

The Powerful Servant of Allah

By Ulysses Tucker, Jr.

The concrete playgrounds in the urban jungle of New York City has produced thousands of talented basketball players over the past three decades. But Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is the best player to ever come out of the state, and perhaps the greatest athlete in the history of the sport.

He is a very mellow and reserved individual who is intellectually sound. People still know little about him because that is the way he would prefer it. Abdul-Jabbar has found peace of mind, serenity, and himself through his Muslim religious convictions. He rarely gives interviews.

A former All-American high school player at Power Memorial in New York under the name of Lew Alcindor. His team once had a 71 game winning streak, and his college squad, U.C.L.A., lost only two games in three years and was the national champion three times while he was there. (1967-68 and 69). He earned MVP honors in the NCAA tournament all three years, and was chosen the "College Player of the Year" in 1967 and 1969, and runner-up to Elvin Hayes in 1968.

Jabbar college scoring average was 24.6 points per contest. It is no coincidence that the dunk was outlawed while he was enrolled at U.C.L.A. Jabbar declined to represent the United States basketball team in the 1968 Olympics partly in protest against the practices of what he called then a "racist nation."

Selected by the Milwaukee Bucks as the number one player in the 1969 college draft, Jabbar quickly made an impact by averaging 28.8 points per game and was named "Rookie of the Year" for the 1969-70 season.

The next season Jabbar averaged 31.7 points per game as the young Bucks ran off with the N.B.A. championship by sweeping the Baltimore Bullets in four games. He was also the league's MVP that year. (1970-71).

When asked why he changed his name, Kareem (stands for generous) Abdul (servant of Allah)-Jabbar (powerful) said, "I changed from being a negro with a christian name to being an Afro-American who has accepted Islam; people don't understand that." He recalled that he first became interested in Islam in high school. The attraction grew, he remembered, probably because of the rise in Black consciousness, the example of the late Malcolm X, "and a response to racism, to bitterness and frustration that is readily apparent."

After successive seasons of scoring 34.8 (71-72), 30.2 (72-73), 27.0 (73-74), and 30.0 (74-75) points per game, and being named MVP of the league in 1971-72 and 1973-74. Abdul-Jabbar asked the Milwaukee Bucks to trade him to the Los Angeles Lakers.

Before leaving the organization, Abdul-Jabbar led the Bucks to five consecutive play-offs. The super center felt that his life style would be more positive on the west coast, and with the diversified population of California he wouldn't feel like an outsider.

On June 16th, 1975, the Milwaukee Bucks made one of basketball's biggest trades by sending Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Walt Westley to the Lakers for Elmore Smith, Brian Winters, Dave Meyers, Junior Bridgeman, and cash.

As a Laker the past five seasons Abdul-Jabbar has scored 27.7 (75-76), 26.6 (76-77), 25.8 (77-78), and

the leagues MVP in 1975-76 when the Lakers lost more games than they won, and a fifth time in 1976-77. Bill Russell, a former Boston great is the only other player in the history of the N.B.A. to be crowned MVP five times.

Currently, Abdul-jabbar is averaging 24.7 points a game (sixth in the N.B.A.), and 11.5 rebounds to rank sixth also. He is leading the league in block shots and second in field goal percentage.

Some fans and critics perceive Abdul-Jabbar as one most serious looking athlete playing in the National Basketball Association. Very seldom does he display a smile while on the court performing.

"I'm basically serious but laugh at a lot of things. People relate to me either as a basketball player or a 7-foot object, not as a person. That's what I have to deal with." His great height as a youth greatly influenced his serious looking facial expression.

"I was always taller than other kids but I was younger, too. You kind of withdraw in that situation. The things you don't know about, you let go by. After awhile it came to be my natural demeanor. Like my freshman year at Power," he said, "I was most of that year but I was on varsity with guys 17 and 18, guys getting ready to go to college, guys with all the experiences of adolescence. You end up doing a whole lot homework on what life's all about. By the time I was a senior, that age gap no longer existed, but because of my height the gap was between me and the people around me," he said.

