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"[Bradley] offers slam-dunk life lessons in teamwork and character."—*People*

# VALUES OF THE GAME



Foreword by Phil Jackson

BILL BRADLEY

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BROADWAY BOOKS \* NEW YORK



Originally published by Artisan in 1998 along with photos not included in this edition.

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First Broadway Books trade paperback edition published 2000.

*Book design by Pei Loi Koay*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Applied For

ISBN 0-7679-0449-4

00 01 02 03 04 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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PRAISE FOR VALUES OF THE GAME

"Bradley hits nothing but net with *Values of the Game*. Call it *The Book of Virtues* meets hardwood."

—USA Today

"This may be the single most important present a parent can give a sports-loving child . . ."

—Dallas Morning News

"[Bradley] has written a love letter to basketball . . . It is every bit as prescient, thoughtful, and just plain valuable a work as you'd expect from a man who never approaches any task without a full commitment."

—Boston Globe

"[Bradley] offers slam-dunk life lessons in teamwork and character."

—People

"He makes the monotony of practice seem purposeful and relationships formed on the court seem more valuable and genuine than many made off it . . . It is good to know someone still feels that way about basketball."

—New York Times

"Bradley's breathless love for the game makes this a sentimental journey worth taking."

—Newsweek

"The sensitivity of Bradley's writing is a reflection of his feeling for the game that defined him as a person."

—New York Newsday

"With this Bill in the White House we might not need baseball, at least not for moral sustenance."

—Robert Lipsyte in the *New York Times*

"The whole is larger than the sum of its parts, not only because it's so personal but because Bradley moves so deftly from the specific to the general."

—Publishers Weekly

# DEDICATION

FOR MY COACHES, all of whom loved the game: Jerry Ryan, Arvel Popp, Eddie Donovan, Butch Van Breda Kolff, Hank Iba, Caesar Rubini, Dick McGuire, Red Holzman; and for those who helped along the way—Ed Macauley, Jerry West, Hank Raymonds, Red Auerbach, John McClen-  
don, and Sonny Hill.

## FOREWORD

BILL BRADLEY CAME FROM the Air Force to the New York Knicks in December 1967, my first year in the NBA. He tried to be just another guy, but everyone wanted a piece of him. It was not hard to see why. There was the big contract (\$500,000 for four years) and the oversized expectations of New York fans that he would lead a Knicks revival. And then there was us, his Knicks teammates, wondering if this smart guy from Princeton and Oxford was indeed the real deal.

He was, in more ways than I realized at the time. Bill brought with him the right work ethic—coming to practice early and staying late to work on his game. But what we didn't anticipate was his ability to adapt his game to whatever the Knicks

needed for the team to succeed. He moved from guard to forward (his position when we won the championships in 1970 and 1973), and from a great scorer to a role player. His ego remained undamaged even though he was no longer the star, or “the man,” because he understood the essence of the Knicks team game—that one guy couldn’t carry the load alone.

Bill won us over off the court too. As the team representative to the players’ union which negotiated labor agreements with the league, he brought this same adaptability, a sense of how to get things accomplished even if he wasn’t at the helm, directing the action or receiving all the credit (Oscar Robertson was the president).

Later in our years in the NBA I became Bill’s roommate on the road. I found myself carried along with his curious nature, his capacity to learn: an art museum in Houston, a shoreline visit in Oregon, a lecture in Boston. And so I found myself getting another education of sorts. Bill’s grasp of our society, what makes it tick and how business gets done, was really fascinating to watch. One summer he accompanied me to Pine Ridge, South Dakota, to help conduct a basketball camp for the Oglala Sioux. After he arrived, Bill plunged into one of the most closed societies I know, and within twenty-four hours he’d worked out the details of the tribe’s power structure. So it wasn’t surprising to me that when Bill took the floor of the U.S. Senate he would bring along the same curiosity, the same group sensitivity, and the same determination to get things done that he first took to the floor of Madison Square Garden.

Bill Bradley’s value system is not only durable, it’s portable. That’s the essence of *Values of the Game*. Bill has long had a magnetism that has radiated beyond his own quiet nature. I first saw it thirty years ago at a sports banquet given in my honor in my

hometown of Williston, North Dakota. I had asked Bill to be a speaker, and on short notice he rearranged his schedule and made the long trek out to Williston on the Great Plains of North America. As Teddy Roosevelt had done eighty years earlier, he arrived with a knowledgeable enthusiasm, having taken the time to learn about the pioneers, cattle ranchers, and Native Americans. Bill's reputation as a leader and a Christian had prompted the local chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes to seek him out. Bill took on the issue of spirituality with great ease. He spoke to them about the great responsibility to keep a personal set of values. The year was 1968, a time when nearly every institution in society was under question. After the banquet, I drove Bill back to the Plainsman Hotel and we talked over the evening's events, about the FCA and his responsibility to meet other people's expectations. As a PK (preacher's kid), I was familiar with how those responsibilities sometimes conflicted with finding one's own way based on self-knowledge. Bill told me how his personal spiritual commitment had evolved and how being young and wanting to do good sometimes got translated by others into trying to be godly. He said that with his education and upbringing, he was committed to finding some way to serve other people. But, importantly, he also said that being a public person didn't mean that you had to surrender the essence of who you were, that you couldn't let the public impose its expectations on your life, that you had to remain faithful to your own convictions and preserve a private space necessary for personal growth.

