sciendo

Physical Culture and Sport. Studies and Research, 2021, 89, 66–83
DOI: 10.2478/pcssr-2021-0007

OPEN ACCESS

Competitive spirit as a form of behavioral addiction: the case study of Michael Jordan

Authors' contribution:

A) conception and design of the study
B) acquisition of data
C) analysis and interpretation of data
D) manuscript preparation
E) obtaining funding

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Received: 3 June 2020
Accepted: 8 December 2020

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Abstract

When studying biographical narratives constituting "The Michael Jordan Myth," certain patterns emerge. For example, it is possible to identify mythemes corresponding with Campbell's concept of the hero's journey monomyth. This study focuses on a particular pattern, which is a progression of addiction with its phases, axial points, and list of symptoms. One of the most frequently used epithets in regard to the hero of this particular myth is "competitive." While this is a quality of numerous outstanding athletes, in Jordan's case competitiveness appears as a dominant quality and a driving force throughout his entire career.

The premise of my study is the assumption that Jordan's competitive spirit is a symptom of behavioral addiction and winning/defeating rivals is the behavior of an addict. The goal of the study is to use Jordan's biographies and, based on Jellinek's model of addiction progression, to verify whether Jordan's accomplishments on and off the court can be viewed as symptoms of unclassified behavioral addiction.

Keywords: Behavioral addiction, competition, biography, Michael Jordan, Jellinek

Competition as a behavioral addiction

Competition is an inherent component of sport. Therefore, competitiveness and the desire to win are, or at least should be, two qualities forming the character of an athlete. This is especially evident in the case of professional athletes who receive large sums as bonuses from their franchises and leagues as a reward for their achievements. The money also comes from endorsement deals and commercials, both of which are mostly only offered to champions. However, even among athletes, to whom competition is their livelihood, it is possible to distinguish individuals whose competitiveness is at a higher level than the average – those who, in order to win, will exploit their skills and bodies to the extreme. There are also those who will break the code of ethics encapsulated in the "fair-play" principle by, e.g., committing flagrant fouls, pulling opponents' jerseys, doping, or even bribing referees. To such athletes, victory, whether in an insignificant game during the season or in the Olympic Final, is the end which justifies the means.

One such athlete was definitely Michael Jordan, a former NBA basketball star who, at the turn of the twentieth century, played for the Chicago Bulls and the Washington Wizards. In the 2020 docuseries *The Last Dance*, viewers were constantly reminded how competitive Jordan was, resulting in a series of jokes and Internet memes about "Jordan taking things personally."[1] In all the biographical narratives on Jordan prior to *The Last Dance,* he was on multiple occasions described as an extremely competitive individual, or as Ervin "Magic" Johnson put it, "I thought I was the most competitive person I ever knew, until I met Michael" (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 9136). Jordan's competitive spirit exceeded basketball courts, where his passion for winning could be justified by striving to achieve the best results possible, as is typical in sports. In turn, he would be rewarded with tangible, material profits. But how does one justify an episode dating back to Jordan's college years when he stayed overnight at the home of his dorm roommate Buzz Peterson's parents and cheated during an innocent card game he played with Peterson and his mother? Peterson recalls that when he caught Jordan cheating, he asked, "Are you really that competitive that you were going to cheat my own mother in cards? You gotta be kidding me" (Taylor, 2003). There was no stake in the game in question apart from the winning itself, and Jordan was a guest at Ms. Peterson's house.

Athletes' drive to compete and win is a natural outcome of the fact that they operate in the world of sports, where one's victory requires another's loss. Athletes compete, i.e., "try to gain at a rival's expense" (Nutter & Moore, 1976, p. 40), simply because it is the nature of competition sports. However, athletes' lucrative contracts and endorsement deals, as well as the passage of time, may temper their motivation and the need to compete. Yet there are athletes, such as LeBron James or Cristiano Ronaldo, whose thirst for competition does not fade away, no matter their age or financial position. Their competitive drive can find its explanation in major theories of motivation, which all name different sources of motivation – defined as "the direction and intensity of effort" (Weinberg & Gould in Stefanek & Peters, 2011) – as the fuel for an athlete's competitive spirit. According to the achievement goal theory, athletes are driven by ego or task; "they perceive themselves to be successful when they perform better than others (i.e., a normative view of success)" (Stefanek & Peters, p. 416) or, when task-oriented, athletes "view themselves as successful when they put forth their best effort, learn something new, or achieve a personal best" (Stefanek & Peters, p. 416). Jordan was driven by both motivations; he believed he could outplay any defender, and his work ethic and desire to develop his basketball skills were unmatched among his peers. Jordan was also totally confident in his skills, his leadership of the team, and his ability to take (and make) the most difficult and important shots. Such self-confidence, which in the self-efficacy theory is one of the key elements of athletes' ability to perform at the highest level (Stefanek & Peters, p. 420), would explain Jordan's seemingly endless highlight reel of high-flying dunks, buzzer-beaters, and championship ceremonies. His success could also be explained by the self-determination theory, according to which athletes' intrinsic motivation is present when three dimensions (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) of their needs are met.

> *Autonomy is a sense of control or determination over one's actions. […] The need for competence includes peoples' perception that they can achieve successful outcomes. Relatedness needs would be met if an individual feels satisfied in her or his involvement with others in the social world.* (Stefanek & Peters, p. 423)

On the basketball court, Jordan felt he could do whatever he wanted in terms of his own skills and regardless of the head coach's playbook. Jordan's faith in victory was unshaken, as he constantly visualized winning plays and shots. He also appreciated his teammates, despite the fact that he would often feel he had to carry the team (which frequently was the case). One of the reasons why Jordan carried his teammates was he refused to believe that, in the end, his team could lose. Jordan not only believed in basketball success, but also loved the game itself. The expectancy value theory (Stefanek & Peters, p. 425) would suggest that Jordan's expectation of success combined with "subjective task value," i.e., the ability to see the actual value and benefits of performing a particular activity, motivated Jordan toward his goals – defeating opponents and winning championship titles. Finally, the attribution theory would suggest that Jordan's constant motivation stemmed from "three dimensions of attributions: controllability (i.e., personally controllable or uncontrollable), locus of causality (i.e., internal or external to oneself), and stability (i.e., changeable or unchangeable over time)" (Stefanek & Peters, p. 417). Jordan was able to fit his individual brilliance into the "triangle offense" executed by the Bulls' coach, Phil Jackson. He realized the team's success or failure depended on how well he performed and never shied away from blame or credit for a loss or win. Jordan was also able to adapt to changing conditions. For example, when he was older he gave up explosive dunks and developed a fade-away jump shot, which allowed him to be effective and added stability to his high-level performance.

[1] https://www.buzzfeed.com/josieayre1/the-last-dance-memes?origin=web-hf

However, Jordan's competitive drive seemed to exceed the norms of professional sports and motivation theory. Moreover, Jordan's biography makes it possible to suspect that his personality is an addictive one.[2] Apart from his incessant desire to win in basketball or frequent card games, Jordan has been known for his love of golf, a passion that transformed into a penchant for gambling. In 1993, the media reported that for years, Jordan had frequently bet high stakes on the golf course. He was also criticized for his regular visits to casinos, where he would lose large sums of money. The media spiral of speculation on Jordan's alleged gambling problem escalated that year to the point that when James Jordan (Michael's father) was mugged and murdered, the media speculated that the murder might have been connected with his famous son's gambling debts. Jordan was outraged by these opinions and denied having any problems with gambling. Not until 2005, when asked by Ed Bradley, the host of *60 Minutes,* whether he had a gambling problem, did Jordan say, "Yeah, I've gotten myself into situations where I would not walk away and I've pushed the envelope […] Is that compulsive? Yeah, it depends on how you look at it. If you're willing to jeopardize your livelihood and your family, then yeah" (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 7421-7423). At the same time, he stressed that he had never broken the law, jeopardized his family, or suffered a significant financial loss.

