
From the Los Angeles Times

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Lakers put the psycho in psychoanalysis

A psychology professor puts Jerry, Kobe and Co. on the couch, albeit figuratively. The conclusion: This might be the ultimate dysfunctional family.

October 20, 2007

Ego problems? Check.

Awful communication? You bet.

Anger, envy, lack of trust, all of it mashed into a combustible mix that's about to blow? Exactly.

The diagnosis is dysfunction. The recommendation is intense therapy.

The Lakers need to see a shrink.

Luckily, this is Los Angeles. Toss a stone, hit a shrink. I found one on the Westside, and I'm sure he can help.

His name is Dr. David Levy. He is a sports-loving Pepperdine psychology professor who treats celebrities. In other words, he knows his hoops, and he's an expert in dealing with dysfunction.

If the Lakers agreed to weeks of on-the-couch, clear-the-mind counseling, where would he start?

"I'd approach them as a struggling family," Levy said.

Jerry Buss is the wily grandfather, still in charge of the family business.

Phil Jackson is the consigliere, the trusted counsel who runs the business, dates the boss' daughter and tries to work his way around the boss' stumbling son.

The father? Jerry West, only he's flown the coop. The stepfather? Mitch Kupchak, the fill-in dad who can do no right.

The grandkids are the players, led by an aloof, older brother wearing jersey No. 24. We all know who he is. Levy would give Kobe Bryant some extra couch time of his own.

"A family like this," the doctor said, "I would need to help them find their homeostasis."

Homeowhat?

"The need for any family to keep its own equilibrium. In some families, that means always maintaining a stoic demeanor."

The Lakers have none. All of that glittering celebrity, all of that history, all of those outsized expectations. For them, "It's now about conflict and adversity," the doctor said. "The status quo within the family has become conflict . . . and to deal with all of this, they appear to have developed a blaming style."

The blame shifts. Sometimes the finger gets pointed at management. Sometimes -- well, usually -- it gets pointed at No. 24.

"Kobe is what you would term 'the golden child,' " Levy said.

That means he is the genius son who gets all the glory, the brother whose shadow hangs over his siblings. Luke, Lamar, Sasha, the whole gang, they love him -- and loathe him. They need him, yet they feel stifled by him. Poor guys, each of them needs to learn how to walk his own path.

The golden child can help, but he must be taught to tread carefully. He must develop a sharper sense for what Levy called "his family's overt and covert rules."

So part of the therapy would be about teaching the genius a few new things.

For starters, no more sulking. Kid, you've got it good. You make millions playing in an arena that's a jump shot from some of the roughest neighborhoods this side of Baghdad. Perspective helps.

Second, control the emotions. Zip the lips when you feel a need to rant. No more parking-lot diatribes delivered to strangers. No more cutting down the goofy, 7-foot kid brother. It might help, too, when you're out in public to lay off your stepdad -- and the old guy writing your paycheck.

Finally, golden boy, please remember, this is not your world. Think of the fans. So many of them stood by your side when you were accused of sexual assault. Suddenly you're talking about jumping ship? Time for some deep breathing, meditation and journaling.

Just as I am, Levy is enthralled by Kobe's talent and thinks it would be a big mistake for him to leave town. Levy said he'd give Kobe plenty of support. Kobe needs it too. After all, from outsiders and from his own family, the golden child gets hit with equal portions of praise and blame. It might be driving him nutty.

"In my profession, Kobe is in what we call 'a double bind,'" Levy said. "You're damned if you do, damned if you don't."

Think about it. Kobe scores 50, his team wins, and he's called a hero. He does what he is told, passes more, scores 18, and the team loses. Now he's a self-centered goat.

Part of the therapy would involve teaching his family to be a little more understanding. The golden child is human too.

I know what you're thinking. Doesn't Kobe bring this on himself? What about this summer and those manic rants? One moment, he gloomily demands to be traded. A few hours later, he's bright and cheerful and wants to be a Laker for life.

"He's either a loose cannon," Levy said, "or he is saying things that are really clever and deciding to say them strategically. I'd have to see."

What about old man Buss? Doesn't he need help too? He goes off half-cocked. Just the other day, he said he might send his prodigal grandson to another family for the right price.

"My impression is that he's a much more strategic man," Levy said. "That was not him being a loose cannon. That was calling a bluff. He bluffs only when he needs to bluff."

What a tangled mess. Levy should make sure his office has a punching bag and loads of Kleenex. The probing will be tough. Not too many families want to look hard in the mirror the way the Lakers need to.

But Levy can see a day when their dreary locker room could be filled with happiness. To get there, he says, the Lakers must be willing to strive, first to build trust, then to negotiate and compromise. That will take a lot of talk and a lot of listening.

"They need to turn over every stone to make this work," he said.

If those upturned stones reveal nothing but mold, Levy said, then there probably will be no alternative. L.A.'s first family will have to split up.

Kobe Bryant, off living under some other roof? Woe to the Lakers.

"He would be like a jealous lover," Levy said. "From a psychological perspective, when a lover is spurned, they frequently want revenge. Kobe will torch the Lakers every chance he gets."

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