Bill was twenty-four and I was twenty-two at the time, and looking back over the last thirty years, I've watched Bill's values hold steady through the changing landscape of our society. Values aren't something that can be donned or discarded, like a used uniform. It seems strange to me that many of the readers of this book



will know Bill mostly as a politician, and never had the opportunity to see him play. *Values of the Game* will give you an understanding of why Bill excelled, and why basketball is a perfect arena from which to draw much bigger lessons. Yes, the game has changed a lot since we played: the 3-point line, “small” forwards at 6 feet 8 inches and 250 pounds, and player contracts the size of a small country’s economy. But what Bill brought to the game—his industry, his leadership, his pure basketball intelligence—hasn’t lost any relevance. And neither have the values, the insights, and the wisdom that he took from the game. He was always generous with the basketball, and I’m delighted that once again he’s taken the opportunity to share the wealth.

*Phil Jackson*

1998

# INTRODUCTION

ONE DAY IN 1996, I was completing my regular physical workout on the StairMaster and treadmill at our local YMCA in Montclair, New Jersey, before returning to work in Washington. After the aerobics, I took a look into the small gym. It was empty—only a runner circling the old-fashioned running track around the ceiling—so I checked out a basketball and went in. It bounced well and the leather felt good. I began to shoot at ten feet, then fifteen, then eighteen. Swish! went the ball as it ripped through the net. Within minutes I was in another world, alone with my body movements and my memories. Years had passed since I'd done this, and yet in several minutes I was back. "I love this game!" I thought. The old inner

voice began urging me to “hit all the shots.” These were different times and such aspiration was foolhardy, but still a surprising number went cleanly through the hoop. After about fifteen minutes, an elderly gentleman poked his head into the gym. I was shooting from the top of the key, then I was driving with a right hook off the boards, followed by a scoop shot. Then I was back at the top of the key. Slowly the man made his way into the gym and out onto the court. He approached me. I pretended to be unaware of him and kept shooting. He leaned in and said, “Bradley?”

“Yes,” I said, launching another eighteen-footer.

“Senator Bradley?” he asked.

“Yes,” I said.

There was a pause, and then, piercing my idyllic reverie, he blurted out, “Why didn’t you answer my letter?”

\* \* \*

IN A WORLD FULL of unrealized dreams and baffling entanglements, basketball seems pure. We know, of course, that it isn’t. It has its own share of greed, violence, and obsession with the culture of entertainment. Yet even in the midst of these distractions, there is still the game. Each time a father takes his son or daughter to the playground to shoot baskets for the first time, a new world opens—one full of values that can shape a lifetime. In my experience, the feeling of getting better came with hard work, and getting better made victory easier. Winning was fun, but so was the struggle to improve. That was one of the lessons you learned from the game: Basketball was a clear example of virtue rewarded.

I was very lucky to play a game I loved for twenty years, as a high school, college, and pro player. It gave me a unique window on the world, and it filled me with moments of insight and years

of tremendous pleasure. Some of the most enjoyable times in my life were spent playing ball. It is that part of the game that this book celebrates—the good times playing basketball. In the course of writing it, I got to know the coach and players on the team at Stanford University, where I was a visiting professor. Watching them in games and talking about basketball with some of them reawakened memories in me of my life as a player. It was like meeting an old friend after twenty years—someone whose stories I remembered, and whose values I understood and wanted to share. Two decades ago I wrote in *Life on the Run* about my experiences as a New York Knick in the 1960s and 1970s, and there are a few excerpts from that book in this one. But what I try to do here is show how, after all the years, the game is still full of joy and the lessons learned from it stay with you—that even though the game has changed, the old values still flow through it.

I hope parents will share this book with their children and basketball fans will find that it rings true. I believe that it applies to the whole of our passage through life.

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# PASSION

PURE PLEASURE, PURE JOY

YOU BEGIN BY BOUNCING a ball—in the house, on the driveway, along the sidewalk, at the playground. Then you start shooting: legs bent, eyes on the rim, elbow under the ball. You shoot and follow through. Let it fly, up, up and in. No equipment is needed beyond a ball, a rim, and imagination. How simple the basic act is. I'm not sure exactly when my interest turned to passion, but I was very young, and it has never diminished.

