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SPORTS SUPERSTITIONS

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CHAPTER 1

FOR THE WIN

A tennis star wears dirty socks on the court. A quarterback carries a lucky rock. Athletes have many **superstitions**. These are beliefs. They are not based on fact. Often, superstitions do not make sense. But people still believe in them.

Balls bounce the wrong way. Players can trip. Bad weather happens. Athletes focus on what they can control. Some have personal superstitions. They often carry **charms**. A charm is a special item. It is thought to bring good luck.



Many athletes have **rituals**. These are actions done in special situations. The actions are always done the same way. They follow a certain order. Certain rituals are thought to bring luck. One player may always swing the bat five times. Another might eat certain foods before a game. Rituals often start as **habits**. A habit is an action a person does regularly. Habits are not usually done on purpose.

Sports fans have charms and rituals too. They may not wash a favorite jersey or hat. Some always sit in the same place. Can this help their team win? Many believe it does.





HOW SUPERSTITIONS START

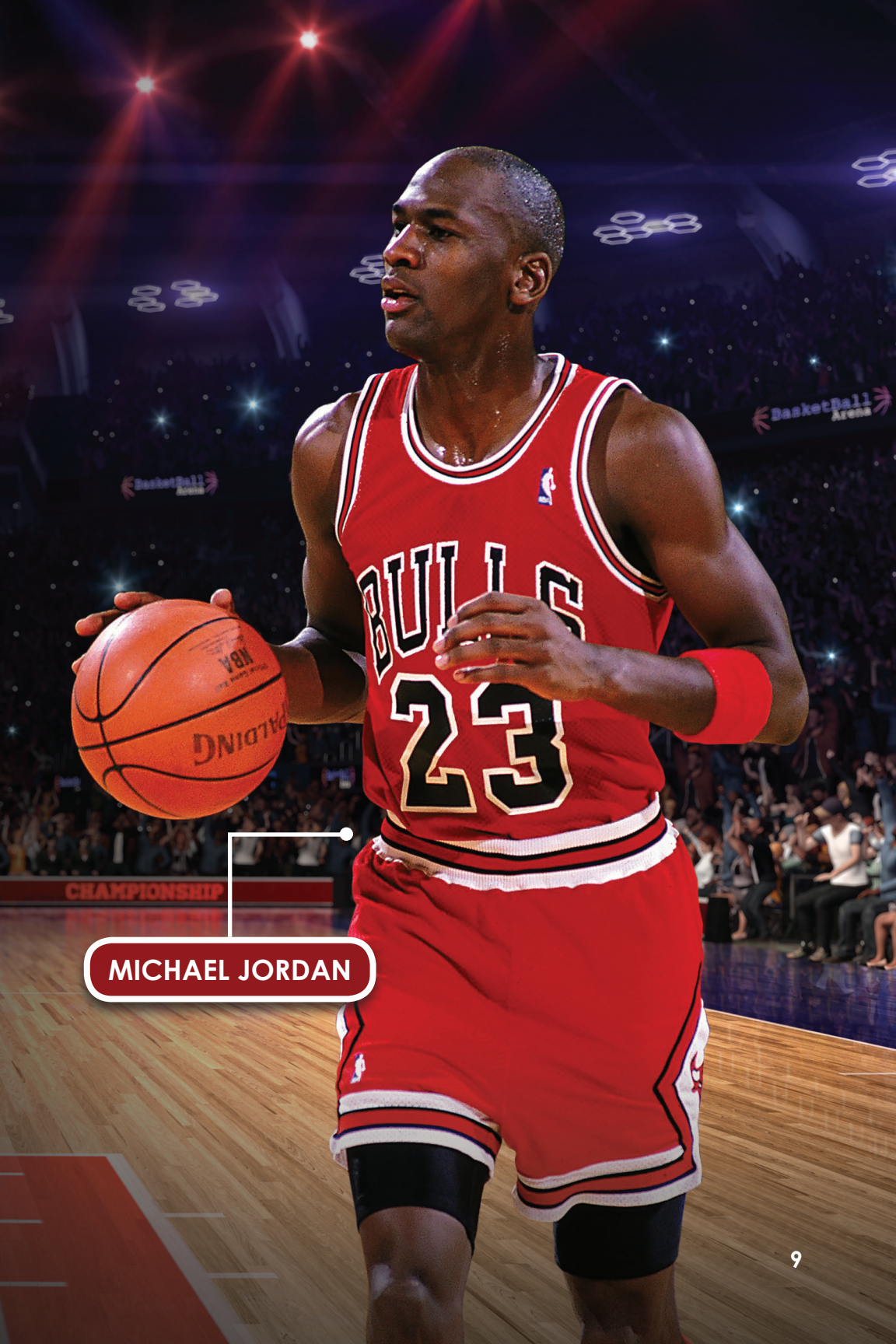
Superstitions often start as part of a routine. Sometimes charms are a gift. Then players see a connection. Did the action or charm increase success? Soon a ritual is done every game. Other items or habits can be added. This can create a chain of rituals. Teammates notice. They think it is working. Before long, an entire team has a superstition.

