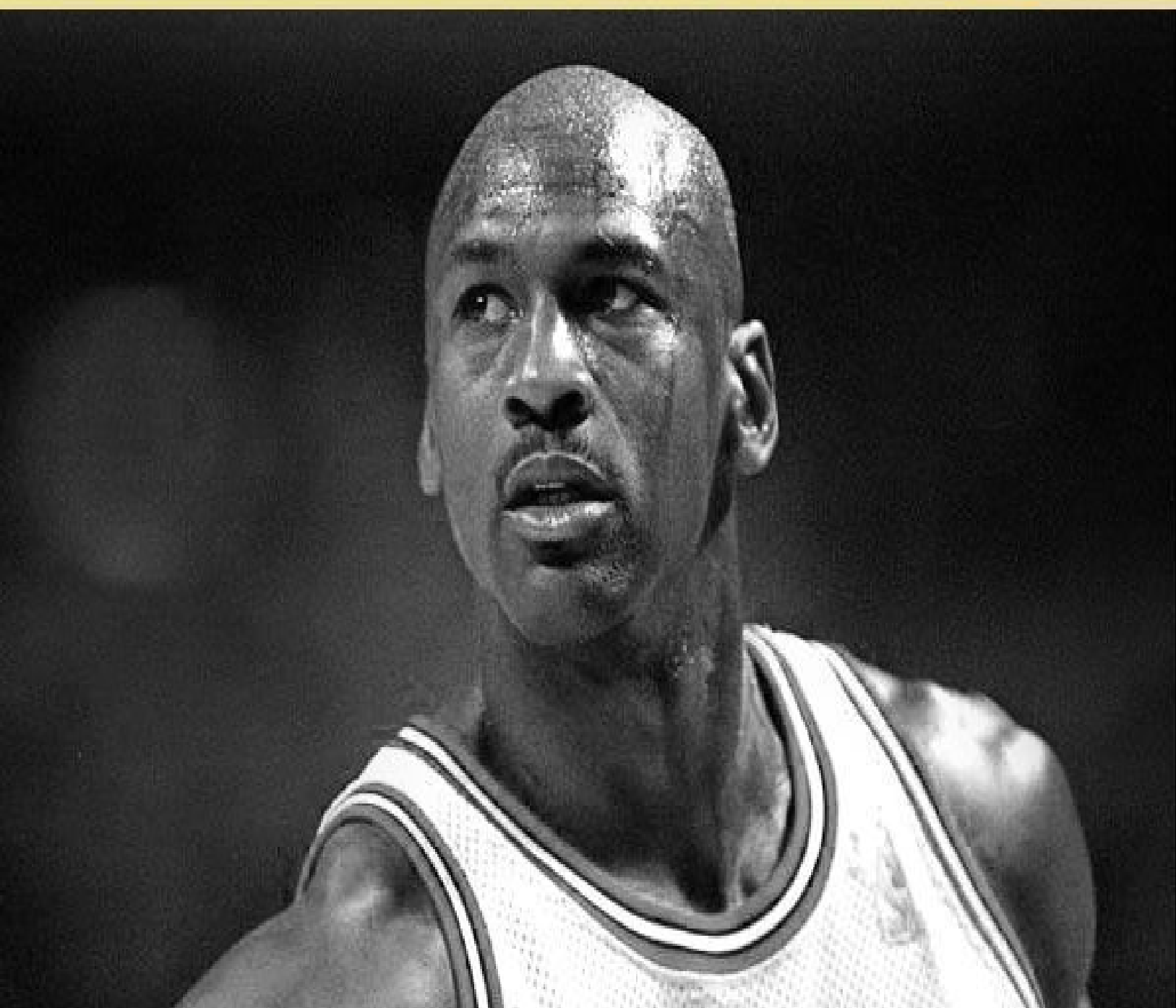


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# MICHAEL JORDAN

The Amazing Story of the Greatest Basketball Player...Ever

CHARLTON BEST

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**Platinum Publishing**

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# Chapter 1 – Once Upon a Time in Wilmington

*"I can accept failure, but I can't accept not trying."*

—  
*Mich  
Jord*

The fourth child of James and Deloris Jordan was born on February 17, 1963 in Brooklyn, New York and was named Michael Jeffrey. Deloris worked as a bank teller and James was an equipment supervisor for General Electric. Soon after Michael was born, the couple felt that the streets and alleys of Brooklyn were unsafe to raise a family. They then decided to move back to James' hometown, Wilmington, North Carolina, where they thought it would be best for Michael and his two older brothers Larry and James Jr. and sister Delois.



*An undated photo of the young Michael Jordan*

Not long after moving to Wilmington, North Carolina, the family welcomed their fifth child Roselyn. As the children were growing up, Deloris noticed that James Jr. exhibited potential leadership qualities, Larry was very athletic and the two girls showed promising artistic talents. She found Michael to be the most combative in the brood but was likewise the most affectionate. At a very young age, she taught her youngest son how to sew, clean and even do the laundry while James taught the boy hard work. They ingrained in him lessons that would keep him from being tempted to join street life.

Michael shared a special bond with his father. Baseball became his first love as he would often play catch in the yard with James. But since he looked up to his Larry so much, he also played his oldest brother's favorite sport: basketball. Michael's love for the

sport intensified when Larry continuously bested him in one-on-one pickup games. Michael took this as a challenge and strived to become a better player than his brother.

## ***Early Disappointments***

Neither James Sr. nor Deloris were tall, nor were his siblings beyond average height. It seemed as though Michael himself would grow short- a very unlikely candidate for the professional basketball career he dreamed about as a kid. To compensate for his height, Michael played harder against his friends and brothers during backyard games. This increased his desire to do better at basketball at a young age.

After finishing his primary education at Ogden Elementary School, Michael went to Trask Junior High School where he played football, baseball and basketball and received certificates of achievement in sports. He was awarded the Dixie Youth Baseball Association's Mr. Baseball in 1975 and was hailed as the Outstanding Athlete in 1977.



*The teenaged Michael Jordan*

As a teenager, he was the only one among his siblings who could not keep a steady job and was generally thought of as the least likely to succeed among them. "I could not keep regular hours. It just wasn't me," he told Gentleman's Quarterly Magazine years later. Instead, he re-directed all of his energies to sports, playing basketball and baseball with the same drive and determination as his siblings and parents had with their work. He also began playing with his tongue sticking out because his father James would always stick out his tongue whenever the latter was deeply concentrating on a task.

Michael attended Emsley A. Laney High School after finishing middle school. His freshman year was plagued with suspensions and trouble in general. His mother would not just leave him alone in the house to do whatever he wanted during his suspension. Instead he brought Michael with her to the bank where she worked and made

him read his books in her presence.

He was not very focused with his studies in both elementary and junior high. But his suspensions had allowed him to mature. From his sophomore year until his senior year, Michael became a B-plus student while continuing to show excellence in sports. He played quarterback for the football team and was also a member of the baseball varsity. In 1980, Michael managed to pitch for the Laney High Varsity Baseball Team forty-five scoreless innings consecutively.

