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THE AXE FILES

The Axe Files - Ep. 194: Steve Kerr (TV episode)

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DAVID AXELROD, CNN HOST: Coach, good to -- good to see you. You guys are headed to Washington in February, and everybody will be watching that visit very closely because normally when the world champions come to town, they make a stop at the White House. You're not going to make that stop. Why?

STEVE KERR, COACH, GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS: Well first we weren't invited, but I think our guys felt pretty strongly even before we knew that we didn't have an invitation that it was going to be a tough visit. A lot of us, myself included, have been pretty critical of President Trump.

And so it would -- it would have been a very non-traditional visit, you know. You think about the White House visit with the championship teams, it's a photo op, it's a thrill, it's everybody's, you know, making jokes and having fun, you give the president the jersey, and that's it, and it's kind of a fun day.

But times have changed, the world has changed, the office of the presidency has changed, and so the whole dynamic of the athlete (ph) visit has shifted entirely.

AXELROD: You know, when I was in the White House working for President Obama, it always used to miff me a little when athletes -- the teams would come, but a few athletes would stay away. And I thought you know, this is to -- this is not a political event.

KERR: Right.

AXELROD: Why are they turning it into a political event? And you probably hear some of that criticism now.

KERR: Sure, sure. I think it goes way beyond politics. I think -- you know, I made the statement that I've been lucky to visit the White House with, I think four different presidents, President Reagan, President Clinton, both President Bush's.

And I didn't always agree with their policy, but I never once thought about oh my gosh, I'm not going to go because I disagree with, you know, immigration or some foreign policy or tax reform. I --

AXELROD: So what's different now?

KERR: It's just a human dignity, it's a human respect issue. And so with all of those presidents that I mentioned, they were all above reproach in terms of their respect for their fellow man, and their respect for the office. And I don't think any of us see that right now.

We see what President Trump does with his -- with his words, with his actions, and it's difficult to reconcile that and just say we'll put all that aside, you know, he can make fun of handicapped people, he can, you know, he can say a lot of, you know, nasty things, ugly things, whether it's about women or whomever.

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THE AXE FILES

There can be a lot of things that happen that are just really difficult to just say all right, we'll put that aside and go visit and shake his hand. It doesn't feel right.

AXELROD: And you know, Steph Curry was outspoken on this point. I think that's how the invitation never came, was that he made his views known as to whether he personally would go to the White House, and the president made it clear that he wasn't going to proffer that invitation. So you guys talked about this among yourselves.

KERR: We did. We talked about it over the summer a little bit. It's hard to get together with the whole team in the summer, everybody's scattered. And so we knew that the invitation, whether it was going to come or not --

AXELROD: Was problematic.

KERR: Yes, it was going to be -- first of all it was a logistical issue of discussing it as a team, and so what happened was we had media day and we were planning on meeting literally the next day to discuss this issue. But on media day, that's when President Trump had tweeted out -- or that's when Steph announced I would not go if we're invited. And that sort of made it easy for everybody, to be honest with you.

AXELROD: Did you know that he was going to do that? Did he tell you he was going to do that?

KERR: I didn't, I didn't, no. Yes.

AXELROD: So now you know what it's like to be on the White House staff.

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: Watch Twitter to see --

KERR: That's right.

AXELROD: -- what people are going to do. You were in -- you were around when the Colin Kaepernick protests were going on, when he was playing for the 49ers. What did you think then about that?

KERR: I totally supported his right to speak out. I thought he made some mistakes, some big mistakes certainly. He wore the socks, the -- you remember the socks that were like policemen in pigs -- or pigs in policemen uniforms.

He I think said -- he didn't -- he didn't have a clear message at first, but I supported his right to protest. And I think what he did was really admirable. He went out and sought the advice of a man named Nate Boyer, who was a former player with the Seahawks who I believe was a ranger, an army ranger. I may have that wrong, he might have been a SEAL.

But he was a military veteran who gave Kaepernick the advice to kneel. And he said instead of

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sitting on the bench, kneel, because kneeling is also a sign of respect, if you think about, you know, you bow in front of somebody.

And so this was the advice that Kaepernick sought out, and so he sort of refined his message. He started saying, I thought, things that made more sense in terms of clarifying what he was protesting. And instead of sitting he knelt, which from the advice of Nate Boyer, was a sign of OK, I'm protesting, but I'm also doing it in a respectful manner.

So once he refined things, once sort of figured out what he wanted to do, what he wanted to say, I thought he had a really powerful message, and it's proven to be very much so.

