

Phil Jackson brings attitude to Lakers, NBA playoffs

(AP) — David Stern is apparently busy plotting how to broadcast NBA games on the backs of fans' eyelids. In the meantime, someone has to say a few good words about the upcoming playoffs.

So here are seven of them: Come for the basketball, stay for Phil Jackson.

For one thing, Jackson figures to be around at the end. For another, he will have the league's most entertaining

team in tow. Need a 3-point play? Watch Phil teach Jack Nicholson how that rather-be-lucky-than-good grin is supposed to look.

Jackson is easy to underestimate. He almost seems to prefer it. He will be the first to say the Lakers aren't the Bulls, just like Los Angeles isn't Chicago.

Sure, there are comparisons. The Lakers play defense, they score fast

enough to bury opponents and they've learned to like winning — tearing off consecutive streaks of 16, 19 and 11 games on the way to 67 regular-season wins.

But Jackson never forgets the difference between this team and that one, either. That's what makes this such a good story. The Lakers could stumble anywhere along the way, and next season half of L.A.'s celebrity row will be

looking at Jackson and swear it's Del Harris with a supply of "Just for Men." Or the Lakers could win it all. And then this time, when Jackson has his picture taken with the NBA trophy, Michael Jordan won't be anywhere in the frame.

Jackson's genius is not inspirational leadership. He doesn't yell at (or choke) players to get their attention. He whistles. But if his own ballplayers ever caught Jackson on ESPN Classic or

were old enough to have seen him play, they'd know why he talks so much about "energy."

Jackson learned to respect talent by respecting the best. That quality cuts to the heart of his credibility with kids the same age as his own. He can watch Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal do their best and honestly say he's seen better. Because he has. He learned how to coax that effort out of others.

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