

HBO ORIGINAL

WINNING TIME

— THE RISE OF THE LAKERS DYNASTY —



COMPANION GUIDE
Season 2 Episode 7

The following is not a comprehensive summary of the facts or fictional scenes depicted in the show but is a selection of what we thought would be some fun points of interest from Episode 207.

IS THIS THE TRUE STORY OF THE 1984 NBA FINALS?

This was one of the greatest championship series in the history of professional sports, so we took pains at every level of production to get the moments right. We encourage you to check out the old game footage on YouTube; we think our crew really knocked it out of the park.

The first iconic play depicted transpires at the end of game two. With 18 seconds left in regulation, Worthy accidentally threw the ball into the hands of Celtic Gerald Henderson, who scored the game-tying basket. The crowd went wild, chanting "Beat LA!" as the words flashed from the scoreboard. Moments later, Magic had a chance to tie or win... but dribbled out the clock. He was devastated by this glaring error – not to mention excoriated in the press, earning the nickname "Tragic Magic." The Celtics went on to win 124-121 in overtime.

After the game, the Lakers locker room was silent.

Jeff Pearlman recounts the aftermath of Magic's miscue in *Showtime*:

'I'll never forget the look on Magic's face,' said Boston's Quinn Buckner. 'It was one of absolute disbelief. He never messed up.' Twice, Los Angeles had Boston right where it wanted. Twice, the moment was blown.... 'We snatched defeat from victory,' the ever-wise Abdul-Jabbar said (Pg. 236).

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

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

BOOK: Bird, Larry. Magic Johnson. Jackie MacMullan. *When the Game Was Ours*. Mariner Books. 2009.

DID JEANIE REALLY DATE THAT HOCKEY PLAYER?

According to her memoir, Jeanie did date LA Kings defenseman, Jay Wells. And true to the story in our episode, she did disclose team payroll information to her then-boyfriend in order to help him negotiate a contract with her father's team. Jeanie claims that she was "flabbergasted" the NHL wouldn't make players' salaries known; so, she rectified the situation.

Jeanie discusses her decision to share information with Jay in her memoir, *Laker Girl*:

I got Jay the information he wanted... This is the age of information. It's all out there. It's just a shame there has to be this feeling of disconnect between the owners and the players. It worries me and leaves me uncertain about the future (Loc 1379).

CHECK OUT THIS SOURCE:

BOOK: Buss, Jeanie; Steve Springer. *Laker Girl*. Triumph Books. 2010. Kindle Edition.

DID THE HEART-TO-HEART BETWEEN WEST AND MAGIC REALLY TAKE PLACE?

Though the scene itself is dramatized, it is drawn from various accounts that Magic leaned on West for guidance in his darkest hours – including through the '84 finals. In his book, Magic recalls how he identified with how West flogged himself emotionally after a loss. Jerry describes in his memoir, *West by West*, how Magic felt that West was "a shoulder to lean on" and provided words of encouragement to make him feel better after he felt like he failed the team in the '84 Finals.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: West, Jerry. Jonathan Coleman. *West by West*. Little Brown, and Company, 2011. Pages 151-152.

ARTICLE: "He missed one that would have won it for us' — Jerry West reveals the NBA championship game that still keeps him up at night" – Basketball Network – Aug 20, 2022

DID BIRD REALLY SAY HIS TEAMMATES PLAYED LIKE “SISSIES?”

He sure did. And publicly. The context: the Celtics had just endured a Game Three trouncing by the Lakers: 137-104 at the Forum. Magic and LA set championship records – Magic with 21 assists, and LA with 47 3rd quarter points. It was a jailbreak run-and-dunk show, with LA scoring 58 points on fast-break layups and transition jumpers alone.

It was also the most lopsided defeat in Celtics playoff history. And, after the game, Bird told the press his teammates “*played like sissies.*” As the scene depicts, Bird continued: “*It’s embarrassing, no doubt about it... Today when you see Magic slapping high fives and guys going behind their backs and shooting layups on us all day long, it seems like someone would try to put a stop to it, but until we get our hearts where they belong, we’re in trouble.*”

Later, Bird said he was so enraged by his teammates’ poor performances that he wanted “*to fight*” every one of them.