In the fall of 1978, at age fifteen, the sophomore Michael stood five foot eleven and tried his luck with EA Laney High's basketball varsity team for the second time. He had tried during his freshman year but was not accepted. Unfortunately, he again did not make the cut because he did not match the eligibility criteria. His six-foot eight best friend Harvest Leroy Smith was the only sophomore to make it to the team. "I went through the day numb. After school, I hurried home, closed the door to my room and cried so hard. It made me know what disappointment felt like. And I knew I did not want that feeling ever again." he said in an interview years later.

This was not the last time that Michael would try for the team. Even as a child, he had always wanted to grow tall. His disqualification made him even more determined to gain more height and he told this to his mother. Deloris told him to put salt in his shoes and say a prayer. Michael thought this was silly and told his father about it. James Sr. replied "You have it in your heart. The tallness is within you. You can be as tall as you want to be in your thinking."



## ***Success at last***

Over the summer, a very motivated Michael grew four inches and practiced rigorously. "Whenever I was working out and got tired and figured I ought to stop, I'd close my eyes and see that list in the locker without my name on it," Michael later recalled, "and that usually got me going again".

He made it to the Laney High Varsity Basket Ball Team in his junior year. Upon joining the team's roster, Michael averaged around twenty-five points every game over his two seasons of high school play. He focused on basketball over the other sporting events he played and practiced every morning before the school bell rang for the first class.

During Michael's senior year, he was chosen to be part of the McDonald's All American Team after he averaged a triple double with 29.2 points, 11.6 rebounds and 10.1 assists. Michael Jordan is the first player in the history of high school basketball to average a triple double.

On April 11, 1981 in Wichita, Kansas, while playing for the McDonald's All American Team, Michael was able to score two free throws with eleven seconds remaining to give the East a 96-95 win. He was able to finish the game with thirty points. He was hailed as the 1981 McDonald's All-American High School Most Valuable Player.

## Chapter 2 – Tar Heel Jordan

*"Everybody in Wilmington expected me to go to North Carolina, sit on the bench for four years, then go back to Wilmington and work the local gas station."*

–  
Mich  
Jord

Michael Jordan's performance for the high school varsity drew the attention of University of North Carolina assistants Bill Guthridge and Roy Williams. In the summer of 1980, Roy Williams made sure that Michael would attend the Dean Smith Basketball camp. When Michael did, he was so impressed with the boy's skills he offered him a scholarship. UCLA would have been Michael's first choice but they never expressed any interest in him. He was also recruited by Maryland and South Carolina but he chose UNC because he admired David Thompson and its coach Dean Smith.

## ***Freshman Year***

In 1981, Michael Jordan was formally offered by the University of North Carolina a basketball scholarship and he accepted. He majored in Cultural Geography and played basketball for the Tar Heels under the legendary coach Dean Smith. As a freshman, he first played somewhat in the shadows of upperclassmen Sam Perkins and James Worthy. He was regarded as an exciting player, though he was not seen as a dominant one. Still, he was the only second freshman to start every game with the first five.

It was also during his freshman year when Michael played at the 1982 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) championship against the Georgetown Hoyas that was led by future NBA rival Patrick Ewing. Michael Jordan made the clutch jump shot in the final minutes of the game that won them the title with 63-62. Michael later called this winning shot the turning point of his career in basketball. He was nicknamed "Superman" and "Last Shot" by teammates and fans alike. Michael was eventually hailed as the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) 1982 Rookie of the Year after averaging 13.4 points per game on a 53.4% shooting (field goal percentage).

## ***Sophomore Year***

As a sophomore, Michael Jordan led the ACC in the score sheets during the 1982-1983 Season. The Tar Heels won the ACC championship but failed to bag the NCAA title that year. However, he was named by the Sporting News as the College Player of the Year first in 1983 and again in 1984 when he also won the Naismith College Player of the Year. During his three seasons with the Tar Heels, he averaged 17.7 points per game on 54.0 % shooting and was able to add 5.0 rebounds per game.

## ***Olympics***

He was likewise chosen to be part of the NCAA All-American First Team during his sophomore and junior years as a co-captain. The team was under coach Bobby Knight and they competed on the 1984 Summer Olympics. Jordan helped the team win the Gold Medal for the Men's Basketball event.

Deloris Jordan recalled in an interview with ESPN Chicago that the two proudest moments of her life was when Michael's coach told her that his skills had grown to a level that would land him a career with the NBA and when Michael won the Gold for the country. She said in the interview that she remembered the nine-year old Michael telling her in 1972, when Russia won the basketball gold medal, that he would be in the Olympics one day and would win one for the US. And then Michael had done just that.

In the same interview, Larry Jordan recalled the past years when they played together in the varsity team and the years before that when they played baseball as children. He said he was a witness to Michael's effort to improve his basketball skills though they always thought he would become a baseball player someday. He added that he was never jealous of Michael's success because they were raised right and was always taught to support each other.

## Chapter 3 – Growing Horns

*"All I can say is that the people of Chicago are in for a real treat."*

—  
*Bern  
King*

In 1984, against his parent's wishes, Michael Jordan left college early to enter the NBA Draft. He was chosen by the Chicago Bulls during the first round overall as a third pick.

## ***Draft Blunder***

Many had expected that Houston Rocket would snatch up Hakeem Olajuwon from the University of Houston after being given the Number One Pick. It was no surprise when they did. But it came as a surprise to many that the Portland Trail Blazers, who had the second pick, chose Sam Bowie of Kentucky instead of Michael Jordan.

Sam Bowie had suffered from several injuries while playing college ball but they chose him over Michael Jordan because they had just acquired a shooting guard the year before named Clyde Drexler. The selection of Sam Bowie over Michael Jordan is generally considered today as the worst draft blunder of all time. Both Clyde Drexler and Hakeem Olajuwon would later establish themselves as basketball super stars like Michael Jordan. Sam Bowie on the other hand was an injury prone player with a pro career that did not make history.



*The Chicago Bulls rookie*

## ***Chicago Bulls and Fashion Trends***

At that time, The Chicago Bulls were limping through a decade of lackluster performances in the hard court. They were in need of a very good athlete that would serve as a strong leader and would galvanize the team. They found one in Michael Jordan.

Michael Jordan carried the Chicago Bulls to the playoffs- something that had not been seen since 1981. It was a short trip though. The Chicago Bulls lost to the Milwaukee Bucks in the first round series, three to one. In spite of this, Chicago Bulls improved to 38-44 ever since Michael Jordan became part of the starting line up. En route to receiving the Rookie of the Year Award, he was able to set the team's rookie record with 49 points against the Detroit Pistons on February 12, 1985.

Pundits compared him to Julius Erving because of the high-flying playing style he will eventually be known for. Michael continued to dangle his tongue out of his mouth as he took off and levitated to the basket and it came to be known as the first of his signature trademarks. He continued wearing his Tar Heels shorts under his Chicago Bulls uniform. This may have been the reason why he wore longer game shorts. He may have once said that longer game shorts allowed him to bend at the waist and tug the hem for a better resting position, but the trend towards baggy basketball shorts had began and it was not long before every other basket player followed.



## ***Fast Stepper***

Michael Jordan's mesmerizing effect was even rumored to have extended to the referees themselves. It was suggested that the Chicago Bulls rookie was being given a veteran's preferential treatment because he was allowed to take an additional step on his way to the basket instead of being slapped with a travelling violation. Many speculated that Michael easily eluded defenders therefore he just had to be travelling. The issue was cleared with a video breakdown where it was established that Michael Jordan's first step was just so fast and he did not violate any of the rules.