What is it like to be a professional athlete? "It's rough on me," he said, "because like it or not, I'm a personality. That infringes on my right to be a private person and for that alone, it's not as desirable as some other situations I can think of."

Abdul-Jabbar quickly admits that he still enjoys playing the game and "it's a great way to make a living. I like the sport which is highly important. I still want to win. When you're just looking to see you get paid on time, that's a very un-professional attitude and that's when it's time to reconsider."

"My attitude towards the game hasn't changed much over the last few years. It's my profession," said the 32 year old Abdul-Jabbar. "At the present time, it's what I do most. There are a number of things I might want to do when I retire. Journalism is one of them. I've been interested in that all my life and I'll want to get involved in it some way or another." Jabbar graduated from U.C.L.A. with a degree in History.

"Basketball is still fun for me now, though. It was a lot more fun when I played on Saturdays and weekdays with my friends after school. You relate to the game differently as you progress. It could still be fun if that was the level of my playing, pickup games. But this is a business so that puts it on a different level," he said.

Throughout his career, Abdul-Jabbar has scored 23,428 points, grabbed 12,043 rebounds, blocked 2,175 shots, dished out 3,685 assists, and has a 28.6 career scoring average in the N.B.A. In play-off competition the gentle giant has scored 2,382 points, pulled down 1,293 rebounds, dished out 321 assists, and has a 30.2 scoring average which is the best in the N.B.A. history.

In addition to these accomplishments, Abdul-Jabbar has been



Kareem Abdul-Jabbar shows form that led him from the playgrounds of New York to the height of NBA stardom.

named to the N.B.A. All-Star team nine times, and the leading vote getter on the west squad this season. He has made the All-N.B.A. first team six times during his career which is more than any active player, and second team three other years.

Abdul-Jabbar has also been named to the N.B.A. All-Defensive first team three years and second team five seasons. From the look of his inspired play this season, these totals can only become better. The Lakers own a 37-16 record which is a half game behind Seattle in the Western Conference.

Recently, Kareem became the highest paid basketball player in the world when new Laker owner Jerry Buss, a real estate wiz with plenty of class and style, destroyed his old contract and wrote a new one.

Abdul-Jabbar old pact called for \$650,000 a year. The new one is estimated to be worth over a million dollars a year, and use of the Forum once a year for the next eight years.

When questioned about the public's expectations of professional athletes, Abdul-Jabbar says, "they want super heroes. They want you to be great on and off the court, in and out of the job which is not realistic, but that's the way it is."

Abdul-Jabbar agrees that people abroad see the situation different, "I've traveled around the world. Outside this country, nobody knows I'm a basketball player but they regard me as a giant. Like in Thailand, the people there are very short and wow, they didn't say much but they stared."

"One time in Pakistan, I had 300 people following me. That can unnerve you. I had to get in a cab. And in Istanbul, two little boys followed me. I doubled back and caught them just to play a joke on them."

Kareem has also toured Africa with the State Department where he spent time in Algeria, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania and Somalia.

"Are you comfortable with being a hero for millions of youngsters around the United States?"

"That's kind of scary. I'm human just like them," he said. "There aren't too many heroes around today because everyone is real. But when I was young my hero was Adam Clayton Powell from Harlem. He was in the halls of Congress, executing real power for the benefit of Black people before those causes became popular," Abdul-Jabbar said.

Abdul-Jabbar's personal goals include doing things for the betterment of Black people. He feels strongly about it but admits, "I'm still searching," he said. "Everyone has their obligation to their community. It's hard on a lot of guys to fulfill them because they can't get away from their everyday jobs. I'm in a different position. I understand my place very well. I never let it get away from me."

"People in this country spend a lot of time watching athletes, and I've been trying to show people what it's like to be a success -- to always be a human being and have the right values," said the Kareem of the crop.

