

Reflections on the Inspiration of Kobe Bryant

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Hi, I'm CiCi Bellis, WTA tour player and you're listening to Compete like a Champion.

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J: Welcome to Compete like a Champion. You're here with Dr. Larry Lauer mental skill specialist and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA Player Development. Today we've got a very special guest on the podcast. Leah Friedman, who is a national manager, inspires a lot of kids around the country getting into the game. Welcome, Leah.

[\(00:27\):](#)

LF: Thanks Johnny.

[\(00:28\):](#)

L: Welcome.

[\(00:29\):](#)

LF: Thanks Larry. I'm so excited to be here this morning.

[\(00:31\):](#)

J: Alrighty, so today we're going to use this podcast as a celebration to reflect on an incredible human being and incredible athlete, Kobe and obviously very sad what happened a couple of weeks ago now. And we, you know, I think Larry, as we look to do this podcast, the main purpose of this would be to sort of celebrate and reflect back on his playing career and his post-career and...

[\(00:52\):](#)

L: Yeah, we didn't want to do this as a way to get downloads or people to subscribe. What we wanted to do was celebrate sort of his influence on people, his career, how he made a difference in the short life that he had unfortunately, and to really help understand it. And it hit me after the tragedy, you know, it was like one of those few times on social media where people actually were being decent and things just kind of, people were talking about the good things. And then there were a few negatives obviously, but you know, it was nice just to hear the outpouring of how, even people who didn't know him, how they're impacted by Kobe and different quotes, different stories, game situations that were coming out. So to me it was clear that this, this man had, in his 42 years, had really made a difference for so many people. And it wasn't just in basketball. I mean you looked at other pro sport leagues, I was watching a hockey game and at the beginning of the game they put the pucks up on the boards before the players come out and they knock them off and they go warm up. They had put, you know, Kobe on the pucks and they had made Kobe's name there. And so I think it was, it was across the board. And everybody, you know, and clearly in tennis as well, and Kobe had a love for tennis, which we're going to dive into. And that's really why Leah is here to talk about that and her experience with Kobe and then certainly his desire after his career to continue to influence people and to use, say his brand, but definitely his career to inspire people that you know what you can dream too. And if you work hard you can reach your dreams.

[\(02:17\)](#):

LF: I love what you said about his impact and you know, taking sports away from this for a second. I mean, Kobe's impact on communities across the world, so not just in this country, is incredible. And I think that even with this tragedy, we saw diverse communities coming together to celebrate this legend and this impact. And I think the world needs more of that and more support from one another and respect from one another. No matter if you look different, if you believe in a different religion. And we saw that following his, you know, sad, tragic death, but there was something special about that. And that's what Kobe promoted. I mean, he wanted to help all and I think that we saw his impact that week after.

[\(03:00\)](#):

J: Yeah, for sure. I mean it was amazing to see all the pictures, the quotes. I mean it's just such positive, the positive quotes that came out that defined his mentality and the way he approached things and you know, and that's what we maybe wanted to start off here with is maybe talking about what he was like as a person in his athletic journey with being one of the best basketball players of all time. And then also talking about his legacy that he was creating post playing career, which, you know, he was, I think he was way on his way in a journey to inspiring so many more people than he already had as an athlete. So it'd be exciting to get into that. And obviously, you know, Leah, you spent quite a bit of time with him as he was getting into tennis and it was great to see how he was trying to have such a strong impact on so many kids within our tennis world and just communities in general and attracting them to different sports and all that. So it'd be great to get into that. So starting off here, I mean Kobe's playing legacy will always be, you know, like any athletes, always gotta be defined by numbers and how they won. But I think the real...

[\(03:58\)](#):

L: Championships.

[\(03:58\)](#):

J: Championships, but the real message here as we dive into it is really centered around the mentality that got to that point, the process, the system that he created himself every single day to help himself and his teammates be as good and as great as they could be. That obviously led to the results that they got. So just to reflect on a couple, cause there's so many, uh, we could just be here for 20 minutes reeling off these, but 18 All-Star appearances out of 20 playing seasons. I mean that's pretty unreal. Four All-Star MVPs, five time NBA champ, two as the finals MVP. So just kinda start right there, cause I think that's a reflection of, you know, just reaching the height of his game for so long. I mean that sustained period of time, there has to be certain, a lot of character traits ingrained in you to sustain that type of success.

