

LIVING THE DREAM: HAKEEM OLAJUWON AND PETER KNOBLER (LITTLE BROWN, 1996)

Chris Begala assisted famed author Peter Knobler with his book 'Living the Dream', that he wrote with basketball legend and Hall of Famer Hakeem Olajuwon. Chris attended The University of Houston with Olajuwon and covered him throughout his amazing career

"I happened to have the ball in my hands the moment the final whistle blew. I kept it. I have it at home right now.

People rushed onto the floor. Movement, color, like big roaring waves, Rocket fans coming from every angle and all directions. I took a few steps, cradled the ball, and sat against the scorers table and just watched. Everybody was jumping and stomping on the floor, hands-up, shouting, grinning. People were so happy. I had never seen anything like it. That was so beautiful to watch. My celebration was to watch everybody being ecstatic, rejoicing, jumping on tables and hugging each other, showing emotion in their own way.

That morning I had prayed that if it was God's will, we would win. So now, I knew: this was His will. And in that moment I gave thanks that He had willed it.

My daughter, Abisola, was at the game and I held her. Players had their families with them as we held the championship trophy. Everybody wanted to put their hands on it. I held back a little. I knew if I grabbed the trophy none of my teammates would take it from me and I really wanted to share this with them. We had worked so hard and come together so beautifully. Everybody had played a role in this victory, from the bench players who practiced hard and were ready whenever they were called to the regular rotation who complemented each other's talents and added to mine to the coaches who conceived the victory and worked to make us bring it home. We celebrated with the entire Rockets family.

I was also happy for the Rockets' new owner, Les Alexander. People didn't know much about Mr. Alexander when he bought the team, but he turned out to be a very nice man. He and his wife were a nice couple. Mr. Alexander was not afraid to make a deal for the benefit of the team. He was willing to step forward and he was willing to pay the price to win, which I respected. I admired his desire to win, his hunger for a championship.

The locker room was churning, thick with media and friends and sweat and hot television camera lights. I couldn't sit at my locker because there were two hundred people in a room that was supposed to hold twenty. Nobody knew what the championship crush would be like and it was wilder and more demanding than anyone had imagined. The NBA had organized a press conference in the concrete guts of the Summit, and I answered questions and smiled and answered more questions and smiled more. I talked to reporters and then slipped back into the shower room for some privacy. It was only when I finally took off my clothes and let the water run over me that it occurred to me: from that night on, all my teammates and I would be NBA champions forever.'

— HAKEEM OLAJUWON WITH PETER KNOBLER

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