The episodes of Jordan's life described above are the premise and main reason why Jordan is the subject of this case study. The purpose of the study is to establish whether it is possible to use Jordan's biographies to determine whether his apparently obsessive need to defeat his opponents, which became an immanent part of his career and resume, can be viewed as a form of addiction and thus open a dialogue on understanding certain individuals in sports (or business, politics, etc.) as competition addicts. It is my contention that motivation and competition theories are insufficient means to explain Jordan's competitive spirit, and that the explanation can be found in the addiction theory.

Addiction theories vary in their explanations of the definition and sources of addiction and how addicts function. However, addiction theorists agree on the symptoms that allow a subject to be classified as an addict. For example, a recent metaphysical model proposed by ontological addiction theory (OAT) follows Griffiths's "components" model of addiction (Griffiths, 2005). OAT defines addiction as "the unwillingness to relinquish an erroneous and deep-rooted belief in an inherently existing 'self' or 'I' as well as the 'impaired functionality' that arises from such a belief" (Van Gordon et al., 2018) and focuses on the metaphysical approach to addiction. However, Griffiths relies on the definition by Marlatt et al., which defined addictive behavior as "…a repetitive habit pattern that increases the risk of disease and/or associated personal and social problems" (Griffiths, 2005). Nevertheless, the criteria for addictive behavior proposed by OAT are the same as Griffiths's and each of the models "[…] asserts that addiction features components of (a) salience, (b) mood modification, (c) tolerance, (d) withdrawal, (e) conflict, and (f) relapse" (Van Gordon et al., 2018). In order to verify whether Jordan can be classified as a "competition addict," this study makes use of the list of signs indicating addiction proposed by Alavi et al. (2012) as it applies Griffiths's model to behavioral addiction. Subsequently, by means of the Jellinek Curve of Addiction Stages[3] chart of the phases of addiction progression (adjusted for the purposes of this study), Jordan's life was examined from a perspective of his history of competing, both in sports and off the court.

Michael Jordan's addiction assumption and diagnosis

In order to establish whether competing can be viewed in Michael Jordan's case as the behavior of an addict, I looked into whether it is possible to observe the following in Jordan's behaviors: symptoms indicating an addiction to competition, how many of these symptoms can be identified, and how those symptoms manifested. I accepted playing basketball on a professional level as the main manifestation of Jordan's addictive behavior as this was the most time consuming activity during Jordan's career as an active player. The analysis of Jordan's behaviors connected with competing was carried out through the prism of indicators listed by Alavi et al.

1. Strong desire or a sense of compulsion to perform addictive activity.

The previously mentioned compulsion to compete and win characteristic of Jordan has been thoroughly described by the athlete's biographers, including Naughton, Halberstam, and Lazenby. In numerous instances, it is presented as the dominant feature of Jordan's character. For example, Lazenby cites Tom Konchalski's opinion on Jordan:

[2] https://www.addictioncenter.com/addiction/addictive-personality/

[3] https://lastingrecovery.com/addiction/about-alcoholism/stages-of-alcoholism/

> *"I don't think he would have had this all-consuming competitiveness. The thing that really set him apart is he had tremendous competitiveness, that XYY chromosome in terms of competitiveness. That's maybe been his downfall in other areas of his life, but in basketball that defined him. That transcended his athleticism. He wouldn't have had that because what happens with AAU is there's always another game. You will play three games in a day. You can lose a game in disgrace and two hours later, there's always the next game. So you're not as focused on winning. Winning's not a critical obsession, and that's what set Michael Jordan apart from other players, that he was an obsessively competitive player. Had he grown up in an AAU culture, he would have lost his winning edge. He would have lost what his real thing is, and that's his competitiveness."* (2014, loc. 1032-1038)

In the documentary *Michael Jordan: His Airness*, Jordan himself admits "To compete, to win... it's all I live for, really" (Weitzman, 1999).

The statements quoted above, which serve as a representative sample of the descriptions of Jordan's competitiveness, indicate the occurrence of Symptom No. 1.

2. Difficulty in controlling behavior connected with performing the addictive activity in terms of beginning, ending, and level of performance.

Jordan has been known, among other things, for scoring points during games in bursts of offensive plays (e.g., 15 points in a row); the same can be said about the victories he collected. In his basketball career alone, Jordan won ten NBA scoring titles, including consecutive wins for seven and three years, respectively (1987-93 and 1996-98). The two-year gap is the result of Jordan's temporary retirement and absence from the NBA. Similarly, Jordan and the Bulls won championships in bulk: the first three-peat in the years 1991-93, and the second one in 1996-98. In the 1990s, it seemed as if there was nothing and nobody who could stop Jordan, who refused to yield victory. His inability to accept losses and the fact that he was a "sore loser" are illustrated in the three descriptions below. The first one portrays Jordan during basketball practices:

> *"He and I practiced every day together and he always had to win. If it was a game of Horse and you beat him, you would have to play another game until he won," Smith said. "You didn't go home until he had won."* (Halberstam, 2012, pp. 20-21)

The second description concerns an insignificant NBA regular season game. Bill Wennington, a member of the Chicago Bulls, recalls:

> *"I remember the game back… it was Vancouver. We should've lost the game. We were down twelve points with six minutes to go. Michael just said 'Well, that's enough. I can't let this happen' and the game was over. He scored nineteen points in six minutes."* (Winik, 1996)

Chicago won the game. The third story presents Jordan in his free time, which one would expect to be free of competition:

> *Early on in his Chicago years, Jordan bought a Ping-Pong table and placed it in the recreation room of his apartment. He was not a good Ping-Pong player at first, and it enraged him that he always lost to Howard White, the Nike ambassador and his close friend. Charles Oakley was a good Ping-Pong player too, and it infuriated Jordan that both men could beat him on his home court. White was amused watching Oakley and Jordan, these two immense men, playing Ping-Pong in so small a room with so low a ceiling—the room seemed filled with competitive energy. If you beat Jordan at Ping-Pong, White learned, then you had to play again—and again—until finally he won.* (Halberstam, 2012, p. 229)

Jordan's lack of ability to give up and let go is summarized by Rick Reilly, a sports journalist: "He [Jordan] goes all out, he's the ultimate chase better. Lose, double up, lose, double up" (Taylor, 2000).

The statements quoted above, which serve as a representative sample of the descriptions of Jordan's lack of control in stopping a competitive activity, indicate the occurrence of Symptom No. 2.

3. Concentration of life around performing an addictive activity.

Both during and after his basketball career, Jordan was described as the most hardworking player during practices and in games. One of Jordan's coaches, Doug Collins, said "He [Jordan] was your hardest worker. He competed every day. That filtered down through your team, so as a coach you never had to talk about the work ethic of your team because your best player always brought that" (Kempf, 2000).

All of Jordan's life was subjugated to developing his skills and maintaining the best physical condition possible. Jordan, as most professional athletes do, kept a proper diet and exercised regularly. However, his preparations exceeded standard exercise. When the very physical Detroit Pistons physically abused Jordan during games in the late 1980s, he hired a personal trainer, Tim Grover, who prepared a special weight training program for him. Also, at Jordan's request, Grover created a special venue to practice free throw shooting with a flickering strobe light, the purpose of which was to get Jordan used to working without the ability to concentrate when shooting in-game free throws, which always involved the blinding lights of fans' and reporters' camera flashes. All of the above reflected Jordan's pursuit of perfection and successive victories, indicating the occurrence of Symptom No. 3.

4. Increased tolerance to addictive activity (need for higher doses/level of the activity in order to feel the effects previously achieved with lower doses/levels).

