



Larry Bird



My Drift

Title: Larry Bird

Written by: Jerry D. Petersen

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This is my third article in a row about great “white” basketball players. I hope you had a chance to read the first two about Rick Barry and Bill Walton. Don’t worry – I’m not a racist. I have already written about Allen Iverson and Wilt Chamberlain and I plan to write articles about Magic Johnson and Michael Jordan in the near future.



Larry Bird, Michael Jordan, and Magic Johnson

Larry Bird BIO



Personal Information

Name: Larry Joe Bird

Nicknames: Larry “Legend” and "The Hick from French Lick"

Born: December 7, 1956 (age 60) in West Baden Springs, Indiana

Height: 6 feet 9 inches

Weight: 220 pounds

Spouses: Dinah Mattingly (m. 1989)
Janet Condra (m. 1975 d. 1976)

Children: Corrie Bird, Mariah Bird,
and Connor Bird

Education: Indiana State University
(1976–1979) and Springs Valley High
School

Basketball Career Information

High school: Springs Valley
(French Lick, Indiana)

College: Indiana State (1976–1979)

NBA draft: 1978 / Round: 1 / Pick: 6th
overall - Selected by the Boston Celtics

Playing career: 1979–1992 (All for the
Celtics)

Position: Small forward

Number: 33

Coaching career: 1997–2000 (Indiana
Pacers)

Current job: President of Indiana
Pacers Basketball Operations

Career highlights and awards

As player:

3× NBA champion (1981, 1984, 1986)

2× NBA Finals MVP (1984, 1986)

3× NBA Most Valuable Player (1984–1986)

12× NBA All-Star (1980–1988, 1990–1992)

NBA All-Star Game MVP (1982)

9× All-NBA First Team (1980–1988)

All-NBA Second Team (1990)

3× NBA All-Defensive Second Team (1982–1984)

NBA Rookie of the Year (1980)

3× NBA 3-Point Shootout champion (1986–1988)
2× 50–40–90 club (1987, 1988)
 (Shooting percentage for season – Field goals, 3-point goals, free throws)
AP Athlete of the Year (1986)
No. 33 retired by Boston Celtics
NBA's 50th Anniversary All-Time Team
National college player of the year (1979)
2× Consensus first-team All-American (1978, 1979)
Third-team All-American – NABC, UPI (1977)
2× MVC Player of the Year (1978, 1979)
Gold Medal at World University Games in Sofia (1977)
Gold Medal at World Invitational Tournament in U.S. (1978)
Gold Medal at Olympic Games in Barcelona, Spain (1992)
As coach:
NBA Coach of the Year (1998)
NBA All-Star Game head coach (1998)
As executive:
NBA Executive of the Year (2012)



College (Indiana State) Statistics

Games: 94 (3 years)
Average Points per Game: 30.3
Field Goal Percentage: 53.3%
Foul Shooting Percentage: 82.2%
Average Rebounds per Game: 13.3
Average Assists per Game: 4.6
 (There was no 3-point shot when Bird played in college – It started after he left school in the 79-80 season)
Minutes Played per Game: 36.9

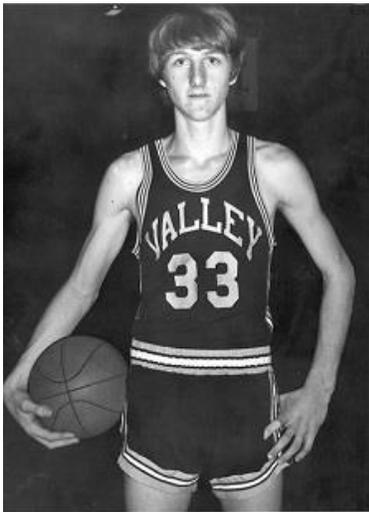
Career NBA (Boston) Statistics

Games: 897 (13 years)
Points: 21,791 (24.3 Points per Game)
Rebounds: 8,974 (10.0 per Game)
Assists: 5,695 (6.3 Assists per Game)
Blocked Shots: 755 (.8 per Game)
Personal Fouls: 2279 (2.5 per Game)
Field Goal Percentage: 49.6%
3-Point Percentage: 37.6%
Foul Shooting Percentage: 88.6%
Minutes Played per Game: 38.4

Once every generation or so, a player comes along who can truly be called a superstar. Larry Bird was such a player.

The Early Years

Bird's legend grew up in the tiny town of French Lick, snuggled in Indiana's corn country, where his family led a simple and frugal life. French Lick had a population of 2,059, most of whom came out to watch Springs Valley High School's home games in a state that takes its schoolboy basketball very seriously. Attendance often reached 1,600--and they were all there to watch the blond-haired shooting whiz with a funny smile named Larry Joe Bird.



