

# The Biggest Reason LeBron Will Never Catch Jordan

*"My motivation is this ghost I'm chasing. The ghost played in Chicago."*

–LeBron James

LeBron James has, in one sense, done the impossible. He has made the GOAT discussion a national discussion. If the greatness of Larry Bird, Magic Johnson, Bill Russell, et. al., wasn't enough to keep Jordan from being the consensus choice among knowledgeable NBA fans, I didn't think anyone ever could. But according to what I read on sports media and Twitter, the discussion is real. It's happening right now. REO's very own [Michael Lytle dealt with it back in June](#).

My take will be distinct from Mike's, even if my conclusion is the same. Let me be absolutely clear about one thing from the outset: I am going to broach this with my opinion about how the debate is viewed nationally, NOT what my opinion is. I've already written about it before and it is that [Larry Bird is the greatest](#). I do have an opinion on these two players and where they rank, but I think it will be more beneficial at this point to see it through the eyes of the nation at large and not just my own.

There is one huge reason why I think LeBron, given his age and time left to play, will almost certainly not catch Jordan in the public eye. Before I get to it, let me comment on how funny it is to observe debate when you have no horse in the race. I do not love nor hate LBJ or MJ and can see it more objectively. And this is common:

***Dude 1: LeBron never lost in the 1st round.***

***Dude 2: Yeah, but he didn't have to play the 86 Celtics.***

(same two people later)

***Dude 2: Jordan never lost in the Finals.***

***Dude 1: Yeah, but he never had to play the 16 Warriors.***

But my main point isn't to make these types of claims but to speak to something that absolutely matters to the USA public conscience, more than anything else when it comes to sports: What is the perception of the athlete when it comes to the Championship game or round? And in this area, Michael is so far ahead of James I don't know if he can catch him.

Note that I am **NOT** saying that Jordan is better than LeBron because  $6 > 3$ . Mike dealt with that and dismissed it completely. Neither is it the brother of that argument that Jordan was 6-0 and LeBron is 3-6 in the NBA Finals.

What I am speaking to is a bit different.

You see, Michael Jeffrey Jordan didn't just win six championships and go 6-0 while doing it. MJ dominated those series at times and, more importantly for my point here, he left us with lasting images of how he dominated. That, in my opinion, is the biggest reason Michael Jordan remains a ghost that cannot be caught.

What do I mean exactly? Well, for one, can you see in your mind's eye Jordan being assisted off the court by Scottie Pippen after making a crucial shot at the end of Game 5 in the 1997 Finals? How many times have you seen the highlight of Jordan shrugging after making his 6th first half three in Game 1 vs. Portland in 1992? Or of him switching hands on a layup vs. the Lakers in 1991, complete with Marv Albert saying "A spectacular move!"?



Beyond these iconic images that manifested how Jordan saved his best plays for the Finals, Michael Jordan did something twice that LeBron has never done: he made a game-winning shot in the final seconds of a Finals game. Almost any NBA fan knows he made the series clincher vs. Utah in 1998, his last game ever with Chicago. But true fans know he did the same thing in Game 1 vs. Utah in 1997. The former is also an image and one that is burned in the brain of people like me, *in huge part because he posed after he shot it*. Though I do remember him pumping his fist after the latter shot as well, that image will never compare to one in 98.



There is little doubt that for most of these moments, MJ's image-producing highlight swings the game and possibly the series. If he doesn't score every one of those 38 points in the Flulike Symptoms Game, Chicago likely doesn't win. If he misses that jumper over Russell in 98, they probably have to go to Game 7. If he doesn't demoralize Portland in Game 1 that year, maybe Chicago doesn't win in six. But what I'm communicating is that these truths aren't nearly as important as the images themselves. People's memories tell them Jordan was incredible and whether or not those moments were crucial sort of takes a backseat. I mean why is the image of him switching hands more famous than the buzzer beater to win Game 1 in 97?



LeBron just does not have this in his arsenal. He has the block vs. Golden State in 2016 and that's about it. Most other images people have of LeBron in the Finals are negative: the grimace and pointing at JR Smith last year, playing hot potato vs. Dallas in 2011, etc. Remember, I'm not saying this is

fair. You can bring out all sorts of stats and facts and data to convince people that LeBron is more clutch than Jordan (and he has made more shots in the playoffs late in games to put his team ahead than Jordan did and has made them at a higher percentage) but for people over 30, generally speaking, it won't matter as much as the images. That is the disease of the video age.



James has a chance with this next generation who grew up with Twitter more than with highlight videos. But in my humble opinion it will be a while before he catches him, probably long after I'm dead. Unless before he retires, he produces a plethora of Finals-defining images that can compete with Jordan. Which seems doubtful.

And so the ghost remains out of reach.