



***USA Today***

**June 8, 2009**

**Torre, Jackson lead L.A. teams to success**

**By Mike Lopresti, Gannett**

LOS ANGELES — Know what they have plenty of around here? Besides road rage?

Living legends calling the shots for their teams. A rare sporting juxtaposition is going on at the moment.

Phil Jackson, the coach with nine championship rings, works at Staples Center. His team currently runs on the inside lane at the NBA Finals.

Three miles away – as the TV helicopter flies, probably while following a police chase – Joe Torre, the manager with four World Series rings, works at Dodger Stadium. His team currently owns the finest record in baseball.

"I've never met him," Torre mentioned of Jackson. "We've sent messages to each other through people, that's about it."

Put that on the to-do list. Someone introduce these guys. In the meantime, we should notice how much they're alike. Or not.

Jackson is 63 and has helped keep hip replacement doctors solvent. Torre is 68 and a cancer survivor. Jackson's parents were ministers. Torre's sister is a nun.

Jackson prospered with the Bulls, but left with hard feelings and landed in southern California. Torre prospered with the Yankees, but left with hard feelings, and landed just up the freeway from Jackson.

Jackson's dumped on Kobe Bryant. Torre's book dumped on Alex Rodriguez.

As a player, Torre once led the league in hitting. As a player, Jackson once led the league in fouls.

Jackson loves motorcycles. Torre loves horse racing.

Jackson's girlfriend used to be a Playboy model. Torre's wife used to be a waitress.

Jackson's first coaching job in college was baseball. Torre read John Wooden's books, and took the Lakers over the Magic in six.

Their legacies do not come cynic-free.



How could anyone, the nitpickers ask, lose with Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant? How could anyone lose with a Yankee payroll that makes most other franchises look like a used car lot?

Their personas to the outside world could not be more different than the two components of an Oreo. Torre is approachable, talkative. The guy holding court over nachos in a sports bar.

Jackson is in his library, waiting for the next NPR broadcast. Only one of them has brought a title for Los Angeles. Not that Torre isn't actively trying.

But here's where their paths cross: They have thrived partly because of what they are not. They are not excitable. They are not impulsive. They are as volatile as skim milk. They might have the fastest cars, but they never drive into the wall.

You've seen the TV shots.

Jackson sitting placidly on the bench, looking like a man waiting in an airport for his flight, even as a lead vanishes. Torre sitting expressionless in the dugout, as if watching opera, even as his bullpen commits baseball arson.

But when they speak, players listen. Athletes might ignore history, but they can count rings.

Torre on Jackson: "I see a calmness in him that I try to portray. Sometimes it's tough. It's all about people. It's all about pulling in the same direction ... and players being able to trust him."

Jackson on Torre: "He seems to be able to take everything in hand. I know he's got to be real good at it because of the type of characters that's he had."

That's the guy who used to coach Dennis Rodman, talking about the guy who manages Manny Ramirez. The way Torre figures, Jackson has the harder gig.

"That game's much tougher to coach than our game. I think you're getting a lot of very strong personalities that know at a very young age they're something special. But he seems to make sense of it."

Jackson does not argue.

"While we go to sleep watching baseball, I know that it's a very intense game and there's a lot of different challenges out there. But there's so many emotions that rise and fall with basketball ... managing the temperament of the players is almost a critical element of coaching."



If the Lakers win in Orlando Tuesday, they go up 3-0 in the Finals. A mortal lock, because who blows a 3-0 lead?

Joe Torre did once. He said it'd be fine to tell the story of the 2004 Yankees to Jackson.

"See if you get a smile out of him."