

Lesson from the NBA Playoffs: You Can't Help Out by Holding Back

This year's NBA Finals features the Cleveland Cavaliers versus the Golden State Warriors for the fourth consecutive season.

For most NBA fans, this comes as no big surprise.

The Cavaliers have LeBron James. If you've paid even the slightest bit of attention to professional basketball for the past decade, you'll know that having LeBron on your team has meant an automatic trip to the Finals. For the past eight years, LeBron's team has made an appearance on the big stage.

Golden State has four all-stars and is frequently referred to as "the greatest team ever assembled." After winning a historic 73 wins in a single season, they added one of the top 3 players in the entire league to their team.

Before the 2017-2018 season began, the Cavs versus the Warriors was the outcome that most experts predicted and it's pretty easy to see why. And yet, a case could be made that neither team deserves to be in their current position.

In order to make it to the finals, the Cleveland Cavaliers had to beat the Boston Celtics in a best of seven game series. It took them all seven games. It also took a historically bad shooting performance from the Celtics. But that's not why the Cavs were fortunate. The Cavs were fortunate because Boston's two best players were injured for the entire series. In other words, the Cavs barely beat a team that was missing the assistance of two all-stars.

The Golden State Warriors experienced a similar fortune. In order to make it to the finals, they needed to beat the Houston Rockets in a best of seven game series. It took them all seven games. It also took a historically bad shooting performance from the Rockets. But that's not why the Warriors were fortunate. At one point, the Warriors were trailing 3-2 in the series. Houston was poised to pull off the upset. Then Houston's second best player — a guy who most people consider to be the best pure point guard in the NBA — suffered an untimely injury. They were forced to play their next two games without the guy who was having his way against the Warriors. And the Warriors still struggled to beat them.

The Cavs and the Warriors greatly benefited from the untimely misfortune of others. There's no way around that observation. If you're a Boston fan or a Houston fan, you're probably nodding your head enthusiastically as you read this. If Boston and Houston had not lost their stars, NBA history might have been forever altered.

But here's an equally important observation: The Cavs are not responsible for the untimely misfortune of the Celtics and the Warriors are not responsible for the untimely misfortune of the Rockets.

Both finals teams are responsible for playing the hand they're dealt and both teams have done that in a way that puts them in a position to win it all. But in order to win it all, both teams have to make a decision to focus on the opportunity in front of them and tune out the thousands of fans, celebrities, and sports commentators who are saying things like "they got lucky" or "they don't deserve to be there" or "the other team was better" and so forth. Those criticisms and complaints may be true in some sense, but they don't change a thing. There's nothing anyone can do about them. And this is where we can learn a valuable lesson from this year's NBA playoffs:

In order to win at life, you sometimes have to be unapologetic about the opportunities you have to create wealth or chase after your dreams.

Should you be grateful for the good fortune you've had along the way? Absolutely.

Should you try to help out those whose fortune has been less than yours? In whatever way you can empower them, make it happen.

Should you rub it in people's faces when they experience bad luck? I can't think of a good reason why you would.

Should you pretend that your success is solely the result of your brilliance and nothing else? Of course not. Life is filled with variables and you're better off being honest with yourself about that.

If it's not clear, I am taking the time to eliminate any excuse anyone might have for twisting this into a heartless message about being an arrogant and apathetic "achiever" who refuses to acknowledge or alleviate the suffering of others. **If you have the power to change someone else's life for the better, then do it.**

But...

Don't confuse "giving back" with "holding back" and don't equate "helping out" with "sitting out." You can't truly be generous if you suppress your talents and stifle your potential because of misdirected pity towards those who have bad luck. Helping people who are losing the game isn't the same thing as mentally checking yourself out of the game.

Sometimes you'll find yourself in a position to do something special, something that will bring great joy or wealth or opportunity to the people rooting for you and the people

working with you. And when those opportunities emerge, you have to turn your attention away from all the noise generated by people who think you don't deserve to be there because of a bunch of stuff that you can't or shouldn't change.

You can't undo all the world's misfortunes nor can you save everyone, but you can make the most of your own life and you have a responsibility to do so.