09:52:41 AXELROD: You're a great judge of athletes, you've been around athletes all your life. You recognize talent when you see it. Why isn't he in the NFL now, Colin Kaepernick?

KERR: Well he's clearly a much better player than a lot of the guys who are playing backup quarterback around the league. I think there's two reasons he's not in the NFL. One is marketing, I think the NFL owners are concerned about their fan base.

And two, and these reasons really go hand-in-hand, the distraction that he would cause. Given modern media, the way we live, the minute he signs with a team, can you imagine the media throng, the attention that will be on every game.

And so I understand, I totally understand a general manager who doesn't want to deal with that. You think about Tim Tebow for example, you know, Tim Tebow was such a distraction because he was Tim Tebow. And it wasn't -- it didn't even become, you know, was he good enough, or was he -- it was like this sort of cultural war over Tim Tebow.

And that was just nothing, right. Tim Tebow, what did he represent? He represented whether he was a great college quarterback or an NFL -- there was no political dynamics to it or anything. So -- but the distraction was so dramatic that the teams that signed him were sort of overwhelmed.

So I think that same dynamic exists right now with Kaepernick, I think teams don't want to deal with that. But the real issue is that it's a marketing thing. I think teams are afraid that their fans, the conservative ones who are offended by Kaepernick's stance, I think they would -- that would affect business, and so as a result, I think -- I think teams are just shying away.

AXELROD: So if you were at GM, you would have to make that same calculation?

Axelrod: Yes. Well what, you know, was kind of shocking, because it came out of the blue, Kaepernick's been out of the league for a very -- for a while. And then the president kind of brought it up out of the blue at a -- at a radical rally in Alabama, and the whole thing started up all over again.

KERR: Right. Yes, well this is another reason why I think all of us in our team have a tough time with the president, because instead of unifying and trying to calm the storm, he's creating it, over and over again. We see it with his tweets every day.

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So that was, you know, he used the words sons of bitches to talk about NFL players who have made it clear they're protesting racial inequality and police brutality, those are sons of bitches. Really? You're going to call -- you're the president of the United States, you're going to call them sons of bitches?

And you're going to call Kaepernick out for nonviolent protest, a staple of democracy? That's really hard to deal with. And that was, for me, that was probably the hardest one to deal with. You know, the personal slights that we've seen from Trump, I mean you sort of get used to it after a while, you get numb to it, but that one really stung, because it was so divisive, and it was so angry, and it just didn't make sense.

AXELROD: But in certain ways it had the desired effect in that he sort of dominated the news.

KERR: Right.

AXELROD: And there's also a constituent -- you've seen the NFL took a hit around it, and the owners were scrambling around that issue. So it was -- it was, you know, maybe diabolically clever, but it was definitely a --

KERR: Yes, but think about it. I mean you're right, it was diabolically clever, but is that the president's job to be diabolically clever, and divide, you know --

AXELROD: No, I understand.

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: I understand. Draymond Green, your wonderful player, great, great player, also very outspoken, and he was at -- he was at Harvard the other day giving a talk, and he got into this colloquy with Mark Cuban --

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: long-distance, because Draymond said I don't think we should call people who run --

KERR: Sure.

AXELROD: -- teams as owners. And I'd never thought about it in those terms before.

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: Did -- what were -- did you talk to him about that before he went and gave that talk?

KERR: Oh no, no, no. Draymond says whatever he wants, anytime he wants, which is what I love about him. But I had never heard that argument either, I had never heard the idea that referencing an owner would be offensive.

But of course, you know, you and I white guys, you know, like we've grown up in a different

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THE AXE FILES

background, different environment. And I think that was Draymond's point, is that, you know, we all have sort of a different circumstance in life, and you've got to think about everybody's circumstance, you've got to put yourself in somebody else's shoes. It makes perfect sense.

AXELROD: Yes, I know, I -- it does, and it made me think you've lived in this world, this -- of NBA sports for a couple of decades. And how much has that sensitized you to issues that you never would have been sensitive to? Because one of the big things that worries me is we live in silos.

KERR: Right.

AXELROD: We live in silos.

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: And you know, the people who say yes, we should stand for the anthem, and I, you know, I don't want to see NFL games if people are protesting, and you know, the people who are protesting police brutality or other issues. But there's very little cross-pollination --

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: -- very little discussion. How much has being a player, and being a coach, sensitized you to issues that you never would have been sensitive towards?

KERR: Yes, it's really one of the great blessings in my life, is to have been raised overseas in different cultures with different people from all over the world. And then, from -- actually from junior high on, basically living and working, or going to school in integrated situations.

