



'My race didn't hold me back'

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar bid adieu to the game in 1989, by when he was unsurpassed as an NBA player. He had scored more points, won more MVP awards, played in more All-Star Games than anyone else. In a chat with Ankita Pandey, the basketball legend dwells on his career, the game and why he was pleasantly surprised when Barack Obama became president. Excerpts...

Greetings from India... Hello. I hope you all are enjoying the basketball. I know cricket is big in your country. I know about cricket. I have my roots in Trinidad. My grand parents came to America in 1917. But I have relatives back in Trinidad, who love cricket... You have been known to have a keen interest in baseball. How did the switch from baseball to basketball happen? I played baseball when I was in school. And I played basketball too. Basketball seemed to come easier. When I played baseball, I was a pitcher. There was this whole thing of control, which I wasn't good at. And basketball just came a whole lot easier. And then I started to grow very tall. I believe that my physical attributes lent themselves to me playing basketball. How has the game evolved since the time you stopped playing? The game hasn't really changed that much. I think the only thing that has changed has been the fact that it has gained popularity worldwide. I think that has been a real change in an aspect of the game — its visibility. It is just that a lot more people are watching it and the international spotlight on the game has become very intense. Do you wish you were playing now? No. Given the salaries maybe, but the time that I played is really seen as the golden age. Because

all the players during that time had to go to university. You couldn't get entry into the NBA unless you played at a university. And when you play in the university, you have a chance to learn the game in less intense circumstances. So at that time their games were more developed when they started than they are now. But the over all general knowledge of the people playing in the NBA was a lot higher at that point. In terms of technology and support staff, players have a lot more advantages now... You have to work very hard to develop your skills and to apply them in the game. These days they watch games on TV and then apply it in their game. In my time, we started with the team. I played in a team when I was in the fifth grade. I played organized basketball very early on and also worked on my game on my own. You started at a time when racial prejudice, especially against the African-Americans, was a major issue. Can you talk a little bit about that time of your life? My race didn't hold me back. I think a lot of opportunities were there regardless of race. The



Abdul-Jabbar in his playing days

year I was born (1947), there was a player named Jackie Robinson, who broke the baseball colour line by playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers. And that changed everything and made it possible for black Americans to succeed in various sports. At that time, the NBA was segregated. The NBA did not integrate till 1950. The integration and the broadening of opportunities became commonplace after that. I came along at the right time. From a prejudiced, segregated country to a nation whose leader is an African-American. How does it feel? I would say that I didn't expect to see that happen, at least not in my life time. And I was really shocked when it did. I think I became aware of it when Barack Obama was still a candidate and he won Iowa. Population of Iowa has only two percent of black people. He won that primary and all of a sudden I realized that something in America had changed. A black-American candidate could be taken seriously. That his colour was not important, his qualities were. It was startling for me at first. But it made me feel so good. It gave me hope. It was a remarkable thing to observe,

especially for someone like myself who had seen the bad aspect of America. Can you talk a little bit about your 'skyhook'? The hook shot is a very old shot in the game. It's just my particular personal take on it; you know I jump pretty high. There was a sportscaster, who covered our team when I was a rookie, named Eddie Duset. He saw how high I jumped and he saw the hook shot and he christened it the 'skyhook'. It's not something that I can claim that I invented but I did put my particular stamp on it. Who is your favourite basketball player? Any one from the present crop you really like? My favourite player of all time is Bill Russell. He played for the Boston Celtics in the 1950s and 60s. I learned a lot from watching him. From the current lot, I enjoy watching Dwayne Wade play. What do you do now? I am working on a documentary at the moment. It's all about the history of basketball. I also study and practice yoga. I have been doing yoga for a very long time. It was an instrumental part of my training routine. Have you ever been to India? No I haven't. I have traveled to Pakistan and Bangladesh and on the way was in Delhi airport for a while. But I would love to visit India. I studied the history of India and it's fascinating.

shortstories

MARTINEZ CONFIRMED FOR WIGAN ATHLETIC

Roberto Martinez will be confirmed as Wigan Athletic's new manager next week, the Premier League club's chairman Dave Whelan said on Saturday. Spanish Martinez, who was also a target for Celtic, will return to the club he spent six years with as a player. Martinez has won many admirers since becoming manager of Swansea City, who he led to the Championship (second division) last year.