[\(04:45\)](#):

L: Well I think one thing that's clear with Kobe and why he had so much influence with a lot of people is on the big stage he brought. It wasn't like he shied away. He wanted the ball, he wanted it in his hands. He wanted to take the shot. It doesn't matter if it was against Jordan or anyone, he was going to bring it. And that's part of that Mamba mentality as well is that you work so hard to put yourself in a situation that you believe in your possibility of being able to get the job done right. And that really defines it.

[\(05:14\)](#):

LF: He thrived off of it. I mean if we think about, you know, Billie Jean King and her quote 'pressure's a privilege'. Kobe wanted that pressure. Kobe wanted to, you know, have the ball, like you said, make that shot, be challenged and show that his hard work, those 5:00 AM workouts, going into the gym after practice. That's where that hard work paid off. And I think that's why, you know all those stats are great but that didn't define who he was. And I think that he wanted to be known for the work mentality, the extra hours in the gym and his dedication to studying the game is what got him to that point.

[\(05:48\)](#):

L: Seems like it's pretty clear he didn't want to be defined by his talent. Cause here you have a talented individual, off the charts talented, and yet, not unlike Michael or many other great athletes, they really prefer to be defined by their work ethic or other character values or attributes.

[\(06:04\)](#):

J: I think, so I pulled up an article, I think it was on Business Insider or something and, you know, I was trying to read more about about him and his legacy. I mean there's obviously a lot out there, but there was one thing that came up in particular. Sort of three things that really made him great, and again it wasn't centered around the numbers that he was, but the first one it talked about is he was loyal. So he was loyal to one team his whole life. Those 20 seasons that he played was with the Lakers and he was very consistent at what he did. He was always trying to find ways to make his and the Laker's situation better, regardless of the team changing so much. And I think in the NBA you see a lot of this, especially the top stars when they get a little unhappy with I guess their support network and jump ship.

[\(06:45\)](#):

LF: Isn't that in every sport? I mean we see that in tennis. I don't mean to cut you off.

[\(06:49\)](#):

J: No, keep going. Yeah.

[\(06:51\)](#):

LF: We see that in tennis, right? People switching coaches when things don't go their way. You see it in baseball, you see it in football. I mean there's a lot of jumping. So to stay with one team for an entire career is incredible.

[\(07:01\)](#):

L: And let me just interject here too. I mean, if anybody had earned a right to go and play for a team that had a chance to win a championship, it was Kobe because of his loyalty. But he didn't. And you know I'm a believer in their free agency in the market, uh, the open marketplace, the players should get paid. And I think that honestly, I'm not going to get political here, but donors make a lot of money, let's put it that way. So I think, I believe in the fact that players should have the ability to move, but it's awesome to see someone have that loyalty to an organization, to an ownership, to the fans. And again, his character was more than about him. I think he felt his influence on that city and what he meant to those fans.

[\(07:45\)](#):

J: I think it's also, it defines that mental stamina or fortitude, however you want to describe that. Because again, I mean there would've been times where I'm sure he was very frustrated like maybe

some players are or some parents are with, you know, they get in a situation where they're not playing very well. They've had a couple of bad tournaments and now they start to question everything and anything that goes into their tennis games. I'm sure he felt a lot of frustrations with the teams he was a part of and, but it seemed like he always was proactive in trying to get the best out of his teammates and himself. And maybe that kind of leads into this second part was the way that he trained. It was almost that lead by example, you know, as you just referenced earlier. I mean he was in the gym at 4:00 AM and he talks about if you start your day earlier, you can just get a lot more done and you can put a lot of time and effort into doing the things like studying the game and all that, whereas he talked about people that get up later and not able to get as much done, well they're already behind the game. And I think obviously when you see people do that day in, day out, day in, day out, he obviously did it day in, day out for 20 years and probably even longer. He probably was doing this when he's in high school. But imagine that the teammates around him that he's inspiring to to do their best by following his example.

[\(08:58\)](#):

LF: I want to go back to what you said really quickly about him being frustrated because all the thousands of quotes that are coming out now that he said, one was about, you know, you have bad days, you get frustrated, but you have to keep pushing through. It doesn't help you just to sit in your own frustration. And I think that that's also how he motivated, you just mentioned, teammates and you know that work ethic. And I think that if you're an athlete, if you're an educator, if you're, you know, working at a desk job, we all have bad days and it's that mentality to be able to turn it on and acknowledge that yeah, it's not the best day, but I have to make this work. And I think that that teaches so many lessons that you know, you can get through challenging times. And I think that that's what he did and we just didn't hear about it and see it as much as maybe we see it with other athletes. But I do think that, you know, that was part of his work ethic.