In the first seven years Michael Jordan spent in the NBA, he had only one goal in mind – winning the championship. Once he achieved this goal in 1991, his hunger for winning only grew. In the documentary *Michael Jordan: His Airness,* it is stated that "[…] as the '92 season began, it was clear that his hunger for winning was far from satisfied" (Weitzman, 1999). In the film, Jordan himself describes the experience and the feeling in the following manner: "It's like the guy in the king-of-the-hill situation. Once you're on top of the hill, you want to defend it" (Weitzman, 1999). After 1991, achievements of lesser rank than winning championships did not satisfy Jordan (until his tolerance towards addictive activity was lowered) and he won six championship titles, which indicates the occurrence of Symptom No. 4.

5. Physiological symptoms of withdrawal occurring when addictive activity ceases or decreases, resulting in a withdrawal syndrome specific to the activity, or performing the same or similar activity in order to ease or avoid symptoms of abstinence.

In Jordan's case, withdrawal syndrome is understood as behaviors and emotional states during periods with no competition or after a loss. Jordan has suffered many losses, both in his professional career and his private life. Even though losing is an integral part of professional sports – there has been no athlete who has experienced only victories, especially in team sports played in the system of regular seasons and play-off phases – Jordan could never stand losing a game, whether an important game or a scrimmage. He could not speak to his teammates for days after losing a game during practice.

Jordan also seemed barely able to do without competition. During his professional career, Jordan was exposed to withdrawal syndrome by necessity during the off-season break, and he looked for any opportunity to compete. His passion for golf, which he played daily (18 or 36 holes) during the summer break was common knowledge, as was his fondness for cards, pool, and Ping-Pong. However, the most distinct example of withdrawal was during Jordan's retirement from the NBA in 1993 after winning the third consecutive championship. Having unlaced his Air Jordans, the man decided to attempt to become a professional baseball player, despite the fact that he last played baseball fifteen years earlier on his middle school varsity team. Nevertheless, for a year and a half he joined the roster of the minor league Birmingham Barons. Thus after withdrawing from basketball competition, he still actively competed in a different sport. Jordan's conviction that he could make it to MLB was perceived as the star's arrogance by some and as a desire to fulfill his father's childhood dream by others. The episode can also be viewed as a "sense of empowerment" typical of the split-personality characteristic of addicts, which would indicate the occurrence of Symptom No. 5.

6. Performing addictive activity despite obvious evidence of harmful consequences.

The risk of injury is ever present in sports and is a risk every athlete agrees to take. Many athletes play with broken fingers, dislocated joints, or other ailments, accepting the experience of pain. Jordan is no exception. During the 1991 NBA Finals, he played with a sore toe and, when the specially-adjusted sneakers meant to protect the toe were limiting his jumping, Jordan switched to his regular shoes. His choice to endure pain in return for greater mobility became legendary (Halberstam, 2012, p. 281). Such behaviors occurred frequently throughout Jordan's career; however, Jordan's desire to play in Game 5 of the 1997 NBA Finals (known as "The Flu Game") defied common sense and the instinct of self-preservation. What follows is Halberstam's depiction of Jordan's physical condition before the game:

> *[…] he [Jordan] woke up violently ill before Game Five of the NBA Finals against the Utah Jazz. Whether it was altitude sickness or food poisoning no one was ever sure. Later, it was reported that he had woken*

> *up with a fever of 103. That was not true: His temperature was high but not that high, not over 100, but he had been so ill during the night that it seemed impossible that he would play. At about 8 A.M., Jordan's bodyguards called Chip Schaefer, the team trainer, to tell him that Jordan was deathly ill. Schaefer rushed to Jordan's room and found him curled up in a fetal position, wrapped in blankets and pathetically weak. He had not slept at all. He had an intense headache and had suffered violent nausea throughout the night. The greatest player in the world looked like a frail, weak zombie. It was inconceivable that he might play that day. […] In the locker room, Jordan's teammates were appalled by what they saw. Michael's skin, normally quite dark, was an alarming color, somewhere between white and gray, Bill Wennington remembered, and his eyes, usually so vital, looked dead.* (2012, p. 13)

Jordan played forty-four out of forty-eight minutes of the game and scored thirty-eight points, including the key four ones in the last seconds of the game that cemented his team's victory. "I almost played myself into passing out," Jordan said. "I came in and I was dehydrated, and it was all to win a basketball game" (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 8801). The image of a staggering Jordan struggling to walk off the court while being held by his teammate, Scottie Pippen,[4] pointedly illustrates Symptom No. 6.

Taking into consideration the fact that only three out of six symptoms must occur in order to diagnose addiction, Jordan's "six out of six" (and this is not a reference to him winning six championship titles in six visits to the NBA Finals) allows him to be considered a person addicted to competing and winning in the form of defeating his opponents.

Stages of Michael Jordan's addiction progression

In order to confirm the above diagnosis, and to verify whether Jordan is still an addict, Jordan's history of addictive competing based on an adjusted Jellinek's Curve of Addiction Stages will be presented.

I. THE INITIAL STAGE

AXIAL POINT – "INITIATION"

In all of the biographical narratives on Michael Jordan, his one-on-one games as a child against his brother, Larry, are pointed to as the first experience of competition which initiated the eleven-year-old boy to the thrill of competing and awakened his need to win. According to Halberstam, "The key to Michael Jordan's fierce competitiveness, friends from his junior high, high school, and college days thought, lay in his rivalry with his older brother Larry," (2012, p. 19), while Lazenby writes:

> *Though Jordan was nearly a year younger, he already stood above his stronger, older brother. Michael was mouthier, but they both talked trash, anything to get under the other's skin. […] Day after day after day, they went at each other, with Larry able to use his strength to dominate his younger brother despite the height disadvantage.* (2014, loc. 673-676)

In addition,

> *It was the same everywhere he went, explained George Mumford, the psychologist who worked with Jordan as a pro player. Each opponent loomed as a Larry to be conquered. Much later, the mythology of the one-on-one games would bring his brother a certain status among Michael's coterie, first in college and later in Chicago.* (2014, loc. 694-696)

SYMPTOMS

1. COMPETING FOR PLEASURE – When he gave a speech after being inducted into The Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2009, Jordan described his early days of competing in the following manner: "My competitive nature has gone a long way from the first time I picked up any sport. Baseball, football, run track, basketball… anything to miss class, I played it." (OfficialHoophall, n.d.)
2. INCREASED ZEST FOR COMPETITION AND HIGHER LEVELS OF CHALLENGE – The whole basketball career of Jordan documents his growing hunger for competition and challenges, from the games against

[4] https://www.sbnation.com/nba/2017/6/11/15778584/michael-jordans-flu-game-1997-nba-finals-chicago-bulls

Larry to playing for school varsity teams and the UNC Tar Heels, to finally reaching the NBA, where he first won a championship and eventually won six and gained the status of G.O.A.T. A specific example of this symptom is a story about how Jordan did not make the varsity team at Laney High:

It was the worst day of Jordan's young life. The list was alphabetical, so he focused on where the Js should be, and it wasn't there, and he kept reading and rereading the list, hoping somehow that he had missed it, or that the alphabetical listing had been done incorrectly. That day he went home by himself and went to his room and cried. […]

Years later, the Laney coaches realized that they had not handled the decision well, not cushioning it and letting Michael know that his time would come, and they had made it seem even worse when they had taken his close friend. Roy Smith thought the coaches were crazy—he might be taller, but he knew Michael was better than he was. "We knew Michael was good," Fred Lynch, the Laney assistant coach, said later, "but we wanted him to play more and we thought the jayvee was better for him." He easily became the best player on the jayvee that year. […] He was so good, in fact, that the jayvee games became quite popular. The entire varsity began to come early so they could watch him play in the jayvee games. (Halberstam, 2012, p. 21)

II. THE WARNING STAGE

AXIAL POINT – "BLACKING OUT"

It must be noted that none of the biographical materials on Jordan's life and career mentions anything directly pointing to him losing due to a preoccupation with competition or losing track of time. However, certain descriptive narratives to a lesser or greater extent suggest that such "blackouts" might have occurred. At least, certain events are described in such a fashion.