*The rookie and his tongue*

Michael finished third in the season's leading scorer's tally with an average of 28.2 points per game. The season's leaders were New York Knick's Bernard King at 32.9 points per game and Boston Celtic's Larry Bird at 28.7. He also placed Chicago Bulls at the top of the rebounding list with 6.5 rebounds per game as well as the steals tally with 196 steals. In his first year with the NBA, Michael Jordan became the Rookie of the Year.

Despite the fact that at that time Chicago Bulls was still struggling, the attendance at the team's home games was boosted by 87 percent when word began to spread about the rookie phenomenon. Michael Jordan was now no longer a local sports hero. The entire country caught up with the fever as well. Attendance rose significantly in every NBA City when the Chicago Bulls came to play. Even the fans of the opposing team seemed content even if the team they were rooting for lost just as long as "MJ" could put on a show. During his first game in Madison Square Garden against the New York Knicks, the young Michael Jordan was given a prolonged standing ovation by the home crowd- a rare event for an opposing player.

## ***Sidelined but Unstoppable***

Unfortunately, Michael Jordan was sidelined for the better part of the 1985-1986 season because of a foot injury during their third game. Many speculated that Michael would miss the rest of the season. But on March 15, 1986, after being able to convince the team's owners and the coaches to allow him to play, Michael Jordan made a triumphant return after missing 64 games. He was able to lead the Chicago Bulls get a berth in the playoffs despite the team's 30-52 record.

The Chicago Bulls came face to face with the Boston Celtics and their popular star Larry Bird in the first round. They lost three games straight to the Boston Celtics, but Michael Jordan was able to score 49 points in Game One and 63 points on Game Two at the Boston Garden. This spectacular show of athleticism established a single-game play off scoring record. Unfortunately, the Boston Celtics prevailed that night with a 135-131 victory in a double overtime. Larry Bird, the league MVP for that season, later remarked "I didn't think anyone was capable of doing what Michael did to us. He is the most exciting, awesome player in the game today. I think it's just God disguised as Michael Jordan."

The Chicago Bulls entered the 1986-1987 playoffs with a new head coach Doug Collins and improved their standing 40-42. In the latter part of November and in the first weeks of December, Michael Jordan was unstoppable. He was able to score more than forty points in nine straight games. He was such an offensive force and he carried his teammates that when their then assistant coach Tex Winter told him "There is no 'I' in the word 'team'", the rookie was quick to reply "There is in the word 'win'."

On their February 26 game against the New Jersey Nets, Michael delivered 58 points and a record of 26 of 27 free throws. A week later in a game against the Detroit Pistons, he poured 61 points. On April 16, he shot 61 points in their game against the Atlanta Hawks.

## ***Record breaking***

In that season alone, Michael Jordan became the very first NBA player to reach 3,000 points since Wilt Chamberlain achieved the feat in the 1962-1963 season. Needless to say, Michael led the league by scoring an average of 37.1 points in every game. This was his career high for a single season. He was also able to set the Chicago Bulls single season record for points with 3,041, free throws with 833, field goals with 1,098 and steals with 236. He displayed his defensive prowess effectively and became the very first player in the entire NBA history to set the record of more than 200 steals and 100 blocks in a single season. For this excellent performance, Michael, was rewarded with the first in a series of All-NBA First Team Selection.

Still, victory remained elusive. The Chicago Bulls may have won 40 games and had advanced to the play offs for the third straight time but they were again eliminated by the Boston Celtics during the first round of the playoffs for the 1986-1987 season.

For a lot of fans, the team's record was but a secondary concern. Their eyes were all on the new Chicago Bulls star Michael Jordan. He combined several qualities that the public was looking for in a star athlete: good looks, excellent athletic skill and prowess as well as, more importantly, a scandal-free image. It was no wonder that advertisers were quick to court the NBA's newest rising star for the commercial endorsement of their products.

## ***Endorsements***

### **Nike**

One of first of these companies was the clothing and footwear company Nike. When Michael gave the thumbs up in endorsing for them, Nike made a new line of shoes called "Air Jordan". The name was taken from Michael's ability to soar four feet above the ground as he took off for a dunk from some distance. Nike's sagging sneakers sales saw a quick boost and earned in its first year of sales an estimated amount of \$ 130 million. MJ was said to have pocketed a fat share of the profits. A version of "Air Jordan" he was seen wearing in his first preseason was considered in violation of the so-called "uniformity of uniform" rule. Though he would be fined if he kept wearing it, Michael occasionally did and the demand for that version never wavered. In fact, the sales kept climbing up.

One of the sneaker's more popular television commercial featured Spike Lee as Mars Blackmon who attempted to find the source of Michael Jordan's prowess and became convinced that "It's gotta be the shoes." The media hype and increasing demand for the shoes even brought a spate of so-called "shoe-jackings" where people wearing the shoes were robbed by street thugs of their "Air Jordan" at gunpoint.



*The signature Air Jordan dunk*

### **Others**

His other endorsement contract came from Chevrolet, McDonald's, Coca-cola and Wheaties Cereal. He also had endorsement deals from smaller businesses situated in the Chicago area. As Sports Illustrated writer David Halberstam said in an article "Jordan is the first super-athlete of the satellite age, the first professional player to benefit on a grand scale from a global

audience for his talents and his products. Jordan has created a kind of fame that exceeds sports. He is both an athlete and an entertainer. He plays in the age the satellite to an audience vastly larger than was possible in the past and is thus the first great athlete of the wired world."

Despite being lavished with all the attention, Michael Jordan never lost his sense of humility. He did not make any snide remarks about Portland Trail Blazers for not picking him. He even told Sports Illustrated "He [Bowie] fits in better than I would. They have an overabundance of big guards and small forwards."

In 1986, Michael Jordan returned to the University of North Carolina to finish his degree in cultural geography. Three years later, he married his girlfriend Juanita Vanoy. Their marriage would give them three children: Jeffrey Michael, Marcus James and Jasmine Mickael.

## Chapter 4 – The Charge of the Chicago Bulls

*“The thing about Michael is he takes nothing for granted. When he first came into the league in 1984, he was primarily a penetrator. His outside shooting wasn’t up to professional standards. So he put in his gym time in the off-season, shooting hundreds of shots each day. Eventually, he became a deadly three-point shooter.”*

—  
*Phil  
Jack.*

## ***Team Player***

In 1987, it was a well known fact that Michael Jordan was a force to reckon with on the hard court. In his first three seasons with the Chicago Bulls, the team advanced to great heights. But he can only do so much. What he needed was a very good supporting cast to help the team win a title.

The Chicago Bulls tried to address that problem during the 1987 NBA Draft. Jerry Krause, the Vice President for Basketball Operations was able to acquire two players that would be vital to the team's future success. With two picks in the top ten, Jerry Krause chose Horace Grant and Olden Polynice. He then traded Olden Polynice to the Seattle Supersonics for the said team's fifth pick, Scottie Pippen.