[\(09:50\)](#):

L: I think it really brings to light his training in mindfulness, his time with Phil Jackson and just a mental approach to the profession. It's more than being able to make any one points. It's about who you are, what you do, the way you impact people. And certainly Kobe, I've seen quotes, I've seen videos of him talking about being present and feeling these emotions and not letting them control you, but in fact acknowledging them, being aware. And then really choosing your response to them. You know, he talked about fear and how he would be afraid or nervous and he would recognize that. And instead of trying to, you know, push it down, ignore it, hide from it, he would want to know why. And then he would be able to turn that into some kind of motivation. Okay, well I'm scared, this is normal, but this is something I really want to do and I can do this. And so I think that through a lot of what you hear in the quotes and the videos is this mindful, really just wonderful kind of positive psychology. He might not have called it that, but just this way of what it's about is getting the most out of yourself, out of others, this human experience and just making the best of it. And some days aren't going to be the best, but you bring the best of what you have with what you have at that point.

[\(11:00\)](#):

LF: I mean, that's a lesson for so many people. And I mean, I even know in my career and in my life, you know, tuning in to who I am and understanding, you know, don't try to be somebody you're not, and being your authentic self, bringing that to work every day, if it's bringing it to the court every day. But you know, it's okay to be vulnerable and I think that that actually shows courage and we, all of us need to do it. And I think that he, you know, just felt those emotions and then, you know, used it on the court. And I think again, that's why he has those rings and those championships. So.

[\(11:32\)](#):

L: And there's no doubt, there are times where you saw Kobe frustrated on the court. He's a human right.

[\(11:37\)](#):

LF: He's a human.

[\(11:37\)](#):

L: We don't want to play him like he was perfect, never felt negative emotion. He did. And he explained that. And that's part of the human experience. But I think, you know, as we're talking about, it's that ability to be aware of that and to respond in a way that whether it's inspiring your teammates, the people around you, through adversity, through these experiences. And certainly not only, as we're talking about, did he want the ball and wanted to step up in the moment, he had the confidence in the work behind that to do that. He also understood there was going to be adversity and he knew that the way he responded was very important, I believe, I don't know, that he understood that he was a role model for so many and he was going to set the set the tone for the Lakers and really for how one should respond to this stuff.

[\(12:24\)](#):

LF: So I have a question for you doc. So I mean in your expertise, I mean imagine if more athletes, you know, were tuned into their emotional side or this vulnerability. Do you think that they would see more success?

[\(12:38\)](#):

L: 100%. I think that a lot of athletes try to hide from or not feel, suppress it, ignore it. I think maybe in Western society that emotion is sometimes seen as vulnerability or weakness. And I don't think we've had very good conversations about really understanding emotion and the value that they play. And honestly, I mean it's not like we have control over these things so we're better off recognizing them and understanding them. That is to be human, you know. For so long, and maybe it's still the way a little girls are not supposed to get angry.

[\(13:08\)](#):

LF: I mean, I've gotten angry so many times and I've been called so many names for getting angry. So yeah, you're right about that.

[\(13:14\)](#):

L: There's a societal norm that girls should not get angry and maybe it exists for women too. They should not get angry.

[\(13:20\)](#):

J: Can you tell my daughter this? She gets angry at me all the time.

[\(13:26\)](#):

L: She's a little young yet, she has no.

[\(13:27\)](#):

J: She can't comprehend it.

[\(13:30\)](#):

L: Can't comprehend this part of it.

[\(13:32\)](#):

LF: It only gets harder, Johnny. I can share stories about how I drove my dad crazy.

[\(13:38\)](#):

L: That's another podcast.

[\(13:40\)](#):

LF: Next week.

[\(13:42\)](#):

J: So I want to go back to the lasting image he left in everyone's brain when he finished his career. What is that, the lasting image? His last game?

[\(13:50\)](#):

L: Oh, he just blew it up, right?

[\(13:52\)](#):

J: Blew it up. He had one of the best games of his life. Was it 60 odd points in his last game? So that's in a period where the Lakers obviously were struggling a lot, you know, the team, what was it, three years ago? Three years ago maybe. I can't remember.

[\(14:05\)](#):

L: We really should have researched that.

