Name: _____ Date: _____

Kobe Bryant's Two Numbers

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 777 words

In 2017, the Lakers hung two jerseys high in the rafters of their arena. One had the number 8. The other had the number 24. Both belonged to one man, Kobe Bryant. He played for the Lakers for 20 years and won five titles with them. This book tells how, and why he wore two numbers.

He was born in Philadelphia in 1978. As a boy, he lived in Italy for a while. Later he went to Lower Merion High School, near Philadelphia. When he finished, he went straight from high school to the NBA. It was 1996. When he played his first NBA game that fall, he was only 18 years old.

Each year, NBA teams choose new players in an event called the draft. One team chose Kobe 13th, and then it traded him to the Lakers. He chose the number 8. At a summer camp, his jersey had said 143. Add 1 and 4 and 3, and you get 8. In his first year, he came off the bench most nights.

The Lakers won the title in 2000, 2001 and 2002. That is three years in a row. Kobe was 21 when the first one came. The coach was Phil Jackson, who ran a plan for how his players should move. Kobe sometimes grumbled about it. But he said that Tex Winter, a coach who helped build it, "taught me how to study every detail."

On January 22, 2006, the Lakers played the Toronto Raptors at home. At halftime, Toronto was ahead. In the second half, Kobe took over. He scored 55 points in that half. About 19,000 fans watched. Over the whole game, he made more than half of his shots.

His total for the night was 81 points. Through November 2026, only two players have ever scored more in one NBA game. They are Wilt Chamberlain, in 1962, and Bam Adebayo, in 2026. Near the end, Kobe stepped to the free throw line. The fans chanted, "MVP! MVP!" The Lakers won.

In 2006, he changed his number from 8 to 24. It was the first number he wore in high school. When he joined the Lakers, a player named George McCloud wore 24. So he took 8. With number 8, he won three titles. With number 24, he won two more, in 2009 and 2010.

In 2008, Kobe played for the U.S. team at the Olympics in Beijing. At training camp, he was the first player to show up. He was working out at 5:30 in the morning. Most of the coaches had not even arrived. An assistant coach, Jim Boeheim, said, "Kobe challenged everybody." The U.S. won the gold medal. It won gold again in 2012.

Kobe kept adding to his game. In the summer of 2009, he worked with Hakeem Olajuwon, a great center in the Hall of Fame. Olajuwon was famous for his footwork. He said footwork "is

repetition. It is a dance step." Even Kobe needed a full day to learn the moves. Olajuwon later said that Kobe used them best.

On April 12, 2013, near the end of a game, Kobe drove to the hoop and fell. He had torn his left Achilles tendon. It is a strong cord that joins the calf to the heel. He got up and made both his free throws. Then he limped off. Doctors said he would be out for six to nine months.

He came back in December 2013, after almost eight months. In November 2015, when he was 37, he wrote a letter called "Dear Basketball." He posted it on a website, The Players' Tribune. He said that season would be his last. "This season is all I have left to give," he wrote.

His last game was on April 13, 2016, at home against Utah. He scored 60 points. He took 50 shots to do it, and the Lakers won. When he stopped playing, only two players had ever scored more points than he had. They were Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Karl Malone.

In December 2017, the Lakers retired both of his numbers. They raised the jerseys to the rafters at halftime of a game against Golden State. In 2018, his short film "Dear Basketball" won an Academy Award. In 2020, he was chosen for the Basketball Hall of Fame.

On January 26, 2020, Kobe Bryant died in a helicopter crash near Los Angeles, with his daughter and seven others. That day, some teams began their games with a clock violation on purpose. It was eight seconds or 24, for the two numbers he wore. A few weeks later, the league named the All-Star Game's best-player award for him.

Questions

1. Why did Kobe choose the number 8 when he joined the Lakers?

A. It was his lucky number from school
B. The digits of his old camp number, 143, add up to 8
C. The coach picked it for him

2. What happened in the second half on January 22, 2006?

A. Kobe sat out with an injury
B. The game was stopped for rain
C. Kobe scored 55 points

3. What does the 5:30 a.m. workout at Olympic camp show about Kobe?

A. He worked hard before most coaches even arrived
B. He was always late
C. He did not like camp

4. The Lakers hung two jerseys from the rafters. What are rafters?

A. Seats near the court
B. Beams high under a roof

C. Bright lights

5. What did the NBA rename in February 2020?

A. The All-Star Game's best-player award

B. The Lakers' arena

C. The draft

Words to know

rafters: high roof beams

draft: picking new players

footwork: foot movement

tendon: muscle-bone cord

Answer key: Kobe Bryant's Two Numbers

1. B. The digits of his old camp number, 143, add up to 8
2. C. Kobe scored 55 points
3. A. He worked hard before most coaches even arrived
4. B. Beams high under a roof
5. A. The All-Star Game's best-player award