With Scottie Pippen and Horace Grant on board along with Michael Jordan, the Chicago Bulls showed great improvement during the 1987-1988 season. They were able to forge a 50-32 record- their best since the 1973-1974 season. They made it to the first round of the playoffs for the very first time since Michael Jordan joined the Chicago Bulls after they bested the Cleveland Cavaliers in five games. But as fate would have it, Chicago Bulls bowed out during the Eastern Conference Semifinals to the more experienced team of physical players dubbed as the "Bad Boys", the Isaiah Thomas-led Detroit Pistons.

Michael Jordan was again the leader of the scoreboards for the season by averaging 35.0 points per game on a 53.5% shooting percentage. He also averaged his league high 3.16 steals per game and an average of 1.6 with blocks. He won his first NBA Most Valuable Player Award that season and was also named as the Defensive Player of the Year. He also won the NBA Slam-Dunk Championship as well as the All-NBA First Team Award.

## **1988-1989**

The Chicago Bulls started the 1988-1989 season with seven new faces on their player's roster. Among the seven that Jerry Krause had acquired were Craig Hodges from the Phoenix Suns and the seven foot-one center Bill Cartwright from the New York Knicks. As the team struggled to adjust to these new players, the Chicago Bulls' record slipped 47-35 even if they made the regular season a tune up for the coming playoffs.

In one of the 1988 games against the Utah Jazz, MJ dunked over the 6'1" John Stockton. A Utah Jazz fan heckled Michael by shouting "Why don't you dunk on somebody your own size?" The next time Michael Jordan saw the opportunity to make another dunk, he dunked on Utah Jazz's 6'11 center Melvin Turpin. He then turned to the heckler and asked "Was he big enough?"

For the third time in the franchise history of the Chicago Bulls, the team was able to advance to the conference finals after besting the New York Knicks in six games and the Cleveland Cavaliers along the way. The series with the Cleveland Cavaliers included one of Michael Jordan's career highlights when he scored a buzzer-beater floating jumper over Craig Ehlo during the series' fifth and final game. The Chicago Bulls were trailing 100-99 in the closing seconds and MJ got the ball in the front court on the right side. He dribbled to his left into the foul circle and took off for a jump shot. Craig Ehlo leaped to block the shot and get his hand on the way. But Michael pulled the ball back and waited as though he was suspended in mid-air until Craig Ehlo passed him. With Craig Ehlo back on the floor, MJ released the shot which went right through the hoop as the buzzer sounded. The Cleveland crowd could only stare in disbelief while Michael Jordan pumped his fist in jubilation. The shot has become one of the most replayed moments in the history of sports television.

In the Eastern Conference, they took a two-games-to-one lead over the Detroit Pistons. But the "Bad Boys" would not bow so easily as they won the next three games and eventually won the series.



They utilized a method they called "Jordan Rules" in guarding the Chicago Bulls star. It primarily consisted of double and triple teaming him whenever he had the ball.

Michael Jordan still led for the third straight year in terms of scoring with 32.5 point per game on 53.8% shooting from the field. He also averaged 8 rebounds per game and had an average of 8 assists per game.

## **1989-1990**

The 1989-1990 season was a better charge of the Chicago Bulls. Phil Jackson took over the coaching helm from Doug Collins. Phil Jackson was a former basketball player that had spent thirteen years in NBA and eleven of them were with the New York Knicks. In 1985, he was named as the Continental Basketball Association's Coach of the Year before hooking up with Chicago Bulls as an assistant coach. Under his tutelage, Chicago Bulls instituted the famous triangle offense. The play constituted of a fluid cutting and passing system that created opportunities that enabled all five players on the floor to score a basket. But on instances when the play broke down and the shot clock waned, Michael Jordan was free to create his own shot.

With Phil Jackson now in control of the team, Chicago Bulls gelled and cruised its way to 55-27 record and make it again to the Eastern Conference finals. Starting in November, Chicago Bulls won fifteen consecutive home games and eight-game road winning streak. This was the longest game road winning streak in the team's franchise history. By midseason, Chicago Bulls was playing solid ball. Scottie Pippen and Michael Jordan made it to the All-Star team.

### **Winning streak...**

Chicago Bulls was roaring after the break. They closed the season with 27- which included a pair of nine-game winning streaks.

On March 28, Michael Jordan made his all-time high by scoring 69 points in against the Cleveland Cavaliers in a 117-113 overtime win . Michael Jordan was again at the league's lead with scoring by averaging 33.6 points per game on a 52.6% shooting from the field along with 6.9 rebounds per game and 6.3 assists per game. He also became a three point threat by posting a percentage of .376- a hundred percent points above his previous record.

### **...but ultimate defeat**

And again, despite being able to push the series to seven games, the Detroit Pistons was again there for the third time to halt

their charge. Detroit Pistons finished four games ahead of the Chicago Bulls in the Central Division. MJ and his teammates may have won the first two rounds of the playoffs by eliminating the Milwaukee Bucks and the Philadelphia 76ers, but it was a different story against the Detroit Pistons. For the second straight year, the "Bad Boys" won the Eastern Conference finals and their second consecutive NBA championship.

This third consecutive defeat at the playoffs to the Detroit Pistons ignited talks that scoring champion Michael Jordan could not lead Chicago Bulls to attain a title. He himself admitted that despite establishing himself as the greatest individual talent in the current game in just three seasons and had single-handedly turned the Chicago Bulls NBA's hottest sensation, they still needed to win the title. "Until we win a championship, there will always be something missing." he said wistfully.

## Chapter 5 – The Air Up There

*"There's Michael Jordan and then there is the rest of us."*

—  
*Mag  
John*

## ***Stolen Shirt***

Michael Jordan's jersey number 23 had become as popular as himself. But he wore the number 12 in one of his games during the 1990-1991 season. He wore it only once in a game after an employee of the Orlando Magic Arena stole his uniform. The number 12 jersey was his backup uniform and it didn't even have his last name on it. Still he was able to rain 49 points to lead the Chicago Bulls in a win against Orlando Magic.

It was in the same season when Michael Jordan won his second MVP award. He averaged 31.5 points per game on 53.9% shooting, 5.5 assists per game and 6.0 rebounds per game during the regular season where they were able to set another franchise record with 61 wins. The team was also able to land the top spot in their division for the first time after sixteen years.

Chicago Bulls out-gunned the Philadelphia 76ers and the New York Knicks in the first two rounds of the playoffs and advanced to the Eastern Conference Finals where they found the Detroit Pistons waiting for them. But this time around Chicago Bulls dominated their bitter rival in a surprising sweep. During the fourth and final game, Isaiah Thomas led the "Bad Boys" of the court before the last few seconds of the game had concluded. Instead of shaking hands with Michael Jordan and his team, majority of the Detroit Pistons went straight to their lockers.

## ***NBA Champions...Finally***

The team was able to compile an impressive 15-2 record in the playoffs and advanced eagerly to the NBA finals for the first time in the history of their franchise. The 1991 NBA Finals was to be a match up between the Chicago Bulls and the Los Angeles Lakers. But it was seen by many as a game between two of the sport's most charismatic figures: Michael Jordan and Magic Johnson. The Los Angeles Lakers bagged the first win of the series but Chicago Bulls came back with a vengeance and won four straight games to shelf the last remnants of the so-called "Showtime" Lakers (Magic Johnson was due to retire before the start of the next season).



