



Coach Wooden and Me: Our 50-Year Friendship On and Off the Court

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Former NBA star and Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient Kareem Abdul-Jabbar explores his 50-year friendship with Coach John Wooden, one of the most enduring and meaningful relationships in sports history.

Instant *New York Times* and *USA Today* Bestseller President Barack Obama's Favorite Book of 2017 *A Boston Globe* and *Huffington Post* Best Book of 2017 Pick

When future NBA legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was still an 18-year-old high school basketball prospect from New York City named Lew Alcindor, he accepted a scholarship from UCLA largely on the strength of Coach John Wooden's reputation as a winner. It turned out to be the right choice, as Alcindor and his teammates won an unprecedented three NCAA championship titles. But it also marked the beginning of one of the most extraordinary and enduring friendships in the history of sports. In *COACH WOODEN AND ME*, Abdul-Jabbar reveals the inspirational story of how his bond with John Wooden evolved from a history-making coach-player mentorship into a deep and genuine friendship that transcended sports, shaped the course of both men's lives, and lasted for half a century.

COACH WOODEN AND ME is a stirring tribute to the subtle but profound influence that Wooden had on Kareem as a player, and then as a person, as they began to share their cultural, religious, and family values while facing some of life's biggest obstacles. From his first day of practice, when the players were taught the importance of putting on their athletic socks properly; to gradually absorbing the sublime wisdom of Coach Wooden's now famous "Pyramid of Success"; to learning to cope with the ugly racism that confronted black athletes during the turbulent Civil Rights era as well as losing loved ones, Abdul-Jabbar fondly recalls how Coach Wooden's fatherly guidance not only paved the way for his unmatched professional success but also made possible a lifetime of personal fulfillment.

Full of intimate, never-before-published details and delivered with the warmth and erudition of a grateful student who has learned his lessons well, *COACH WOODEN AND ME* is at once a celebration of the unique philosophical outlook of college basketball's most storied coach and a moving testament to the all-conquering power of friendship.

Coach Wooden and Me: Our 50-Year Friendship On and Off the Court Details

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From Reader Review Coach Wooden and Me: Our 50-Year Friendship On and Off the Court for online ebook

Schuyler Wallace says

I've just finished reading of a love between two men that has deeply touched me. There is no embarrassment in it, no hesitation in recounting their closeness, no apologies for its tenderness. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has written of his coach and friend of 50 years, John Wooden, sharing their relationship, and paying credit to the influence that his old coach has made on his life. "Coach Wooden and Me: Our 50-Year Friendship On and Off the Court" is a story for all time written by a 7 foot 2-inch tall black Muslim man about his much older mentor, a white, fatherly Midwesterner of solid moral values who guided him, prodded him, chided him, and shared mutual love for all his adult life.

We never really know sports superstars. Their exploits are splashed all over the media. Some come across as surly, some are childish, some appear much more agreeable than they really are, and, in fairness, there are some really great people out there too. But we don't really know them. Abdul-Jabbar has been that sort of enigma to me, reclusive with a quiet but forceful personality that exudes a sort of quiet anger against an unjust world.

John Wooden was the perfect coach, mysterious in his influence, dogmatic, and relentless in demands made of his players, but possessing some strange aura that brought his players to a level of being unbeatable. There is no whining here, no lack of discipline. Just pride in doing things right, the Wooden way.

Abdul-Jabbar is a complex person, deeply influenced by his black experience and conversion to Islam. Wooden had nothing in common with him and even projected a quiet disapproval for some of Abdul-Jabbar's beliefs. But their love for each other intensified through the years based on their observations of each other's devoutness to their personal convictions. It was the glue that held them together.

The writing is superb, the passion is real, and the message is timeless.

I urge you to read this book. There will be two superstars you will come to know better.

Meg Marie says

I'm not crying, you're crying.

J Beckett says

A pleasant tribute of friendship and admiration from NBA great, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar to college coach and "in loco parentis," John Wooden. At times emotional and sentimental, then philosophical and inspirational,

Coach Wooden and Me, is the sort of story that assures eternal life and the stuff of legend; a memoir covering the 50 year friendship between Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and John Wooden.

Filled with wholesome bit of wisdom, Coach Wooden becomes an icon beyond the basketball court, assuming the post of theoretical life-guru as smoothly as a Jabbar hook-shot. From the story Jabbar successfully relays that practice was more academic, skill, and technique aligned than a mechanical series of runs and jumps. It was Wooden's unique and sincere approach to the game and his though provoking words that produced better players, according to Jabbar. To his players he'd say:

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

"If you don't have time to do it right, when will you have time to do it over?"