Chronologically, early symptoms of Jordan's losing himself in competition can be discerned in descriptions of the previously mentioned brotherly basketball duels, which would last until late at night: "The contests quickly turned physical, then heated. When the yelling and arguing grew to a pitch, Deloris Jordan would step to the back door to enforce the peace. Some days she had to order them into the house" (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 674-675).

SYMPTOMS

1. LOOKING FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO COMPETE – Just as with the second symptom of the Initial Stage, Jordan's entire career as an athlete is a testament to continuous competition. An early example of searching for or leaving the door open to competition is the "Love of the Game" clause included in his first contract with the Chicago Bulls. The clause allowed Jordan to bypass the standard limitations clubs place on their players. Below is Lazenby's report on the matter:

   One key element was a "Love of the Game" clause that Jordan had insisted upon. The standard NBA contract called for the agreement to be voided if the player was injured in some activity other than a team-sanctioned one. Jordan wanted the freedom to compete wherever and whenever he wanted with impunity, as defined by his love of the game. The team made the concession in light of the favorable terms the Jordan family had approved. (2014, loc. 3517-3519)

2. INITIATING COMPETITION – In college, Jordan unceasingly looked for ways to demonstrate his athletic superiority, even outside of basketball. He kept challenging his friends and teammates and always took losses badly.

   The other thing his teammates came to realize was that he was driven by an almost unparalleled desire – or need – to win. The ghost of losing to his brother Larry in backyard contests still lived. All top athletes are driven, and no one made the Carolina roster unless he had been by far the hardest-working kid in his neighborhood, his high school, and finally his high school conference, but Jordan was self-evidently the most driven of all. He simply hated to lose, on the court in big games, on the court in little games, in practice, in Monopoly games with his friends (if he fell far behind late in a game, he was capable of sending his opponents' hotels and houses crashing to the floor with one great sweep of his arm). In card games and pool games, his passion to win was obvious – in fact, he often seemed to change the rules to ensure his victory. A pool shot that he missed did not count because someone spoke just as he was about to shoot. Once when Carolina was playing Virginia at Charlottesville, he and his teammates were hanging around a game room,

and Jordan issued a challenge to play anyone in pool. Matt Doherty took it up, they played, and to Jordan's surprise Doherty won. Jordan threw down his stick, studied the table carefully, announced, "This table's not regulation size," and stomped out. (Halberstam, 2012, p. 100)

Jordan displayed similar behaviors throughout his career. For example, during the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona, Jordan wanted to play cards every night with the greats of basketball – Larry Bird and Ervin "Magic" Johnson. (He beat them on the basketball court.)

3. WINNING RESULTS IN A BETTER MOOD, BRINGS RELIEF, RELEASES TENSION – This symptom can be observed in all athletes who win. In Jordan's case, the best example of relief resulting from winning and the tension which preceded it is winning the first championship title. For seven seasons in the NBA, Jordan, despite individual accolades, had not been able to lead his team to the title. What added to Jordan's growing frustration was the fact that his team was regularly eliminated from play-offs by one team – the Detroit Pistons, who blocked the Bulls' way to the Finals in the years 1989-1990.

   For three straight years, the Bulls would meet the Pistons in the playoffs. And for three straight years, they would suffer a bitter defeat.
   Jordan: "I felt it was very disappointing each and every time that we ended up getting to this hurdle and couldn't get over it."

   With each passing year, Michael's frustration grew deeper while the whispers grew louder that Jordan was simply a one-man show who could not elevate the performance of his team.
   Jordan: "I had to contend with people saying that a scoring champion doesn't win championships, which just drove me nuts."(Weitzman, 1999)

In 1991, there was a breakthrough and Jordan finally won the championship he so desperately coveted. The video and film materials presenting the Bulls' victory all show Jordan clasping the trophy and weeping tears of happiness and relief. This outpour of emotions, uncharacteristic of the alpha dogs professional athletes usually are, reflects the relief of tension the victory brought Jordan.

4. COMPETITION IN PROGRESS RESULTS IN "LOSING TRACK OF TIME/AWARENESS" – As was already mentioned, the study of biographical materials on Jordan has not revealed descriptions that would *explicitly* demonstrate occurrences of Symptom No. 4. Below are three fragments of different biographical materials that suggest Jordan may have lost himself in competition. The first passage describes an incident in 1991:

   During a two-day break in the playoff series with Philadelphia, Jordan and writer Mark Vancil motored over to an Atlantic City casino. They dragged back to the team hotel about six thirty the next morning, and Jordan still made the Bulls' practice at ten a.m., which was no great surprise to anyone who knew him. The media took note of it, and later it would be cited as the first tremor in his rolling quake of troubles.
   ***Basketball brought him back to a reality** of sorts. The Bulls dispensed with the Sixers, setting up the only rematch that Jordan wanted: the Bad Boys in the Eastern Conference championship series.* (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 6468-6472)

In the next passage, Halberstam describes Jordan's emotional state after winning a practice game of the US Basketball Team in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona:

   *Jordan seemed to be on some kind of **competitive high**, he thought. […] There he was on the sideline […] knowing that he had dominated the play among the best players in the world. As Jordan danced, Magic Johnson sat thirty yards away telling a few reporters, "We just screwed up. We got him mad. We all did too much talking. You'd think by now we'd know better."*
   Jan Hubbard walked over to talk to Jordan. "You just have to win every time, don't you?" he said. (2012, pp. 301-302)

It is also worth citing memories of that stint (Barcelona '92) from other members of the Dream Team who have shared their impressions on how Jordan operated during the pre-Olympic practice in Monte Carlo:

   Drexler: I remember thinking that…Does this guy ever sleep?

   Jordan: Golf, thirty-six holes. I'm playing that tomorrow, too.

Drexler: He would do more things and be ready to practice and play as much as anybody.

Robinson: The thing that I remember the most was going out and playing golf with Michael Jordan before a game and I thought, "Man, I'm going to be exhausted tonight!" And Michael had just ridiculous energy and was phenomenal.

Barkley: We played cards in Magic's room till five o'clock in the morning pretty much every night. It was so much fun.

Krzyzewski: He's like a bionic guy. He'd play cards, play golf, play basketball. I don't know when he ever slept. Finally, after a ball game, he was just lying down and I looked at him and I said: "I think that's the first time he's gone to sleep… on the whole trip. (Levitt, 2012)

Ervin "Magic" Johnson adds,

"Michael tried to get me on his schedule over there, and I just couldn't do it," Magic says today. "I got so I could play cards all night, and so did some of the other guys. But then to go out and play eighteen, thirty-six holes of golf? Then come back and get 20 in the game like it's nothing?

Man, nobody could do that." (McCallum, 2013, pp. 638-639)

5. ATTEMPTS TO COMPETE IN HIDING OR AS A WAY TO COPE WITH WITHDRAWAL SYNDROME – As mentioned above, Jordan could take up any basketball challenge at any time he wanted because of the "Love of the Game" clause. To do that, he still needed opponents. Even in college, Jordan found a way to challenge and compete against himself when there was no one to play basketball, cards, or Ping-Pong against. The way in question was golf, which turned into a passion Jordan devoted more and more time to, as was reported on by *Sports Illustrated* journalist, Jack McCallum, in his article "Horns Of A Dilemma": "Jordan figures he gets his rest during the off-season, now that he substitutes eight or 10 hours of golf a day for the three or four hours he used to devote to playground basketball" (McCallum, 1993, p. 35).

Jordan's passion for golf was in the public record; what was kept secret for a long time was the fact that he gambled on the golf course. The symptom of competing in hiding could be observed when it was revealed that Jordan would bet large sums of money on his golf games. As was already mentioned, in 1993 Jordan became an object of harsh criticism from the press and a subject of the investigation launched by then-NBA commissioner, David Stern. The goal of the investigation was to establish whether Jordan had violated the league's rules by playing golf for money. The suspicions of Jordan's gambling addiction stemmed from a book by Richard Esquinas, *Michael & Me: Our Gambling Addiction… My Cry for Help!,* in which Esquinas claims that Jordan had lost a total sum of $1.25 million to him on the golf course. Jordan initially denied this claim, but later paid Esquinas "somewhere between $200,000 and $300,000" (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 6957-6958).

