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# Q+A: Jerry West

The Logo discusses why he wrote his new book and how it's been received.

by Kyle Stack / @KyleStack

To call Jerry West 'honest' would be an understatement. The Hall of Famer is known for his bluntness, which is why his recently-released autobiography, *West by West: My Charmed, Tormented Life*, has struck a chord with those who've read it.

In the book, West reveals the events from his childhood, positive and negative, which shaped how he developed as a person. From withstanding an abusive father to losing his older brother to the Korean War to battling depression, West opens himself up to the reader.

He also discusses his famed basketball career, which was highlighted by two Final Four Most Outstanding Player awards at West Virginia, a gold medal at the 1960 Rome Olympic Games and a renowned 14 seasons in the NBA.



West was in New York City Sunday night to promote the book he co-wrote with author Jonathan Coleman. At the 92Y, a community center in NYC's Upper East Side, West told the audience stories of his life and basketball career that provided inspiration for writing the book.

He noted that boxers Joe Louis and Sugar Ray Robinson were his first sports heroes. West also said that his proudest moment as a child was when he finally was able to shoot one-handed, rather than by using two hands to shoot a ball from his chest. His love of basketball as a child helped him develop an affinity for children later in his life; he said that during his playing days in Los Angeles, he would randomly play basketball with kids in his neighborhood. And he made a point to note that it was the stress of his job as the Lakers' general manager, not his self-proclaimed non-existent relationship with Phil Jackson, that led to his departure from the franchise in 2000.

West had more to say in a sit-down with SLAMonline prior to the speaking engagement.

### SLAM: How do you feel about the response your book has received?

**Jerry West:** Well, frankly it's been pretty amazing to me in terms of people that I've heard from who have seen in a little bit different way to their lives. And I've heard from some athletes who've been fairly prominent and people who have called and said they appreciated it, that I would take it upon myself to talk about some of the issues that I think a lot of athletes face. I've gotten responses from people who have been through a lot of different things in life and probably fight the same issues that I fight.

### SLAM: Did writing this book help you come to peace with a lot of the issues that you've gone through?

**JW:** Yes and no. Because, as I say, I really don't want to keep harping on it, but I do have some awful dark days. I have no idea what sets them off, but the last couple days have not been good, maybe because I've been talking about it so much. And I'm happy I did for the reason that hopefully kids and people who shared the same kind of life I had understand that there is a path for success, of some sort. It doesn't have to in



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athletics, at all. I just happen to be fortunate enough to be an athlete and have a chance to live a life that I didn't dream possible.

But there are times when I would have always liked to ask my father, "Why?" But I guess I wasn't confident enough to do that or didn't want to go there anymore. I never asked him that before he died and maybe [it was] something I should have.

**SLAM: Being that you're a relatively private person, how does it sit with you that people know these details of your life?**

**JW:** I think so many positive things are written about people that they don't know what goes on behind closed doors. And most athletes are very protective of their privacy. More importantly, they want to embellish, a lot of these sports do embellish the careers of these players and it's not something I wanted to do. To me, just something I love to do. I love to compete, it was something I seemed to be pretty good at but ultimately, at the end of the day, the thing I liked most was being around my teammates in the locker room before a game. And that enormous rush that you feel before you're getting ready to play.

Those were the things that drove me and had little or nothing to do with these other issues. And these other issues are issues I dealt with after games, after losses. Being an executive probably brought out the worst in me, to be honest with you.

**SLAM: Were there any teammates or coaches or other people who you dealt with in the basketball world who you felt comfortable talking with? Anyone who helped you get through these issues?**

**JW:** I think a few people because most of the time I'm usually smiling. I really do like people a lot, and I don't hate anyone—thank God. But I just felt that those were things that were part of what really drove me, to be honest with you. I learned a lot of lessons growing up in my life. You know, diminished returns is probably the expectation I had. As I say, basketball came to me and for some reason it gave me an opportunity to live a life that I didn't dream possible. But it did let me live my dreams.

**SLAM: You've said that part of the reason for this book was to eradicate some of the stereotypes of you that existed. Were there one or two, in particular, which bothered you most throughout the years?**

**JW:** Well, again, you fail so much in sports, you really do. I think in this country we always relish winners and there's only going to be one winner to any year in all sports and everyone is going to talk about how great they were and where they were rank. I didn't see that very much. We won a lot, but we got close a lot. And I think, in the process, I would love to know what other people would think about in the locker room and if there was a degree of "They stunk" or "They weren't very good." So listen, they cared as much as the other team. They gave just as much, or maybe even more, and sometimes they weren't good enough.

That's one thing I think I guess always sort of rankled me, that all we do is praise winners. I know guys on Championship teams, for a few Championship teams, who didn't even get in the game. And people talk about what great champions they are. But I see some of the enormously gifted and great players who had enormous careers and everyone still looks at them without a Championship.

**SLAM: Where do you go from here? The book is out, you're doing the media tours. Where do you take it from here?**

**JW:** Frankly, when I'm done talking about it, I'm not going to talk about it anymore, okay? It's part of my life that, revisiting it hasn't been the most pleasant thing. As I say, I do, a lot of days I get down thinking about scars that I've opened by writing a book of this nature. But, more importantly, to tell people that I am human. I'm not what they think I am. I'm flawed. There's a lot of people who are flawed who, frankly, don't want anyone to know it. I've had so many wonderful things happen to me in my life. A lot of good things and a lot of very hurtful things that are said about you because people, when they try to read what's in your mind, it's always surprising some of the things they come up with. And I've always felt that even though that creates controversy, it creates conversation.

They have no clue what I'm thinking, as I have no clue what you're thinking sitting here. They don't know what drives me, they don't know what makes me feel good. At the end of the day, what makes me feel good is trying to do something for someone, help someone, give to someone. Those are the things that make me feel good.

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