"Make each day your masterpiece."

"Never lie, never cheat, never steal."

"Nothing will work unless you do."

To the commoner these words are, perhaps simple, not unlike those heard from a father to a son or daughter, but simplicity proves a champions' cloak and is wholly profound to those with abstract direction. Wooden, says Jabbar, was a simple man, and this simplicity made him a giant.

Wooden took to Jabbar, not like a father would to a son (Jabbar pays great homage to his parents), but like a hiker would take to uncharted terrain: respectfully, cautiously, with no intention to tame, but every intention to keep on a course. What made their relationship effortless was an innate trust and an odd similarity, even with the vastness of their differences. Coach Wooden and Me... is not a bar room tale. There is little in the way of the victory inspired fanfare common in today's college sports programs. Maybe that admission was intentionally omitted, but it isn't missed, producing instead a DIY guide to success beyond the moment and an acknowledgement of the importance of people who enter one's life.

If you're looking for a rough and tumble sports driven tale, look elsewhere. This is one man's tribute to another who helped change and shape his life. A magnificent, yet simple, story from one icon to another.

Budd Margolis says

The greatest coach in American history was a simple man from Indiana who ended up at UCLA and created a legendary programme and 10 NCAA Championships. This one school was changed by a man who revolutionised how to think and play basketball as a lesson for life. Wooden was a modest man and a genius. Who better to tell his story through a most remarkable relationship and friendship than Kareem Abdul Jabbar. This book has tender moments interrupted by stark reality of the times and events they lived through. UCLA's basketball program did not teach plays but the rhythm of the game, the game which Kareem accurately describes as jazz.

UCLA had already won an NCAA championships when Alcindor arrived. Freshman were barred from playing on the senior team. He become the only player to win three Most Outstanding Player awards at the

Final Four. UCLA went 88-2 during his time there but the lessons for life remained and his discovery is a journey that inspires and restores faith in America and people.

If you approach this book with an open heart you will be rewarded with love.

Dylan Richer says

Coach Wooden and me is a book about two of the biggest basketball faces ever and about how their friendship started and evolved. Kareem is the all time leader in career points and John Wooden is one of the greatest basketball coaches ever. Kareem and John first meet when Kareem is applying for college. At first Kareem does not trust Coach Wooden because of a relationship with a former coach. This is a story of how two very different people with different backgrounds became friends over the sport of basketball. This book is not super exciting but I did enjoy it because it was written well and used mini stories to tell the big story of their friendship.

Brandice says

It seems odd to describe a book by basketball legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar as “a sweet story” but that’s the description that comes to mind upon finishing *Coach Wooden and Me*.

Kareem details not only his time at UCLA under Coach Wooden’s leadership, but also the friendship that evolved between the two, well-beyond those UCLA years, and the long-lasting lessons Wooden taught him, helping to shape Kareem into the man he became. Their friendship lasted 50! years, from Kareem’s college days until Wooden’s death in 2010. He lived to be 99 years old.

The UCLA dynasty along with Kareem’s NBA career was before my time, but as an avid sports fan, I’m familiar with Kareem’s dominance as well as the brilliance of Wooden as a coach. That said, as I read this book, I was surprised by how little I actually knew about Kareem and Coach Wooden.

While basketball was the foundation for this dynamic duo, the book reveals the depth of their friendship which was much more than the sport that initially bonded them. Kareem and Coach Wooden were from two different worlds, and while they didn’t always see eye-to-eye, they were able to have thoughtful, informed discussions about timely topics such as race, religion, and politics, and taught each other some things along the way.

If we’re lucky in life, we have great mentors who take the time to both guide us and challenge us in our pursuits. Coach Wooden was that person for Kareem, along with the numerous other men who had the privilege of playing for him. As I read *Coach Wooden and Me*, I couldn’t help but think of one of my own mentors, my first boss from my job in college, which was for the university’s basketball team. He constantly supported me and offered sound advice. It is a great feeling as a young adult to have that support and then be able to return the favor down the road, showing all you have learned, and paying it forward by offering the same guidance to the next generation.

“Some lives defy description because the people who knew that person all have different, even conflicting perspectives. ... What’s remarkable about Coach Wooden is how consistent the description of him is from

everyone who knew him. History will remember John Wooden for his unprecedented sports accomplishments. But his family, friends, and former players will remember him for living the teaching he most cherished: 'Happiness begins where selfishness ends.' "

Susan says

This is a fantastic book about a 50 year friendship between Kareem Abdul Jabbar and his UCLA basketball coach, John Wooden. Kareem describes how their relationship evolved from coach/player to true friendship. The book is filled with Woodenisms- his poems, sayings and admonitions to his players- his pyramid of success and more. What comes through clearly is that Wooden focused on building young men of good character, with winning basketball games as a secondary concern. Kareem describes how this approach affected him and made him into the person he is. I listened to the book, read by Kareem. I would recommend it for basketball fans as well as anyone interested in personal development.