CHAPTER 2

BASKETBALL

Basketball is a fast-paced sport. It requires great **skill**. But there is also luck involved. Some players believe in this more than others.

Michael Jordan was a talented basketball player. He was a shooting guard in college. Later he was **drafted** by the Chicago Bulls. Jordan kept wearing his shorts from college. These were his good luck charm. There was one problem though. They stuck out of the bottom of his Bulls uniform. Longer shorts were needed to cover them. This style became popular. Other players soon began wearing long shorts.



MICHAEL JORDAN

Mike Bibby played 1,001 games in the NBA. The point guard bit his fingernails. When **anxiety** struck, he chewed. Then a teammate saw. He gave Bibby some nail clippers. Using them helped the nervous player. Bibby trimmed his nails during time-outs. Soon it became a ritual.

Jerry Tarkanian was a college basketball coach. His teams were champions. During games, he chewed on a towel. This odd habit started in the 1950s. Tarkanian had dry mouth. A doctor told him that chewing on a wet towel might help. It did. Soon the coach noticed a connection. Chewing the towel led to big wins. A new superstition was formed.



JERRY TARKANIAN

LeBron James joined the NBA in 2003. Fans call him “King James.” In each game, he scores about 27 points. The athlete always chucks his hands before playing. He claps his hands together and blows on them. Chalk dust floats through the air. James also has a special handshake for each of his teammates. They shake before every game. This ritual is calming. It lets the king rule the court.

THE SCIENCE OF SUPERSTITIONS

Superstitions are common in sports. Most players have one. Some players have many. Two scientists were curious about this. They did a study in 2006. The scientists talked to almost 200 players. Most of them played soccer. Others played hockey and volleyball. All were professionals. About 80 percent said they were superstitious. Many had two or more rituals.

In 2010, other scientists did experiments. Four experiments were with golfers. Only 20 percent were not superstitious. Most golfers believed in good luck. Scientists gave them “lucky” golf balls. This superstition helped. The athletes played better. When golfers felt lucky, they were more confident. Their stress was reduced. With clear minds, their bodies worked better.



GLOSSARY

ANXIETY

worry or fear about what might happen

BIRDIE

a score that is one under the number of strokes a golfer is expected to take to finish a hole

BROADCASTER

a person who shares information on radio or TV

CHARM

an object thought to bring good luck

DRAFT

to select a player to be on a professional sports team

DUGOUT

a low shelter on the side of a baseball field where players and coaches sit

HABIT

an action that a person repeats regularly

JINX

to cause bad luck for someone or something

LEGEND

a person famous for doing something well

LOGO

a design that appears on a team's uniforms, arena, and other products

SPORTS SUPERSTITIONS

Playing a sport requires training and skill. But many believe winning also involves luck. Athletes often have good luck charms or pregame rituals. Coaches and fans do too. From college and professional leagues to the Olympics, superstitions are everywhere in the world of sports. But do these interesting items and peculiar practices actually help teams win?

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