*The first championship Title: A tear-jerker*

One of the most memorable moments in the series was on Game 2 when Michael Jordan attempted a dunk. Sam Perkins rose to block him but MJ switched the ball from his right hand to his left while in mid-air for a lay-up. In his very first Finals appearance, he posted an average of 31.2 points on 56% shooting from the field, 6.6 rebounds, 11.4 assists, 1.4 blocks and 2.8 steals.

MJ scored 30 points and made 10 assist in Game 5 which landed them a 108-101 victory against the Los Angeles Lakers. It gave them the first NBA championship title in the franchise's 25-year history.

Michael Jordan won his first NBA Finals MVP award. He was in tears as he cradled the NBA Finals trophy in his arms. This was only the beginning of the rampage of the Chicago Bulls and Michael Jordan.

## 1991-1992

The 1991-1992 season saw no decline in the Chicago Bulls' performance as they continued to show dominance by establishing a record of 67-15 which bested their 1990-1991 franchise record. MJ was awarded his second consecutive MVP title after averaging 30.1 points per game on 52% shooting from the field, 6.1 assists, and 6.4 rebounds.

Chicago Bulls won over the New York Knicks after a physical seven-game series in the second round of the playoffs. They then demolished the Cleveland Cavaliers once again in six games of the Conference Finals and finally came head to head with the Portland Trail Blazers led by Clyde Drexler. The meeting of these two teams in the finals generated a media hype of a Michael "Air" Jordan versus Clyde "The Glide" Drexler which was comparable to the Magic Johnson-Larry Bird rivalry.



*Magic Johnson Vs. Michael Jordan*

By this time, MJ had shaved his head completely bald. This made him more recognizable by his dark rounded silhouette alone while it triggered another trend. It was also said that he became really demanding of his team mates and he ruffled more than a few feathers with his criticisms. But what he lacked in interpersonal relationship, he more than made up with his performance in the hard court.

During the first game of the finals, "His Airness" opened with a Finals-record setting of 35 points in the first half alone, along with another record of six three-point field goals. After Michael Jordan sank the sixth three-pointer, he was seen jogging down the court

shrugging while he looked outside, as if saying "I can not believe I am actually doing this." Chicago Bulls won that game but Clyde Drexler and his boys were not to be beaten easily. They bounced right back and was about to force Chicago Bulls to a Game 7 when they took the lead during the fourth quarter of Game 6 with a 79-64 lead. But Chicago Bulls was unstoppable. They won the game with a score of 97-93 and clinched the title. This made the Chicago Bulls the fourth NBA franchise to win back-to-back titles.

MJ was crowned as the Finals MVP for the second consecutive time. He ended the series with an average of 35.8 points per game on 53% shooting from the field, 6.5 assists and 4.8 rebounds.



## ***"His Airness"***

The following 1992-1993 season, MJ's consecutive wins for the MVP seasons grinded to a halt as the award was given to his friend Charles Barkley of the Phoenix Suns. Michael's records were still impressive though with averages of 32.6 points per game, 6.7 rebounds per game and 5.5 assists per game.

MJ led the Chicago Bulls past Patrick Ewing and his New York Knicks for the fourth time in five successive seasons. They won the eastern Conference Finals in six games without having the home court advantage. Michael sank 54 points to win game 4 with 105-95. The turning point of the series was on Game 5 when he made a triple double with 29 points, 14 assists and 10 rebounds.



*MJ on the 1993 NBA Finals*

As fate would have it, Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley met on the hard court when both Chicago Bulls and the Phoenix Suns both made it to the 1993 NBA Finals. It was Chicago Bulls who brought home the trophy for the third straight time with a game-finishing shot made by John Paxson and a timely last second block by Horace Grant. But it was "His Airness" that was the catalyst. His Finals record averaged at 41.0 points per game. This broke the previous record set by Rick Barry for the highest scoring average in a Finals series. He also became the first player in the history of NBA to win three consecutive Finals MVP awards. The victory that would have been impossible without MJ made the Chicago Bulls the first NBA franchise in 27 seasons to win three straight championships.

The Chicago Bulls' first victorious "Threepeat" capped Michael Jordan's first seven-year run with the NBA where he was able to attain three championships and seven scoring titles. Michael Jordan had evolved from a basketball star to become something of a folk hero. During the early part of his career with the NBA, he

attained a Peter Pan-like status with his gravity-defying jumps and dunks. But as his career progressed, Peter Pan became more like the Pied Piper of Hamelin as he won a legion of young fans who he asked to emulate him with his sports drink advertising slogan "Be Like Mike"

## *1992 Olympics*



*The 1992 Dream Team*

In 1992, The Olympic Committee had voted to lift the ban which prohibited professional athletes from participating in the 25<sup>th</sup> Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain. Michael Jordan joined NBA Stars Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Patrick Ewing, Charles Barkley, John Stockton, Chris Mullin, Scottie Pippen, Karl Malone and Clyde Drexler to form the "Dream Team". They were treated by their opponents as basketball royalty and were idolized like pop icons by fans all over the world. They won the gold medal by winning eight straight games and scoring more than a hundred points in each game. Michael averaged only 14.9 points per game in the series due to frequent blowouts. He may have finished second in the team scoring, but he was the only player to start all their games. This was the second Olympic gold that he had won. It made him, Patrick Ewing and Chris Mullin the only American men's basketball players to win Olympic gold medals both as amateurs and professionals.

## Chapter 6 – Jordan on the Mound

*"When I leave the game, I'll leave on top. That's the only way I'll walk away. I don't want to leave after my feet have slowed, my hands aren't as quick or my eyesight isn't as sharp. I don't want people to remember me that way. I want the people to remember me that way. I want people to remember me playing exactly the kind of game I'm capable of playing right now. Nothing less."*

—  
Mich  
Jord

Despite the triumphs and accolades, slowly there were signs were showing that "His Airness" was beginning to get tired of his celebrity status and other hassles in his life which was not related with basketball.

## ***Gambling***

Negative publicity began as early as the 1980's when teenagers were said to have resorted to violent means just to attain a pair of Air Jordan sneaker which were priced at \$100. Later, MJ had to defend himself against accusations of compulsive gambling on card games and golf.

He was subjected to investigation by the league twice because of his alleged gambling activities. The first was in 1991 when he admitted betting a minimum of \$50,000.00 on golf games with James "Slim" Boulter, who was later convicted of selling cocaine.

In 1993, while Chicago Bulls was on its spectacular playoff run, a controversy flooded the airwaves and the print media when MJ was spotted gambling in Atlantic City, New Jersey and was reported to have incurred a loss of \$57,000.00. This was a night before a scheduled Eastern Conference Finals game against the New York Knicks. Author/Businessman Richard Esquinas likewise mentioned in a book he had written that he had allegedly won \$1.25 million from MJ in a game of golf.

"His Airness" claimed that he never made any bets near the million dollar mark in a golf game and that he only gambles for recreation.

These revelations prompted the league to initiate a second investigation regarding Michael Jordan's off-court gambling issues. The investigation headed by former federal judge Frederick Lacey concluded that there was no evidence to prove that the Chicago Bulls Star had violated any of the NBA's regulations with his actions. Some critics however claimed that the investigations on MJ's alleged gambling activities were "soft" because he was a "powerful box office draw" for the league.