Gambling also appears in Jordan's biography as a means to cope with withdrawal syndrome, i.e., losing. The same year when the golf gambling story broke out, Jordan exposed himself to criticism and gambling accusations when he spent the night before an important game in a casino. In 1993 in the Eastern Conference Finals, the Bulls were up against the New York Knicks. The first two games of the series were played in New York. After the Bulls lost Game 1, Jordan took a private jet to Atlanta, where, according to the press, he was seen at a casino until late at night. His actions were heavily criticized, especially after Chicago lost the second game – the one preceded by the trip to the casino. Lazenby describes the situation as thus:

The outcome was further weighted in the aftermath with a New York Times *report that Jordan had been seen at an Atlantic City casino in the wee hours before Game 2, suggesting that perhaps he wasn't properly rested for competition. Jackson and Krause quickly came to his defense. "There is no problem with Michael Jordan," Krause told reporters. "He cares about winning and is one of the great winners of all time."*

"We don't need a curfew," Jackson added. "These are adults.… You have to have other things in your life or the pressure becomes too great."

Jordan himself was unrepentant […]. (2014, loc. 7160-7164)

His reaction to the media hype was to refuse granting any interviews.

III. THE CRITICAL STAGE

AXIAL POINT – "REMATCH"

On numerous occasions, Jordan would act out towards his opponents after a loss or (in his mind) challenge to his athletic abilities. In all those cases, Jordan felt compelled to prove that a loss was "an accident at work" or that a person questioning his skills was mistaken. The first such instance of significance was when, as previously mentioned, Jordan failed to make the high school varsity team as a freshman. The cut propelled Jordan to work even harder on his basketball skills, as did his desire to get back at the coaches. In 2009, more than thirty years after the event in question, Jordan mentioned the cut during his Basketball Hall of Fame induction speech:

Leroy Smith was the guy when I got cut, he made the team… on the varsity team. […] But he started that whole process for me because when he made the team and I didn't, I wanted to prove not just to Leroy Smith, not just to myself, but to the coach who actually picked Leroy over me… I wanted to make sure you understood you made a mistake, dude! (OfficialHoophall, n.d.)

SYMPTOMS

1. REMORSE – "MORAL HANGOVER" – An unpleasant incident took place during a routine Chicago Bulls practice game in 1996. Phil Jackson, the team's head coach, split the Bulls into two teams and ordered a scrimmage. The player who was tasked to defend against Jordan, Steve Kerr, was a foot shorter and forty pounds lighter. Jordan treated scrimmages as seriously as he did the Finals games and gave Kerr a hard time. Kerr decided to stand up to Jordan. Below is how Jordan remembers that practice game:

   Phil [Jackson] put Steve Kerr opposite of me, but he was giving Steve all the calls. I'm getting like really ticked off, so I started to play very, very physical. Well, Steve started giving me hard fouls. Next thing you know I hauled off and just whacked him, right. And then Phil threw me out of practice, and I get home and I'm just like really hurt. They gave me Steve's phone number; I got his answering machine. I said "Steve, I am so sorry. You know, my anger got the best of me." (Taylor, 2003)

   In the film, right after Jordan states the above, one of his teammates, in a separate clip, adds that whenever Jordan lost it, he would always feel remorse and apologize to those teammates on whom he took his anger out.

2. "TAKING IT OUT ON SOMEBODY" BRINGS RELIEF – Just as every loss resulted in a bad mood for Jordan, every victory brought him joy and relief, especially when it was preceded by a competition marked by defeats. The most illuminating example of such a sequence was the rivalry between the Chicago Bulls and Detroit Pistons in the years 1988-91. For the first three years, the Pistons would eliminate the Bulls from play-offs, thus preventing Jordan from reaching his ultimate goal of winning the world championship. When the Bulls finally defeated the Pistons in the Eastern Conference Finals, a weight was lifted off their chest.

   Halberstam describes it in a mystical fashion, writing that "The Bulls won handily. They had swept the Pistons; the demons were exorcised" (Halberstam, 2012, p. 274), while Lazenby reports:

   Rather than join Thomas in the protest, Dumars stopped to congratulate his foe. He too was upset with Jordan's comments, but he remembered the pain in Jordan's face at the end of each of the previous seasons. "That look is the reason I stopped and shook his hand when they beat us," Dumars recalled in 2012. "I was not going to walk past the guy and not shake his hand. I shook Phil's hand and Michael's hand and a few of the other guys. I figured if that guy can shake my hand with that kind of hurt and disappointment he had in his face, there's no way I'm going to walk off this court and not shake his hand." (2014, loc. 6507-6511)

   Lazenby also writes:

   The vanquishing of the Bad Boys had been such a hurdle for Jordan and his Bulls that even though they still faced the league championship series, they couldn't help but pause for celebration, memorably kicked off by Jerry Krause. (2014, loc. 6524-6526)

   Also, the viewers of *Michael Jordan: His Airness* are, at one point, informed that "Finally earning their vindication, the Bulls completed a four-game sweep and put the Pistons nightmare behind them" (Weitzman, 1999). As enormous as the relief was, it did not last long; a few days after defeating the Pistons, Jordan went up against "Magic" Johnson in the NBA Finals and eventually won the championship title he so intensively desired. A year

later he won another one, and then another, and later three more in a row. Altogether, Jordan and the Bulls won the championship six times in the span of eight years.

3. NEGLECTING FAMILY AND MARITAL CONFLICTS – Although the life of a professional athlete involves long hours spent at work (team practices, individual practices, games, press conferences, etc.) and being on the road, Jordan was for a long time portrayed as a man devoted to his family, a loving husband and caring father. This all changed in 2002 when Juanita (Jordan's first wife) filed for divorce.

   That January, in the midst of it all, Juanita Jordan filed for divorce in Chicago, and soon a reporter from the Sun-Times showed up in the Wizards' locker room to question Jordan about the split. Interview sessions with Jordan, dating back to Chicago, had always focused on basketball issues. Now, it was incongruous, painful for some, to witness the confrontation, which came after a win over the Los Angeles Clippers. The reporter asked if his divorce was inevitable. "None of your business," Jordan shot back. A Washington publication offered a detailed account of his attempts that same night after the game to make a play for a woman in a Washington nightspot, with help from members of his entourage, including Tim Grover. (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 9882-9886)

Though never officially confirmed, Juanita's decision to file for divorce was rumored to have been the outcome of not only Jordan's alleged infidelity, but also of Jordan's return to the NBA after three years away from actively playing the game. This return shattered the family's daily life, which was so important to Mrs. Jordan.

4. MISSING WORK – Jordan was, among other things, known for being "[…] determined to be Michael Jordan every night. I never got the impression that he threw his shoes out or sent his uniform out there and take the night off" (Weitzman, 1999). Naturally, injuries cause players to be absent from work. However, they are a risk to all players. The one which eliminated Jordan from playing in the 1985-86 season was the result of him playing "[…] with that level of intensity who can still do it every night, who is a target every night" (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 3935-3936). Moreover, apart from playing, professional athletes are contractually obliged to perform in areas outside of the sport that are also considered to be part of their profession, e.g., public appearances. Lazenby writes about an instance which exemplifies Symptom No. 4:

   The same resentment surfaced just weeks later when Jordan decided not to join the team in the traditional Rose Garden ceremony with President George Bush. Instead, he headed off on a golf trip with a group of pals that included childhood friend David Bridgers. […]

   While they were out, Michael basically told Horace that he wasn't going to see President Bush. Michael said, "It's not obligatory. It's on my time, and I have other things to do." […]

   "No way am I going," Jordan told reporters when asked about the traditional visit. "No one asked me if the date was convenient. It's OK if the other guys go, but the White House is just like any other house. It's just cleaner." (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 6722-6733)

In this context, it can be said that Jordan did not show up for work because he preferred to compete on the golf course.

