

# SPORTS

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Home > [Featured Articles](#) > **Lebron James**

## NBA's best all-time? You be the judge

March 23, 2012 | Fred Mitchell

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One of the great sports debates across America has been the question of who was the greatest basketball player of all time.

The answer almost universally now is Michael Jordan, who led the Bulls to six NBA championships.

For a generation of fans inundated with ESPN highlights, slick shoe commercials and compelling visual evidence, Jordan is the slam dunk choice.

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But, wait, hold on to your sneakers.

The NBA's all-time leading scorer is Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. He also led the league in blocked shots four times. And he matched Jordan's total of six NBA championships with the Lakers and Bucks.

Abdul-Jabbar was a six-time league MVP and 19-time All-Star. Jordan was a five-time MVP and 14-time All-Star.

And we haven't even introduced to the conversation Wilt Chamberlain, who once scored a record 100 points in a single game, won seven league scoring titles, 11 rebounding titles and even led the league in assists.

"There are several layers of talent you have to deal with when you're talking about the game," Abdul-Jabbar told me last week. "Most young people today are only aware of the NBA, like, since 2005. So it's difficult to get through to them about all of the things that happened before they were born.

"Last year Scottie Pippen was talking about LeBron James being the greatest scorer ever to play the

game. And he didn't even take into [account](#) Wilt. LeBron James hasn't come close to doing anything that Wilt did. And Scottie was totally unaware of what Wilt had done and kind of embarrassed himself in that sense."

Isiah Thomas starred for the [Pistons](#) in the '80s and '90s and has an opinion on the matter.

"If they say the numbers don't lie, then Kareem is the greatest ever to play the game," Thomas said. "And I'm a big proponent of that. ... No disrespect to Jordan, but he won in the '90s. And if the '80s are the golden era, then the person who dominated the NBA in the '80s and the '70s was Kareem Abdul-Jabbar."

Oscar Robertson is the only NBA player ever to average a triple-double for an entire season (30.8 points, 11.4 assists and 12.5 rebounds).

"We didn't even know what a triple-double was back then (1961-62)," Robertson once told me. "If I had known it was such a big deal, I would have tried to do that more often."

Thomas believes Abdul-Jabbar proved his dominance over an extended period.

"Magic Johnson never won a championship without Kareem Abdul-Jabbar," Thomas said. "You know, Kareem dominated our league for two decades.

"... The danger is that historically ... tradition, history, [education](#) is just being thoroughly wiped out, manipulated and misleading, which is dangerous for sports."

And the debate rages on.

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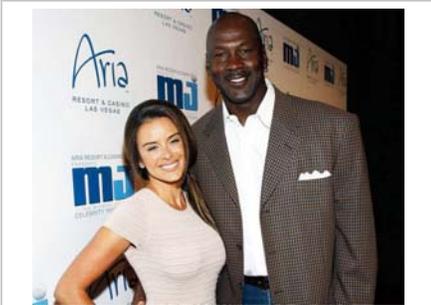
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