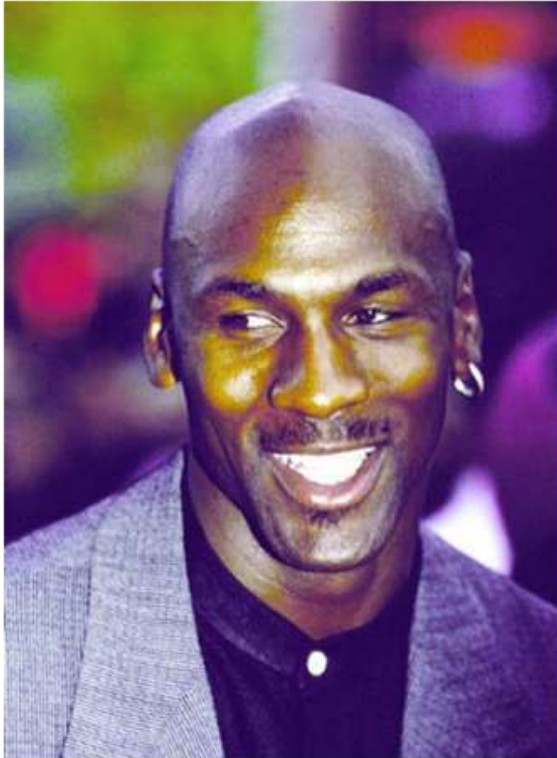


Michael Jordan

Jordan, Michael



Record Information

Source: Archive Photos. Popperfoto.

Record Type: Photograph or Illustration

Date: b. 1963–

Description:

After leading the U.S. basketball team to a gold medal in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic games, Michael Jeffrey Jordan began his career as a professional basketball player. Signed by the Chicago Bulls, he finished his first season as Rookie of the Year. The following season, he won the first of seven consecutive league scoring titles. Led by Jordan, the previously unsuccessful Bulls won three straight titles, and he was voted Most Valuable Player in 1991 and 1992. Just after the 1993 finals, however, Jordan's father was murdered and he retired from basketball to begin a career in professional baseball. Following a stint with the Chicago White Sox, he returned to the Bulls, winning two more MVP awards in the 1995–1996 and 1997–1998 seasons. Jordan is pictured here in 1996. On January 13, 1999, he again retired from basketball—as the third-leading scorer in NBA history. Jordan is currently the president of basketball operations for the Washington Wizards.

Michael Jordan emerged in the 1980s as the most famous athlete on the planet. His ability to leap high and perform acrobatic maneuvers while in the air inspired an entire line of athletic shoes known as "Air Jordan." His overall skill and competitive drive carried him to a record 10 National Basketball Association (NBA) scoring titles and six league championships. His warmth, humor, and accessibility made him a marketing gold mine. Jordan's accomplishments are so impressive that no less a basketball artist than Larry Bird has said of him, "I think he's God disguised as a basketball player."

Michael Jeffrey Jordan was born on February 17, 1963, in Brooklyn, New York, the fourth of five children of James and Delores Jordan. The family moved to Wallace, North Carolina, when Michael was an infant and settled in Wilmington when he was seven. There James worked his way up from mechanic to supervisor at a General Electric plant and Delores made a similar advancement working at a bank.

Jordan's first love as a child was baseball, which was also his father's favorite sport. He has said that his favorite childhood memory is winning the league Most Valuable Player (MVP) trophy for his Babe Ruth League team with his lively fastball. He also dabbled in track as well as in football, until he was scared away by an injury. But eventually, he and his brother, Larry, who was a year older, began to concentrate on basketball.

James Jordan accommodated them by building them a full-sized basketball court on their property.

During his early days at Laney High School, Jordan appeared to have made the wrong choice of sports. As a five-foot-11-inch sophomore, he failed to make the varsity team. But after adding four inches and improving his skills over the next year, he was able to join Larry on the varsity for a season. Jordan's admiration of his older brother was evidenced by his choosing number 23 for his uniform—as close as could get to half of Larry's number 45. He was further inspired by the aerial artistry of Julius Erving and began creating his own repertoire of slam dunks.

Jordan's potential became evident in his senior year, and he was recruited by the University of North Carolina, one of the nation's elite basketball schools. He spent much of his freshman year learning Coach Dean Smith's system and working on his defense. He finished third in scoring on the talented Tarheels, who reached the finals of the 1982 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) tournament. Few basketball fans knew who Jordan was until the final seconds of that game against Georgetown. With his team trailing by 62-61, it was Jordan—and not his veteran teammates and future NBA stars James Worthy and Sam Perkins—who was called on to nail the jump shot that gave North Carolina its first national championship.

Jordan never achieved gaudy scoring numbers in Coach Smith's team-oriented offense. But even though he averaged barely 20 points per game his sophomore and junior years, the *Sporting News* voted him College Player of the Year both seasons. Jordan then skipped his senior season to play in the NBA. Before turning pro, however, he led the U.S. Olympic team to a surprisingly easy gold medal victory in the 1984 Olympics. The Spanish Coach, after watching him lead the dismantling of his team in the finals, muttered of Jordan, "He's a rubber man. He's not human."

