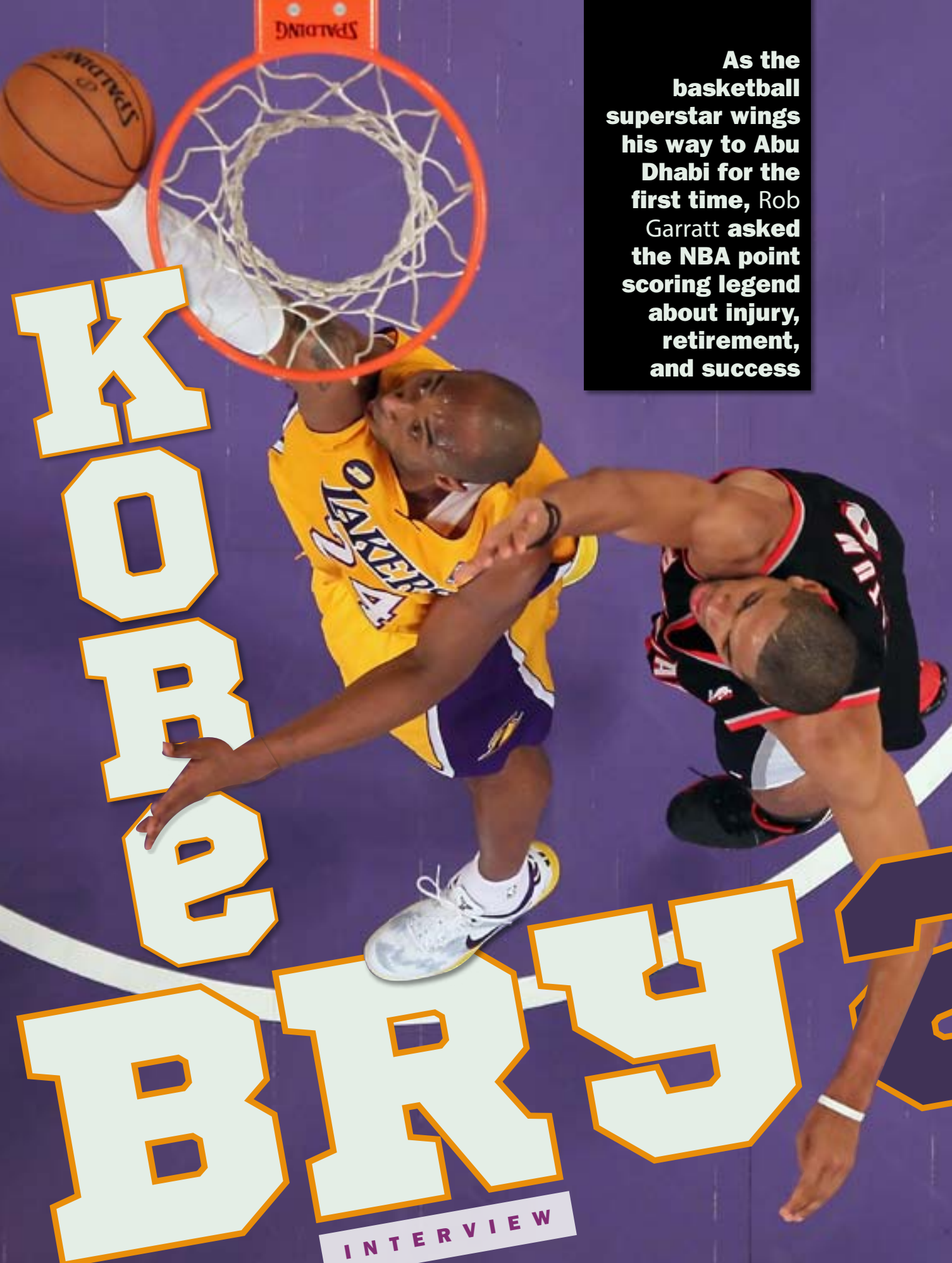


**As the basketball superstar wings his way to Abu Dhabi for the first time, Rob Garratt asked the NBA point scoring legend about injury, retirement, and success**

# KOBE



**INTERVIEW**

If you're not a basketball fan, please allow us to introduce you to Mr Kobe Bryant. Over a 17-year career with the Los Angeles Lakers, Bryant has helped lead the team to five NBA championships and is currently the fourth highest point-scorer in the 67 year history of the league. In numbers, that means he's netted more than 31,000 points in 1,200 games. In addition he's firmly etched in all the record books after netting more in a single game than anyone else has for more than 50 years, putting away 81 points against the Toronto Raptors in 2006. In 2010 he was named player of the decade by both US magazine *Sporting News* and TV network TNT. It's no coincidence that in the same year *Forbes* named Bryant as the third highest paid sportsman of the year, behind Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan, having earned Dhs176 million in just 12 months.