GUNNING IN CHINA



FRENCH CONNECTION: Arsene Wenger poses for a portrait on a visit to the Great Wall of China during his tour of Asia -GETTY IMAGES

BARCA LOOKING FOR MORE

Treble winners Barcelona are planning to sign three or four top players to strengthen the squad for next season, president Joan Laporta said on Sunday. Laporta also said there had been a number of offers for striker Samuel Eto'o and club officials would be meeting the Cameroon international's agent this week to discuss whether he will stay or be sold.

MATT AND MARK SHARE LEAD

Americans Matt Bettencourt and Mark Wilson shared the lead after the third round of the PGA Memorial tournament but Tiger Woods and Geoff Ogilvy also charged into contention here on Saturday. World number one Woods matched Bettencourt, seeking his first PGA victory, for the day's second-low round at four-under 68.

gamespeopleplay

BECKS MISSED HIS FAMILY



Star footballer David Beckham has revealed that he missed his wife and children while he played for AC Milan. Beckham has been on loan to the Italian football club since January, and while he shifted to Italy, Victoria and their three sons remained in the US. "There are sacrifices I have made to be in Milan," Sky News quoted him as saying. "I haven't seen my children for six or seven weeks and that's the biggest sacrifice I have had to make. Not seeing my family, not seeing my wife. I know there are many people with many jobs that do that but it doesn't get any easier, doesn't matter who you are," he added.

'I WANT RON'



Big Brother star Sophie Reade says her dream fella is Man U's Cristiano Ronaldo — even though she supports rivals Liverpool. The blonde, 20, has confessed that Portuguese winger is her passion. In a recent interview with Playboy.co.uk she revealed: "I would like Cristiano Ronaldo wrapped up please."

Argentina on course, Dutch book WC berth



MY FATHER STRONGEST: Argentina's Carlos Tevez poses with his daughter Florencia and an unidentified child and (right) forward Sergio Aguero holds his son Benjamin Aguero Maradona before the game against Colombia on Saturday -REUTERS

Maradona's men beat Colombia 1-0; Brazil outclass Uruguay 4-0; Netherlands become first European team to qualify for 2010 edition

Argentina remained on course for a 2010 World Cup berth when defender Daniel Diaz's second-half strike earned them a 1-0 win over Colombia in their qualifier on Saturday. The result helped ease the pressure on Argentina coach Diego Maradona after his team crashed 6-1 in Bolivia in April. Colombia, who have scored only six goals in 13 qualifiers, dominated the first half and squandered a superb chance to equalise shortly after Diaz's goal, his first for his country. The win kept Argentina in the top four of the 10-team South American group with 22 points from 13 games and five to play. Meanwhile, the orange-clad army of Dutch fans can start booking flights for South Africa after the Netherlands became the first European nation to qualify for next year's World Cup finals with victory in Iceland on Saturday. A 2-1 win in Reykjavik, courtesy of goals from Nigel de Jong and Mark van Bommel, left the Dutch uncatchable at the top of

qualifying Group Nine with a maximum 18 points. Brazil went top of the South American World Cup qualifying group with an astonishing 4-0 win in Uruguay on Saturday as previous leaders Paraguay slumped to a 2-0 home defeat by Chile. Bolivia were brought back to earth with a bump as they lost 1-0 to a youthful Venezuela team. A stuttering Portugal kept alive their hopes of qualifying with a last-gasp 2-1 victory in Albania that kept them in touch in Group One, but

only just. They have nine points, seven behind Denmark and four shy of second-placed Hungary with four matches remaining. Only the winners of the nine European qualifying groups automatically qualify for South Africa with the best eight runners-up having to come through a two-legged playoff. Netherlands can relax after completing their qualifying mission with consummate ease. They join South Korea, Japan, Australia and hosts South Africa on the confirmed list of finalists. -AGENCIES