Following a sophomore season that was shortened by a broken ankle, Bird emerged as a star during his junior year. Springs Valley went 19-2 and young Larry became a local celebrity. Fans always seemed to be willing to give a ride to Bird's parents, who couldn't afford a car of their own. As a senior Bird became the school's all-time scoring champion and about 4,000 people attended his final home game.

Bird's father Claude Joseph "Joe" Bird was a veteran of the Korean War. Larry Bird was raised in French Lick where his mother Georgia worked two jobs to support Larry and his five siblings. Bird has said that being poor as a child still motivates him "to this day". Georgia and Joe divorced when Larry was in high school, and Joe committed suicide about a year later. Larry used basketball as an escape from his family troubles, starring for Springs Valley High School and averaging 31 points, 21 rebounds, and 4 assists as a senior on his way to becoming the school's all-time scoring leader.

College

Bird found the transition to college life difficult. He started out as an Indiana Hoosier but later left the school and team coached by the legendary Bobby Knight. Then he left the local junior college, Northwood Institute. Finally, Bird enrolled at Indiana State, which had posted 12-14 records in each of the two previous years and where the pressure was not quite the same as at Indiana University, a perennial Big Ten power and national title contender.

Home-game attendance hovered around 3,100 when Bird arrived at Indiana State, but as he had done in Springs Valley, Bird single-handedly packed the house and elevated his team to respectability and more. He averaged better than 30 points and 10 rebounds for the Sycamores during his first campaign. Season-ticket sales tripled. TV stations showed film clips of Bird instead of commercials. Students skipped class to line up for tickets eight hours before tipoff. "Larry Bird Ball" was the most popular sport in Terre Haute.

The Sycamores went undefeated and reached No. 1 in Bird's senior year--that is, until a Michigan State team featuring a 6-9 guard named Earvin "Magic" Johnson knocked them off in the 1979 NCAA Championship Game. This game held in Salt Lake City was one of the most widely watched showdowns in basketball history.



Bird Guarding Magic in the NCAA Championship Game

Bird was named the 1978-79 College Player of the Year and left ISU as the fifth-highest scorer in NCAA history. The Sycamores had gone 81-13 during Bird's three-year career.

Pro Career

The Boston Celtics had selected him in the 1978 NBA Draft, hoping that Bird, who had become eligible for the NBA after his junior year, might forgo his senior season--but knowing he was worth the wait even if he didn't. In 1977-78 the Celtics had compiled a 32-50 record, their worst since 1949-50. When Bird elected to return to Indiana State for one more year, the Celtics dipped to 29-53, but Bird finally came to Boston for the 1979-80 campaign and sparked one of the greatest single-season turnarounds in NBA history.

Legend: If you are not a BIG basketball fan, you might not know what all these box score abbreviations mean. The following terms are used in my basketball articles:

**ppg = Points per Game
rpg = Rebounds per Game
apg = Assists per Game**

The 1979-80 Celtics improved by 32 games to 61-21 and returned to the top of their division. Playing in all 82 contests, Bird led the team in scoring (21.3 ppg), rebounding (10.4 rpg), steals (143), and minutes played (2,955) and was second in assists (4.5 apg) and three-pointers (58). Although Magic also turned in an impressive first season for the NBA-champion Los Angeles Lakers, Bird was named NBA Rookie of the Year and made the first of his 12 trips to the NBA All-Star Game.

An offseason trade that many consider the most lopsided in NBA history brought center Robert Parish and sixth man Kevin McHale to Boston. They teamed with Bird and veteran Cedric Maxwell in a frontcourt and guards Tiny Archibald and Chris Ford to win the NBA Championship in 1980-81. Boston survived a memorable Eastern Conference Finals series against Philadelphia in which the Celtics bounced back from a 3-1 deficit and posted come-from-behind victories in each of the last three games, then took the title over Moses Malone and the Houston Rockets in a six-game NBA Finals. Bird once again led the team in points (21.2 ppg), rebounds (10.9 rpg), steals (161), and minutes (3,239).

Fans were filling not only Boston Garden, which sold out the final 541 games of Bird's career, but arenas all over the country to witness Bird's exploits. Along with Magic, Bird was revitalizing the NBA, helping the league live up to its new slogan, "NBA Action: It's FAN-tastic." After only two seasons, fans, coaches and players knew exactly what Bird was all about: big numbers and clutch performances. Bird's concentration and composure were unmatched. He was unflappable and virtually unstoppable. The hours he had spent working on his shot as a youngster paid big dividends in the NBA. No other player in his era was as good or as consistent a shooter as Bird.

