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COMMUNITY VOICES: Kobe taught us many life lessons

By Jeff LaForce

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Devastating. Tragic. Unbelievable.

These are just a few words used to describe an inexplicable event that often leaves us searching for answers. Why did this happen? Why were certain decisions made? Why him? Why her? Why them? Why now?

These are the questions that have been running through our minds as we search for peace for everyone affected by the most recent tragedy in California. The horrific accident on the morning of Jan. 26 in Calabasas that claimed the lives of nine people has been on the forefront of many people's minds for the past few days. Many stories have, and will, continue to be shared by all who have been moved in one way or another.

This is my small contribution of how Kobe Bryant helped shape me as an athlete, coach and mentor.

I was born in 1977. Kobe Bryant was born in 1978. To say that I "grew up" following his career would be an understatement. Not only am I a huge Lakers fan, I'm more of a fan of athletes — those that embody the professionalism and character it requires to be a person anyone would look up to as a role model. During his playing years, Kobe conducted himself with extreme focus and determination, an unwavering mentality of overcoming any and all challenges, and a ridiculously strong desire to become the greatest ever.

After his playing days were over, he continued to have the same focus and determination, the same mentality of overcoming challenges, and the same desire to become the greatest. Yet, only now his target wasn't an NBA championship, but rather to be the best father and role model to his four children, and a professional advocate to many others around the globe.

During both phases of his life, the professional athlete and the professional mentor, Kobe Bryant was just that: a professional. His work ethic in both phases of his life was unmatched, his positive outlook unrivaled, and his inspiration unparalleled. The transition from his playing career to his new stage of life became visible when he won an Academy Award for his short film, "Dear Basketball." This film showcased to the world that the competitive nature in Kobe would not stop on the court, but continue through his future endeavors.

After his retirement, he was successful in creating an investment organization, various sports complexes and becoming an advocate for education. As confirmed by his relationship with his former high school teacher, Kobe was passionate about writing and storytelling and was getting prepared to introduce a new book to the public. He had so much more to give to the world, and he will truly be missed for eternity.

I have incorporated many things I learned from this man into my personal and professional life. I will never be able to match the level which Kobe Bryant was able to affect others, but striving toward perfection is the ultimate motivating factor.

Kobe was not perfect, but he proved in every aspect of his life that pushing for perfection is the true meaning of a persistent champion and I will always strive for that level.

In my current role as an educational adviser at Bakersfield College, my drive is for each and every student to leave my office with a mindset of completion. As a higher education mentor, I have the opportunity to change lives on a daily basis, and I do not take that responsibility lightly. My single focus is assisting students to successfully transfer from BC to a four-year institution — to influence them to be persistent toward their educational goals. I aim to model for them the work ethic they need to complete their assignments, their classes and their degrees.

We all have something to learn from Kobe's career and can each carry forth a piece of his legacy. In that spirit, I encourage all Bakersfield College students to carry on the Mamba mentality of hard work, grit, determination and persistence as they strive for greatness in achieving their goals.

Long live the legend of Kobe Bryant. Rest in peace, Black Mamba.

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