

## A Talkative Kareem Abdul-Jabbar Reflects on Becoming Himself

Retired NBA player, historian, activist and author to tour with one-man stage show this fall

By **JOHN ROGERS**  
*Associated Press*

NEWPORT BEACH, Calif. — Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has been a best-selling author, civil-rights activist, actor, historian and one of the greatest basketball players who ever lived.

One thing Abdul-Jabbar has never been — at least not in public — is chatty.

“I’m not known for being a blabbermouth, you know?” the soft-spoken Abdul-Jabbar concedes with a smile, something else he was never particularly known for during his playing days. But, he adds, still smiling, his public can expect to see that change — and soon.

This fall Abdul-Jabbar will embark on a cross-country tour as part of “Becoming Kareem,” a stage show in which he’ll discuss his life, answer audience questions and talk about the key mentors he says helped him achieve his goals. Among them: civil rights heroes Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, his legendary college coach and lifelong friend John Wooden, and fellow superstar athletes Muhammad Ali and Wilt Chamberlain.

The tour was inspired by the 2017 best-seller “Becoming Kareem,” a memoir of his years from childhood to age 24.

Inspirational, poignant, funny and occasionally heartbreaking, it recounts the coming of age of a bright and hardworking but painfully introverted kid, one who was always the tallest in class.

And although he didn’t realize

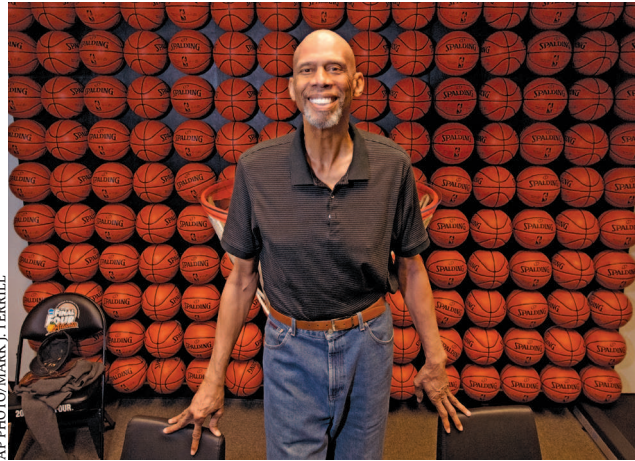
it until looking closely at a class photo taken in the third grade, he was often the only black kid in class, a circumstance that in later years would expose him to repeated episodes of ugly racism, no matter his fame or success, that would leave deep emotional scars that sometimes took decades to heal.

So he kept his game face on, both on and off the court, and persevered through setbacks and successes.

“I’m not known for being a blabbermouth, you know?”

“I did the book because I thought that the process that I went through could be very useful for young people right now,” Abdul-Jabbar told *The Associated Press* during a wide-ranging interview this week at the offices of the Skyhook Foundation, the charitable nonprofit he created several years ago to provide educational opportunities for elementary school children, the same group he targeted his book for.

After its publication, sports



In this Feb. 12 photo, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar poses in his office, in Newport Beach, Calif. Abdul-Jabbar has been a best-selling author, civil-rights activist, actor, historian and one of the greatest basketball players who ever lived. This fall Abdul-Jabbar will embark on a cross-country tour as part of “Becoming Kareem,” a stage show in which he’ll discuss his life, answer audience questions and talk about the key mentors in his life he says helped him achieve his goals along the way.

broadcaster Roy Firestone, a longtime friend, suggested he share those experiences directly with live audiences, telling him his words would not only resonate with young people today but provide a chance for Abdul-Jabbar to clear up some lingering misconceptions dating to his playing days. The clipped, seemingly curt answers he often gave during postgame interviews, for example, frequently came across not as shy but as surly, especially coming from someone who stood an intimidatingly tall 7 feet, 2 inches.

“And that was very unfortunate,” Abdul-Jabbar says softly now. “I think it kept me from a head coaching job and commercials and stuff because people wanted to assume the worst.”

Not that he hasn’t had a storied life and career before and after basketball.

Abdul-Jabbar played on six NBA championship teams, was

See **KAREEM** on page 10

## FILM REVIEW: Chadwick Boseman Rises to the Occasion as ‘Black Panther’



‘Black Panther’

By **Kam Williams**  
*For The Skanner News*

Chadwick Boseman has already made quite a career out of portraying a variety of prominent African Americans, from football star Floyd Little (“The Express”), to baseball great Jackie Robinson (“42”), to Godfather of Soul James Brown (“Get on Up”) to U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall (“Marshall”). The versatile actor’s efforts have been appreciated by the NAACP which has seen fit to nominate him for five Image Awards.

Although Black Panther is a fictional character, the role is ostensibly of no less significance than the historical figures Chadwick has played in the past. That’s because black kids have rarely had a superhero that looks like them to root for, even in Africa, where the Lord of the Jungle, Tarzan, was white, too.

Consequently, advance ticket sales for this Afrocentric origins tale have been through the roof, and I’m happy to report that audiences will not be disappointed. For, the film not only features a dignified protagonist and a socially-relevant plotline, but it’s also a worthy addition to the Marvel Cinematic Universe franchise.

The picture was directed by Ryan Coogler (“Creed”) who made the most of his \$200 million budget, between visually-captivating special effects and an A-list cast which includes Academy Award-winners Forest Whitaker (for *The Last King of Scotland*) and Lupita Nyong’o (for *12 Years a Slave*), Os-

car-nominee Angela Bassett (for *What’s Love Got to Do with It*), as well as Michael B. Jordan, Daniel Kaluuya and Sterling K. Brown.

At the point of departure, we learn that in ancient times the five tribes of Africa went to war over vibranium, a meteorite which imbues its holder with superhuman powers. Fast-forward to the present and we find T’Challa (Boseman) being summoned home to the fictional nation of Wakanda to assume the reins of power in the wake of the passing of his father, King T’Chaka (John Kani).

Complicating matters is the fact that a number of other warriors covet the throne and that a South African arms smuggler (Andy Serkis) is trying to get his hands on some vibranium. Not to worry. T’Challa has a capable CIA agent (Martin Freeman) and a trio of loyal females on his side in his 16 year-old sister (Letitia Wright), his ex-girlfriend (Nyong’o) and a two-fisted bodyguard (Danai Gurira).

What ensues is an edge of the seat roller coaster ride every bit as entertaining as any “Spider-Man,” “Wonder Woman” or other superhero adventure. Simply ‘Marvel’ous!

Excellent ★★★★★

Rated PG-13 for pervasive violent action sequences and a rude gesture

Running time: 134 minutes

Production Studios: Marvel Studios / Walt Disney Pictures

Distributor: Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures

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