In 1981-82, Bird made the first of his three consecutive appearances on the NBA All-Defensive Second Team-even though he was relatively slow and not the greatest one-on-one defender, his anticipation and court sense made him peerless as a team defender. As many observed, he would see plays not as they were developing, but before they developed.

Bird finished runner-up to Moses Malone for the NBA Most Valuable Player Award, as he would the following year. Bird's 19 points in the 1982 NBA All-Star Game, including 12 of the East's last 15, earned him the game's MVP trophy. It wasn't until 1983-84, however, that the Celtics returned to the NBA Finals. By that time, Bird's scoring average had reached the mid-20s, and he was averaging upwards of 7 assists. He also hit nearly 90 percent of his free-throw attempts.

They had some pretty good basketball players during Birds time in the NBA. Here is a list of the MVPs for that period:

Moses Malone 79,82,83

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar 80

Julius Erving 81

Larry Bird 84,85,86

Magic Johnson 87,89,90

Michael Jordan 88,91,92



Michael Jordan and Dr. J



Moses Malone and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar



Larry Bird and Magic Johnson

Coming off the first of his three consecutive MVP seasons, the third man to achieve that feat after Russell and Chamberlain, Bird helped the Celtics to a seven-game triumph against the Los Angeles Lakers in the 1984 NBA Finals. It was Bird's first postseason meeting with Magic since the 1979 NCAA title game, and it was a memorable one. In Game 5, with the temperature inside Boston Garden approaching 100 degrees, Bird pumped in 34 points, leading the Celtics to a 121-103 victory. In

Game 7, a record TV basketball audience watched Bird score 20 points and gather 12 rebounds in Boston's 111-102 win. With series averages of 27.4 points and 14.0 rebounds, Bird was named Finals MVP.

Bird's scoring average soared to 28.7 points in 1984-85, the second-highest mark in the league and the second highest of his career. He boosted that average with a career-best 60 points against Atlanta. He also canned 56-of-131 three-point attempts for a .427 percentage, second in the NBA behind the Lakers' Byron Scott. Injuries to Bird's elbow and fingers, however, contributed to the Celtics' six-game loss to the Lakers in the 1985 Finals. Nevertheless, at season's end Bird won his second consecutive NBA Most Valuable Player Award.

The following year, which saw Boston win its 16th championship, Bird attained living-legend status. He was showered with commendations: NBA MVP, Finals MVP, The Sporting News Man of the Year, and the Associated Press Male Athlete of the Year. He led the league in three-pointers made (82) and in free throw percentage (.896), an unheard-of accomplishment for a forward. He placed in the top 10 in three other categories. He even won the first-ever three-point shooting competition at the NBA All-Star Weekend. The Celtics finished the 1985-86 season with a 67-15 record; their best under Bird. In the NBA Finals against Houston, Bird nearly averaged a triple-double (24.0 ppg, 9.7 rpg, 9.5 apg). In the decisive Game 6 Bird tallied 29 points, 11 rebounds and 12 assists. He earned a second Finals MVP Award.



Bird and Hakeem Olajuwon

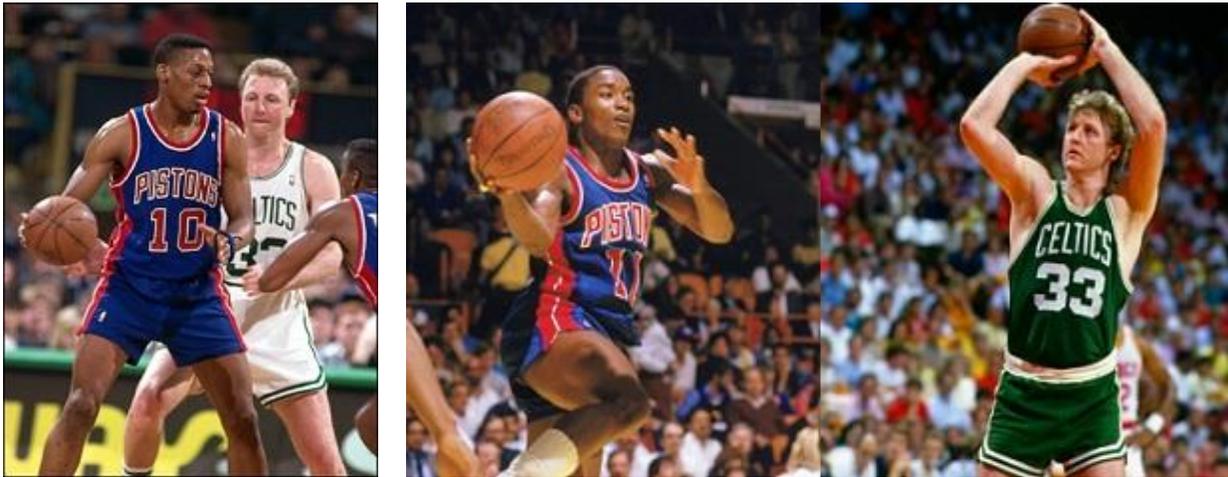


Bird making a behind the head pass

The next year brought yet another amazing Bird feat. He became the first player ever to shoot at least .500 from the floor (.525) and .900 from the free throw line (.910) in the same season. In classic Bird fashion, he proved that was no fluke by doing it again

the following season (.527 and .916). And he still managed to average more than nine rebounds and six assists both seasons.

