Name: _____ Date: _____

Michael Jordan's Six Titles

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 931 words

Who is Michael Jordan? He lost to the same team three years in a row. Later he retired, tried baseball, and came back with a two-word message. He still won six NBA titles. He won all six Finals he played. He was born in Brooklyn in 1963 and grew up in North Carolina. In 2026, he is 63.

The first scene is in March 1982, in New Orleans. North Carolina and Georgetown were playing for the national college title. Jordan was a freshman, only 19 years old. Fewer than 20 seconds were left. He took a jump shot. It went in. His shot put North Carolina ahead, and they won, 63 to 62.

Jordan told reporters afterward, "I didn't see it go in. I didn't want to look." Soon after, a Georgetown player threw a bad pass. North Carolina's James Worthy caught it. The game was over. Jordan has also said of that shot, "When I hit that shot, my whole name became Michael Jordan."

How did he get there? He went to Laney High School in Wilmington, North Carolina. As a sophomore, he did not make the varsity team. That is the school's top team. He played on the junior varsity instead. He scored more than 40 points in a couple of games. By his junior year, he had grown a lot, and he played varsity.

In 1984, Jordan left college after his junior year. He joined the NBA draft, where teams choose new players. Houston chose first. Portland chose second. Chicago chose third, and it picked Jordan. The Bulls had won only 27 games the year before. By our arithmetic, almost twice as many fans came to home games in his first season. He was named Rookie of the Year.

In his second season, Jordan hurt his foot. He played only 18 games. The Bulls still made the playoffs and played Boston. In Game 2, Jordan scored 63 points, a playoff record at the time. Boston won after two overtimes. Boston star Larry Bird said, "I didn't think anyone was capable of doing what Michael has done to us the past two games."

For seven seasons in a row, Jordan scored more points per game than anyone else in the league. That ran from 1986-87 through 1992-93. In 1987-88, he was also named the league's best defender. That same year, he was named its Most Valuable Player. He also led the league in steals that year. A steal is taking the ball from the other team.

Still, his team kept losing in the playoffs. Detroit beat Chicago in 1988, 1989 and 1990. Detroit's coach, Chuck Daly, later told how they played Jordan. They often pushed him to his left and put two players on him. They also hit him hard when he got past. In 1991, Chicago swept Detroit, four games to none.

Then Chicago beat the Los Angeles Lakers, four games to one. It was the Bulls' first title in 25 years of play. In the last game, the Lakers kept two players on Jordan. That left teammate John Paxson open. Jordan passed to him again and again. Paxson hit five shots in a row. Jordan said, "we accomplished it together."

The Bulls won again in 1992 and 1993. In Game 6 of the 1993 Finals, Phoenix led late. Two Phoenix players guarded Jordan, so he passed to Scottie Pippen. Pippen passed to Horace Grant. Grant passed to Paxson. Paxson made a three-point shot with 3.9 seconds left. Chicago won by one point. That made three titles in a row.

In October 1993, Jordan said he was retiring. He was 30 years old. He said, "I just feel that I have reached the pinnacle of my career." The next February, he signed with the Chicago White Sox, a baseball team. He played for its minor-league team, the Birmingham Barons. He got a hit about one time in five.

On March 18, 1995, a short message came from Jordan's agent. It said, "I'm back." Jordan wrote those two words himself. The next day, he played for the Bulls at Indiana. He scored 19 points, but he missed most of his shots. Chicago lost. In his fifth game back, in New York, he scored 55 points.

The next season, 1995-96, Chicago won 72 games and lost only 10. Jordan led the league in scoring again. The Bulls ranked first in the league on offense and on defense. They beat Seattle in the Finals, four games to two. It was Jordan's fourth title. It was also the first of a second run of three.

In 1997, Chicago played Utah in the Finals. Before Game 5, in Salt Lake City, Jordan got very sick. People still disagree about why. Some say flu. Some say food poisoning. He played anyway and scored 38 points. Chicago won. At one point, Scottie Pippen helped him off the floor. Jordan called it "probably the most difficult thing I've ever done."

In June 1998, Chicago and Utah met again. In Game 6, Utah led by one point. Jordan took the ball from Karl Malone. He dribbled up the court and made a jump shot. Only 5.2 seconds were left. Chicago won, 87 to 86. It was Jordan's sixth title in six trips to the Finals. He was 35 years old.

Jordan retired again in January 1999. Later he played two more seasons for Washington. Then he retired for good. In 2009, he was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame. The Bulls had won 27 games the year before they drafted him. Jordan left with six championships.

Questions

1. What happened with fewer than 20 seconds left in the 1982 title game?

A. Jordan's jump shot put North Carolina ahead

B. Georgetown scored the last basket

C. The game went to overtime

2. In 1984, which team chose Michael Jordan in the draft?

A. Houston
B. Portland
C. Chicago

3. Why was Paxson open in the last game of the 1991 Finals?

A. He ran faster than everyone
B. The Lakers kept two defenders on Jordan
C. The Lakers forgot to guard him

4. In the sentence "Jordan retired again in January 1999," what does retired mean?

A. Stopped playing
B. Joined a new team
C. Got hurt

5. What does the story of the fans at Bulls games suggest?

A. Fewer people liked basketball
B. The Bulls moved to a new city
C. More people came to watch once Jordan joined

6. How many Finals did Jordan win, out of the Finals he played in?

A. Three of six
B. Six of six
C. Four of six

Words to know

freshman: first-year student
varsity: top school team
draft: choosing new players
overtimes: extra periods
retired: stopped playing

Answer key: Michael Jordan's Six Titles

1. A. Jordan's jump shot put North Carolina ahead
2. C. Chicago
3. B. The Lakers kept two defenders on Jordan
4. A. Stopped playing
5. C. More people came to watch once Jordan joined
6. B. Six of six