When I was a teenager, alone in the high school gym for hours, the repetition of shooting, shot after shot, became a kind of ritual for me. The seams and the grain of the leather ball had to feel a certain way. My fingertips went right to the grooves and told me if it felt right. The key to the fingertips was

keeping them clean. I would rub my right hand to my sweaty brow, then against my T-shirt at chest level, and then I would cradle the ball. By the end of shooting practice, the grime had made its way from the floor to the ball to my fingertips to my shirt. After thousands of shots, my shirts were permanently stained.

The gymnasium itself was a part of my solitary joy. I took in every nuance of the place. It was a state-of-the-art facility, with retractable fan-shaped glass backboards. The floor was polished and shining; when I moved, it glistened as if I were playing on a mirror. The only daylight streamed in from windows high along the sloping ceiling. The smell was not of locker room mildew but of pungent varnish and slightly oiled mops, the guarantors of floor quality throughout the years. The gym's janitor insisted on one absolute rule: no street shoes allowed on the floor. It was sacred terrain, traversable only by the soft soles of Converse or Keds.

Then there were the sounds. *Thwat, thwat!* The ball hit the floor and the popping sound echoed from the steel beams of the ceiling and the collapsed wooden stands that stacked up twenty feet high. *Thwat, thwat, squeak*—the squeal of your sneakers against the floor, followed by the jump and then the shot. The *swish* of the ball through the net, a sound sweeter than the roar of the crowd. *Swish. Thwat, thwat, squeak, swish!*

I couldn't get enough. If I hit ten in a row, I wanted fifteen. If I hit fifteen, I wanted twenty-five. Driven to excel by some deep, unsurveyed urge, I stayed out on that floor hour after hour, day after day, year after year. I played until my muscles stiffened and my arms ached. I persevered through blisters, contusions, and strained joints. When I got home I had to take a nap before I could muster the energy to eat the dinner that sat in the oven. After one Friday night high school game, which we lost to our arch

rival, I was back in the gym at nine on Saturday morning, with the bleachers still deployed and the popcorn boxes scattered beneath them, soaking my defeat by shooting. Others had been in this place last night, I thought, but now I was here by myself, and I was home.

When I practiced alone, I often conjured up the wider world of basketball. Maybe I had just seen the Los Angeles Lakers play on TV the day before; I'd try to remember a particular move that Laker forward Elgin Baylor had made, then imitate it. I would simulate the whole game in my mind, including the spiel of the announcer. "Five seconds left, four seconds, three, Bradley dribbles right in heavy traffic, jumps, shoots—good at the buzzer!" I dreamed that someday I'd experience that moment for real, maybe even take the clutch shot in the state finals. In my dream, of course, I'd hit it and we'd be state champions.

The passion of solitary practice was matched by the joy of playing team ball. The constant kaleidoscope of team play was infinitely interesting to me. For every challenge thrown up by the defense, there was an offensive counter. Having the court sense to recognize this in the flow of the game produced a real high. The notion that someday I could be paid to play a game I loved never occurred to me.



YOU COULD ALWAYS TELL that Magic Johnson loved to play. He smiled, grimaced, and pushed himself and his teammates. His gusto honored the game. Some players these days seem more angry than joyful, yet the great ones still have a zest. Grant Hill's pleasure comes from his game's completeness and his own unflappable composure. Hakeem Olajuwon exudes a



delighted confidence when the ball goes into him at the low post. Clyde Drexler, like Dr. J in earlier years, conveys an effortless joy when he has the ball in open court and heads for the basket.

Even the controversial Dennis Rodman evinces a love of the game despite his antics. His game within the game is rebounding. He studies films to see which way a shooter's shot usually bounces. He keeps his body in top shape. He uses his body only after he uses his brain and his eyes, and then he makes a second, third, and fourth effort. When he gets the ball, he smiles the smile of someone dedicated to something well beyond himself.

The women's game in particular is full of a kind of beautiful enthusiasm. On many teams each player seems deeply involved in her teammates' spirits as well as their play. I used to love to watch Kate Starbird spark her Stanford team with her tenacity, intensity, and 3-point-shooting skill, but the epitome, for me, is Chamique Holdsclaw of Tennessee, the female Michael Jordan. She has a winning combination of zeal and ability that allows her to generate excitement in the crowd, dedication among her teammates, and fear in the minds of her opponents. Her sheer love of the game becomes infectious.

Imagine what happens when you've got an entire team of players who are passionate about the game. In my Knicks days, there was no feeling comparable to the one I got when the team's game came together—those nights when five guys moved as one. The moment was one of beautiful isolation, the result of the correct blending of human forces at the proper time and to the exact degree. With my team, before the crowd, against our opponents, it was almost as if this were my private world and no one else could sense the inexorable rightness of the moment.

The Knicks 1973 championship was more fun for me than the initial one in 1970. We weren't under the pressure of trying to