A crafty defensive player, Bird's most famous steal came in Game 5 of the 1987 Eastern Conference Finals against Detroit. With five seconds remaining and the Celtics trailing 107-106, Bird stole an Isiah Thomas inbound pass and fed Dennis Johnson, whose layup gave Boston the win. The Celtics won the physical, bitter series in seven games and advanced to the NBA Finals for the fourth consecutive year, meeting the Lakers for the third time. But Los Angeles won the series in six games.



Dennis Rodman, Isiah Thomas, and Larry Bird

Bird, now 30 years old and with worsening back condition and foot problems as well, would not win a fourth championship ring. But there were plenty more heroics yet to come.

In 1987-88, Bird was the first Celtic ever to record a 40-20 game, with a 42-point, 20-rebound effort against Indiana. He averaged a career-high 29.9 points that year, falling just five points short of averaging 30 per contest. Bird also won his third consecutive NBA Long Distance Shootout title, a feat later matched by Chicago Bulls' Craig Hodges from 1990-92.

In Game 7 of the Eastern Conference Semifinals that year against Atlanta, Bird engaged in a memorable fourth-quarter shootout with the Hawks' Dominique Wilkins. Bird poured in 20 points in the final period to outdo his counterpart and lead the Celtics to victory -- even though he had bronchial pneumonia. The Celtics, however, fell to the Pistons in the conference finals.

Surgery to remove bone spurs from both heels limited Bird to only six games in 1988-89. The following year Bird posted the third-longest free-throw streak in NBA history, hitting 71 consecutive attempts. Bird missed 22 games in 1990-91 because of a compressed nerve root in his back, a condition that eventually forced his retirement. In a first-round series that year, Bird badly bruised his face in a second-quarter fall in Game 5 against Indiana. His back was also hurting, but Bird came back in the third period to help lift the Celtics to an emotional 124-121 victory. A disk was removed from his back after the season, but it didn't help all that much.

The following year was Bird's last. He missed 37 games because of the continuing back problems. In a nationally televised game against Portland in March, Bird pulled off one final miracle performance -- he scored 16 points in the fourth quarter, including the Celtics' last nine points and a game-tying three-pointer with two seconds left. Boston won, 152-148, in double overtime. Bird finished with 49 points, 14 rebounds, 12 assists and 4 steals. "Anytime you have Bird on the floor, anything can happen," Portland's Clyde Drexler told the Boston Herald after the game.

In one of the only noteworthy gaffes of his career, Bird missed a routine layup in overtime that would have tied Game 4 of a playoff series with Cleveland that spring. The Cavaliers won in seven games; Boston lost three of the four games Bird couldn't play because of his back.

The end of Bird's career was at hand, but not before one last achievement: a gold medal with the 1992 U.S. Olympic Dream Team, which dominated the competition at Barcelona and won millions of fans for the sport with its brilliance.

As the 1992-93 NBA season approached, Bird decided he could not continue. On August 18, 1992, he announced his retirement as a player. After 897 games, Bird retired with 21,791 points (24.3 ppg), 8,974 rebounds (10.0 rpg) and 5,695 assists (6.3 apg). During his career, he shot .496 from the floor and .886 from the free-throw line, ranking fifth all-time in the latter category behind Mark Price, Rick Barry, Calvin Murphy and Scott Skiles.

For 13 seasons with the Boston Celtics, from 1979-80 through 1991-92, Bird personified hustle, consistency and excellence in all areas of play--as a scorer, a passer, a rebounder, a defender, a team player, and, perhaps above all, as a clutch performer. Bird was so self-confident that he was known to waltz up to the opponents' bench before tipoff and predict a 40-point performance for himself. He was such a deadly shooter that he sometimes practiced three-pointers with his eyes closed. Among Bird's contemporaries, perhaps only, Earvin "Magic" Johnson was

considered a better passer, a player who he would inextricably be linked with forever. Few played tougher than Bird, who would leap into crowds and over press tables for loose balls.

