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Progression II—
Three Exercises and an Essay:
Confetti Is Everywhere

Exercise 1—Word Picture

My object is purple and gold. It is used to hold one’s keys. You often see people wear these around their necks, or nowadays, hanging down from their pants or shorts. It represents the biggest sports team here in Los Angeles. It is one of the memorabilia of this team. You can find this item in a sports store and I have even seen them in auto-parts stores. The price varies from $6 to anywhere around $15. This item comes in either primarily gold or primarily purple, with the team’s logo all over it. The team’s logo is plastered on it about 25 times (that’s a guess).

I chose this object because it reminds me of when I was younger and I would watch all the games. I would sit there with my dad, godfather, and my cousin. We would have parties where we would watch the playoff games. My schedule was, and still is, centered around Laker games. I remember rushing home from school when I was about 8 or 9, because I didn’t want to miss the game. (I got out at 3 and the game started at 7:30, but I thought that I was going to somehow miss something.) I knew every player and everything about the team. When I went to Chicago, I felt out of place because everything was so different, but no matter where we went, I saw someone in a Laker jersey.

Exercise 2—Scene

Brian and I are sitting on the couch, awaiting the seventh and final game of the series. Both teams have three wins apiece. My purple-and-gold key chain is in the same spot it has been for the entire playoffs: back left pocket. This is the same green team that beat us two years ago, in embarrassing fashion. Brian and I reminisce on how it was to go to school the next day and get ridiculed.

“I remember having to go to school and having to hear all my hater friends ask ‘What happened to your team?’” he says.

“Yeah, me too. The moment I walked into class, my friend David was there with a grin on his face. He made fun of my pain,” I reply, laughing.
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The clock strikes five and the game begins. There are butterflies in my stomach, and probably in his too. Both teams come out cold. The arena is so loud we can hardly hear the announcers. Halftime rolls around and they are up 40–34. In the third quarter, their lead plateaus and drops and we are now down 13. Brian gets up, donned in his purple jersey, and begins cursing at the TV as I sit there in disbelief. Slowly, we begin to chip away, and before you know it, we are only down by 1. The buzzer sounds and the quarter is over; three down, one to go. Fast forward about 20 minutes, 5:21 left; the best player on the team, probably in the world, hits a jump shot after struggling all game. “Hell, yeah!” Brian yells as we high five each other. We are up four. It feels like the trophy is ours but we do not want to celebrate early. Time keeps ticking and the game is back and forth. We make a shot and they answer with one of their own. The butterflies have turned into elephants. There are now seven seconds left; we are up four, but they have the ball. They inbound and take a tough three pointer—*clank*. We rebound the miss and throw it down court. The clock hits zero and the buzzer goes off. Final score: 83–79.

Confetti begins to rain down from the rafters of the Staples Center, with Randy Newman’s “I Love L.A.” blaring through the speakers. The players in gold uniforms are celebrating. Brian’s frown is now a big smile that matches mine. We celebrate as if we are also getting rings. We have just beaten our biggest rival, the same team that embarrassed us two years earlier by 39 points in the final game. The same team that poured Gatorade on their coach as if they were playing on gridiron and not hardwood. This is the fifth championship we have witnessed, and undoubtedly, this is the best.

“Oh my God, what a game!” I remember saying.

My dad gets home from work and gives us a big hug. Brian gets on the computer and finds Queen’s “We Are the Champions” on YouTube. We shout the lyrics with joy, with pride. We watch the trophy ceremony; our smiles are now touching our ears. We won number 16. We have our revenge, and boy is it sweet. Just as sweet as it will be to rub it in David’s face the next day.

**Exercise 3—Observation**

With the acquisition of superstars Steve Nash and Dwight Howard, the Lakers had a busy off-season. That is the way they operate. They want championships. Anything short of that is a failed season. However, in all my years of being a fan, never has there been a time when Kobe Bryant was not the main subject dressed in purple and gold.