Years later, Michael would admit to Ed Bradley at the CBS evening show called 60 Minutes that he had made reckless decisions when gambling. "Yeah, I've gotten myself into situations where I would not walk away and I've pushed the envelope. Is that compulsive? Yeah, it depends on how you look at it. If you are willing

to jeopardize your livelihood and your family, then yeah." But he did tell the talk show host that his gambling never jeopardized his livelihood or his family.

## ***Tragedy***

On the summer of 1993, a tragedy rocked Michael Jordan's seemingly perfect life. His father James Jordan Sr.'s 1993 Lexus was found stripped bare off Interstate 95 on August 5, 1993. The following day, it was announced that a body had been found three days earlier in a South Carolina swamp with a bullet wound in the chest. Its dental records matched those of the NBA star's father. Further investigation conducted by the authorities disclosed that James Jordan Sr. was killed on July 23, 1993 at a highway rest area in Lumberton, North Carolina by teenagers Daniel Andre Green and Larry Martin Demery during a botched robbery attempt. Both perpetrators were caught, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment after they were traced from the calls using the victim's cellular phone.

## ***A Father's Dream***

Sixty-two days later on October 6, 1993, Michael Jordan dropped a bomb by announcing his retirement from the game at the age of thirty. This was three days before the investigation of his gambling activities was closed. MJ's announcement came as a shock for NBA and it appeared on the front pages of newspapers around the globe.

A few months before his father was murdered, he had also told People magazine that he wanted to end the "strange isolated existence" he leads in a constant effort to avoid being mobbed by the media and fans alike. He said in the interview "I feel I'm at the stage of my career when it's tough to move up. I can only maintain and be consistent. I've set such high standards. You lose a bit of joy as you move on."

No one was certain what he would do next. Some thought he would take a year off to grieve since it was known to everybody how close he was to his father. Others said he would go and look for a white collar job to practice his degree in cultural geography. And there were also others who said he would try his luck with other sports, like golf.

But it was not golf that Michael Jordan would be playing next. Chicago Bulls Chairman Jerry Reinsdorf asked MJ what he wanted to do next. His reply was "I want to play baseball. It's my father's dream that I become a baseball player."



*Baseball Mike*

On February 7, 1994, thirty-one year old Michael Jordan signed a minor-league contract to play for the Birmingham Barons. The Birmingham Barons is a Double A affiliate of the Chicago White Sox and was also chaired by Jerry Reinsdorf, who continued to honor MJ's basketball contract during his years with baseball. MJ reported for spring training and was assigned to the minor league



baseball team on March 31, 1994.

Michael's professional baseball debut went 0-3 and was lost to the Chattanooga Lookouts in 10-3. He finished the 1995 minor league season with a batting average of .202 with 114 strikeouts in 436 at-bats. He was able to set a record of 30 stolen bases, 51 RBI's and 11 errors. This record made him one of the six minor league baseball players to reach that total for that season alone. In 1994, he also played for the Scottsdale Scorpions during the Arizona Fall League. He batted .252 against the top prospects in the minor league. His presence in the Minor League drew a larger audience than it was previously accustomed to.

On the first of November 1994, MJ's jersey number 23 was retired by the Chicago Bulls during a ceremony that was conducted when the permanent sculpture called "The Spirit" was erected outside the new United Center.

## ***The Bulls after Jordan***

The Chicago Bulls proved in the 1993-1994 that there is life without "His Airness". They were not able to win their fourth consecutive championship title, but they were able to post a record of 55-27, second behind the Atlanta Hawks for the Central Division. They were able to advance to the Eastern Conference Semifinals but was eliminated by the New York Knicks for the first time after four consecutive playoff games. It took the New York Knicks seven games to achieve the feat.

In the absence of Michael Jordan, Scottie Pippen stepped up and displayed grace under pressure in all facets of the sport. He became the lead vote-getter for the NBA All-Defensive Team as well as the All-NBA First Team. He won the MVP award for the 1994 NBA All-Star Game where he was joined for the first time by his teammates BJ Armstrong and Horace Grant. Scottie Pippen ranked No. 8 in the league in terms of scoring with 22.0 points per game, No. 23 in terms of rebounds with 8.7 rebounds per game, No. 19 in assists with 5.6 assists per game and No. 2 in steals with 2.93 per game.

Tony Kukoc played an excellent season and gave the franchise confidence in what the future holds for them. He had difficulty adjusting to the NBA at first but eventually made his way to the NBA All-Rookie Second Team after scoring an average of 10.9 points per game. The rookie sank several winning shots during the season, including a last-second three-point shot when he went head to head with the New York Knicks in Game 3 of the conference semis. He was seen as the one of the team's focal points after Horace Grant left to join Orlando Magic.

## *Space Jam*



*A scene from Space Jam*

The only time that the public had seen Michael Jordan playing basketball after he retired was with Warner Bros.' Looney Tunes cartoon characters in 1993. He appeared in a Nike commercial shown during the 1993 Super Bowl XXVII with Bugs Bunny playing basketball against Martians. This Super Bowl advertisement would later inspire a full length live action/animated movie entitled "Space Jam" which starred MJ and Bugs Bunny and other Looney Tunes Characters. The story was set during Michael Jordan's 1993 retirement. One of the movies highlights was when Elmer Fudd dunked with his tongue sticking out like MJ. It also featured NBA Stars Patrick Ewing, Larry Johnson and Charles Barkley and grossed \$ 230 million world wide.

## Chapter 7 – His Airness Returns

*"If you're trying to achieve, there will be roadblocks. I've had them; everybody has had them. But obstacles don't have to stop you. If you run into a wall, don't turn around and give up. Figure out how to climb it, go through it, or work around it. You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them."*

—  
Mich  
Jord

The 1994-1995 season began for Chicago Bulls in a new arena with Michael "Air" Jordan as a memory that reminded them of past glories. After losing the power forward Horace Grant, Chicago Bulls was but a shadow of its former self. They badly needed a boost despite the best efforts of Scottie Pippen and Tony Kukoc.

The boost came while they were struggling during the mid-season to secure a place in the playoffs when Michael Jordan called Chicago Bulls guard BJ Armstrong and invited him for breakfast. The meal led to an impromptu shoot-around. Michael realized how much he missed basketball and longed to get back to in the hard court.

The 1995 labor dispute between team owners and baseball players had delayed the start of the season. This left Michael disappointed with his attempt to make it in baseball and used the opportunity to return to basketball. Amidst much fanfare, "His Airness" announced in March 18, 1995 press conference his return to the hard court with two words "I'm back." This became one of the most memorable returns of a player in NBA history.

The Chicago Bulls only had 17 games remaining in the season when MJ returned, now sporting a #45 jersey instead of his popular #23. #45 was his brother's number and to him #23 had already retired.

## ***Comeback Blues***

Sports commentators were quick to notice that his time away made an obvious difference in his game. Being away from the hard court for twenty-one months, he acknowledged that he was indeed rusty. He was only able to score 19 points in his comeback game versus the Indiana Pacers though the game had the highest Nielsen rating of a regular season NBA game since 1975. This led many to wonder if his advanced age of 32 was partly responsible for this as well though he sank the winning jump shot in his fourth game comeback against the Atlanta Hawks. He averaged 26.9 points per game in the said remaining games which Chicago Bulls finished with a record of 13-4.

