Magic Johnson Shares His Life, From the NBA to HIV, in a New TV Series

The four-part docuseries “They Call Me Magic” on Apple TV+ offers an inside look at Magic Johnson and his sports and HIV legacy.

April 19, 2022 By Trent Straube

Everyone knows Magic Johnson as an iconic basketball player and one of the most famous faces of the HIV epidemic. But do you know what the man himself thinks about these aspects of his life? Now, you can find out. The legendary Lakers star opens up about his life in They Call Me Magic, a new four-part docuseries that premieres on Apple TV+ Friday, April 22 (click the image above the headline to watch a trailer).

Just over 30 years ago, on November 7, 1991, Earvin “Magic” Johnson shocked the world by announcing at the height of his fame that he had tested positive for HIV and was retiring from the Los Angeles Lakers immediately (you can watch that 1991 press converence below). At the time, HIV was widely considered a death sentence; effective HIV treatment didn’t become available until 1996.

Johnson returned to the hardwood to play in the 1992 All-Star Game and then as a member of the Olympic “Dream Team” that same year. He also returned to the Lakers for their 1995–96 season.

But as They Call Me Magic reveals, there are many other facets to Johnson’s life. For starters, there’s his family, including his wife, Cookie, who has been a vocal supporter over the decades, and his son EJ, now 29, who came out as gay to his dad in 2010. Magic did not fully accept his son’s sexuality at first, he recalls, but inspired by his son’s pride and confidence, he soon came around and is now an ally of the LGBTQ community. In fact, the gender-fluid EJ, in a silver sequined gown, joined his dad and family for the docuseries premiere.

View this post on Instagram

A post shared by Earvin “Magic” Johnson (@magicjohnson)

Apple TV+ describes the four episodes of the series as follows:

> Chapter 1
> All eyes are on a young basketball sensation from Lansing, Michigan—dubbed “Magic”—the NBA’s 1979 first overall draft pick.
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> Chapter 2
> After clinching the 1980 NBA Championship, Magic’s popularity soars. But his personal life is turbulent, and new NBA rivals emerge.
>
> Chapter 3
> Just as life is on the upswing, with marriage and a baby on the way, Magic receives an earth-shattering diagnosis that he’s contracted HIV.
>
> Chapter 4
> Fresh off the Dream Team’s historic win, Magic stages a comeback while evolving into a business powerhouse and nurturing a growing family.

In recent years, Johnson has used his celebrity status to promote COVID-19 vaccines, notably among the African-American community. For more, see “Magic Johnson on the Parallels Between COVID-19 and HIV.”

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