On Saturday, October 13, I went to John’s Incredible Pizza Company, a pizza buffet in Montclair. This restaurant has different rooms in which to eat, such as a kid’s room where they play cartoons, and the cabin lounge which gives the effect that you are camping. I was not expecting to do this
ethnography exercise there, but something stood out to me. There was a Lakers pre-season game being shown in the sports room. The Lakers were playing the Utah Jazz at Staples Center, their first game played at the arena this year. The sports room was full, which surprised me since it was pre-season. I figured most were there because their cable provider did not carry Time Warner Cable Sports Net, the new channel that broadcasts the Laker games. There were three men and two children wearing their Laker gear. Three of them had jerseys, one of them had a cap, and the other had a key chain similar to mine. There were also other obvious fans, who celebrated when the Lakers scored.

What really stood out to me were the eyes of the fans when Steve Nash touched the ball. They were locked on the screen. It was as if they were anticipating an amazing pass, one they would see on the highlight reel. When the Lakers were on defense, they continued to eat their pizza or converse with their dinner guests. When the other team would score, they didn’t seem angry, but rather excited because Nash would get the ball and run the offense again. They resettled themselves in their seats.

At the 3:43 mark in the first quarter, Nash was subbed out. He was replaced by second-year guard Darius Morris. This was when the viewers all went to get more pizza or to the restroom. Bench players remained in the game for the rest of the quarter. The fans returned to their tables around the start of the second quarter. Nash and Kobe were still out, so their attention was not on the game. I spoke with a fan seated at the table next to us. His name was Jerry. He looked about 40 years old. He told me he was there for his daughter’s birthday. He was at the table while his wife and kids were at the arcade and he was going to meet them at halftime. I recorded him with my sister’s phone.

“Who is your favorite Laker right now?”

“Steve Nash, because it’s been a while since we had a good point guard. Plus, he can create easy shots for everyone. I mean, I still got love for Kobe, but I’ve been watching him play since he was drafted. The only time I got to see Nash was when L.A. played Phoenix. That was what, like five times a year?”

Nash subbed back in at around the five minute mark. A couple of minutes later, he made a no-look pass to Kobe that sent “oohs” and “ahhs” around the restaurant. It was a very simple pass, but it was pretty nice. For the remainder of the quarter, Nash had their complete attention although he was not even as involved as he had been in the first two pre-season games. At one point, I looked over to my right and saw what appeared to be a father and son. The boy was talking to his dad about something. His dad was nodding his head saying, “Uh huh, uh huh.” I looked at the screen and saw Nash bringing the ball up court and calling a play. It reminded me of when my dad and I are watching TV and my little brother keeps talking about something that happened at school. When he leaves, we look at each other and say, “What did he just say?”
Kobe Bryant was having himself a good first half. He had made a between-the-legs pass for a slam dunk back in the first quarter. However, at one point he was over-dribbling and he was double-teamed. I saw a guy mouthing the words, “Give it to Steve.” When Kobe did, I saw the guy look over to his guest and say, “Finally!” It was as if he was relieved that Nash had the ball in his hands again. This completely shocked my cousin and me because we had never seen people so excited when someone other than Kobe Bryant had the ball. Kobe Bryant! The same Kobe Bryant that brought this city five NBA championships.

The half ended and the Lakers were up by 11. Everyone, including myself, made our way into the arcade. They did not return to their seats; instead, I saw them playing games with the people who had been at their table. I could not help but think that if it had been a regular season game, they would be back at their tables rooting for Nash and the Lakers.

**Essay: Confetti Is Everywhere**

I consider Jack Nicholson to be a brother of mine. Ice Cube, George Lopez, and David Beckham are also on the family tree. We are all related by blood, the purple and gold blood that runs through our veins. Unlike them, I do not sit courtside, nor have I even been to a game. However, you can bet that come game time, our television is locked on the Lakers, just as it has been for years. My family knows that if they want me to do anything, they have to wait for commercials or halftime. Not only are the Lakers my team, they are my Los Angeles.