Now 35 years of age, there's no way retirement can't have crossed his mind – especially seeing as an injury in April ended his last season early. As we approach the new 2013/14 NBA season next month, it's still not clear if Bryant will be fit to lead the Lakers come tip off.

If you are a basketball fan... Well, no introduction is necessary.

**Hi Kobe. This will be your first visit to the UAE, what do you expect?**

I'm not sure what to expect, that's the fun part of it – you go to a new country and just try not to have any expectations, and to learn as much as you can about the culture. It's a chance to be around new people. That's the aspect of the experience I love.

**In Dubai you'll be coaching your 'Team Black Mamba' against a side of Real Madrid legends. Now, your team will be made up of some local celebrities, including Kris Fade and DJ Bliss. What are you going to do if these guys aren't up to scratch?**

You have to put them in a situation where you maximise their efforts. If a guy can't dribble, hopefully he can just shoot. I have to identify

the [team's] strengths and weaknesses.

**You've played under some impressive coaches in your time – such as Phil Jackson, who led you and the Lakers to five NBA championships. What is the key to good coaching?**

I think it's bringing people together – that's the crux of coaching, or any management. Building a group that works well together, and supports the weaknesses of each other. **But surely personal egos get in the way on the court?**

Hopefully you can pull guys into a position where you work their egos – you have a guy who can shoot and has an ego, a guy who can rebound and has an ego – and you put all these egos together, and everyone has one thing they have an ego about.

**Back to Abu Dhabi – what is it you get out of doing this kind of thing? Why would you choose to travel thousands of miles across the world to watch some young UAE players?**

I've learned a lot of new things by being around people that love training. And it's in support of a fantastic cause [promoting diabetes awareness], which raises awareness about healthy living that can have an impact on people's lives, and their families' lives, for years to come.

**Speaking of families, how much of a sportsperson's success do you think can be put down to nature, and how much of it is nurture?**

I think it depends on the player. You have some players born with gifts – height, speed – that come naturally. But even if you're born with them you have to nurture your talents and fully devote yourself. Some players are born with nothing and build themselves up – it depends on the person.

**What about you – nature or nurture?**  
I'm a little bit of both. I was born with height

and long arms and athleticism, but I worked hard – to be faster, to be a higher jumper.

**You've been at the Lakers since your professional career began in 1996 – you were 17 at the time. What has kept you at just one team for so long?**

I have been very fortunate. That's how I imagined my career growing up – Magic [Johnson, who played exclusively at the Lakers throughout his career between 1979 and 1996] was like that, and that's how I assumed it would be. And I've been very fortunate it's just worked out that way.

**So now – the question on everyone's lips: How is your Achilles tendon? Do you think you'll be able to start the new season on October 29?**

I'm feeling pretty good, it's stronger than it was. I'm ahead of [my recovery] schedule. I don't know [whether] that means I will start the season – I hope so.

**So the doctors haven't said yes or no? No, they don't know.**

**Looking at the new season – do you think anyone can topple the two-time defending champions Miami Heat?**

I think they're playing well. When you're champions, you come in being favourites to win. Our job is to prevent that from happening.

**And do you think that the Lakers can do that with their current roster?**

Of course we can.

**An average age for a basketball player to retire is around 36. You're currently 35 – how much longer do you see yourself on the court playing pro?**

I don't know, I just want to play. They say 'you will know when you know' – you will know when it's time. The biggest key is that it's your decision, and not a physical ailment that keeps you from playing. That your decision is based on your mindset.

**So another year or two for you?**

I don't know, it's tough to say. I feel very strong. My excitement for the game hasn't waned, that's the main thing.

**Whenever you do hang up your basketball shoes for good, is there any chance of reviving your music career? You were signed to Sony and put out single 'K.O.B.E.' in 2000.**

I don't think so. Financing a project could be an option if I really believed in it, but that's it.

*Kobe Bryant will be conducting a clinic for selected invited young players at the GEMS American Academy Abu Dhabi on Thursday September 26. For the chance to enter, see [www.facebook.com/dmccjlt](http://www.facebook.com/dmccjlt).*

*The DMCC Kobe Bryant Health & Fitness Weekend Celebrity Basketball Game will be hosted at the American University in Dubai on Friday September 27. For tickets, starting from Dhs250, go to [www.timeouttickets.com](http://www.timeouttickets.com).*

*More information at [www.kobefitnessuae.com](http://www.kobefitnessuae.com)*