Perhaps the memorable game of MJ's first comeback was during his sixth game dubbed as "Double Nickel". He was able to score 55 points with spinning lay ups and fade-away jumps in the game against the New York Knicks. During the last moments of a tied game, "His Airness" drew attention by dribbling around the perimeter then passing the ball to Bill Wennington who was wide open and was able to convert it to a winning point to land a 113-111 victory.

Coach Phil Jackson said after game "It's rare that players can live quite up to New York. I've seen a lot of them fall flat on their faces because of the pressure to perform there. But he had the whole evening in the palm of his hand. Sometimes the game just seems to gravitate into his grasp."

MJ poured 31.5 points per game in the playoff. But it was not enough to defeat the Orlando Magic led by Shaquille O'Neal and their former teammate Horace Grant. According to Orlando Magic's Nick Anderson (who on Game 1 stripped MJ from behind which lead to the game-winning basket for his team),"He did not look like the old Michael Jordan". An extra-motivated MJ had again worn his old number after that game. This was meant to recapture his old appeal but all it did was incur fines from the league because Chicago Bulls had failed to notify NBA in advance regarding the number change. Chicago Bulls bowed out of the series after six games.

## ***Getting the ram back into the rod***

Michael Jordan used the time during the off-season to retrain his body for basketball and work on a playing style that capitalized on his maturity. He improved his jump shots until they were deadly accurate.

With MJ on the lead and the addition of the rebound specialist Dennis Rodman, they dominated the league by starting the season with a 41-3 record and finishing it with the best regular season record in the history of the NBA: a whopping 72-10. "His Airness" lead the scoring with 30.4 points per game average and won both the league's All-Star Game and regular season MVP awards. He also became the tenth NBA player that scored 25 000 career points and the second fastest after Wilt Chamberlain to reach the mark. Jeff Coplon of the New York Times Biographical Service observed "He had has traded risk for feel, nerve for guile, spectacle for efficiency... and because he is Jordan, even his efficiency can seem spectacular"

During the playoffs, Chicago Bulls lost thrice only and bested the Seattle Super Sonics in NBA Finals in six games. Few of those who witnessed the last game of the series would forget the sight of "His Airness" falling to his knees with his head bent over the winning ball. This was a moment of bittersweet victory for Michael because the game was played on Father's Day, three years after the untimely passing of James Jordan Sr.

MJ was hailed as the Finals MVP for a record fourth time. He had surpassed Magic Johnson's three Finals MVP awards.

The 1996-1997 season began for the defending champions with a 69-11 record. They narrowly missed out a second consecutive 70-win season after losing the lat two games and finished with 69-13 instead. NBA MVP award of the season was not won by "His Airness" as it went to Karl Malone. It was not an easy road to the finals though. MJ and Scottie Pippen had to carry the team after Toni Kukoc and Luc Longley was injured and Dennis Rodman was suspended and had been under constant scrutiny of the media. Still, Chicago Bulls prevailed over Atlanta Hawks to win the Central

Division in 13 games.

MJ made more NBA history along the way when he became the first player in NBA history that was able to record a triple-double at the All-Star game with 14 points, 11 assists and 11 rebounds.

Chicago Bulls advanced to the Finals to face the new MVP and his Utah Jazz. The faceoff featured two of the memorable clutch efforts made by MJ in his career. The first was on Game 1 when Chicago Bulls pocketed the win with a buzzer-beater jump shot. The second was in Game 5 when the series was tied at 2-2 and Michael Jordan scored the game deciding three-point shot with less than a minute remaining despite being dehydrated and feverish because of a stomach virus. Chicago Bulls won that game with a 90-88 score and took home the championship in six games.

For the fifth time around, MJ was hailed as the Finals MVP. He and Phil Jackson signed new one-year contracts that would provide the franchise to bag another "three-peat" for the second time in the decade.

MJ's other professional life as a businessman was always kept on track. His endorsement deals with companies such as Wheaties and Nike along with his own Golf Company and products like the Michael Jordan cologne(which was said to have sold 1.5 million bottles within the first two months of its release in the market) made him a multimillionaire. In 1997, he was ranked as the highest paid athlete in the world after being signed for a contract worth \$30 million. It was said to be the largest one-year salary in the history of sports. His endorsement deals reached an approximate of \$40 million a year.

Chicago Bulls began the 1997-1998 season with a shaky start. They were challenged mentally and physically. Scottie Pippen was on the injured list at the start of the season. He missed their first 35 games because he had to recover from a left foot surgery. They lost during the opening night to the Boston Celtics and started the season slow with a 12-9 record. But they bounced back during the mid-season as Michael Jordan carried his team with the assistance of Tony Kukoc and the league's leading rebound powerhouse Dennis Rodman. The franchise ended the season with a 62-20 record, tied

with the Utah Jazz for the top mark in the league.



### A jumper during the 1998 NBA Finals

Michael Jordan added more honors to his already impressive resume with a plethora of more honors such as All-Star MVP for the third time, season MVP for the fifth time, All-NBA First Team and All-Defensive First Team.

Chicago Bulls won the Eastern Conference championship for the third successive time after surviving a hard-fought seven game series with the Indiana Pacers led by Reggie Miller and NBA Legend Larry Bird. This was the first time that "His Airness" played in a Game 7 after the 1992 series against the New York Knicks. MJ's 28 points sealed the 88-83 win for his team and it was back to the finals for a rematch with Utah Jazz.

Utah Jazz was given the home-court advantage because of their impressive season-series sweep over Chicago Bulls. Utah Jazz was able to defend their home court in Game 1 and Chicago Bulls roared with vengeance to win Game 2 with a 93-88 victory and again on Game 3 with a 96-54 rout. Chicago Bulls again prevailed in Game 4, bringing them a win away from a "three-peat" championship. But Utah Jazz was not about to give up just yet. Karl Malone sank 39 points to give Utah Jazz a 88-86 victory after MJ's last second shot missed its mark.



## ***Game 6***

On June 14, 1998, Michael Jordan and Chicago Bulls returned to Utah for Game 6. This was the game where "His Airness" executed a series of plays that is considered to be one of the best clutch performances in the history of the NBA Finals. With 41.9 seconds remaining and Chicago Bulls trailing 86-83, Phil Jackson called for a timeout. When the game resumed, MJ received an inbound pass, drove to the basket and scored a layup over several Utah Jazz defenders. Utah Jazz then brought the ball upcourt and passed it to Karl Malone who was being guarded by Dennis Rodman. Karl Malone and Dennis Rodman jostled but the former caught the ball anyway. But Michael Jordan was behind him and managed a steal. MJ then slowly dribbled the ball upcourt and paused as he eyes the defending Utah Jazz player Bryon Russell. With less than ten seconds remaining, "His Airness" dribbled right, crossed over to the left and pushed off Bryon Russell then made the best jump shot in his entire career. After Utah Jazz's John Stockton missed a desperate three-point shot, Chicago Bulls, MJ and the Chicago Bulls won their sixth NBA championship to forge a second "three-peat".

Michael Jordan was again awarded the Finals MVP after having led the scoring board with 33.5 points per game- 45 of which were made during the deciding Game 6. This made another NBA history record. The 1998 NBA Finals likewise holds the record for the highest television rating of any NBA Finals series. Game 6 also received the highest television rating of any game in the entire history of the league.