CONCACAF RESULTS: Trinidad and Tobago 2 Costa Rica 3, United States 2 Honduras 1, El Salvador 2 Mexico 1 ASIAN RESULTS: Qatar 0 Australia 0, Uzbekistan 0 Japan 1, North Korea 0 Iran 0, United Arab Emirates 0 South Korea 2 EUROPEAN RESULTS: Sweden 0 Denmark 1, Albania 1 Portugal 2, Slovakia 7 San Marino 0, Azerbaijan 0 Wales 1, Finland 2 Liechtenstein 1, Kazakhstan 0 England 4, Belarus 5 Andorra 1, Croatia 2 Ukraine 2, Lithuania 0 Romania 1, Serbia 1 Austria 0, Cyprus 2 Montenegro 2, Bulgaria 1 Ireland 1, Macedonia 0 Norway 0, Iceland 1 Netherlands 2

yourzone

- q&awith... The lanky son of a famous father ran out of luck in his team's shock defeat against Netherlands. He managed to grill him after he finished a long fielding session which involved trying to hit a barn door with a golf ball. 1 You were a bungling joker the other day? It's the skipper you must call a joker. He should have bowled the last over. 2 So you feel like the fall guy? My dad is powerful. If Colly acts smart my dad will fine him for anything under the sun. 3 Your team couldn't hit a single six? Don't ask me that question. KP was assigned to do that. 4 World Twenty20 is just not for you? Last time Freddie provoked Yuvi and I was hit for... I'll fall sick if we have to play India 5 Now what? I would go back to becoming an opener which I was when I started my cricket. Send in your answers at sports@dnaindia.net *Disclaimer: All characters are real but the interviews are fictional

Saturday's answer: Those who gave the right answers: Philomena D'Souza, Harshini Arvind, G Arvind, Monica, Llewellyn D'Souza, KS Sundaram, Aruna Natarajan, Shradhithy Patel, Ankit Khandelwal, Maria C, Rajiv Abhang, Naviyaa Poonia, Paresh Mehta, Urivish Mehta, Farhat Fakih Virender Sehwag

kakuro

Conceptis Kakuro By Dave Green. Grid with numbers and arrows. The task is to fill all of the empty squares, using numbers 1 to 9, so the sum of each horizontal block equals the number to its left, and the sum of each vertical block equals the number on its top.

webwrap

- Plenty to distract The Lord's members had plenty to distract them on the day Holland drove England to Twenty20 distraction. Indeed, if anything, the Pavilion was more solemn than usual. One reason for this is that for many discerning members Lord's is part sporting venue, part well-appointed pub and part, and often primarily, very superior Travel Lodge. The aura of low key persisted when it was announced: "The opening ceremony has been abandoned for safety reasons." Imagine how much money might be saved, how much shame averted, if we knew in advance that the London Olympics opening ceremony would be subject to cancellation. Outside in the corridor there was a kerfuffle. There were women in the Pavilion! There were women under 25 in the Pavilion!! There were women under 25 in shorts in the Pavilion! Posted on Sportblog on Guardian
- Congrats to Dutch Regular readers will recall that I predicted two months ago that England would pick the wrong team and get beaten by Netherlands, and so it has come to pass. Discussion of England's incompetence can wait until they have been eliminated; today is for lavishing praise upon the Dutch. Netherlands won because they entered into the spirit of Twenty20 and their opponents did not. Theirs was a performance of committed enterprise. England's one of nervous inhibition. Their preparation was no doubt enhanced by the experience of Dirk Nannes, the Australian whose Dutch parentage makes him eligible for the Dutch team but also allowed him to play for Middlesex last year as a non-overseas player. Posted by Mike Holmans on Cricinfo

WAGS AT IT AGAIN



England striker Peter Crouch's girlfriend Abbey Clancy sparked on the red carpet at the Glamour Awards in a black, sequinned shift. As ever, her hair and make-up were immaculate and she let her fabulous figure do the talking in a statement dress. The high street is full of matt sequins that you can dress up like Abbey, or down with some skinny jeans or jeggings. Meanwhile, on the deck of a yacht this week, Eva Longoria Parker appeared to have lost her upper half of her bikini. As a result, the Desperate Housewives star improvised and wrapped a hand towel around.