



The Earth finally Drags the “Black Mamba” Home

[Eric Shaw](#), Jan 27, 2020

Though he'd made prominent missteps, when Kobe Bryant's helicopter fell from the sky Sunday, he was basketball's most impressive ambassador.

In his on-air conversations, you felt the force of one of basketball's great minds.

He was always poised, self-possessed, and profoundly articulate.

When he retired in 2016, his 20-year career was the longest of any guard in NBA history.

His stamina was buttressed by his relative youth.

Like the league's current top star, LeBron James, Kobe went straight from high school to the pros. A prep standout, he'd won a Pennsylvania state championship and averaged 31 points per game.

When he joined the LA Lakers at age 18 in '96, he was the youngest NBA baller ever.

His whole pro career would play out in Los Angeles, and under coach Phil Jackson — who masterminded Michael Jordan's 6 Chicago championships — Kobe won 5.

In his two decades, he averaged 25 points per game, 12th best in league history.

Only Jordan exceeded the 6' 4" Bryant in the beauty of his play and ferocity as a competitor.

The two banged heads over 4 seasons— and Kobe wholly imitated MJ's lyrical, airborne style.

When Bryant's on-court days ended, he remained creative and focused, authoring an Academy-Award-winning animated short, writing a best-selling children's book, and publishing complex YouTube commentaries on the game. As a keyboardist, his rap band, CHEIZAW, was signed by Sony Entertainment.

His dad, Joe "Jellybean" Bryant, preceded him as a basketball savant. Jellybean played eight years in the NBA (1975–1983), then eight more in Europe — for four Italian teams and one French one. From 2003 to 2015, the elder Bryant coached pro teams in the U.S. and Asia.

Born in '78, Kobe grew up overseas, becoming fluent in Spanish and Italian.

Married 21 years to his wife Vanessa, their 4th child was born in June of 2019.

The day before the 41-year-old died (alongside his 13-year-old daughter, Gianna) in a 'copter crash 55 miles from its origin at Santa Ana's John Wayne Airport, LeBron James had passed Bryant for third place on the NBA's all-time scoring list.

James now plays for the Lakers, but that game was in Philadelphia — the home of Kobe's Lower Merion High School.

Twelve hours before his death on SoCal's Calabasas Hills, Kobe publically praised James for the milestone — and for “moving the game forward.”

Moving the game forward was something the self-styled “Black Mamba” did, too — for nearly all his four decades running — or floating — over the Earth.