Bird was the embodiment of "Celtics Pride." He was a classy, confident, hardworking player who thrived on pressure and inspired teammates to excel. Like Bob Cousy, Bill Russell, John Havlicek and Dave Cowens, the low-key Bird brought out the best in the players around him. But even those legendary players didn't fill Boston Garden, wowing fans and dominating games as Bird did.

Bird helped rebuild a Celtics franchise that had been suffering from substandard play and poor attendance in the late 1970s. With Bird as the focal point of a well-rounded squad, the Celtics won three NBA titles and 10 Atlantic Division crowns. In addition to his three championship rings, Bird piled up an awesome collection of personal achievements. He became only the third player (and the first non-center) to win three consecutive NBA Most Valuable Player Awards. He was a 12-time All-Star, a two-time NBA Finals MVP and a nine-time member of the All-NBA First Team. He led the league in free-throw percentage four times.

An obsessive perfectionist, Bird was idolized by Celtic fans and basketball purists of all allegiances. His last-second heroics, ranging from seemingly impossible reverse layups to miraculous 35-foot bombs over multiple defenders, never ceased to amaze those who followed his career.

"Larry Bird has helped define the way a generation of basketball fans has come to view and appreciate the NBA," said Commissioner David J. Stern when Bird retired due to a painful back condition in 1992, after capturing a gold medal with the original Dream Team at the Olympics in Barcelona.

Coaching

Bird was named a special assistant in the Celtics' front office, with limited duties that included some scouting and player evaluation. In reality, he spent most of the next five years in Florida, playing golf and taking it easy. He did some commercials and appeared in a few films, including Michael Jordan's Space Jam.

But mostly he was bored. He missed the competition, and with each passing year the urge grew to get back into the NBA in a more active capacity. Finally, with the Celtics in a decline that hit bottom in 1996-97, Bird decided to take the plunge. When the Celtics named Rick Pitino as the franchise's new President and Head Coach, Bird

knew any role for him in Boston would be a limited one. So, he cut the ties and went home.

On May 12, 1997, Bird was named head coach of the Indiana Pacers. Even though he had never coached a game in his life, the Pacers had no qualms about turning over the reins to Bird.

"This guy is the epitome of everything I've tried to do here," Pacers President Donnie Walsh said of Bird. "When I started here, I wanted to see the high school, college and professional basketball worlds come together, and Bird symbolizes that. I also really believe he can be a heck of a coach. "He pulls people together. When he talks, you come into his world. That's what a coach has to do."

Despite joking that he hoped he could get the Xs and Os right in the huddle, and that he didn't draw up any plays with himself in them, Bird approached his new role with typical aww-shucks aplomb.

"I'm new at this (coaching) game but I feel I can get the job done," he said. "I have all the confidence in the world that I'll be able to handle these guys and do the things that are necessary to win games."



Bird with Reggie Miller

Bird did a fine job in his three seasons on the bench. In his first season, the Pacers with Reggie Miller as its main weapon, were defeated by the defending champion Chicago Bulls and Jordan in a tough seven-game conference finals series. And in the 2000 NBA Finals, the Pacers succumbed in a six-game series to the Lakers, led by Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant, for the Lakers' first of three consecutive titles.

Bird resigned as Pacers' coach after that NBA Finals appearance and has attempted to come back to the league in an ownership capacity. But this has not happened yet. An avid outdoorsman who also has a passion for country music, auto racing, golf and the St. Louis Cardinals, Bird has many interests. He also owns "Larry Bird's Boston Connection," a hotel/restaurant in Terre Haute that also serves as a museum for many of his trophies and awards.

President of Indiana Pacers Basketball Operations

Bird was President of Basketball of Operations for the team from 2003 until June 27, 2012. He then took a year off to take care of some health issues. He returned to the position July 1, 2013 and as of this writing, Bird still holds this position.

Ten Fascinating Facts about The Hick from French Lick

10. He Grew Up in Poverty

Larry Bird was born in West Baden, a small town next to French Lick, Indiana (itself a small farming town with a population of 2,000). He was the fourth of six children born to Joe and Georgia Bird. His father mainly worked construction between long stints of unemployment, and his mother worked in a diner to make ends meet. The family's small house was situated beside railroad tracks and only had a coal furnace for warmth—one that would often break down, leaving the family in harsh conditions during some winter nights.



Bird's House in French Lick

If you look close, you can see the basket on the garage – that is where Larry learned to shoot so good.



Later, when Bird become famous, they named a street for him in French Lick.

His father was an alcoholic who sometimes spent his earnings at the local bar instead of bringing them home to his family. Due to financial difficulties, Larry would often be sent to live with his grandmother, but whether in West Baden or French Lick, he received no relief from the desperate conditions which surrounded him. Larry always said his desire to escape from a life of poverty was one of the biggest motivators behind his success. Perhaps this was why—all through his childhood—Larry would take 200 practice shots every morning before going to school.