[\(14:07\)](#):

J: So his last game, he pulled out one of the best games of his life.

[\(14:11\)](#):

L: Thanks Mick for that, for letting everybody know.

[\(14:14\)](#):

LF: I know the date of the last game because the coincidence is it was on my birthday.

[\(14:18\)](#):

L: Oh wow.

[\(14:19\)](#):

LF: So I think that, you know, I think that there's a lot of reasons why it was me on the court with him. But then when I found out that his last game was on my birthday, it just kind of added to it. But I can't tell you what year it was.

[\(14:30\)](#):

J: No, it's all good.

[\(14:32\)](#):

L: Our listeners are just thinking, you guys are idiots.

[\(14:35\)](#):

J: So his last game. 60-odd points. I think he knew it was his last game. It was his testimonial game, so to speak. But he approached that no differently than any other game. He still went out there to compete to win, to help his teammates to try and win that game. Now I don't think they won that game, but he went out in a fashion that he tried to compete at his whole career. Now when you know someone's going out after an incredible legacy that they've already built, you think that they might sit back, enjoy it a little bit more, you know, kind of let the emotion, you know, sometimes the emotions get a little bit, you know, the best of you in those situations. You know, it's emotional for an athlete when they know it's time, but he blew that thing up in the same fashion and creating that, that lasting image on people's brains that that is, that's just who he was. You know? I think that is a testimony to him and that sort of, that mental emotional toughness, which is sort of that third part to this article I was reading where he talks about owning the results of everything.

[\(15:28\)](#):

LF: Accountability is very important to him. And again, there's all these quotes floating around right now, but you know, accountability for yourself and then accountability for other people and you're going to piss people off, I don't know if I'm allowed to say piss off.

[\(15:42\)](#):

L: Well we just got an E beside this episode. It's alright.

[\(15:48\)](#):

LF: I mean, I'm trying to monitor what I say, but you know, holding everybody accountable is very important. He said you're going to make people upset when you hold people accountable. But I think he entered every game or every situation again. And I got to see him on the tennis court playing fun games. So, you know, it was that mentality no matter what it was. He's coming in, you know, ready to go and prepared.

[\(16:11\)](#):

L: Okay. So 2016.

[\(16:13\)](#):

LF: Got the year.

[\(16:14\)](#):

L: There you go.

(16:15):

J: Three years ago? Wow.

(16:17):

L: Yeah, three plus.

(16:17):

LF: Almost four.

(16:19):

J: There we go. Good memory Johnny. Good memory.

(16:21):

L: Well yeah.

(16:22):

J: So going back to that, so just I want to pull up one of those quotes. So he talked about, with this sort of mental, emotional toughness side, that everything negative, pressure, challenges, is an opportunity for me to rise. I mean how often as well, I mean that takes a special person in order to do that. Always take those opportunities to rise when there's, there's negative blowing around. He has a bad game, he has a second bad game. I'm sure the press, there were times where they would just on him so much and there were those negative vibes towards him and there was a lot of pressures probably a lot of times when the team wasn't doing so well or obviously when they were doing very well and they were going for those championships. And then obviously all the unique different challenges that happen from year to year. But he always took that as an opportunity to rise. So hearing him say that, and not just hearing him say it, but seeing him do it is another matter. Right? People can say they step up, but do you actually see it?

(17:12):

LF: Anybody can talk the talk.

(17:13):

J: Right.

(17:13):

LF: It's how you walk. It's how you show up on the bad days. It's how, you know, you show other people. And I think that that's where he always showed other people how to be the best. If it was, you know, just talking to groups of kids, and again, I got to see that, but you know, no matter what he approached, you know, he knew that he could impact somebody in that way. And that went from the court, you know, to his career after the court.

(17:38):

J: So then let's segue that into talking to him as a parent. There was a lot of media and images that come to mind here when, you know, you help coach your daughter's basketball team, but more of the images of him putting his arm around his daughter, giving her a kiss, supporting from the sidelines, supporting the coach. You know, and if you look at Kobe, it's Kobe. So if there's anyone that's entitled to sort of speak up and say anything about basketball, it's him, but he often took that seat back and was just that supportive role. And was always almost that model of positive parenting behavior that I think was part of that legacy that he was creating. That was just really cool to see because obviously we know that, you know, if there's too much parent involvement, especially at certain stages along the way that it can, a lot of the time turn into sort of a negative relationship between the parent and the and the child. But it was really cool to see how he was supporting his daughter in her athletic ventures and seeing him just role model, you know, positive parenting behaviors.

