

Grant Hill retires leaving behind lessons, a legacy, and model generations to come

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Before [Kobe Bryant](#) , before [LeBron James](#) , and before [Kevin Durant](#) there was [Grant Hill](#) . The quiet, clean cut, and well-mannered kid from Duke University came into the NBA in 1994 as a beacon of light for the league and as the next superstar to take the reigns over from the stars of yesteryear.

The changing of the guard from Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, and Larry Bird was impossible on the surface, but plausible with Hill.

Yesterday, Grant Hill retired after 19 years in the NBA.

Hill was an ambassador of the game and his career was very much like two acts of a play. The first 10 years were surrounding by rousing success as an individual and, at the same time, marred with injuries.

In that 10th year, doctors told Hill that he should retire and that he will never play basketball again. That was their expert opinion. Instead, he worked hard for his second act, earning the right to play nine more seasons in the league that showed a different brand of Hill as a role player just doing what was asked of him. In the process, he helped young players along the way and created some special moments.

This was reminiscent of Shawn Michaels, who, after roughly 10 years in wrestling was told his career was over despite having the potential to be one of the greats. He worked hard for four years and came back to have a second act as well. The first act was filled with the promise of greatness while showcasing it on the court, but the second half was what defines each in their careers.

Through his first six seasons in the league, Hill did not disappoint playing in nearly every game,

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averaging 21.6 points per game, 7.8 rebounds, 6.2 assists, and 1.6 steals with a Rookie of the Year trophy (shared with Jason Kidd) and four trips to the All-Star game in his back pocket. The [Detroit Pistons](#)

won eight more games with Hill during his rookie year and then proceeded to make the playoffs four of the next five years under his direction.

He was the star that the league needed, but struggled in the playoffs with the Pistons, never getting out of the first round. The team was talented, but fell victim to average teams like the Atlanta Hawks and Miami Heat year after year in the first round.

That lack of success in the playoffs in-part (the other part was a 7-year 92.9 million dollar contract) led to his move to the [Orlando Magic](#) .

Back in 1999, the Magic were attempting to put together the league's next dynamic duo with [Tracy McGrady](#)

and Hill on the perimeter a la the

[Chicago Bulls](#)

in the 1990's with Jordan and Pippen. Again, this was plausible because of the type of player Hill was and still had the potential to be, but never manifested into much, as the Magic never found a way to pull a first round series win out of the hat. Those playoff woes seemed to follow Hill from the Pistons to the Magic with his teams never making it past the first round of the playoffs for the first 15 years of his career.

Hill struggled with injuries and played a total of 200 games while only making the playoffs once with the Magic, an ironic dust pan needing sweep to the Pistons.

With Hill seemingly getting back to relatively good health towards the final year with the Magic, he crossed the country for the first time in his playing career to join the [Phoenix Suns](#) for what would become the role that redefined his career.

Insert the Suns training staff here.

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With their assistance, as well as playing with [Steve Nash](#) and Amar'e Stoudemire, it was a career resurgence for Hill in the Valley. As he was able to not only get back to form and back on the court, but also finally get back to winning.

It was that change of scenery and lack of pressure that allowed Hill to step on the court in Phoenix to contribute. He was brought in for leadership, defense, versatility, and his class. He was reflective of the culture that the franchise had established over the years and it continued with Hill, who exemplified that to a T.

Team	Games	%	PTS	REBS	ASTS	STLS	
Suns			362			91.8	12.07
Other			664			64.2	19.22

Hill was always the extension of an idea on and off the court. That idea was how to play the game of basketball and how to approach the game. His value was not measurable with just per game numbers, playoff wins, or advanced statistics.

There were numerous moments over the five years Hill was in Phoenix that stood out. As an individual defender, he guarded positions 1-4 with resolve and quality. His 34 points against the [Indiana Pacers](#) at 38 years old was impressive for a player who hadn't scored with that volume in exactly six

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years.

I was sitting in a bar in Phoenix watching game five of the Suns and [Lakers](#) in the Western Conference Finals. This bar was split 50/50 with fans of each team, as the winner of this game would have control of the series with a trip to the NBA Finals on the line. The Suns had been to the Finals twice before in team history, while the Lakers had been there the previous two years alone. Bryant was special in that series (33.7 PPG 8.3 APG 7.2 RPG), but had to earn everything against Hill who was draped all over him all game. That is what I will always remember Grant Hill for.

Whether it was conscious or not, Hill left behind an impression with every young player he crossed paths with. He molded those who never could reach their potential to play their best basketball.

Hill personifies class, perseverance, and what a star should hope to be. Everything he did was with thought and respect. Hill has been and continues to be the model for young stars, in all sports, on how greatness can be achieved, taken away, then earned with work ethic and character.

These were the first two acts of a career that is not over. He may never score another point in this league, but Hill is easing into the third act with the same quiet, clean cut, manner as he did nearly 20 years ago.