5. JUSTIFYING COMPETING ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS – Jordan never had to justify competing – the nature of his profession was to compete. Nevertheless, the family problems described above were, to a certain extent, the result of the fact that Jordan seemed to bore easily with "ordinary" life and kept coming back to active competition.

6. GROWING AGGRESSIVENESS, CONFLICTS WITH THE LAW – During his NBA career, Jordan was known as a vicious "trash-talker." However, as this did not correspond with the promoted image of him as a nice and likable guy, this aspect of Jordan's basketball arsenal was downplayed in promotional materials and sports articles. While in the 1993 documentary *Michael Jordan: Air Time,* Jordan admits that "No matter what trash you talk, we're gonna talk the most trash and then we're gonna back it up" (Winik, 1993), this is the only such statement from Jordan's career. Only after Jordan retired for good did stories come out about him verbally intimidating, discrediting, and tormenting his opponents. He sometimes did this in a humorous fashion, e.g., by pointing out that a player wearing Air Jordans should not talk trash to the man whose likeness is on the shoes,

but he could also be malicious and aggressive. One of such stories concerns a game between the Chicago Bulls and Charlotte Hornets in 1995:

At a key point during the '95 playoff series between the Bulls and Charlotte Hornets, Jordan backed off of the five-foot-three Bogues and told him, "Shoot it, you fucking midget." Bogues missed the shot, lost his confidence, and later reportedly told Johnny Bach that the play started his career down the path to ruination. (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 8206-8208)

Similar, if not worse, is the story of how Jordan attacked a much younger teammate, Kwame Brown, in 2003:

Meanwhile, Leahy discovered the roster shell-shocked at what it meant to be Jordan's teammate. The initial thought was that Kwame Brown might turn out to be an athletic young frontcourt player […]

Brown was a lighthearted kid from a troubled family when he stepped into camp with Jordan. He had smallish hands for a post player and almost no clue of how to please his new boss. […] Someone leaked to Leahy that Jordan had screamed at the new kid and called him a "faggot" in front of the team. It didn't play well in the Post *that week, nor later in Leahy's book,* When Nothing Else Matters*.*

Krause, meanwhile, was working the phones, digging for information from his sources on the Wizards staff. "Kwame was an outstanding prospect," Krause remembered. "I heard that Michael got on his ass so hard that he ruined that kid. His father was in jail. His mother was going to jail. He had all kinds of family problems. He was not the kind of kid you scream at. According to the people I knew on that club, Michael wrecked him." (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 9780-9791)

Jordan, due to his megastar position and the billions of dollars he generated, could get away with many questionable behaviors, especially in the NBA. However, once his gambling practices were revealed, Jordan found himself in conflict with the law.

It was in the wake of these events that Jordan's first real troubles surfaced. In December, police surveillance of a Charlotte man, a convicted cocaine dealer named James "Slim" Bouler, turned up a $57,000 check that Jordan had written to him. Bouler was later charged with money laundering after a tax-evasion investigation. Both Bouler and Jordan told authorities that the money was a loan, but Jordan was soon caught up in Bouler's troubles and would later be served with a subpoena to testify in the case against him.

Then in February 1992, a bail bondsman, Eddie Dow, was murdered during a robbery at his home. Thieves took $20,000 in cash from a metal briefcase on the premises but left three checks worth $108,000 written by Jordan. The lawyer handling Dow's estate confirmed that the checks were for gambling debts owed by Jordan to a North Carolina contractor named Dean Chapman and two other men. Press reports revealed that Jordan often hosted small gatherings for golfing and gambling at his Hilton Head Island residence, where Jordan had lost the money. Dow had been to at least three such gatherings, according to his attorney. Jordan was also known to host Mike's Time, a gathering for golf and high-stakes poker before training camp each season.

The reports prompted NBA commissioner David Stern to issue a reprimand to Jordan. The league soon launched the first of two "investigations" into Jordan's activities, although they were limited in scope. (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 6754-6765)

Both these investigations finished with Jordan being cleared of all charges.

7. NEGLECTING LOOKING AFTER PERSONAL APPEARANCE – Jordan always took care of his appearance, both in terms of his physique, which is a requirement for any professional athlete, and in terms of his outfits. He even admitted that he paid too much attention to how people saw him on the occasions of public appearances. Materials presenting Jordan as a private person also depict him as an elegant man, even when he was wearing a tracksuit.

He looked better in sweats, one member of the team that shot his Nike commercials noted, than most movie stars did in black tie. "Make me look good," Jordan would admonish Jim Riswold, the Portland advertising man who was in charge of the Nike commercials, before each shoot. Riswold once told him, "Michael, I co-

uld shoot you pushing little ladies into onrushing cars in the middle of downtown traffic or throwing puppies into boiling water and you'd still look good." (Halberstam, 2012, p. 11)

Although Jordan had his share of poor fashion choices, it is impossible to demonstrate the occurrence of Symptom No. 7.

8. SEXUAL DRIVE DISORDERS – Jordan's sex life and the mores of his sexual prowess is not a topic touched on by his biographers. What is known is that he was and most probably still is sexually active, as he fathered three children with his first wife and two more with his current wife, becoming the father of twins at age fifty-one. There have been rumors of Jordan being sexually active outside of his marriage, but there is no evidence of them being true. Based on the biographical narratives, it is impossible to demonstrate the occurrence of Symptom No. 8.

BINGE-COMPETING IN TURNS WITH ABSTINENCE PERIODS TO REGAIN HEALTH, TO DISPLAY "STRONG WILL" – Jordan retired from basketball three times and twice came back to actively playing in the NBA. Upon his first retirement in 1993 after winning three consecutive championships, he spoke in a press conference about being burnt out and lacking the motivation to continue playing. However, abstinence from competing was not in his plans as he intended to make his late father's wish come true and try his hand at professional baseball. (Jason Culver, n.d.) In 1995, he returned to the Chicago Bulls and won three more consecutive titles in the years 1996-98. In January 1999, Jordan called for a "definitive" end to his career, saying:

My life will take a change, and a lot of people say "Well, Michael Jordan didn't have any challenges away from the game of basketball." Well, I dispute that. Being a parent is very challenging. If you have kids, you know that. And I welcome that challenge and I look forward to it. I will live vicariously through my kids if they play the game of basketball or if they don't, I will support that. My wife and I will do the same. We will do what we can as parents and make sure that happens and that's the challenge that I have in front of me and I look forward to that. (Chad Blanchard, n.d.)

Even when declaring that he would focus on his family, Jordan referred to this as a challenge.

Jordan lasted three years in his second retirement. In 2001, he traded his shares in the Washington Wizards, where he had been Basketball Operations Director, in exchange for a spot on the team. Jordan played for the Wizards until 2003, when he retired mid-season. Although he did not call a press conference that time, during a special farewell prepared for him by the NBA at the All-Star Game, he said, "I leave the game in good hands. […] Now, I can go home and feel at peace with the game of basketball." (zxc09800, n.d.)

9. PROMISING ABSTINENCE – Although it took Jordan three attempts to break away from being an active basketball player for good, he never made any promises that he would stay away from competing entirely. Moreover, in 2009, when he was inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame at the age of forty-six, Jordan blustered that "Although I'm recognized with this tremendous honor of being in the Basketball Hall of Fame, I don't look at this as a defining end of my relationship with the game of basketball. […] One day, you might look up and see me playing the game at fifty… [audience laughs]… Oh, don't laugh. Never say never." (OfficialHoophall, n.d.)

