's most public connection with the game he loves is through his March Madness brackets that have a huge post-presidential audience on social media. Ahead of this year's event that begins on Thursday, the ex-president picks UConn to beat Kentucky in the final of the men's tournament and has South Carolina beating Caitlin Clark's Iowa in the women's final.

"The first year I did this, 2009, right? I'd been sworn in. And I picked North Carolina. ... And they won," Obama said. "And my bracket was beautiful and people were pretty impressed. They thought, 'Look at the President United States. He's in the top 4% of all the people who enter in their brackets publicly.' And I was kind of feeling it, and I thought, 'You know what, I think this is what's going to happen every year.'"

Obama added: "And I'm pretty sure each year I've lost since then. So, I have not necessarily picked a winner."

His playing days might be over, but as his bracket choices show, basketball remains what it always was for Obama even before he ran for president - a conduit to a wider audience that adds a dash of cool to his persona.

Early in his political career, Obama viewed himself almost like the star of an NBA team - who can sink the big shots under huge pressure. It was audacious and maybe arrogant. But it gave an up-and-coming politician some swagger.

"I'm LeBron, baby. I can play on this level. I got some game," the then-nationally unknown Obama told the journalist David Mendell before the 2004 Democratic National Convention speech in Boston that made him a political rock star.

From the start, Obama's fondness for basketball - and the fact he was fit and young enough to play it - was used by his campaign as a way to shape an image of a vigorous and athletic candidate and to stress the passing of a torch to a new political generation. It became widely known that he would play basketball with aides as he waited for the results of his primary races against Democratic rival Hillary Clinton. During a tour of the Middle East to demonstrate he could handle foreign policy, then-Sen. Obama drained a long-range shot in front of a gym full of US service members in Kuwait. The subsequent television reports featuring his triumph didn't do him any harm at all.

Once at the White House, Obama converted the White House tennis court so it could be used as a basketball court. Some of his favorite events appeared to be his yearly receptions for the NBA Champions. In 2010, for instance, the 44th president met the late Kobe Bryant and the Los Angeles Lakers at the White House and they presented him with a yellow jersey with his name on the back.

A presidential injury

Obama's physical games of pickup basketball with Cabinet members, aides and others brought in to make up the numbers soon became one of the hottest tickets in Washington. They often took place at a military base or government building near the White House. Sometimes he played on the court in the presidential mansion's backyard. On one notorious occasion in 2010, the famously sharp-elbowed president came off worse in an encounter with an opposing player - a Capitol Hill aide - and ended up with stitches to his mouth.

But even the self-confident Obama sometimes missed his shot. The former president was once embarrassed when he kept hitting the rim while playing on the basketball court on the South Lawn of the White House and he was spotted by a pool of chuckling reporters. He kept trying until he eventually made the basket.

Sometimes the then-president would coach one of his daughters' school basketball games. In 2012, he used March Madness as a diplomatic backdrop, taking British Prime Minister David Cameron to a game in Dayton, Ohio. On the way back to Washington on Air Force One, Obama offered his weary guest the use of the presidential bed in the nose of the aircraft, saying, "I bet Roosevelt never did this for Churchill," according to Cameron's memoir. On another occasion in November 2011, Obama marked Veterans Day at a Michigan State-North Carolina basketball game played on the deck of a moored aircraft carrier in San Diego harbor.

Even though he's no longer seen on the hardboard, Obama has still got game. While campaigning with Biden in Michigan in 2020, he scored a walk off three-pointer in a gym and was clearly delighted, saying, "That's what I do. That's what I do."

On the "Ways to Win" podcast, the former president drew some analogies between his experience at the highest level of ***politics*** and basketball coaches who are trying to motivate their college teams this week.

"Don't get too high when things are going good. Don't get too low when things are going bad. That feels right to me in terms of leadership," Obama said.

That's some advice to offer Biden as he embarks on a tough reelection race, when [*the pair appears together*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/20/politics/barack-obama-joe-biden-donald-trump-obamacare/index.html) at a virtual election rally this weekend to tout the Affordable Care Act on its 14th anniversary.

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