Dan Shaughnessy called the game “*the most lopsided defeat in Celtics playoff history.*” Shaughnessy discusses Larry’s comments following Game Three in his book, *Wish it Lasted Forever*, in which he quotes Larry describing it as “*embarrassing*” and accusing his teammates of playing “*like sissies.*” When Larry was asked how to fix it, Larry said, “*You go to the hospital and get twelve heart transplants.*”

Bird discusses his post-game interview in *When the Game was Ours*:

‘I wanted to fight every teammate I had after Game 3,’ Bird said. ‘I did everything I could in the papers to get them fired up. I knew if something didn’t change, we were going to lose... I was not going to watch Magic celebrating in front of me again’ (Pgs. 133-134).

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Shaughnessy, Dan. *Wish it Lasted Forever: Life with the Larry Bird Celtics*. Scribner. 2021. Pages 105-106.

BOOK: Bird, Larry. Magic Johnson. Jackie MacMullan. *When the Game Was Ours*. Mariner Books. 2009.

ARTICLE: https://www.basketball-reference.com/teams/LAL/1984_games.html

CLAIRE'S TRIUMPHANT CABLE DEAL!

It's true: in June 1984, the NBA signed a new deal with TBS worth \$20 million – fulfilling Buss's foresight that the future of the league was cable television. According to the new deal, the network would now air 55 regular season games and 20 playoff games.

CHECK OUT THIS SOURCE:

ARTICLE: "NBA in hand, Turner wants more sports" – The Miami Herald – Jun 22, 1984

HOW ACCURATE IS THE MCHALE/RAMBIS CLOTHESLINE IN GAME FOUR?

Ask any hoop-head. This was another iconic moment in NBA history, and we encourage you to check the tape. In the third quarter, with the Lakers ahead – and looking destined to take a commanding 3-1 series lead – LA turned a Celtics miss into another fast break. But with Kurt Rambis streaking to the basket, Kevin McHale came out of nowhere and leveled him with a ferocious clothesline. The foul led to a chaotic, bench-clearing clash between the teams.

So how did the Lakers respond? They took the bait. The game became a street fight, slowing to the Celtics pace. Leaving behind the free-flowing, fast-running game the Lakers preferred. They were suddenly playing Boston basketball. Indeed, minutes after the takedown, Bird tangled with Michael Cooper just as depicted – shoving him onto photographers. He also got into it with Kareem, who told Bird: *"I will fuck you up, white boy"* – then fouled out of the game.

With 16 seconds left, Bird realized he had Johnson guarding him, waved madly for the ball, then lofted a soft fall-away jumper over Magic's outstretched fingers. Swish. Though it was not the final shot, the Celtics held on to win in overtime.

Despite best efforts to stay cool, even Riley finally lost it – ordering his team: *"No layups!"* Meaning: next time the Celtics went for one, they were to foul – and foul hard.

To this day, "The Clothesline" is one of the most famous moments in NBA history.

After the game, Riley admits that he became "unglued." In postgame interviews, he ridiculed Boston, calling the Celtics "a bunch of thugs." But in truth, he now admits the Lakers lost more than just a game; they lost their cool... and thus they lost control of the whole series.

Jeff Pearlman chronicles the drama from this game in *Showtime*:

Both benches cleared, with Cooper flying into the middle of the gold-and-green sea, anxious to hit anyone wearing Celtic colors. 'You knew this was going to happen,' Stockton said. 'You could see it coming.'

Amazingly, no one was ejected. A flagrant foul was called on McHale, and Rambis sank one of two free throws. Yet, in that singular moment, the mood shifted. Not just in the game, but in the series (Pg. 239).