10. FEELINGS OF EMPTINESS AND HELPLESSNESS – In *Michael Jordan: Air Time,* then thirty-year-old Jordan states, "If I have any problems away from the basketball court… when I play basketball, no matter how they're playing, I got solution for that. So, it's like my psychologist or whatever. If you ever take that away from me, I wouldn't know what to do" (Winik, 1993). Jordan did manage to get his life together, although it took him some time. He returned to the NBA twice after two- and three-year intervals; at the age of forty, he retired for good; and in 2010, he became a majority owner of the Charlotte Hornets franchise. Thus, he never really broke away from the NBA. After all, in 1993 he said he could not imagine life without basketball.

IV. THE CHRONIC STAGE

AXIAL POINT – "LOSING CONTROL"

As mentioned previously, Jordan competed and won in streaks. Once he began a victory run, it seemed the only person who could stop him was himself. The period of Jordan's life when the loss of control is most visible are the years 1991-93, at the end of which Jordan was burnt out and, in October 1993, he announced that he was leaving basketball. Obviously, his decision was influenced by the media frenzy over his alleged gambling problem and the

murder of his father in July that year. Aside from gambling, the period in question was marked by continuous competition and a series of wins described in detail under Symptom No. 1.

SYMPTOMS

1. LONG-LASTING STREAKS OF COMPETING AND WINNING – Jordan finished the 1990-91 season by winning the NBA championship, defeating his "eternal" enemies, the Detroit Pistons. In the Finals, he won against a team led by "Magic" Johnson, who was considered the greatest basketball player at that time. During the season, Jordan became the league's scoring champion (for the fifth time in a row) and won the MVP[5] titles for the regular season and the Finals. He spent the off-season playing golf (and probably gambling), and in the next season he repeated the feats of the previous one.

   In 1991-92, Jordan won the scoring title once again and was again voted the MVP of the regular season. After embarrassing his main opponent, Clyde Drexler, who was considered by some to be as great as Jordan by, e.g., setting new Finals records in three-pointers made and points scored in one half of Game 1, Jordan was granted another Finals MVP title. The Bulls won the Finals and the second championship in a row, and during the regular season tied the NBA record for most games won in one season.

   Jordan spent the summer of 1992 competing not only on golf courses. Together with the Dream Team,[6] made up of the NBA's best players and one college player, he won the Tournament of Americas in June/July, hence qualifying for the 1992 Olympic Games in Barcelona. A month later, the Dream Team and Jordan beat all their rival teams in the Olympics, effortlessly winning the gold. Having won the Olympic laurels, Jordan began preparing for the next NBA season.

   In the 1992-93 season, Jordan was not voted the league's MVP, despite tying Wilt Chamberlain's record of seven consecutive scoring titles. The award went to Jordan's Dream Teammate, Charles Barkley, whom Jordan later defeated in the '93 Finals. In the championship series, Jordan set a record for the highest points per game average, which was one of the reasons he was voted the Finals MVP for the third straight time, and the Chicago Bulls won the third consecutive world championship.

2. COMPETING SINCE MORNING – Jordan would regularly appear for morning practices before other Bulls did, which earned him the reputation of the hardest-working player. He could also partake in competition from daybreak, especially when he felt the need to settle a score. An example of such behavior was his golf loss to Chuck Daly, the head coach of the Dream Team. Rick Reilly describes what happened afterwards as such:

   One day in Monte Carlo last summer, where the Dream Team trained before the Barcelona Olympics, coach Chuck Daly beat Jordan by one shot on the golf course. "That's it," Daly said, meaning that he was quitting while he was ahead. "I'll never play Michael again." The next morning, at the crack of dawn, Jordan rang Daly's room. Getting no response, he went directly to Daly's room and knocked. Then he pounded. He wouldn't go away until he got his rematch. (1993, p. 74)

3. COMPETING IN SOLITUDE – Jordan never competed in solitude simply because it is practically impossible to compete without opponents. However, he did hide from the public a particular form of competing – gambling – whether at a casino or on the golf course. Once the media publicized this aspect of Jordan's life, his reaction resembled the mechanism of illusion and denial typical of addicts, which was pointed out by a knowledgeable lawyer:

   Thank heavens that's over. "As far as the subject of Michael Jordan," NBA commissioner David Stern said last week, "that subject is closed." Hallelujah. And pass the Moët-Chandon.

   So why is Chuck Freiburger so worried? "Because it reminds me so much of what we went through in the early stages." Freiburger says. "Exactly. The checks written for debts. The escalating amounts. The denial that there's any problem." What does Freiburger know? Not much, except that for years he was the lawyer for a confessed gambling addict—former Baltimore Colt quarterback Art Schlichter. (Reilly, 1993, p. 74)

4. LOWERED TOLERANCE TO A LEVEL OF SUCCESS – This symptom occurred when Jordan retired from basketball to play baseball. The largely failed attempt and the lack of tangible success were described in a 2010

[5] Most Valuable Player award

[6] Unofficial name of the 1992 US Basketball Olympic team.

documentary, *30 for 30: Jordan Rides the Bus*. As stated by Ron Shelton, the film's director, "[…] this era of Michael Jordan's career, which is often used to hang on great deal of criticism… I take the opposite out of. I think that this is a sign of his greatness that he could even dare do it, and try it, and accomplish anything at that level" (Shelton, 2010). Jordan treated the "baseball hangover" with returning to the NBA and winning three consecutive championships for the second time. The symptom of lowered tolerance was also visible when, in the years 2001-03, he played for the Washington Wizards. The team was too weak to qualify for the play-offs, not to mention a championship run, but it was satisfying enough for Jordan to be able to play at a professional level at the age of forty. He also claimed that his goal at that stage was not victory, but the opportunity to share his basketball knowledge and experience. Below is Jordan's statement from when he was announcing his return to the NBA in 2001:

"If I fall, I fall," Jordan, a can of Gatorade placed strategically by his side for the cameras, told reporters. "You get up and move on. If I try to teach my kids anything, it's to have a vision and try.… If I do it, it's great. If I don't, I can live with myself."

There was a generation of young, athletic players eager to take advantage of him in his advancing years, he admitted. "My head is on a block," he said. "The young dogs are going to chase me around. Well, I'm not going to bark too far away from them either. I'm not running from nobody. If anything, it'll be a great challenge." Mostly, he wanted to avoid the sense of regret that had invaded his life since being forced to desert his game in Chicago. "There's an itch that still needs to be scratched here," he said. "And I want to make sure it doesn't bother me the rest of my life." (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 9761-9768)

In the TV commercial for the anniversary edition of Air Jordan XX basketball shoes released in 2005, Spike Lee, as the narrator of "A Tale of Jordan," cites Jordan's words: "I can accept failure, I can't accept not trying." (Getoutthebox1, n.d.)

5. TOXIC COMPETITION – The previously described examples of Jordan's aggressive "trash-talking" were especially toxic when they targeted his own teammates. Reilly provides an example of how Jordan treated Rodney McCray:

"He has practically ruined [reserve forward] Rodney McCray for us." When the two players are on opposite teams in scrimmages, the source says, "[Jordan] is in Rodney's face, screaming, "You're a loser! You've always been a loser!" Rodney can hardly put up a jumper now." (1993, p. 74)

Similarly, Halberstam reports on Jordan's relations with the Bulls' center, Bill Cartwright:

Jordan did not respect Cartwright as a man or as a player. He called him Medical Bill because of his past injuries. He thought Cartwright had bad hands, so sometimes in practice he threw him passes that were unnecessarily hard so that Cartwright would fumble them and prove Jordan's point. (Halberstam, 2012, p. 247)

Although Cartwright was normally known for his good-natured disposition, Jordan drove him to the point of making a verbal threat:

Michael is just… he's killing Bill Cartwright all the time in the locker room in front of everybody. Cartwright gets Michael aside and he says: "Look, if you ever do anything like that again, you will never play basketball because I'm gonna break both your legs." (Taylor, 2003)

Anyone who could not stand up to Jordan mentally became his victim.

