

Michael Jordan - 3 on 3

We were living in Clovis, California, a suburb of Fresno, in the Summer of 1990. We had gotten a beautiful airedale puppy that we named Sierra, inspired by the nearby Sierra Mountains. She was a beautiful dog, but they are large, rambunctious and full of energy. For example, we had just moved into a new home and the yard was newly sodded. Even as a puppy, she would grab one corner of the 20 x 40 inch standard sod strip, and pull it up and run around the yard with it. It was quite a sight, but not recommended by landscapers for establishing your lawn.

We lived next to Clovis West High School, which is huge, with 3 outdoor swimming and diving pools, where they held the Olympic Qualifying Meet in 1988. They also had large acreage of football and baseball fields, where we would daily take Sierra to let her run. We quickly learned you can't let her run loose if there was a game going on, as she would see a ball hit in an organized baseball game and run it down, enjoying the resulting *keep a way game* she created with the players, as all of us unsuccessfully tried to catch her. If she could throw, she'd make a good shortstop.

To get Sierra exercise, with such high puppy energy, I started taking her nightly to the fenced schoolyard after dark, when no one else was there. This way she wouldn't interfere with their ball games, and she could run to her heart's desire, until she was exhausted and calm. One particular *Hot August Night*, I took Sierra over to the high school in the dark and let her run wild, as was our routine. It was then that I noticed a conspicuous sight. The school gym door was open with light coming out, and that beam of light from the gym, lit up a limousine parked just outside the gym door. That's not something Sierra and I would normally see, and our curiosity was aroused. So, I got Sierra back on her leash and we walked over to investigate.

As I got closer, I could see that the limo driver was in the doorway and he was watching a 3 on 3 basketball game of shirts and skins. If you watched ESPN's 10 part documentary on Michael Jordan, entitled "*The Last Dance*," you know that Jordan would come to Fresno for 10 years to participate in a youth camp put on by his former Chicago Bulls teammate and former Fresno State Bulldog, Rod Higgins. At the time, I wasn't aware of that, so I was shocked to see this intense game of shirts and skins, that included Michael Jordan, with little debate, the greatest player of all time. Sierra didn't seem particularly impressed, but she had finished her workout and she sat there patiently watching with the limo driver and me.

The basket was just a few feet from the door, and we watched these great professional basketball players, playing 3 on 3, drenched in sweat, right in front of us. The intense competition seemed to have been going on for some time, judging from the amount of sweat on both the shirts and the skins. The game appeared fierce and intense, as this was not just a casual shoot around. They were calling their own fowls and would have mild debates over the calls. There may have been a bet between them, I'm not sure. Michael has been known to place a bet, occasionally.

This was before we had cell phones and I couldn't call or notify Linda, what was the delay in walking the dog. I wanted her to go wake up our son, Travis, who was 6 years old at the time, so they both could experience seeing this great athlete in person. We had recently moved from North Carolina and we even had a North Carolina basketball, that Michael would surely sign for a little boy. Especially, this cute little buddy, who even strangers, when we lived in North Carolina, would come up to us and say, "You look just like Opie Taylor from the Andy Griffith Show." There was a resemblance. I chose not to leave the gym door, as I didn't want to miss anything and I didn't want to impose on Michael, liked an obsessed fan. As it turned out, I think I made the right call.

Sierra and I watched for about a half hour, with the driver, until the game concluded. Then the 6 very tall men headed toward our doorway and the limo driver went with them to start the car. The visual of this moment seemed like I was in a Nike commercial as all the men walked by, except for Michael. The most popular man on the planet at the time, threw his shirt over his shoulder and instead of passing by without acknowledgement like the others, Michael stopped, smiled, and was full of questions. "That is a really cool dog." "What kind is it." "What's her name." "I'm in the market for a dog, can you tell me about the breed." My jaw dropped, but I was able to respond, "This is Sierra, and she is a great dog, but they need plenty of room to run, more than most California homes provide. That's why we come here at night."

Michael got down on his knees to personally say hello to Sierra, and she immediately started licking the sweat off of his face and chest. He just laughed, gave her a hug and said, "She is so sweet." It was then that the guys in the Limo started yelling, "Come on Michael let's go!"

"Alright, Alright" he yelled back, as he stood and said, "Sorry, I gotta go, but thanks." As he started to walk away however, after taking a few steps, he stopped and turned back around and said, "Thanks again man, I really love your dog. I may have to get me one. Airedale right."

Understandably, celebrities at his level can grow tired of the attention of the common sports fan. But Michael Jordan did not disappoint, as he went out of his way to be friendly, smile, acknowledge and spend a few minutes with Sierra and me.

The lesson I learned here is, if you ever have the chance to meet a legend, and you would like to spend a little time with them, be sure to be holding a cute baby or a friendly dog on a leash. That makes all the difference in the world.