I remember becoming a fan when I was six. The Lakers had just won the NBA championship. I jumped on the bandwagon because I wanted to celebrate with my father, so I became a fan. The next year, we won another championship. Again we celebrated. The year after that, another celebration. Three years in a row! By this time, I was interested in not only the team, but the sport. I played basketball with my older cousin every day. We would take turns to be Shaq and to be Kobe. I imitated all of Shaq’s post moves. I studied the moves he used to score on his defender and I utilized them when I played at recess with my friends. The Lakers were on my mind 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

After they won the trophy for three consecutive years, I was sure that a fourth would be coming. Unfortunately it did not. I remember the camera panning to the players on the bench, and seeing them cry. I started to cry with them and so did my cousin. Then I remember my dad, who was sitting on the other couch with a glum face, reminding us that the Lakers could not win
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every year. It was hard to accept this. However, I noticed that everywhere I went for the next couple of months, people still wore their Laker jerseys. This was weird to me because I thought fans should be embarrassed, like I was, to show others that they supported a losing team.

The 2005 and 2006 seasons were the worst. In 2005, I had no reason to watch the playoffs because I could not stomach watching other teams play. In 2006 I did watch, but stopped after the five-game elimination. That offseason, my cousin won a Laker jersey after he beat a coach—who supervised the summer school basketball program—in a game of one-on-one. I was shocked that the coach had given up his expensive jersey so easily. I knew the price of those jerseys because I had bought a cheap one from downtown. I was the coolest of all my friends, though, and they all eventually went to get one.

Later, when I asked the coach how he could give up such an expensive jersey so easily, he said, “It’s alright. I got like, ten.”

“Ten?” I said, “But they’ve been playing horrible for … like the last three years.”

“For better or worse,” he responded.

This stuck with me all these years. It reminded me of something my dad would say, and it made me realize why I kept seeing everyone wear their Laker jerseys despite the fact that they had not had a parade for almost four years.

First-round playoff exits were a pattern until 2008, when the Lakers reached the Finals. It was against the Celtics. I was young, only in the eighth grade, but I knew the history of this match-up. I knew of all the great players who had put on the green and gold uniforms. It was not the first time I had seen footage of Magic Johnson and Larry Bird in the Finals. It definitely was not my dad’s first time. He remembered where he had been and what he had been doing when these two greats played more than 20 years ago. I had heard all of my friends’ trash-talk. They told me that the Lakers had no chance, but I did not listen; I had faith. Unfortunately, my friends were right. The Lakers lost in six games. The fourth and title-clinching win for the Celtics was by a margin of 39 points.

I was embarrassed to go to school the next day. The moment I walked into class, my friend David was there with a big grin on his face, because he hated the Lakers. That whole day was horrible for me. Everywhere I walked, I heard others talking about how badly the Lakers had played. My embarrassment turned into anger. At one point, I turned the corner to go into P.E. and saw a guy in a Laker jersey. He was sitting with a group of about five others.
I remember their conversation: they were making fun of him for wearing his jersey, but he did not care. I overheard him say how proud he was that they at least had made the Finals. This reminded me of the coach from elementary school, but it also made me angry. For me, it was win a championship, or the season was a failure.

Over that next summer, I kept hearing from NBA insiders that the Lakers’ main focus in training camp was to win a trophy. This was apparent when they opened the season strong. I was still reluctant to crown them so early in the season, but the Lakers kept coming out on the winning side of games.

They went into the playoffs as the top seed in the Western Conference. They took down the Oklahoma City Thunder, Houston Rockets, and Denver Nuggets. For the second year in a row, they were in the Finals. This time, they played the Orlando Magic, and this time they won. I remember what I did when the final buzzer went off. I jumped out of my seat and hugged my dad. I then called my cousin who was yelling on the phone. But the next day, all the water-cooler talk was about the riots at LA Live. I kept thinking, “Who cares about those idiots? Did you guys see how great the Lakers played?”