6. BREAKUP OF FAMILY BONDS – Jordan's first marriage to Juanita Vanoy, which lasted seventeen years and endured long periods of the two being away from each other, Jordan's alleged affairs, and a separation in 2002, ended in 2006. Lazenby describes Jordan's divorce from his first wife in the following manner:

From there, Jordan settled in as an executive for the Bobcats, a period punctuated by his continued travels about the globe, golfing and gambling and partying. It seemed no great surprise that he soon faced divorce once again, after seventeen years of marriage to Juanita. The divorce was finalized in December 2006 and estimated by Forbes to have cost Jordan $150 million, said to be one of the largest settlements in history. (Lazenby, 2014, loc. 10046-10049)

7. SELLING HOUSEHOLD OBJECTS, THEFTS (IN ORDER TO AFFORD THE COMPETITION) – The biographical narratives do not indicate that this symptom has occurred. During his basketball career as an active player, Jordan amassed a fortune of approximately five hundred million dollars, mainly through endorsement deals. As of February 2020, his net worth is estimated to be $2.1 billion.[7] There was no need for him to steal in order to finance any form of competition.

8. PROFESSIONAL AND SOCIAL DEGRADATION – The biographical narratives do not indicate that this symptom has occurred in the professional sphere, and Jordan's short biography on the NBA's official website still reads, "By acclamation, Michael Jordan is the greatest basketball player of all time,"[8] with the greatness being largely attributed to his unmatched will to win. However, in the social sphere, the 1993 revelations concerning his gambling practices considerably undermined his image as a role model for young people. During the 1993 play-offs, Knicks fans would come to Madison Square Garden holding banners reading "Be like Mike, bet on it!" which was a derisive parody of the Gatorade campaign slogan, "Be like Mike, drink Gatorade" (a product endorsed by Jordan). Nevertheless, this social scrutiny was temporary since, as Rick Reilly put it, "Still, let's do what Stern and Rashad and Jordan all want us to do—forget about it. Subject closed and swept under the rug. None of our business anyway. Besides, Jordan is this nation's most cherished athlete. What could happen to him?" (1993, p. 74).

9. TORPIDITY/"FUNCTIONAL ILLITERACY" – The biographical narratives do not indicate that the symptom has occurred.

10. COMPETITION BECOMING THE ONLY GOAL IN LIFE – As mentioned above, Jordan himself admitted "To compete, to win... it's all I live for, really" (Weitzman, 1999). His entire professional career, as well as episodes from his private life, serves as a confirmation of these words.

11. ILLNESSES AND PSYCHOSIS – The biographical narratives do not indicate that the symptom has occurred.

12. EXTREME PHYSICAL EXHAUSTION – The biographical narratives do not indicate that the symptom has occurred.

13. DEATH – The biographical narratives do not indicate that the symptom has occurred.

Conclusions

In 2020, Jordan continues to reap the benefits brought by his addiction to competition, and he seems to be in good physical and mental health. The financial empire he has created through his collaboration with Nike is growing. Apart from the Jordan Brand, the former basketball player gains profits from a majority ownership of the Charlotte Hornets and sales of the Cincoro tequila brand, in which he invested in 2019. Jordan's private life also seems to be orderly: he remarried in 2013 and a year later became the father of twins; in 2019, he became a grandfather. All of the above do not imply that he managed to entirely overcome the need to compete. While Jordan has not suffered death in a physiological sense, his previous mental exhaustion and the loss of joy in competing made clear through his resignation from playing professional basketball in 1993 can be viewed symbolically as him losing the battle with his addiction. It can also be seen as an attempt to fight the addiction, and his returns to active playing in the NBA can be treated as relapses. Rather mild relapses of the addiction could be observed in Jordan's behavior long after he parted ways with professional basketball. An example of such a recurrence is his Basketball Hall of Fame induction speech in 2009, which was widely criticized for lacking modesty. During his speech, he attempted to explain his uncompromising urge for competition by pointing to the igniters of the "competitive fire" (OfficialHoophall, n.d.) burning in him and the fuel which kept the fire burning. In other words, Jordan listed many of those who had gotten under his skin during his career and reminded the audience that he had dominated them all. While the speech could be perceived as a manner of settling with the past, Jordan still pitches into any opportunity

[7] https://www.forbes.com/profile/michael-jordan/#37f2b6042d83
[8] https://www.nba.com/history/legends/profiles/michael-jordan

to demonstrate his superiority or, at least, to provoke a rival. In 1996, Jordan and the Chicago Bulls, on their way to the championship title, set a record for most games won by a team in a regular season (72 wins and 10 losses). The record was broken in 2016 by the Golden State Warriors, who won 73 out of 82 games and yet failed to win the championship that season. In 2017, at an NBA team-owners meeting, Jordan took the opportunity to diss a new rival – the Golden State Warriors owner, Joe Lacob – by saying, "You know, 73 don't mean shit [without the ring]."[9] Jordan still projects the image of an alpha male who constantly feels the need to dominate.

As evidenced by this study, it is possible to perceive Michael Jordan as a "competition addict." The question still remains as to whether Jordan overcame his addiction to competing. Is he actually operating in a framework that has allowed him to dwell in his addiction without suffering its destructive impact? Professional sports is an area where competition takes place daily and victories are rewarded. Despite the idea of "fair-play," professional leagues, which officially condemn unethical behaviors, do tolerate such behaviors as long as they propel the business machine and the league is able to cover them up (e.g., doping or other forms of unfair play), as in the case of allegations against agents operating in the Major League of Baseball in 2018 (Schmidt & Waldstein, 2018). This is especially true for American culture, in which, as observed by Goldman, "The Sherman Anti-Trust Act, reflecting prevailing American social values, codified cultural beliefs about the inherent goodness of competition. Competition became an end in itself, a Darwinian regulator of industry as it was of nature, uncoupled from the social impact of the object of the competition. At the same time that competition was being enshrined by Congress and the Supreme Court as a sacred American value" (Goldman, 1993, p. 22). The philosophy of almost unrestrained competition makes the concept of "the end justifying the means" a part of the American Dream in American professional sports. Athletes such as Jordan, who live the dream, are presented as role models – people who overcame difficulties, including their own vices and imperfections, and achieved success.

The case study of Michael Jordan described in this article is not enough to treat competing and the need to win as a behavioral addiction on a massive scale. Nevertheless, the study opens the door for discussion and further studies on competitiveness as a form of behavioral addiction, as Jordan's "competitive spirit" is not an isolated case. In the world of sports alone, it is possible to find individuals who can be assumed to be addicted to competing. One such individual was definitely Kobe Bryant, who died in a tragic accident in January 2020. Bryant patterned his basketball career on Jordan, and Jordan himself named Bryant as the only other person as competitive as him. However, there are others: Is not Lance Armstrong, who overcame cancer and won the Tour de France seven years in a row only to be exposed as having been doping, such an individual? What about Muhammad Ali, who lost his heavyweight champion belt three times and won it back twice, simultaneously challenging racism, intolerance, and the American government? Is Cristiano Ronaldo, who frequently cries on the pitch, a football actor or an individual who, on an emotional level, cannot accept failure? What about Bill Russel, Diego Maradona, Wladimir Klitschko, Tom Brady, Serena Williams, Pele, Michael Phelps, Tiger Woods, Roger Federer, or Lennox Lewis? Each one of these athletes dominated their sports. Some of them cheated (Maradona's "Hand of God"). All of them achieved success by competing. Is it possible to accept that, as in Jordan's case, in order to win multiple times one needs to be addicted to winning in some way? The question extends past the realm of sports and encourages an in-depth look at the biographies of figures who have operated in different fields and became famous for their competitiveness. Among such figures are Julius Cesar, Alexander the Great, Katherine the Great, John Rockefeller, Thomas Edison, and, from more contemporary times, Margaret Thatcher, Bill Gates, and Larry Ellison. None of those figures would have described themselves as being addicted, but rather ambitious, competitive, and determined. After all, history is written by winners.

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[9] https://www.foxsports.com/nba/story/michael-jordan-golden-state-warriors-73-wins-doesnt-mean-without-ring-meaningless-020817

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