Name: _____ Date: _____

Kobe Bryant and Every Detail

Reading level 11 (7th grade) · 1218 words

Who was Kobe Bryant? He was a basketball player from Philadelphia. He spent all 20 of his NBA seasons, from 1996 to 2016, with the Los Angeles Lakers. He stood 6 feet 6 inches tall and played mostly as a shooting guard. He won five championships, one regular-season Most Valuable Player award and two Olympic gold medals. Fans remember his big nights, such as the night he scored 81 points. But this book follows the work: how he practiced, who taught him and what the records show.

Kobe spent part of his childhood in Italy. Then he went to Lower Merion High School, near Philadelphia, and came to the NBA straight from there. In 1996, the Charlotte Hornets chose him 13th in the draft, the yearly event in which teams pick new players. They had agreed to trade him to the Lakers for center Vlade Divac. Before the draft, Jerry Colangelo, who owned the Phoenix Suns, watched him work out at age 17. He later told the New York Times it was the best pre-draft workout he had ever seen.

Before the 1999-2000 season, the Lakers hired Phil Jackson, who ran an offense called the triangle. Sam Barry created it at the University of Southern California, and Tex Winter wrote the book on it in 1962. Each of the five players fills a spot on the floor. The name comes from the sideline triangle: a post player near the basket and two teammates, one in the corner and one on the wing. The coach does not call set plays. The players read what the defense does and react to it.

Jackson's Lakers won three straight championships, in 2000, 2001 and 2002, when Kobe was 21 to 23 years old. Sports Illustrated reported that he and teammate Shaquille O'Neal sometimes grumbled about the limits of the system. Even so, he praised Winter: "Tex taught me how to study every detail." Writers disagree about how much a system matters. In 2012, the writer Chuck Klosterman argued that the triangle did not explain the titles. He noted that the Chicago Bulls and the Lakers, the two teams that used it most, had more talent than nearly anyone they faced. But he wrote that it was central to how those teams worked.

Kobe kept looking for teachers. He called on Hakeem Olajuwon, a Hall of Fame center, to help refine his game. In 2009, they worked together on his post game. Olajuwon's method starts with footwork: "the footwork is repetition. It is a dance step." Sports Illustrated reported that even Kobe needed a full-day tutorial. It also noted that his post efficiency did not rise afterward, though he moved more of his shots closer to the basket. Olajuwon later said that no player made more of what he taught.

In 2006, Jerry Colangelo, who ran the U.S. men's team, asked Kobe to play in the 2008 Olympics. At the team's camp, he was the first player to arrive. He was working out at 5:30 in

the morning, ahead of most of the coaches. His attitude, said assistant coach Jim Boeheim, was that he would defend the toughest guy on every team. The United States won the gold medal in Beijing. With about three minutes left in the final against Spain, he made a four-point play that sealed the win.

On January 22, 2006, the Lakers were losing to the Toronto Raptors at halftime. Then Kobe took over, and he finished the night with 81 points. Through November 2026, only two players have ever scored more in one NBA game: Wilt Chamberlain, with 100 in 1962, and Bam Adebayo, with 83 in March 2026. Many of Kobe's points came at the free throw line, the spot where a foul sends a player. A scorer who keeps drawing fouls keeps getting free chances. About 19,000 fans watched in Los Angeles, and the Lakers won.

In 2006, Kobe changed his number from 8 to 24. He wore each number for ten seasons. He had picked 8 because his summer-camp jersey said 143, and 1 plus 4 plus 3 is 8. The 24 was his first high-school number, but when he joined the Lakers in 1996, a player named George McCloud wore it. He won three championships as number 8 and two as number 24. By our arithmetic from Basketball-Reference's season totals, he scored almost the same number of points in each: 16,866 as number 8 and 16,777 as number 24.

In 2012-13, at 34, Kobe played more than 38 minutes a game, more than any player over 30 in the league. On April 12, 2013, near the end of a game against Golden State, he drove past a defender and fell. He had torn his left Achilles tendon. It joins the calf muscles to the heel bone and is the largest tendon in the body. Such tears happen when the calf is stretched too quickly, as in landing from a jump. He still made both free throws, then limped to the locker room.

Surgery repaired the tendon, and doctors said he would be out at least six to nine months. The next day, he wrote on Facebook that all the training and sacrifice "just flew out the window with one step that I've done millions of times." He returned on December 8, 2013. Within two weeks, an MRI found a fracture in his left knee. No source says why that tendon tore. The records only show what followed: he played 6 games in 2013-14, then 35, then 66 in his last season.

In November 2015, when he was 37, Kobe wrote a letter called "Dear Basketball" and published it on The Players' Tribune website. He said that season would be his last. "This season is all I have left to give," he wrote. His final game was on April 13, 2016, against Utah. He scored 60 points on 50 shots, and the Lakers won. When he retired, he was third on the career scoring list. As of November 2026, he is fourth, behind LeBron James, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Karl Malone. Lists like this can change when other players keep scoring.

In December 2017, the Lakers retired both of his numbers, 8 and 24, and raised the jerseys to the rafters in a ceremony at halftime of a game against Golden State. The Warriors skipped their usual halftime routine to watch it. In 2018, his short film "Dear Basketball" won an

Academy Award. On January 26, 2020, he died in a helicopter crash in Calabasas, California, with his daughter and seven others. Later that year, he was elected to the Basketball Hall of Fame, in a class with Tim Duncan, Kevin Garnett and Tamika Catchings.

What do we really know about Kobe Bryant's work? The facts here come from box scores, news reports from the time, a medical page about the Achilles tendon, and what coaches, officials and other players said on the record. Some things are not known: why one tendon tore, or how much one system explains. What the sources do report is a player in a gym at 5:30 in the morning, by Jerry Colangelo's account, a full day spent on footwork, and two free throws on a torn tendon. He once said that Tex Winter taught him how to study every detail.

Questions

1. Why is the triangle offense called a triangle?

A. The coach draws triangles on a board
B. A post player and two teammates form a triangle near one sideline
C. It uses three players only

2. What did Sports Illustrated report about Kobe's post efficiency after his 2009 work with Olajuwon?

A. It rose a great deal
B. It was never measured
C. It did not rise afterward

3. Why does the book say "No source says why that tendon tore"?

A. The sources only report what happened, not the cause
B. The tendon was never repaired
C. Kobe refused to talk about it

4. In the sentence "to help refine his game," what does refine mean?

A. Give away
B. Hide
C. Make better

5. What did Jim Boeheim say Kobe did at the Olympic camp?

A. He would defend the toughest guy on every team
B. He asked for more rest
C. He left early

6. What happened to the Lakers' numbers in December 2017?

A. The Lakers changed them
B. The Lakers retired both 8 and 24
C. The league banned them

Words to know

offense: scoring plan
tutorial: private lesson
tendon: muscle-bone cord
refine: make better

Answer key: Kobe Bryant and Every Detail

1. B. A post player and two teammates form a triangle near one sideline
2. C. It did not rise afterward
3. A. The sources only report what happened, not the cause
4. C. Make better
5. A. He would defend the toughest guy on every team
6. B. The Lakers retired both 8 and 24