Pearlman also notes the immediate aftermath of the clothesline in *Showtime*:

McHale, a normally lovable sort. Unlike the stoic Bird, McHale was always laughing, joking, kidding. Less than a minute after hammering Rambis, he tried to apologize. The gesture was met with an indifferent shrug (Pg. 240).

Pearlman describes Riley losing his head in *Showtime*:

Afterward, Riley came unglued: 'What Boston did was the equivalent of two gang warlords meeting the night before a rumble and deciding the weapons. They both bare fists, and one of them shows up with zip guns. We're not going to lower ourselves to the level of a Kevin McHale and his tactics. But I'll tell you what we're going to do. We'll be ready for anything. What they did is they came into our territory, a neutral zone, and decided to use zip guns. Weapons that we didn't plan on using because this is a game of basketball. We understand the physical part. We want to win. They want to win. It takes something like what McHale did to change the whole mood of physical play. Now it's Katie-bar-the-door, that's all. McHale's play changed the whole mood of the thing. That's the mood it's gonna be for the next three games. Now it's an ugly situation' (Pgs. 240-241).

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

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

BOOK: Shaughnessy, Dan. *Wish It Lasted Forever: Life with the Larry Bird Celtics*. Scribner. Kindle Edition. Page 110.

BOOK: Bird, Larry; Magic Johnson, and Jackie MacMullan. *When The Game Was Ours*. HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.

WAS GAME FIVE REALLY THAT HOT?

It wasn't called "The Steambath Game" for nothing...

June 8, 1984 was one of the hottest, most humid days in Boston history. And the Boston Garden wasn't air conditioned. There was a huge thermometer mounted in one corner of the Garden, and TV cameras cut to show it almost as often as the scoreboard or the clock.

In their locker room, of course, the Celtics had air conditioning and powerful electric fans. Each Celtic was supplied with three fresh uniforms, to boot. And – foreseeing the heat-wave – Red had his team order hundreds of pounds of extra ice to keep the players cool.

The Lakers were not so lucky. To this day, the team and management accuse Red and the Celtics of playing dirty tricks. The showers in their locker room ran only scalding water, and they claim it felt as if hot air was being pumped into the dingy room. On top of this, the Boston press was printing the location of the team hotel each night, so fans kept the Lakers awake by screaming and pulling fire alarms. The games in Boston Garden were psychological warfare.

On the floor, Bird was unconcerned with the heat and humidity. For him, it was no more stifling than the summertime in his hometown, French Lick. But Magic had already sweated through his uniform before the Lakers took the floor. As depicted, at one point in the game, Kareem sat on the bench, gasping for air – with an oxygen mask strapped around his head! Celtics won 121-103 at Boston Garden.

And yes, the referee really did faint on the floor due to the heat. Riley discusses the 'Steambath Game' in his book, *The Winner Within*, in which he explained that the Celtics knew what they were getting into with the heat, so they supplied themselves with extra air conditioners, fans, ice, and extra sets of uniforms. The Lakers had nothing but their game plan.

Dan Shaughnessy mentions Kareem wearing an oxygen mask when on the bench in his book, *Wish it Lasted Forever*.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Riley, Pat. *The Winner Within*. Berkley Books. 1994. Page 115.

BOOK: Shaughnessy, Dan. *Wish It Lasted Forever: Life with the Larry Bird Celtics*. Scribner. Kindle Edition. Page 113.

WERE KURT RAMBIS AND LINDA ACTUALLY A THING?

In her scene with Jeanie, Linda Zafrani refers to a budding romance with Kurt Rambis. This is true. Linda and Kurt did indeed start dating in 1982. It worked out. They were married in 1985 and remain together to this day – one of the league's true 'power couples.'

Linda also references "the Rambis Youth," a Rambis fan club that came to games wearing his signature Clark Kent glasses. At first, Kurt thought they were making fun of him. But Linda organized a summit between the parties and Kurt quickly realized they were rabid fans.