[\(18:40\)](#):

L: Yeah, absolutely. And I know as a parent coach as well, or a parent watching my kids being coached, it can be hard to step back and not say anything or be supportive of the coach at times. And, like you said, if anybody had the right to step in and exert his expertise it was Kobe cause obviously he has a lot of understanding of the game and a great way of messaging it. And I think it just goes to show his humility and the fact that you can be humble and confident. You know, if you look on a court, I mean he was a very confident athlete and he demonstrated that many times over as we talked about earlier, and yet to have this humility and this willingness to step aside and say, I'm going to let someone else coach my daughter. I think it's impressive, and I think there's a message there for a lot of us that if Kobe can do it, we can do that as well. It's that willingness to support somebody else. And you know, I'm going to assume this, I don't know this, but why would he do that? Well I think he knew that was what was best for his daughter, so let somebody else coach them. That was part of their growing up and that experience and that he was going to be in that support role and be supportive of the coach, for that coach to do the coaching role. And I think that's a big message here.

[\(19:49\)](#):

LF: No, I love that you said humility because again, I saw Kobe as a person and not as the basketball superstar and you know, with him at the US open, we just got off the court doing the coin toss with Roger Federer, he thought it was the coolest thing, and then you know, he wanted to stay and watch. The match that night was Naomi and Coco. And I knew that he had a relationship, he was mentoring Naomi and you know, Kobe, are you staying for tonight? Are you extending your trip? He's like, I gotta get home. I gotta get home to my girls. I can only be gone for so long. And you know, he loved tennis and he wanted to be there, but nothing would come in between his time with his girls. And you know, each time I watched him, you know, talk to people about his daughters. And again, he wasn't just Kobe the superstar, it was Kobe the dad. And you know, I don't have kids, but watching him talk about his love for his girls and wanting them to do whatever they wanted and be good at it and he was going to support them in whatever that was. And I think that there's a lot to be said for that and I'm sure you both see it in the Player Development world of parents pushing kids down one way. And I think that again, we can all learn from, you know, accepting what your kids want to be and you know, giving them the support and the tools to really succeed in that pathway.

[\(21:10\)](#):

J: And I think that's a good message there, cause obviously there's a lot of really good images out there. I mean obviously Sophia Kenin, she has an unbelievable relationship with her dad who has taught her, coached her, mentored her, supported her, being able to find a right balance I guess and just being able

to see them embrace each other and have such a positive relationship is pretty cool. But not every story is like that, unfortunately. I mean there's a lot of, there's a lot of situations. We also know that they don't end in a positive relationship between the parent and the child when it comes to sports. But, you know, sort of getting back to here though, is wanting to dive more into how he got involved in tennis. You know, how did it come about that he started getting involved in the tennis world. How was he involved at the US Open and what was the overall goal there in bringing Kobe in, I guess.

[\(22:00\)](#):

LF: Yeah. I mean, he loved tennis before we came into the picture. So it wasn't that, you know, we, the USTA got him. He always had passion for tennis. He loved the mental side of tennis. You're out there alone. You have to work through challenges. No ball comes at you the same way. He loved it. So I just want to make sure everybody knows that too. I mean we're not taking any credit for that. But as he wrote his three books, his second book was about tennis and he, in the book, it's this young girl who has to work hard, who you know, doesn't have all the resources. And as he was starting to promote his book, we got asked to come out to Orange County as he started to do filming. And we brought two of our net generation influencers out and we had this rare opportunity to watch him; One, film with Naomi Osaka and talk about the book.

[\(22:49\)](#):

And she was supportive of, you know, helping him in the promoting of it. We watched them hit together and you know, the way that he walked in and shook everyone's hand and introduced himself, and again, this is Kobe Bryant. Like you don't need an introduction, but you know, good handshake, looked you in the eye, paid really close attention to everything you said. And during that time on court with him in Orange County, we started talking about the US Open and knowing that he was so involved in the Aspen Institute and project play and the importance of multi-skilled athletes. You know, I started talking to him about our kids zone and you know, we would love for you to come to the Open. He was even thinking about any ways obviously to promote the book, but he ended up changing his plan so he could come in earlier to see kids zone and to have the maximum opportunity at the Open and at the US Open is really the chance that I got to be with him on court. You know, after that too. I mean even in July, I remember getting back on the plane and I wanted to announce to the entire plane, I just got to hit with Kobe Bryant because I was so excited and again, it had nothing to do with him being the basketball player. I was so impressed, again, I'm going to bring out that word, with his humility, his dedication to the skill. I mean, I got to help him with his backhand and forehand and I have this raw video on my phone and I didn't even realize it at the time, but I told him to bend his knees more because he's a basketball player and he didn't care that he was this legend on the basketball court, he wanted the tips to be better on the tennis court.

