

HBO ORIGINAL

WINNING TIME

— THE RISE OF THE LAKERS DYNASTY —



COMPANION GUIDE
Season 2 Episode 1

The following is not a comprehensive summary of the facts or fictional scenes depicted in episode 201 but is a selection of what we thought would be fun points of interest.

DID BOSTON FANS REALLY ROCK THE BUS?

Yah huh. The Lakers bus was rocked by a hundred or so Celtics fans, though in reality this happened after Game 7, not Game 1. According to first hand accounts, they rocked the vehicle back and forth, hurling beer cans and rocks at the windows. In his memoir, Magic recalls being frightened; police had to break up the mob.

Jeff Pearlman describes how the Celtic fans rocked the Lakers bus in his book, *Showtime*:

That night, while their bus drove from the Garden to the hotel, the Lakers were accosted by a hundred or so fans. They rocked the vehicle back and forth, hurled beer cans and rocks at the windows. 'It was frightening,' Johnson said. 'Our nerves were shot to begin with...and now everyone is freaking out because we were surrounded and we couldn't go anywhere' (Pg. 241).

CHECK OUT THIS SOURCE:

BOOK: Pearlman, Jeff. *Showtime: Magic, Kareem, Riley, and the Los Angeles Lakers Dynasty of the 1980s*. Gotham. 2014.

HOW BIG WAS RED'S DRAFT DAY COUP?

It was one of the greatest coups in NBA history. On June 10, 1980, Red Auerbach managed to add two future Hall of Famers for the price of none. Using the Celtics' Number One pick as bait, Red finagled the basketball world into believing that he planned to use it on Joe Barry Carroll. In reality, he had his eye on a sleeper: Kevin McHale. The "false flag" allowed him to trade his Number One pick to The Warriors for their starting center, Robert Parish, along with their Number Three pick...which Red used to draft his real prize, McHale. Parish and McHale filled out the Celtics roster, helping lead them to three more titles in the decade. Eventually, both were named to the NBA's 50 greatest of all time.

Dan Shaughnessy describes Red's draft day coup in his book, *Seeing Red*.

FUN FACT: In confirmation of Buss's prescience about ESPN, this was the first NBA draft to be televised... on cable.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Shaughnessy, Dan. *Seeing Red*. Crown Publishing Group. 1994. (Pg. 226)

ARTICLE: For Celts, 'It Was A Great Draft' – The Times Argus – Jun 11 1980

DID SUCCESS GO TO WESTHEAD'S HEAD?

Literally and figuratively...Westhead did indeed go for a new hairstyle. In fact, he claims in his memoir that it was he who first rocked the slick-back look Pat Riley would later make famous.

He also went for a new look offense. Armed with a \$1M contract from Dr. Buss, the humble-rooted Westhead saw himself exalted by the press as a “genius”...and came into his first full season as head coach determined to prove it—by reinventing the very offense that won the team a title just a few months prior. Among the players, this was a controversial move: Why fix what ain't broke? But Westhead remained committed. He admits, in his memoir, that he was so jazzed around this time it made it hard for him to stay in touch.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Westhead, Paul. *The Speed Game: My Fast Times in Basketball*.

University of Nebraska Press. 2020.

ARTICLE: “Westhead Brings New Lines to Coaching Profession” –
The Miami Herald – May 22 1980

WAS WESTHEAD'S SYSTEM REALLY CALLED “THE SYSTEM”?

Believe it or not, the English professor did not seem to have a more imaginative name for his new system than “The System.” Or, if he did, he neglected to tell anyone. In reality, Westhead introduced the new scheme right away, at the Lakers' first official practice at the College of the Desert. New year, new team, new plan of attack. At least that was the theory. The players were more skeptical.

But was “The System” really such a crazy notion? Westhead's idea was to move the ball down court as quickly as possible and get a shot off in less than 10 seconds. The players would typically run to a specific spot on the court to create easy passing opportunities. Though controversial in its day, might Westhead have been AHEAD of his time? Did he foresee the future run-and-gun offenses of Mike D'Antoni and Steph Curry's Golden State Warriors? Paul Westhead finally got a chance to institute his “system” later as a

college coach at Loyola Marymount. And his team became the highest scoring in NCAA history.

Westhead described his new system as “the center of controversy” and “a constant battle” among players in his own book, *The Speed Game*.

And Jeff Pearlman describes Westhead’s “new year...new team” in *Showtime*:

Generally speaking, it takes time to develop into a genius... Yet, more often than not, genius is something that is crafted and constructed and nurtured... In the aftermath of the Los Angeles Lakers’ magnificent championship run, Paul Westhead—former obscure head coach of the La Salle College Explorers of the East Coast Conference—was proclaimed a genius. OK, the word itself wasn’t literally used all that often. But when the stories on Magic Johnson’s rookie greatness and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s sixth MVP trophy and Spencer Haywood’s implosion ran dry, the media turned its affections toward a professorial forty-one-year-old man who fell into a dream job and was wise enough to stick with his predecessor’s philosophy. Yet now that Jack McKinney was officially gone, hired by Indiana to coach the Pacers, Paul Westhead felt liberated to implement his own ideas and philosophies. ‘When Paul became a genius,’ said Jamaal Wilkes, ‘trouble started.’...