9. Larry's Father Shot Himself

When Larry Bird was just 18 years old, his father shot himself right after making a phone call to Larry's mother. The couple were divorced at that point, with Joe's alcoholism being the main reason for their separation. Support payments were due and work was nonexistent, which led Joe to the decision that the family would be better served through his insurance money. Just before he was to be picked up by the police for failing to make his payments, Joe called his wife and told her she didn't need to worry anymore about the situation. He then hung up and fired one shot into his head, killing himself instantly.

Growing up, Larry was best friends with his father. The two spent almost all their time together, so Joe's death affected Larry deeply. Being a very private person, Larry never publicly showed it. Although he felt betrayed by his father's act, Larry did manage to learn at least one lesson from him that he would carry for the rest of his life. When his father did work, he was a hard worker. Bird picked up this trait and vowed to never be poor again.

8. Bird Dropped Out of College and Worked as a Garbage Man

Recruited by Bobby Knight of the legendary Indiana Hoosiers into Indiana University straight from high school, Larry Bird would last only a few weeks before he left—due to not only the strangeness of his new environment but a severe lack of funds. Larry returned home to French Lick, where he also dropped out of a junior college. He then took a job with the city as a garbage man out of necessity. In the meantime, he also found himself newly married and with a child.

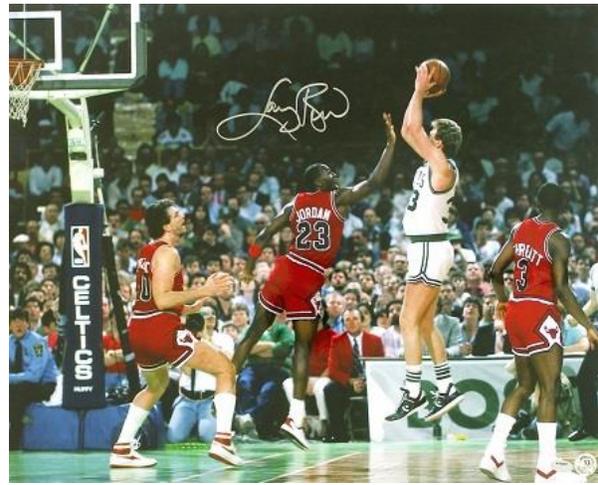
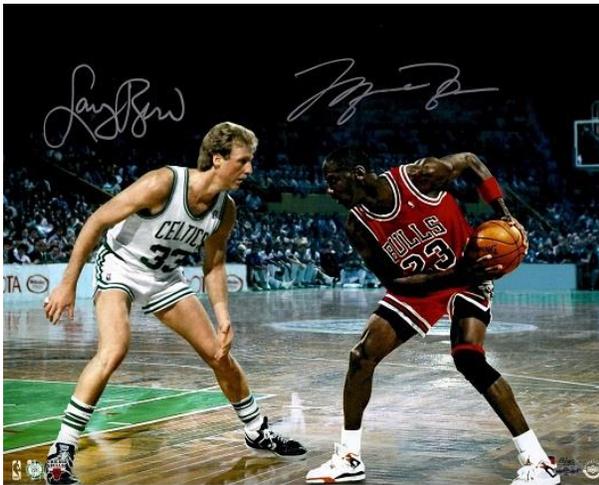


Larry said of the job, “I loved that job. It was outdoors, you were around your friends. Picking up trash, cleaning things up. I felt like I was really accomplishing something. How many times are you riding around your town and you say to yourself, ‘Why don't they fix that? Why don't they clean the streets up?’ And here I had the chance to do that. I had the chance to make my community look better.”

Things probably would have stayed this way—and the world would have never heard of Larry Bird—if it were not for Bill Hodges, who fought hard to get Larry to come to the smaller Indiana State University and play ball there. In his senior year, Larry would lead his college team to a 33-0 record and a chance to face his future rival, Magic Johnson, for the 1979 NCAA championship. It was this game that would mark the beginning of one of the biggest rivalries in all of sports history.

7. Michael Jordan versus Larry Bird

Michael “Air” Jordan is considered by most basketball fans to be the greatest basketball player of all time—and rightly so. However, few people realize just how close to eclipsing that greatness Larry “Legend” Bird came in his career. A comparison between the two players reveals this truth. One can see that Larry matches or beats Jordan in almost every statistical category except points and steals per game. When asked, more than one player has stated that Larry was harder to guard than Jordan.