It was a great summer. I loved the fact that ESPN kept talking about the Lakers and how they could see them repeat as champions. And that is exactly what they did. It took seven games, but the Lakers won another title. This one was sweeter, however, because it was against those Celtics. My cousin and I watched the game together. We were both nervous, especially when the Lakers trailed by 13 points. My cousin was wearing his Lakers jersey and I had my keychain, but we both wanted to take them off at this point. It was not long before the Lakers were back in the game and eventually led. That fourth quarter was the most nerve-racking time in my life, but when the clock hit zero, it was undoubtedly the happiest.

After riding the emotional high of winning back-to-back championships, I then had to ride the emotional low of back-to-back second-round exits. While the rest of the country was having barbeques and watching fireworks explode in the sky during the Fourth of July, my dad, cousin, and I were inside watching ESPN. The Lakers had just traded for Steve Nash, one of the best floor generals in basketball, despite being 38 years old. The former two-time MVP had averaged 10.7 assists the previous year for the Phoenix Suns while Kobe had led the Lakers that year with only 4.3 assists (NBA.com/stats). For us, the fireworks were celebrating the acquisition of the point guard.

To put the cherry on the sundae, a month later the Lakers traded for Dwight Howard, perhaps the best center in the NBA, according to many experts such as Charles Barkley, who said, “This just makes the Lakers the team
ESPN’s coverage of the Lakers’ huge offseason went on all weekend. I imagined the instructions at the morning staff meetings at ESPN headquarters: “Just talk about what the Lakers have done over the past month.” It was good to be a Laker fan again. All the jokes about them being has-beens had become irritating. I was also starting to get angry again at the losses. After the trades occurred, all my fellow Laker “family members” were extremely excited, more so for Steve Nash because of his skill. Jerry, a fellow fan I spoke to at John’s Incredible Pizza Company in Montclair, said that Nash was his favorite Laker and that Nash could “create easy shots for everyone.” At this restaurant, I also noticed that Kobe Bryant appeared to be old news because there was no excitement when he made a basket. Jerry mentioned, “I’ve been watching him [Kobe] play since he was drafted in 1996.” It came as a shock, because if there was no Kobe, there would be no championships.

Laker fans are different. A successful season is one that ends with a championship, and we do not accept anything less. We are not like Detroit Lions fans, who hope to just make the playoffs. We do not get excited over a blowout win over the New Orleans Hornets. As a matter of fact, we leave early, because let’s not forget how congested the 110 freeway is, especially after a basketball game. We might not even watch the game if we expect a “W” in the win column. Los Angeles is a Laker town, because they give us the best chance of a parade. The Clippers are turning the corner and could snag a championship, but that would be only one to our sixteen. The Dodgers have not won the World Series since the 1980’s and no one even knew that Los Angeles had a hockey team until the Kings won in 2012. As for the Galaxy, no one watches soccer in America.

I am a realist. I know that the Lakers are not going to win the trophy every year. I know that when the Lakers get eliminated, I am not going to be a happy camper. But what speeds up the healing process is the fact that, in a couple of months, a new journey begins. The same goes for all sports fans; every year you think your team can go all the way. However, what separates the Lakers’ fan base from the Bobcats’ fan base is the fact that we demand a good product on the court. Ownership knows we do not want scrubs out there getting us to only the second round, which is why they went out and got Howard and Nash. Sadly, it did not pan out.

To others, Los Angeles is about the beaches, palm trees, and Hollywood. To me, it is about the team playing in Staples Center, wearing the gold jerseys. It is about the memories I have with my father and cousin surrounding this team. It is about me rushing home to finish my homework when I was
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younger, so that I could watch the game in peace and not have to hear my mom lingering over me, asking, “Is your homework done?” If you were to ask me what I wore last week, I would really have to think about it. But ask me what I wore to the parades, there will be no hesitation. The Lakers have always, and will always, be my number one team. Everything else in life—besides family—takes a back seat from the beginning of the season in November, to June, when, hopefully, I will be partying on Figueroa Boulevard.

Works Cited