HBalikov says

Man's Humanity to Man

"A coach's primary function should be not to make better players, but to make better people." —John Wooden

Abdul-Jabar has now been an author for longer than he was a professional basketball player. He writes with care and craftsmanship about race and history and social responsibility as well as about himself. This book is a reflection (with no co-author) on his decision to keep a relationship with his college basketball coach. I found it more candid than most and a book that resonated with me on various levels. I am going to include a number of excerpts from the book so that you can determine if you might have a similar reaction.

"Our relationship had been born over basketball, but eventually that became the least important aspect of it. Our friendship blossomed and grew over shared values, over complicated loves and devastating losses, over a never truly satisfied search for understanding of this world and our place in it."

Wooden's excellence as a coach is often tied to how many national titles his team won. That wasn't his primary focus, but a by-product of what he was doing.

"He had developed my athletic skills, had nourished my intellectual pursuits, and had been a moral lighthouse that showed the way."

Wooden was a notable basketball player in his own right. Part of his talent was in being able to see how to improve the basketball skills of the already outstanding young men that came to him and UCLA.

"Coach taught me the techniques to hone the hook into my iconic shot that carried me through championships in college and the pros. But his real lesson about perseverance and adapting has carried me through life beyond the basketball court."

Abdul-Jabbar writes with emotion about the period of turmoil that surrounded his time in high school,

college and his early professional career.

"...interracial dating was a fairly recent phenomenon. He didn't realize how widespread it was on campus, especially among his own players. He spoke privately with Mike Warren, who was dating a white girl, and Kenny Heitz, who was dating an Asian-American girl, warning them of possible repercussions from outside. He never objected to the idea of interracial dating, but he had grown up in a place where the Ku Klux Klan would have responded to such a thing with extreme violence and worried about us coming to similar harm. He wanted to protect his boys, but he was out of touch with how rapidly the culture was changing."

The author is very candid about the challenges he found in being away from home and trying to find his own identity and contribution.

"At no time in American history were the subjects of religion and politics more contentious or did they inspire more animosity than during my years at UCLA and a few years after. Between the rise of the civil rights movement in 1964 and the fall of Saigon in 1975, the United States was a battleground of riots, marches, and protests. It started with blacks seeking voting rights, but soon grew to include college students and veterans protesting the Vietnam War, and women seeking liberation from sexual, social, and political repression. The Vietnam War (1955–1975) brought the protesting factions of blacks, anti-war demonstrators, and advocates for women's liberation together to seek civil rights for all. The resulting violence and turmoil in the streets and on campuses frightened the white male conservative establishment, who were anxious to restore order by turning back the clock to the 1950s, when women and blacks were treated as children, and children did as they were told."

Given that, it was surprising to the author as well as the reader that he was able to "connect" with Wooden.

"I was pursuing the wisdom and example of accomplished black men as spiritual guides—like Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Martin Luther King, Jr.—not a middle-aged white man with a Midwestern twang who wore white socks with black shoes."

When he returned to Los Angeles to play for the Lakers he took the initiative to find ways to connect with Wooden.

"I left the restaurant that day with two things: a tomato soup stain on my shirt, and the realization that the legacy I had with Coach wasn't over, it was just starting. It was not a legacy that would appear in any record books. Sports analysts would never refer to it on TV shows. My obituary would not mention it. But our legacy as friends would be one of the most important and rewarding accomplishments of my life."

By waiting beyond Wooden's death, Abdul-Jabbar has gained a profound perspective on the arc of his relationship with his friend.

"I could connect the dots and realize how everything I had learned had affected my actions and choices beyond basketball. Because of that, I was able to show my gratitude to Coach Wooden, and to open myself up to keep learning from him. More, I could repay his influence by being there for him in his times of need, as he was for me. I no longer wanted to impress him, I wanted to support him."

If this is not true friendship, I am at a loss to come up with a better description.

"You and I have been through the wringer, Lewis," he said. "But we're still standing. That's what matters. Still standing and helping others to stand."

Here are several additional quotations. Abdul-Jabbar is speaking for many people of color who lived and grew up in the 1960s-70s.