Jordan was the third player selected in the 1984 NBA draft. His new team, the hapless Chicago Bulls, had modest expectations for Jordan. One team executive warned the public, "Jordan isn't going to turn this franchise around. He's a very good offensive player but not an overpowering offensive player." It did not, however, take Jordan long to prove him wrong. Finding the faster-paced, wide-open NBA game more suited to his talents than college ball, Jordan poured in 22 points in a single quarter in just his third game of the season. He scored so often and with such gravity-defying flair that he quickly became the league's top drawing card. He won the NBA Slam Dunk contest and finished the season with an average of 28.2 points, six assists, and six rebounds to beat out Hakeem Abdul Olajuwon easily as the league's Rookie of the Year. The only sour note his first year was at the All-Star game, when the veteran players on his team, apparently jealous of Jordan's popularity, deliberately kept the ball away from him. Just as the six-foot-six-inch guard was establishing himself as the NBA's refreshing new star, disaster struck when he fractured his foot in October 1985. After missing most of the season, he stubbornly insisted on coming back to play, against the advice of Bulls' management and medical staff. Jordan sparked a late-season rally that pushed the Bulls into the play-offs. Then, against the Boston Celtics, Jordan put on an incredible one-man show. He scored a play-off record 63 points in one game and averaged more than 43 points for the series, in a losing effort. The Boston coach, K. C. Jones, remarked, "I

thought he was awesome the last time we played against him. I don't have a word for him this time."

Jordan's domination of the NBA scoring title began in the first game of the 1986–87 season when he scored 50 points. He finished the year with a 37.1 average, the highest ever by an NBA guard and second only to Wilt Chamberlain in league history. **Jordan** repeated as scoring champ the following year with an average of 35.0. Almost lost in the excitement over his offensive displays was the fact that **Jordan** had become one of basketball's top defensive players. He led the league in steals that season and became the first person ever to win the scoring title and be voted Defensive Player of the Year in the same season. **Jordan** also reeled in his first MVP Award. **Jordan** continued to win scoring titles over the next several years, but the Bulls kept bowing out early in the postseason play-offs despite **Jordan's** heroics. The Bulls' star came under criticism for being a ball hog who could not blend in with his teammates to be successful. Such perceptions stung **Jordan**, who was fiercely competitive and a tireless perfectionist in practice.

The Bulls gradually gathered a strong supporting cast for **Jordan**, who then showed he could be both a scoring star and a team player. In 1990–91, the Bulls won 61 games, best in the league, and then beat their longtime nemesis, Detroit, to make the finals. There, **Jordan** sank 12 consecutive shots in one game and buried a last-second shot to send another game into overtime to lead the team past the Los Angeles Lakers for their first title. Chicago then went on to win the next two championships, silencing **Jordan's** critics once and for all.

Jordan's wonderful world was rocked in the summer of 1993, when his father was reported missing and found weeks later, murdered. **Jordan** abruptly announced his retirement before the next season, then stunned fans even more by attempting a widely publicized baseball career. The venture met with limited success in the Chicago White Sox minor league organization, and in March 1995, **Jordan** pulled another stunning about-face by returning to basketball. The effects of the year-and-a-half layoff were too great to overcome that season, but **Jordan** returned to his old form in 1995–96. He regained his scoring title with a 30.4 average and led the Bulls back to the NBA championship. **Jordan** retained his scoring title as the Bulls repeated as NBA champions the following two seasons.

Jordan's performance against the Utah Jazz in the finals of 1998 solidified his exalted status in sports. With the Bulls trailing by a point in game six of the finals with seconds to go and the ball in the hands of Utah's Karl Malone, Chicago appeared to be doomed to defeat. But, taking a reckless gamble, **Jordan** left his man and stripped Malone of the ball, then calmly drained a jump shot to win the game and the title.

It was a perfect note on which to finish the most illustrious career in NBA history. In addition to his 10 scoring titles, **Jordan** led the NBA in steals three times, was named to the All-Defensive team nine times, won the NBA MVP Award five times, and won the NBA Finals MVP Award another five times. He retired from basketball again, well set for life as the most recognizable pitchman in the nation with an income from endorsements exceeding \$30 million per year.

Unable to stay out of basketball, **Jordan** became president of the Washington Wizards in January 2000. The team's inept performances eventually pushed **Jordan**'s competitive nature to its limit, and in 2001 he again shocked the basketball world by announcing he would play for the Wizards. Most experts thought the 38-year-old **Jordan**, who had been out of the game three years, was taking on too great a challenge this time, and many feared he would embarrass himself. But after a rough start, **Jordan** performed yet another miracle by guiding the once-woeful team back to respectability. In 2003, at the age of 40, **Jordan** proved he could still bring it by scoring 43 points in a game. He retired for good at the end of the season, widely regarded as the finest basketball player ever. He has been inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame twice: in 2009 for his individual career, and in 2010 as a member of the 1992 U.S. men's Olympic basketball team.

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