After Chicago Bulls wrapped up the season with a celebration held at the Grant Park in hometown Chicago, what would happen next was a big question mark. After leading the franchise to six championships, Phil Jackson announced that he would not be renewing his contract with the Chicago Bulls. Scottie Pippen had expressed his desired to be traded and Dennis Rodman had been contemplating on joining the Los Angeles Lakers. Michael Jordan had told the press on numerous occasions that he would retire if Phil Jackson left the franchise. With the owner induced NBA lock-out

over a labor dispute between coaches and players, the immanent departure of Scottie Pippen and Dennis Rodman and his Game 6 heroics, it was the perfect time for Michael Jackson to retire.

## ***2<sup>nd</sup> Retirement***

On January 13, 1999, Michael Jackson announced his retirement for the second time in a press conference where he also paid tribute to a Chicago Police Officer who died in the line of duty recently. He told the press that "Right now I don't have the mental challenges that I have had in the past to proceed as a basketball player." He further added that "he was 99.9 percent sure that he would never play again.

## Chapter 8 – The Real Wizard

*"There is no such thing as a perfect basketball player, and I don't believe there is only one greatest player either. Everyone plays in different eras. I built my talents on the shoulders of someone else's talent. I believe greatness is an evolutionary process that changes and evolves era to era. Without [Julius Erving](#), David Thompson, Walter Davis, and [Elgin Baylor](#) there would never have been a Michael Jordan. I evolved from them."*

—  
Mich  
Jord

Michael Jordan returned to the NBA on January 19, 2000, this time around not as a player but as the President of Basketball Operations and part owner of the Washington Wizards. His duties in the Washington Wizards were comprehensive in nature. He was in charge of the team's basketball operations and he had the last say in all matters that involved its personnel. The opinions of many about his new role were varied. Some said he would not make a good executive while others were willing to give him the benefit of the doubt.

One of the first things MJ did was to purge the team of highly paid players that were not living up to the franchise's expectations. Among those he let go were point guard Rod Strickland and forward Juwan Howard. He then chose high school student Kwame Brown when they were given the first pick in the 2001 NBA Draft. Unfortunately, Kwame Brown was not the player they thought he was. Washington Wizards traded him away after four seasons.

Eventually, MJ would be inspired by the recent NHL comeback of Mario Lemieux. Thus, despite his earlier announcement that he was 99.9 sure that he would not play professional basketball anymore, "His Airness" expressed interest in making another comeback. He then spent the spring and summer of 2001 in training. Michael held several basketball camps for NBA players and later hired his former coach Doug Collins to coach the Washington Wizards in the upcoming season.

## ***2<sup>nd</sup> Comeback***

MJ officially announced his second return to the hard court with the Washington Wizards on September 25, 2001. He said he intended to donate his player's salary to the victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Amidst talks regarding his advanced age for a basketball player, the thirty-eight year old Michael said "Physically, I know I'm not twenty-five years old, but I feel I can play the game of basketball on the highest level".

The Washington Wizards had only won 19 games in the past season. But they somehow improved with MJ on the playing roster. In the 2001-2002 season, despite being plagued by injuries, he led the team with 22.9 points per game, 5.2 assists per game and 1.42 steals per game. He also helped the team attain a franchise record of nine-game winning streak from December 6 to December 26, 2001. After 60 games, he was forced to end playing for the team due to a torn cartilage in his right knee. This was the fewest number of games he had played in a season since his first retirement last 1994-1995 season.

"His Airness" was distracted in January 2002 when his wife Juanita filed for divorce. The divorce was called off the following month and MJ announced that he planned to play one more season with the Washington Wizards.



*The real wizard*

MJ returned for the 2002-03 season with orthotic insoles to help his knees. He became the only player of the Washington Wizards to play in all its 82 games during the season. He was able to average 20.0 points per game, 6.1 rebounds per game, 1.5 steals per game and 3.8 assists per game. MJ shot 82% from the free throw line and 45% from the field.

## ***40 and going strong***

Despite turning 40 years old during the season, he scored more than 20 points in 42 games, 30 or more in nine and 40 or more thrice. By February 21, 2003, MJ became the first 40-year old player to tally 43 points in a single NBA game. His 32, 292 career points today stands as the third-most all-time highest behind Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Karl Malone.

During his time with the Washington Wizards, all of his home games held at the MCI Center were packed to the rafters with fans. The Washington Wizards became the second most watched team in the league.

He played his 14<sup>th</sup> and last NBA All-Star Game in 2003. He managed to surpass Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as the all-time top scorer in the history of the All-Star game despite missing a slam dunk.

Both of MJ's last two seasons with the Washington Wizards did not result to any playoff appearances. It was common knowledge that he was dissatisfied with his teammates and he openly criticized them by citing their lack of intensity and focus. His number one draft pick Kwame Brown received most of these lashings.

## ***Last Season***

Recognizing that 2002-2003 would be the last season of "His Airness", tributes to Michael Jordan were given throughout the NBA. In his final game at his former stomping ground, United Center in Chicago, he received a prolonged standing ovation which he had to interrupt by giving an impromptu speech when the crowd showed no sign of stopping. On April 11, 2003, The Miami Heat retired the number 23 jersey even if MJ never played for them. It was the first jersey Miami Heat had ever retired in the history of their franchise. At the 2003, All-Star Game, MJ was offered by both Allen Iverson and Tracy McGrady the starting spot. He refused them both, but was forced to accept the spot from Vince Carter because of public pressure. A half-time ceremony was dedicated to MJ's career where Mariah Carey sang a tribute.

Michael Jordan was bestowed an additional honor in his final home game. He was honored after the game by Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary of Defense, who presented him the American Flag that flew over the pentagon on the first year anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

Michael "Air" Jordan's final NBA game was on April 16, 2003 in Philadelphia. He was only able to score 13 points and went to the bench with 0:04:13 remaining in the third quarter. The Washington Wizards were trailing behind the Philadelphia 76ers with 76-56. Just a few minutes when the buzzer went off to signal the start of the last quarter, the sold-out crowd in the First Union Center began chanting "We want Mike! We Want Mike! We Want Mike!" After much encouragement from Doug Collins, "His Airness" finally rose from the bench to re-enter the game with 0:02:35 remaining. At the 0:01:45 mark, MJ was intentionally fouled by Eric Snow and was given two free throws. After the second foul shot, the ball was inbounded to John Salmons of the Philadelphia 76ers who in turn was fouled intentionally by Bobby Simmons so that the clock would be stopped and Michael Jordan could return to the bench. "His Airness" was given a three minute standing ovation by the crowd of 21 257 fans, the game officials, his teammates and his opponents.

Michael Jordan returned to his executive role with the franchise, believing that with the cluster of young stars he left behind in the hard court, the NBA was in good shape.



## ***Recognition***

By the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the preeminent all-sports network conducted a survey of athletes, media personnel and others associated with the sports world in order to rank the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest athletes. The number one spot went to Michael Jordan, above Muhammad Ali and Babe Ruth.



A monument to Michael Jordan stands today in front of the United Center in Chicago. The two-thousand pound bronze statue that depicts "His Airness" in full flight and ready to slam dunk the ball over cowering defenders has a plaque which says "The best there ever was. The best there ever will be."