"They wanted me to be the clean-cut example of racial equality, the poster boy for how anybody from any background, regardless of race, religion, or economic standing, could become an American Success Story. To them, I was the living proof that racism was a mythological beast"

"But when it came to race, we just couldn't find a comfort level. We were itchy and fidgety. During my four years at UCLA, we faced racists together, we discussed the plight of black Americans, and we dealt with racial hostilities among fans. But that didn't bring us closer. He didn't quite understand that when you're black in America, everything is about race."

Doesn't this show that it takes a lot of both effort and good fortune for people on both sides of the racial divide to find a way to bridge it?

Jeet Das says

As a UCLA alumnus, John Wooden's aura is ubiquitous throughout campus. You can barely take a step without seeing some pithy, profound quote of his (my favorite: "Be quick but don't hurry.") But I had been born after his age of dominance had long since passed, and I only knew of him as an extremely successful figure in college basketball history.

Success is a word also used to describe the author, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. These two combined to form one of the legendary tandems in sports history. But this book is hardly about that. This book is about race, and politics, and religion, and friendship. It is about two people from different worlds becoming father and son. It is about the meaning of success, and how profound an impact a coach can have on the lives of his/her players.

An interesting point about this book is that the author writes it as an elderly man speaking from his college-aged self. As such, we see the world as he saw it both then and now - rampant racial strife, highly charged political beliefs, dueling religious factions. We also see Coach Wooden the way the author saw him in college and, truly, throughout most of his life: as an almost prophetic figure who impacted the lives of everyone he met.

This book is worth the read. If you're a sports fan/athlete, it's basically required reading. But more broadly, the relationship between Abdul-Jabbar and Wooden is a fascinating one, and will make you think of who the John Woodens are in your own life.

Linda says

Good book, surprising tearjerker. Had moments of wisdom and what it was like to grow up being Kareem Abdul. Also what it's like to have a long term friendship with someone very different from yourself. This book gave me a perspective of friendships with a long lens. A good read.

Chuck Barton says

Very readable. Not particularly well-written. Abdul-Jabbar is very articulate and intelligent so the writing is something of a letdown. It may be that this book is geared more toward young readers or at least written to be accessible to them. Lots of interesting anecdotes and life lessons, but it can seem repetitious. Enjoyable for what it is - a heart-warming story of two giants from very different backgrounds who find common ground in basketball and build a meaningful friendship on that foundation.

Tess Huelskamp says

Long time basketball player Kareem Abdul-Jamar details his 50 year friendship with his mentor and father figure Coach Wooden of UCLA.

Some thoughts:

- * Coach Wooden's cute Midwestern/English teacher anachronisms -- "Is this lightning or a lightning bug?"- were fun to read about. They reminded me of a few of my own teachers, directors, and coaches :) which was heartwarming.
- * Racism, religion, family, and death were respectfully and tactfully covered here.
- * This book is clearly written with a great amount of love and respect which was so refreshing to read.
- * Kareem did a responsible job portraying both the positive and negative aspects of Coach Wooden.
- * Not very much technical talk of basketball here. Those interested in sports would still like this book but I would also recommend it to those who only had a glancing interest in basketball.
- * I picked this book up after seeing it on Obama's 2017 booklist and forgot about it until I saw a copy last weekend at the library. I didn't have any expectations going into reading this book but was glad to be sobbing at the end.

Highly recommend.

Lucy says

Okay, my bias may be showing because I am a UCLA alumna, but this truly is a wonderful book. The relationship between Lewis/Kareem and Coach Wooden is so special and I have been waiting for years for it to be shared. Kareem does a great job of describing all aspects of their relationship: the good times and bad, victories and losses, happy memories and tragic losses. Wooden's words of wisdom are sprinkled throughout the book and I found myself wanting to share many passages with my friends. We all know how this story ended, but I still found myself crying. Two very special men; one amazing friendship.

Max Mannina says

This book told the story of one of the greatest sports friendships ever was amazing. It described their friendship from beginning to end and how it started as player and coach and ended as best friends. Each person was extremely successful on their own but when they were together it was a duo that could never be

broken up. Kareem wouldn't have been the great center he was without John Wooden's intelligence and John Wooden wouldn't have been as successful as a coach without the 3 championships Kareem brought to UCLA. Overall I would highly recommend this book to anyone no matter if you know about basketball or not.

Christin says

A heartfelt account of a beautiful friendship between two admirable men. Easy reading (think more conversation, less great American novel), but the reflective nature and the earnestness will make you cry. For fans of either man, of their accomplishments on or off the court, or for anyone who has felt the presence in their life of a path-altering teacher, student, or friend.