Many have said that it wasn't athleticism that made Larry great but his mind. He played the game like a thinker. He was known not only for his uncanny ability to read his opponents' plays before they were even completed but for finding a way to get himself open in even the most crowded of plays. People he played with and against have said he was a “basketball genius” with an inflexible will to win. Time and time again, he proved this on the court. And—just for the record—how was Larry's performance against Michael Jordan and the Bulls? Larry won 17 games while Michael won 11—a stat that pays testament to Larry's true greatness.

6. Trash Talking King

Another legendary trait of Larry Bird was his extreme confidence, one that he was not afraid to show off on the court. He would often predict his game scores in advance, as well as tell the other team he would be getting the ball during clutch moments. He was simply never afraid once he stepped on the court, no matter the circumstances of the game. Oddly enough, he has said that he always got nervous before each game and that he hated the feeling.

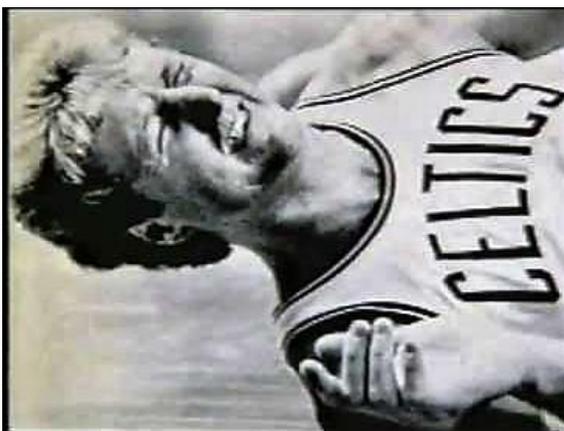


Dr. J and Bird Trying to Kill Each Other

Other players of his era note not only his trash talking but also his ability to fight if needed. Larry got into more than one scrape during his career. Perhaps most notable is the one he got into with Dr. J during a game in which they were both fined \$7,500. Even though the fight was broken up, Larry returned for seconds, not being quite finished with his opponent.

5. He Played His Last Years in the NBA Through Extreme Pain

In 1985, Larry Bird decided to build the driveway of his mother's home himself. He spent all day shoveling gravel and ended up hurting his back and causing his spine to get misaligned. Later in his career, this injury, as well as multiple surgeries he had to remove spurs from the bones in his heels, would make every game he played a struggle. From 1987–88 onward, he would have to have his spine realigned before many of the games, just to be able to participate.



The injury was so severe that he often had to lie down for hours at a time, either between games or sometimes even during and after them. His toughness was legendary, however, as even during one playoff game against the Pacers, in which he suffered a concussion, he returned to the floor to lead his team to victory. His performance was so amazing that even the opposing Pacers team congratulated his effort after the game had ended.

4. Bird Never Forgot His Roots

Larry Bird had homes in West Baden and French Lick, Indiana, which have now been turned into fancy hotels that any adoring fan can stay in. In 2007, Larry sold his home in French Lick just for this very purpose. Anyone with a reservation can now practice on the very court where Larry used to play.



In addition to that, there's a Larry-themed restaurant in French Lick. Although Larry does not own or make any money from the restaurant, he has publicly endorsed it and donated many items of memorabilia for decoration. The town, of course, has also celebrated its biggest star and even renamed a street to "Larry Bird Boulevard." Even today, Larry often visits his hometown for entire summers and walks down its streets and avenues as just a normal and humble Indiana hometown hero.

3. Larry Bird's illustrious Collegiate Baseball Career at Indiana State



The soon-to-be Boston Celtics star, then fresh off a national title game loss to Magic Johnson's Michigan State Spartans, decided to lace up the spikes for one doubleheader in the spring of 1979 to fulfill a wager with Sycamores baseball coach Bob Warn.

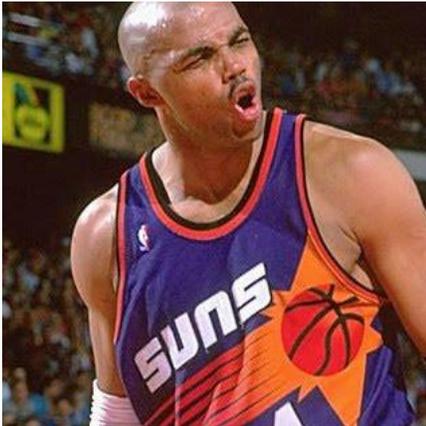
Wearing No. 24 (the only jersey that fit his 6-foot-9 frame), Bird played first base, went 1-for-2 with two RBIs and knocked in the winning run as Indiana State knocked off Kentucky Wesleyan.