...Then, to kick off the first official practice inside the College of the Desert’s gymnasium, Westhead made what must be considered one of the great blunders of his coaching career. He introduced (egad) ‘The System.’ ‘This is a new year and a new team,’ he said, ‘and we’re going to do things differently. We’re going to put in a new offense, and you’ll need to trust me. Because I know what I’m doing.’ Now that he was in charge, and empowered with a brand-new four-year, \$1.1 million contract, Westhead wanted to incorporate his own ideas (Pg. 102-103).

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Westhead, Paul. *The Speed Game: My Fast Times in Basketball*. University of Nebraska Press. 2020.

BOOK: Pearlman, Jeff. *Showtime: Magic, Kareem, Riley, and the Los Angeles Lakers Dynasty of the 1980s*. Gotham. 2014.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE LAVISH PAY HIKES? DID BUSS REALLY DISH THOSE OUT?

You bet he did! After the 1980 championship win, Buss foresaw that the league’s new free agency rule would drastically drive up the market value of all players. Bucking the trend of other more tight-fisted

owners (Red Auerbach, for one, was furious) Buss sought to get ahead of the curve by offering generous short-term raises, to earn his players' loyalty. So...

Kareem's salary rose from \$650K to \$1M
Wilkes's salary rose from \$350K to \$600K
Nixon's salary rose from: \$65K to \$400K
Cooper's salary rose from \$35K to \$250K
Chones's salary rose from \$250K to \$350K

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Halberstam, David. *The Breaks of the Game*. Knopf. 1981

Article: "Will Others Want in Act after Magic's Big Trick?" – The Spokesman-Review – Jun 28 1981

ARTICLE: "NBA Free Agents Gain Rights to Owners' Pocketbooks" - The Arizona Republic - Jul 8 1981

THE NEW BUSS MANSION!

It's true: flush with a championship win, Dr. Jerry Buss became the proud new owner of Pickfair, the famous former estate of Hollywood royalty Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks. Once a playground for movie stars and international jet-setters, Buss shelled out a then-Beverly Hills record of \$5,362,500 in September 1980. He called the 42 rooms and 2.7 acre property the "frosting" his cake...before spending an additional \$2M-\$3M on remodels.

Jeff Pearlman describes Buss's new mansion in *Showtime*:

Buss transformed the twenty-two-room home into a magnificent ode to classic décor meets 1980s adventurism. His dinner parties were fantastic. His guest list was magnificent. Buss thought of Pickfair as a souped-up Playboy Mansion. 'Jerry was a night owl,' said John Rockwell, an actor who befriended the Laker owner. 'He spent a lot of time at night in Pickfair, playing poker, drinking rum and Cokes' (Pg. 267).

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Pearlman, Jeff. *Showtime: Magic, Kareem, Riley, and the Los Angeles Lakers Dynasty of the 1980s*. Gotham. 2014.

ARTICLE: "Pickfair is sold to Dr. Buss for \$5 million plus" – The Daily Breeze – Sep 21 1980

ARTICLE: "Pickfair estate sells for record BH price" – The LA Times – Sept 27 1980

ARTICLE: "Lakers Owner Jerry Buss Buys Pickfair" –The LA Times – Sept 20 1980

YOU GET A TEAM, AND YOU GET A TEAM...

Jerry Buss did, indeed, gift his children with sports franchises. In reality, Jeanie took on stewardship of the LA Strings in 1981. Johnny began to helm the Lazers in 1982. Jimmy really went to jockey school – at 6-foot-4, attempting to be one of history’s tallest jockeys – and was given control of the family thorough-breds. He later took over the Lazers when Johnny stepped down from his position in 1985.

FUN FACT: The Johnny Hatten Band was Johnny Buss’s actual country-western outfit. Hatten being his (and his father’s) middle name.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

ARTICLE: “She’s Got Balls” - Sports Illustrated - Nov 2 1998

ARTICLE: “A teenager these days has enough problems” - The LA Times - Mar 26 1981

ARTICLE: “Soccer Tries a Comeback in LA” - The LA Times - June 25 1982

ARTICLE FOR JOHNNY HATTEN BAND: “Lazers Turn Out to Be Only Winners on Program at Forum” - Nov 13, 1984 - The LA Times

WAS THERE REALLY TENSION BETWEEN MAGIC AND KAREEM?