[\(24:24\)](#):

J: Did it improve his forehand and backhand?

[\(24:26\)](#):

LF: I think so. I mean, yeah, I think so. But you know, at the US Open we were hitting and there were a lot of people watching and it felt like it was just he and I on the court and I've been told that, you know, when you look at us on the videos, it looks like we're good friends. And I think that that was just because I saw him as a person. And even then, I mean we did games like, Kobe how many do you think you can get out of 10 okay, let's go for 10 out of 10. Well we got six. And it was like, Nope, he's like, we got to do

it again. So we did it again until he got 10 out of 10 and his desire to just keep going was incredible. And then we had fun filming games for kids to watch him play and he was just so easy to work with. And again, I watched him at the Open, I brought some kids in from a program in the Bronx and he played with them in the kid zone. And following that tragic accident, the kids sent me a video that they made for him and a young boy in the video said, you know, thank you, I can't believe you took time out of your day to talk to kids from the Bronx. And I did a lot of crying after that Sunday, I cried during that video, but everybody that stopped him in that time at the US Open got his undivided attention. And here he was being pulled from 7:00 AM till 10 o'clock at night and no matter who stopped him, it was the same enthusiasm and it was the same interest. And it's the best thing and the biggest impact of my career in a while and has made me think about my life a little bit differently.

[\(25:59\)](#):

J: That's brilliant. I mean it's such an amazing, powerful story. I mean, how awesome for those kids to have gone through that. And I'm sure that obviously that they'll be probably pretty upset that they were able to spend a little bit of time with him and get to know him and obviously seeing him go as someone who's impacted their lives. So, you know, maybe those kids will take this as more inspiration to be able to dream big and you know, and be able to achieve whatever it is that they put their hearts to, you know?

[\(26:25\)](#):

LF: Yeah, no, I do. And I want to share another story because we were waiting to go out onto the court, Arthur Ashe stadium, we're in the player tunnel leading to the court and I had my little buddy Henry with me who was I think six or seven and didn't really know what was going on. And here comes Roger Federer and Kobe and Federer embrace and there is this magical picture that I have now of Henry and I watching Kobe and Roger Federer embrace. And it's a picture that I'll hold on forever, but Henry's shoe was untied and I could've bent down to tie it, and instead Kobe bent down to tie his shoe. And we have that picture also. And it's for Henry now to see that and at the time, Henry didn't really understand what was happening, but I have since talked to Henry's mom and Henry now has the picture of he and Kobe in his notebooks. He has been, you know, he had some emotional, you know, he had an emotional side and a reaction to what happened. And I think for Henry, I know that this will now inspire him and he's young, but he will now remember that moment as, and he will cherish it and it will continue to inspire him as he goes on. But again, anybody could have tied Henry's shoe and there was Kobe on one knee tying his shoe.

[\(27:39\)](#):

L: Well, that speaks volumes right there.

[\(27:41\)](#):

J: That's unreal. So let's, uh, I mean it's great to hear those stories and how he got so involved and kind of coming back full circle here, want to touch on, you know, the, the title of the podcast is the Mamba mentality, so really want to dive into that just a little bit. I know we're running short of time here, but really diving into Mamba mentality. So I pulled up a quote when he was asked what exactly does Mamba mentality mean? And so I'll just read it out here, it's a constant quest to find answers, it's that infinite curiosity to want to be better, to figure things out. Mamba mentality is you're going, you're competing, you're not worried about the end result, you're not worried about what people say, you're not worried

about disappointing others, you're not worried about any of that. You're just focused on being in the moment. That's what Mamba mentality truly is. It sounds like a cue for you to come in, Larry.