Community Calendar

ELIOT NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION. 7:30 p.m. Feb. 5, 1980., Prince Hall, 116 N. Russell.

TENTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION. Vicki Adams, editor of the *BURNING SPEAR*, in celebration of their tenth anniversary, will be speaking at the Mallory Avenue Church, 138 N.E. Alberta, Friday February 8 at 7:30. Childcare provided. **DEATH PENALTY U.S.A.** a slide show documenting the use of the death penalty as a means of genocide against Black people also will be shown, Friday, February 8 at 7:30 at the Mallory Avenue Church. For more information call 236-3611.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT BREAKFAST. Senator Vern Cook, Representative Glenn Otto and Multnomah County Commissioner Gordon Shadburne will host the interim legislative report breakfast, at 8:00 a.m. Saturday, February 2nd, at the M & M Restaurant in Gresham. The February breakfast will feature as special guests Felicia Trader, Multnomah County Budget Director and Dave Warren, Senior Analyst in the Multnomah County Budget office. They will discuss the 1979/80 County budget as it relates to the upcoming 1980/81 County budget.

KBPS HIGHLIGHTS (1450 AM). Monday, February 4, 1980., 8:30 p.m. **ROTARY CLUB:** "A Black Actor Appreciates America," a speech by Thomas Jefferson Pruitt, character actor and television personality.

HORIZONS: KBPS 1450 AM, February 7, 1980, 9:00 a.m. "Eartha Kitt: A Struggle for Stardom." In a sensitive and poignant account of her life, Eartha Kitt speaks candidly about her early years in the South and in Harlem, her struggles, overnight successes, stardom, and her determination to succeed. The program was produced by NPR's Donna Limberick.

MILITANT BOOKSTORE FORUM. Sunday, Feb. 3, 7:30 p.m. Subject: "Capitalism's Economic Crisis Today," with speaker Marty Landsberg, professor of Economics, Lewis and Clark College, and regional coordinator of the Union of Radical Political Economists. (Rescheduled from Nov. 18, 1979, when Forum was cancelled due to illness). For more information call 222-7225.

BEGINNING ADULT JAZZ CLASS. Men and women interested in dance can learn modern fundamentals in the Beginning Adult Jazz Class being held at the Northeast YMCA each Monday from 7:30 to 8:30 p.m. "The class is active, fast-paced and fun, and no previous experience is necessary," according to instructor Robin Rifer, a dance graduate of Portland State University who has performed with the Portland State Repertory Dance Company. The northeast YMCA Fitness Center is located at 1630 NE 38th in Portland. For

BABY CARE. A course in "Baby Care" will be offered by the Nursing and Health Services Division of the American Red Cross during February. The 4-session course will be given Mondays and Wednesdays, 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m., on Feb. 4, 6, 11, and 13, in the Red Cross Auditorium at 4200 S.W. Corbett Ave. The class is primarily for parents, grandparents, foster parents or other primary care persons. There is no charge for the course. For more information, call 243-5272, American Red Cross, Nursing and Health Services.

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE. The Committee of Spanish Speaking People of Oregon is offering its service to low-income Hispanics and other persons who need help with emergency assistance to heat their home, emergency food and clothing, translation, transportation and employment. If you would like to utilize any of these services, please contact CC by dropping by our office at 3214 S.E. Holgate (in the ODD FE building), or call us at 283-1387 for an appointment from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday.

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Friday - Brotherhood Fellowship Service with Morning Star 3rd Sunday	7:00pm

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		Choir Rehearsal	7:00pm
		Friday:	
		"The Pastor Speaks"	7:30pm
"Showers of Blessings Broadcast"			
KGAR 1550	11:30am-12:30pm	84 NE Killingsworth	
YPBC	6:30pm	281-0499	
Evangelistic Worship	8:00pm		
Tuesday-Friday	Noon Day Prayer		