According to numerous sources (including the memoirs of Magic, Kareem, and Westhead), Magic came into camp determined to make the team his own. After winning the 1980 Finals MVP, clinching the championship with his historic performance in Game 6 (with Kareem out injured), Magic asserted more control right from the start of training camp. This led to a power clash between him and The Captain. For his part, Kareem was not yet fully recovered from his injury; In *The Speed Game*, Westhead describes the power struggle between Magic and Kareem as well as Kareem showing up in poor shape, which opened the door for Magic’s attempt to take “symbolic charge” over the team. Westhead further explained that, “we had a monster on our hands and someone was going to get hurt” (Ch. 13). In Kareem’s book, *Giant Steps*, he laments — with some frustration — the way the PR division of the team moved Magic front-and-center... ahead of himself.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem; Peter Knobler; *Giant Steps: The Autobiography of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar*. Bantam Books. 1983. Chapter 15.

BOOK: Westhead, Paul. *The Speed Game: My Fast Times in Basketball*. University of Nebraska Press. 2020. Chapter 11.

BOOK: Johnson, Magic; William Novak. *My Life*. Random House. 1992. Kindle edition.

MAGIC AND KAREEM: WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN?

It is true both Magic and Kareem became new fathers in the same year.

AMIR ABDUL-JABBAR

Amir was Kareem's first child with Cheryl Pistono, who gave birth on November 18, 1980. According to his memoir *Giant Steps*, Kareem saw Amir's birth as a chance to reorder his personal and professional priorities. Indeed, in 1981 he publicly considered leaving the Lakers and moving to New York, to be closer to his roots.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Abdul-Jabbar, Kareem; Peter Knobler; *Giant Steps: The Autobiography of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar*. Bantam Books. 1983. Loc 4553 on Kindle.

ARTICLE: "Abdul-Jabbar Said To Want To Play Here" - The NY Times - Jul 31 1981

ANDRE JOHNSON

Though parental agreement is fictional and the details of the private encounters between the Johnson and Mitchell families have been fictionalized in Episode 201 for dramatic effect, there was tension between the families due to the pregnancy. In reality, Magic was in Los Angeles when Andre was delivered, and flew back to meet his newborn child the next day.

In Magic's memoir, *My Life*, he explains that he and Melissa Mitchell were together during a period in which he and Cookie had broken up and when Melissa told him about the pregnancy, he wasn't very happy because he was young, only 21 at the time, and not ready to be a father. Magic also said that Melissa's family saw him as a "...villain, and there was bad blood in the air" (Ch. 10).

In Cookie's memoir *Believing in Magic*, she recalls that Magic didn't believe the baby was his own for years until a paternity test proved otherwise.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Johnson, Magic; William Novak. *My Life*. Random House. 1992.

BOOK: Johnson, Cookie. *Believing in Magic: My Story of Love, Overcoming Adversity, and Keeping the Faith*. Howard Books. 2017. Kindle Edition. Page 67.

BOOK: Johnson, Magic; William Novak. *My Life*. Random House. 1992. Kindle Edition.

HOW BAD DID MAGIC HURT HIS KNEE?

Real bad. On November 18, 1980, in a game between the Lakers and Kansas City Kings, with approximately 7 minutes until halftime, Magic heard a snap in his knee and suddenly dropped to the floor. Six days later, he underwent a meniscectomy (removal of meniscus cartilage).

There was real fear that the injury might be career-ending. In his memoir, Magic describes being miserable in Lansing after the injury, terrified that he might never play again; or at least, might never be the same star player he once was. He recalls spending much time moping, feeling sorry for himself, and watching daytime television...including his favorite, *Scooby-Doo*.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Johnson, Magic; William Novak. *My Life*. Random House. 1992.
Chapter 10.

BOOK: Johnson, Magic; Rich Levin. *Magic*. Viking Adult. 1983

ARTICLE: "Cartilage Tear Is Suspected; Lakers Win" - The LA Times - Nov 19 1980

ARTICLE: "Johnson has surgery, out 10 to 12 weeks" - The LA Times - Nov 25 1980

DID THE TEAM SUCCEED WITHOUT THEIR MAGIC MAN?

Yes! Westhead's System did the trick...for a time. After a rocky start, the Magic-less Lakers rallied together for a winning stretch (28-17) before their star point guard's big return.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Riley, Pat. *The Winner Within*. Berkley Books. 1994.

ARTICLE: "Guess Who Isn't Over The Hill Yet" - The LA Times - Nov 28 1980

DID MAGIC DISRUPT THE TEAM WHEN HE CAME BACK TO VISIT?

It's true! A contemporary article describes the scene depicted at the end of 201, in which the crowd's response to Magic's arrival seemed to disrupt team chemistry. The game described took place in Detroit against the Pistons, but we moved it to the Forum...against Larry Bird.

CHECK OUT THIS SOURCE:

ARTICLE: "Lakers top feisty Pistons, 111-102" – Detroit Free Press – Feb 17, 1981

Winning Time is a dramatization of certain facts and events. Some of the names have been changed and some of the events and characters have been fictionalized, modified or composited for dramatic purposes.

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