[\(28:32\)](#):

L: Yeah. Well, I mean, I think that's exactly the kind of approach that we try to teach and encourage our players to take. A few things I hear there. One is openness to the experience, growth mindset and just willing to, and Leah, you talked about it on the tennis court, willing to take feedback, willing to try things and not afraid to fail. He's talked about that a lot. Don't be afraid to fail using those times as opportunities to continue to improve and get better. And so there's a lot of that in that message and the Mamba mentality and there's also this idea that, uh, you know, hard work is going to lead your dreams. I think one of the things we see with the millennial generation or maybe generation Z athletes is that sometimes they have these huge dreams, but they're not always sure, you know, of the work that it takes. And that's probably also a product of adolescents, but he's very clear on you can reach your dreams, but it's going to be work that's going to get you there. And the daily work of making yourself better of striving to find the answers. That's what we talk about every day, the process, you know, the process. And finally I think about, you know, this idea of being present and staying in the moment and to do so is to be free to let go of the worries as he talked about and knowing that you're going to be okay. And you know that whatever happens, you know that you put your best foot forward, that you did your best and you can feel proud of yourself when you walk off the court. And you know his openness, he's talked about many things, but using meditation in the beginning of the day to start off on the right mindset to get purposeful, to be present. He's talked about the use of visualization, not only to see your dreams happening, but using it as sort of a step-by-step creative process to see how you're getting better and really driving yourself to that dream, that excellence. And he also talked a lot about what I would say like emotional strength and that's that ability to, and we talked about this earlier, recognize emotion, acknowledge it and not try to suppress it or run away from it, but actually to face it and then choose how you're going to respond to it. And this emotional strength is something that to me is one of the hallmarks of someone who's going to be very resilient, someone who's going to be very tough as a competitor, but also as a human being who's going to be very impactful because they're going to be there no matter what. Their philosophy, their consistency is always going to be there because they're not getting off course as much. Adversity is not taking them down a road where they can't come back. They still struggle at times, but they're going to get back on course and they're going to stay the course and they're going to continue to be who they are. So there's a lot to unpack there. But for me, that mamba mentality means a whole lot and it truly is brilliant. And again, I think about Phil Jackson because I can only imagine how much that man impacted Kobe, but that it's just, if you're a young athlete, you're listening to this, I really encourage you to see what you can find on YouTube or read books, the books that he has to learn more about this mentality because it will benefit you.

[\(31:31\)](#):

LF: Wow. I mean, you just said a whole lot of good things.

[\(31:35\)](#):

L: I know I said a whole lot.

[\(31:39\)](#):

LF: No, you said a lot of really good things and I want to...

[\(31:42\)](#):

J: Every squirrel finds a nut, so sometimes he does.

[\(31:45\)](#):

L: Thanks.

[\(31:45\)](#):

LF: You know, again, the Mamba mentality for me, I didn't know too much about it. I mean, again, I was looking at who he was as a person and I can tell you that in my own career and the way that I live my life now, I'm so much more in tune with, we all have a responsibility to be better, but to impact others around us. And he just reiterated that for me, that staying on this course, you know, it's how you inspire people to work hard. Dream big, but that success does not happen unless you work for it. And that, you know, we, I mean, we all work for the USTA, I mean, we as an organization have a responsibility to get more kids active and teach them these life skills that happen on the court, but really take them off the court. And when I look at my own life and I think about this experience that I had with him, which again was of the highlights of my career and will impact me now going forward, you know, we have to be better. We have to do better. If it's the way, if we stop, just stopping and talking to somebody that we wouldn't normally talk to or if it's, you know, taking more interest in somebody knowing that they could be having a bad day and just giving them that lift. And he, again, I don't think about Mamba mentality in that sense, but, you know, I know who he was and in that little bit of time, and it's the drive, it's the resilience. It's, you know, being able to connect with people, which is so important in sports. And, you know, I think that, we're talking to young athletes and so young athletes and coaches out there, you have to connect with people and you have to build that trust with whoever you're talking to if you want to see results. And I can tell you I'm more focused and driven now that I can use tennis as this vehicle to help communities and we can make a lot of good things happen through sports if we think about the power that we have to help others.

[\(33:48\)](#):

L: Well it's just shines through that he knew himself and he was intentional. Intentional with his life and intentional about his messaging. Everything from how he played the game to how he parented his children. And certainly, you know, I think that's a great message for all of us is to be intentional and look for ways to impact others and try to make that difference. And everybody has a different opportunity of course. And Kobe had a huge opportunity and a huge responsibility and he took full advantage of it in the time that he had.

[\(34:21\)](#):

J: Alright, so we're pretty much how to time here, I mean, I'm sure we could keep talking for hours. Maybe we should just set this up standing every Thursday.

