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English 110

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November 15, 2022

**Cover Letter**

During this phase of the course I got to write a persuasive essay on any topic of my choosing. I chose to write about who I think the greatest basketball player of all time is and why. This essay was beneficial to me because it allowed me to explore intricacies of essay writing without being too challenged by the subject matter, as I am very familiar with basketball.

The intended audience for my essay are my peers and teacher, who may not be as familiar without the subject matter of basketball as I am. Therefore, I tailored my essay to them by breaking concepts down in a simple way anyone could understand.

Through this essay I’ve learned about researching for scholarly articles, citing them, and the balance between source work and analysis. As learned by the librarian, in order to efficiently search for scholarly articles use must be precise and smart with your searching. In order to cite the sources you must include an in-text citation when mentioned and a works cited page. You must balance your source work with your analysis and mention the rhetorical situation of your articles.

While I had learned to acknowledge the rhetorical situation in the previous phase, in this assignment I had to use and include it in my essay that I hadn’t before. When researching for the essay I had to plan, collaborate and draft. Lastly, I had to practice MLA citations.

**Who is the G.O.A.T. in Basketball?**

“Some people want it to happen. Some people wish it would happen. And others make it happen.” - Michael Jordan. Winning championships is a team accomplishment, and can’t be done on one's own but Jordan did what he had to do on and off the court to ensure he never lost one. Although Jordan is undisputedly one of the greatest basketball players ever, there is still a debate on who is *the* greatest. LeBron James, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and Kobe Bryant are all mentioned along with Mike to be the G.O.A.T.. Although LeBron has better longevity stats, Jordan is the greater player due to having better advanced analytics in spite of the disadvantages of the rules, style, and medicine of his era.

Players' performance on the court is tracked by statistics like points, rebounds, and assists. While these are an objective measure of a player's performance, they can be misleading when used to compare two players. For example, a player like Paul Pierce has more all-time points than Kevin Durant however, Durant is regarded as the better player by fans and player. This is because Pierce had a longer and healthier career and thus, amassed more points over his career. Durant is mid-way through his career and has been plagued with injuries that have kept him off the court but when he is on the court he’s regarded as one of the best players to ever touch a basketball. This “peak vs longevity”(Jacobsen 5) argument can be extrapolated to the Jordan vs LeBron debate. “He is not only possibly the league’s GOAT but its most prolific player from 1985–98”(Huckins 1) but in LeBron’s **20** year career he’s passed Jordan in every all-time counting statistic; however, was LeBron’s peak as good as Jordans and does his longevity make him greater?

In order to peek behind the veil of counting statistics to compare players one can look to advanced statistics, which are all-encompassing and equalizing. Statistics like WS/48(Win Shares per 48 Minutes) equalize a players minutes and try to encompass all of their stats in order to determine there “win share” or part of the win they’re responsible for. There are a number of these advanced stats like VORP(Value over Replacement Player) and PER(Player Efficiency Rating). Michael Jordan leads in all of these statistics(Jacobsen 4).

Is leading in all advanced statistics enough to declare Jordan as greater than LeBron. As writer Rob Huckins states, “Its complicated”. “Greatest” is a subjective term added to our cultural lexicon to sensationalize basketball and make interesting debates. I view being “greater” similar to its textbook definition, “of an extent, amount, or intensity considerably above the normal or average”. To be greater is to be better than the average by more which is vastly different than being better.

LeBron is a *better* basketball player than Michael Jordan. LeBron came in the NBA younger and dominated for longer. He plays in an NBA climate much different from which requires a more well-rounded skill set. The players he plays against are more talented than the ones Jordans faced. Yet Jordan is the *greater* player. The distance between him and his competition was larger than LeBron’s. The reason this distance may not be apparent through counting stats lies in a difference in eras.

As Zach Lowe stated, both LeBron and Michael Jordan played in different eras and in order for us to properly compare the two, we must contextualize both eras. “Fluke salary cap spike enabling Kevin Durant to sign with the Golden State Warriors in 2016”, “LeBron upended norms about "loyalty" and teambuilding”, “Perimeter defenders hand-checked Jordan. The Pistons body-slammed him, and got penalized with common fouls” (Lowe) are all reasons cited by Zach Lowe explaining the differences between Lebrons and Jordans eras.. In the modern era, the three point jump shot has revolutionized the game. This has led to higher scoring games and therefore higher scoring averages. For example, in 1986 Michael Jordan averaged 37 points per game and was the only player above 30 points per game. Currently there are 9 players averaging above 30 points per game. The three point shot not only affects scoring because it is worth more, it also leads to a more spaced offense. Defenders must respect the three point shot of teammates which creates more driving space for the ball handler. LeBron has used this to his advantage by always surrounding himself with shooters.

Another difference between their eras is the progress in health and safety. As stated by Rob Huckins, this is something that must be considered when evaluating the G.O.A.T. in order to remain objective. According to Chris Haynes, LeBron spends an estimate of 1.5 million on his body per year. Couple that with the fact that technology has improved at an unprecedented rate since the 90’s and it's not a surprise that LeBron has been able to maintain his health for so long. Jordan was able to maintain a higher peaking 13 year career without these advantages.

The last major difference between eras is the rules. Hand checking, illegal defense, and the frequency of calls have all changed. In Jordan's era players were allowed to put their hands on the ball handler and stop them with their hands whilst now you must play defense with your feet and any contact from your upper body will likely be called a foul. In this era, players are free to move around the court on defense which allows for complex zone schemes which guard one player with the entire team. However, in Jordan's era being more than 3 feet from your matched player was a foul called illegal defense. As stated by Zach Lowe, the frequency of calls has increased in this era and refs are more likely to call “ticky-tack” fouls. This difference in rules impacted the style of LeBron's game and therefore impacted his stats. Due to the removal of illegal defense LeBron has had less space to operate as compared to Jordan. This combined with the faster pace of play has led to LeBron taking more threes and taking less of a beating on his body. With more foul calls and no hand-checking it is easier for LeBron to score points.

At face value I believe LeBron is a better basketball player. He plays a different game which was revolutionized by his predecessors and benefits from the progress in technology. If prime Michael Jordan was to magically teleport today I believe he would adapt and succeed, but we can only take his body of work for what it is. However, the debate often held is not who the better player is, it is who the greatest player of all time is. “Greater” is the operative word here because I believe it means who was better relative to their era, and based on the advanced analytics we know it to be Jordan. So I believe LeBron is the better player but Michael Jordan is the greater player otherwise known as the G.O.A.T..

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