Oh, and he also had a full-on collision with his own catcher. Larry being Larry, charged in after a popup even though the catcher tried calling him off and was in

better position to make the play. They ran hard and they collided and went down. Larry managed to catch and hang on to the ball, but they both laid there and didn't move for a few seconds - then they both popped up unhurt. Luckily for Celtics fans, Bird survived his baseball career. He was removed from the game and never played competitive baseball again. He retired from the game with a career batting average of .500.

2. Bird Drinks the Great Charles Barkley Under the Table

For an athlete with such impressive skills and a rigorous training routine, at times Larry would simply let himself go. Early in his career, he would not only chew tobacco (much to the disgust of his teammates) but also drink heavily on more than one "victory night." One time, he even managed to drink the great Charles Barkley under the table, a feat few could match.



Charles tells this story: "I made the mistake of going out drinking with Larry Bird one night and I still to this day do not remember how I got back to my hotel room. Larry does Budweiser, and for some reason Budweiser is the strongest beer in the world. Like, I can drink a case of Corona but if I drink like 10 or 12 Budweisers, something bad al-like I'm not gonna remember it. He drank me under the table."

1. Remembering devilish Danny Ainge, the 5th Wheel on the great Boston teams of the 1980's - and why opposing fans loved to hate him

Larry Bird didn't win all those games and championships by himself. He had 3 other Hall of Famers and the 5th Wheel non-Hall of Fame player named Danny Ainge helping him.

Before Christian Laettner became the most hated player in college basketball, one could make a case that Danny Ainge held that unenviable NBA title in the mid-1980's before Bill Laimbeer took the crown away.

A supreme athlete and competitor with a baby face tinged by impish mischievousness, the occasionally brash Ainge infuriated opposing fans and players with his refusal to back down while backing it up with a dagger shot or unpopularity feisty play, time and again.

Despite a slender and unimposing physique, Ainge is still the only U.S. athlete to be named a high school All-American in football, basketball and baseball at North Eugene, Oregon. He won big at every level, and in multiple sports.



Danny Ainge #44

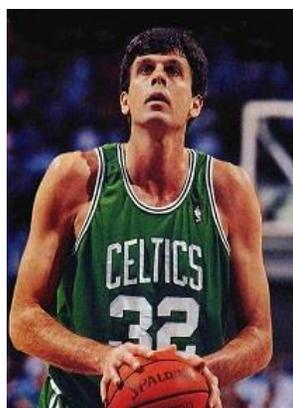
Danny Ainge was a fine shooter (career NBA 85% foul shooter, 47% field goal shooter and 38% three-point bomber), a very good passer, solid ballhandler, a good defender, and a smart player who was tough in the clutch. And yes, he was quite athletic, even though he rarely if ever dunked after he broke his arm in college being fouled from behind on a driving stuff try.

In a five-year stretch as a starter for Boston from 1984-88 when they won two titles and made four NBA Finals, he shot 88 percent from the foul line, including 90.4 percent in the 1985-86 championship season. Ainge averaged 15.9 points and 6.2 assists a game, despite taking just 9.4 shots per game during his Boston tenure.

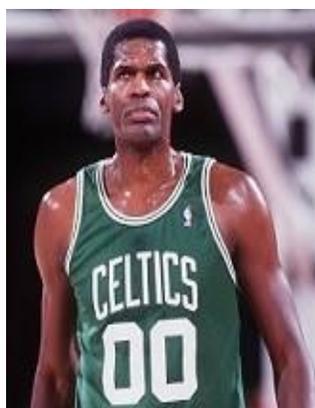
However, in spite of his efficient play as the fifth option on arguably the best starting lineup in NBA history that featured four Hall of Famers (Larry Bird, Kevin McHale, Robert Parish, and Dennis Johnson), fans found it easy to dislike Ainge, an All-Star talent in his own right.



Larry Bird
Small Forward



Kevin McHale
Power Forward



Robert Parish
Center



Dennis Johnson
Point Guard

Celtic patriarch Red Auerbach picked Danny, who would have been a top five selection had he not declared he was playing baseball, early in the 1981 draft's second round, just on the off chance he might change his mind.

It turned out to be another wise, low-risk gamble by Auerbach that paid off big when Danny did opt for the hardwood. Not only was Ainge a tremendous competitor, he came up big regularly on the biggest stages. In round two of the 1981 NCAA tournament, Danny Ainge playing for BYU torched UCLA for 37 points in a 78-55 blowout of the defending national champions. Ainge was a great college player who averaged 24.4 points per game in his senior year at BYU.

Well, there you have it. Larry "Legend" Bird or "The Hick from French Lick", if you prefer, was a great basketball player and had a spectacular career. However, Bird was not liked by many players who wished he would have kept that garbage man job in French Lick.

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