[\(34:28\)](#):

LF: I would love to come back. This is the highlight of my week right now, so.

[\(34:33\)](#):

L: Wow.

[\(34:34\)](#):

J: But let's go around the room here, so Kobe's legacy to you, Dr. Lauer then to you Leah and maybe as a key takeaway for some of the listener, what will Kobe's impact have on you Dr. Lauer?

[\(34:46\)](#):

L: I think it was what I was just saying about the professionalism, the intentionality and the way he lived his life, that I believe that he woke up and was looking for a way to make a difference that day. In himself and in others and having that intentionality that every opportunity as Leah was saying, is an opportunity to help someone, to make them feel better, to continue to grow as a person and to really never stop growing. And continuing to find ways to improve yourself. I mean, after basketball, you know, a lot of players struggle with finding another mission or any sport like tennis. And he found those missions. He had a significant meaning in his life. And that's something that I take away and continue to try to make sure that, you know, what is my intention when I wake up in the morning? What is my meaning? How do I make a difference? You know, when I go coach kids in baseball and hockey, after I do my tennis work all day, how am I influencing them? How am I helping them to enjoy the sport, to get better, to have those dreams and feel like, you know what, I can achieve them and this coach made me feel like I could do that. So that's what I'm feeling right now from it.

[\(35:51\)](#):

LF: We can always be better. I mean, it's not, like Larry said, I mean, it's that mindset of growing and evolving and you can be the best, but you can even be better than the best. And success does not happen without that hard work. And every detail matters. And I could share more stories, but every small detail and that intention matters. And I'm going to just keep working harder and I'm going to keep sharing my thoughts and opinions and hold people accountable because we don't see change unless we hold people accountable and hold myself accountable with what I say and what I do. And just, you know, I want to continue to inspire people to dream. But you have to work hard.

[\(36:36\)](#):

L: Isn't that a beautiful thing that when you're holding others accountable, you start with yourself, right, Leah? That's where it begins.

[\(36:43\)](#):

LF: Practice what you preach.

[\(36:43\)](#):

L: Exactly. And that intentionality of, you know, JP that...

[\(36:47\)](#):

LF: Oh, JP, I didn't know you had a nickname.

[\(36:47\)](#):

L: JP, yeah, coach JP.

[\(36:51\)](#):

J: Only for Larry.

[\(36:52\)](#):

LF: Now me.

[\(36:52\)](#):

L: And now Leah. Anyway, but you know, just this idea that I can make mistakes and it doesn't make me lesser than, you know what I mean? It doesn't make me a worse person. And actually my mistakes make me better. And I think that's an important message as well.

[\(37:05\)](#):

LF: I mean, I've learned the most from my mistakes and I, I've grown so much through my mistakes and my most challenging times.

[\(37:13\)](#):

J: I mean it's like you read my mind there, so I'm going to finish with three quotes and I think the first one is maybe more geared towards coaches. I mean it would really be for anyone, but the first one, I guess I'd pick this out more for coaches. The most important thing is to try and inspire people so that we can be great in whatever they want to do. The second one I picked out maybe more for the players, once you know what failure feels like, determination chases success. And then the last one here I've picked out for parents, Kobe said, my parents are my backbone. Still are. They're the only group that will support you if you score zero or you score 40 and I guess there as we, you know, this podcast here is, we try and do content and information that parents, coaches, players can take with them. So I guess I'll finish on those three. Hopefully you could take those messages. Hopefully you can take home the messages that we've talked about today. Again, I mean, this podcast is called compete like a champion and certainly Kobe reflected that in his everyday life. Again, not just as the personal, sorry, not just as the athlete, Kobe Bryant that maybe we all knew him as, but as a person that Leah was fortunate to get to know him as so, you know, hopefully you get some strong messages out of this and you know, basically call it a day. So Leah, thank you so much for joining us.

[\(38:23\)](#):

LF: Thank you so much for having me.

[\(38:24\)](#):

J: Yeah, it's been great having you. Love to get you on again and Doc Lauer. It's been great.

[\(38:29\)](#):

L: Yeah, man as always.

[\(38:31\)](#):

J: Alright, well we'll come up with some more good stuff for you. Um, but until next time, this is Dr. Larry and I, or before I finish up, we're going to put a couple of things on the show notes. We'll put a link to his book. We'll put on a nice video there of the don't retire kids initiative. But until next time, this is Dr. Lauer, Leah and I checking out.