Jeanie recounts when Linda and Kurt first began to date in her book, *Laker Girl*:

When Kurt joined the Lakers in 1981, Linda said to me, 'That new guy on the team is cute.' I said, 'Are you kidding me? The guy with the glasses? I don't think so.' Linda went with me to Philadelphia when the Lakers faced the Sixers in the 1982 NBA Finals, and that's when she and Kurt started hanging out (Pg. 96).

CHECK OUT THIS SOURCE:

BOOK: Buss, Jeanie; Steve Springer. *Laker Girl*. Triumph Books. 2010.

HOW BAD WAS KAREEM'S GAME SIX MIGRAINE?

Kareem had been suffering for years from migraine headaches. Stress amplified the situation, and during this Finals series, the headaches started coming every day. Riley points out in his memoir that an ear-splittingly-loud arena like The Forum, with its bright flashing lights and monumental game pressure, may be the worst possible place to have a migraine. Right before Game 6, Kareem vomited and received an IV transfusion as result of his discomfort.

Then he went out and scored 30 points, along with 10 rebounds, in a 119-108 Lakers win.

As illustrated in the episode, Laker fans became much rowdier by this point of the series – an outgrowth of the brutal, escalating, physical combat on the floor. Following the game, Celtic M.L. Carr got hit in the eye with a cup loaded with mustard, beer, and chewed hotdogs. Somebody also hit Bird with a hot dog and beer after the game. Ironically, this behavior backfired: giving the Celtics extra incentive to destroy LA in Game 7.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

BOOK: Bird, Larry; Johnson, Earvin; MacMullan, Jackie. *When The Game Was Ours*. HarperCollins. Kindle Edition. Pages 140-141.

BOOK: Bird, Larry; Ryan, Bob. *Drive*. Bantam. 1990. Page 134.

WEBSITE: https://www.basketball-reference.com/teams/LAL/1984_games.html

HOW CLOSE IS GAME SEVEN TO REALITY?

As close as we could get it! The Celtics held a 14-point lead in the 4th quarter with 7:54 to go. But then the Lakers staged a comeback, pulling close before things slipped away...

The game was still in reach by the final minute of play, but officials allowed dozens of Boston fans to crowd in-bounds onto the floor – infuriating Riley, who had been told there would be additional security. (Another of Red's dirty tricks?) In any case, Magic lost the ball in the last minute of the game, and the Celtics won 111-102 to clinch the series and the championship.

AND THE RIOT THAT FOLLOWED?

As is quite clear on the telecast, Celtics fans “*stormed the Garden floor, knocking down baskets, grabbing jerseys, [and stole] Abdul-Jabbar’s trademark goggles off his forehead*” (Pg. 242). One fan later accused Kurt Rambis of punching him in the nose. Rambis says he has no memory of the alleged incident and settled it in 1987.

An LA Times article outlines the lawsuit where Baribeau claims he was sucker punched by Rambis and filed a \$100,000 lawsuit against him and the Lakers, but Rambis said he had no memory of the incident.

But in a later article, published in 2008 in the Boston Herald, Baribeau admits to provoking Rambis when he tried to grab Rambis’ jersey off his back as “*the ultimate souvenir*.” As Baribeau grabbed the shirt, Rambis turned around and punched him. Baribeau is quoted as saying:

They say you shouldn’t try and take the cape off of Superman’s back...I should have listened.

In his post-game TV interview, Red Auerbach was characteristically cocky, snarking at the notion of a ‘Lakers dynasty’. Meanwhile, the Lakers wallowed in disbelief. Magic blamed himself for dribbling out the clock, for poor

passes, and for not doing more to win the series. In his book, he describes sitting on the floor of the Boston Garden locker room shower in tears.

CHECK OUT THESE SOURCES:

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

BOOK: Shaughnessy, Dan. *Wish It Lasted Forever: Life with the Larry Bird Celtics*. Scribner. Kindle Edition.

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

ARTICLE: "Rambis-Baribeau Lawsuit" – The LA Times – Apr 9, 1985

ARTICLE: "Celtics fan revved up over long-ago Kurt Rambis run-in" – The Boston Herald – June 3, 2008

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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