And then being in the NBA for I guess 27 years now, whatever, 29 years, it's a multicultural melting pot work environment. And you just, you understand, you start to see where everybody comes from. And you know, my old coach Gregg Popovich has one of the great sayings I've ever heard. He said we are all just an accident of birth, you know.

Like none of us are asked to be born into the situations we're born in. We're born black, we're born white, we're born poor or rich, whatever. We are just, you know, we are who we are. And it's so important to understand who the other person is, and where he came from.

Because it's, in most cases, it's very different. And the more you can learn about that person, the easier it is to get out of that silo that you mentioned, and understand that there's nuance to everything in the world.

AXELROD: Okay. All right. So -- I follow your Twitter feed. It's mostly not about sports.

KERR: Mm-hmm.

AXELROD: It's mostly about public issues and the question comes up -- why should people care what you or what athletes say? I mean, you're prominent because of your, of your, of your work on sport and around that.

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THE AXE FILES

KERR: Yeah.

AXELROD: And -- so why should folks look to you guys for political inspiration?

KERR: They shouldn't. They don't need to. Or if they don't want to, then they don't have to. But -- everybody's got a Twitter feed. You know, like why, why does anybody care --

(CROSSTALK)

AXELROD: People who probably shouldn't, but yes.

KERR: (LAUGHS) Yeah, exactly. To me, this is more -- a question of, of you know, how the world works now and social media and, and just the, the whole way we operate. Everybody has a voice. It just so happens that if you're famous, more people are going to follow you.

10:06:09 AXELROD: Do you feel a responsibility because you're famous that, to speak out on these issues?

KERR: That's a good question. I don't know that I feel a responsibility. It's more just in my heart. I'm so, so disgusted by the lack of sensible gun policy. I'm so disgusted by --

(CROSSTALK)

AXELROD: I know that's a lot of what you've been Tweeting about lately.

KERR: Yeah, yeah. I Tweet a lot, I mostly re-Tweet stuff, you know, I -- especially in the position that I'm in. You know, I used to Tweet when I was a commentator for TNT and I would Tweet about basketball and as with everything in Twitter, stuff gets thrown back in my face all the time. You know.

(LAUGHTER)

So like years ago, a lot of us working at TNT and LeBron had a huge game and I Tweeted something like, you know, if I could pick one player to have in a road game, Game 7 in the playoffs --

(LAUGHTER)

I'd take LeBron. You think any Cleveland fans might have re-Tweeted that after Cleveland beat us on the road in Game 7? So I learned my lesson with Twitter, like you've got to be really careful, especially now. So I'm more interested in just re-Tweeting articles, trying to spread the word. If I see something really sensible -- Nick Kristof wrote a great piece in the New York Times two weeks about comparing gun safety to the automobile industry. Right? And you know, in the '50s you were nine times as likely to die in a car accident than you are today. And the reason it's gone down is simple, you know, safety measures; seatbelts, car seats, you know, speed limits. You know, making sure driver's license background stuff was, was thorough and the right people were behind the wheel and -- and the whole article was like, you know, we don't

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THE AXE FILES

have to take away people's Second Amendment rights. But what we need is some common sense. And yet people are getting massacred every week and we won't do anything about it. That's ridiculous to me and it drives me crazy and so I'm constantly re-Tweeting stuff that I read about that issue, because it means something to me.

10:08 AXELROD: I look at you and I would say, well, this guy is a -- like the missing Beach Boy. You have the blonde hair, the blue eyes and so on and I think the assumption is that you grew up playing basketball in the U.S. and you know, went to the University of Arizona and the rest flow from there. But you didn't grow up, you spent part of your life here, but part of your life in the Middle East.

KERR: Right.

AXELROD: Talk about what that was like, because you were very much not sort of in the mainstream of your, of culture and so on. What did you learn from that experience?

10:08:58 KERR: Well, I sort of had the best of both worlds. I was born in Beirut, but spent most of my childhood in --

(CROSSTALK)

AXELROD: Explain why you --

KERR: Well, my dad was --

AXELROD: Longstanding connection.

KERR: Yeah, yeah. Actually my grandparents settled in Beirut after World War I. They had a - a really great history of running an orphanage for Armenian children during the Armenian Holocaust and they ended up settling in Beirut afterwards.

But my dad eventually took a job at UCLA, so we spent a lot of time in Los Angeles and then periodically he would take sabbaticals overseas. He was a professor of Middle Eastern History and so we spent time in Cairo and Tunisia --

AXELROD: More than a little. You were there during your junior high school --

KERR: Yeah. Three years in Cairo. A year in France. A summer in Tunisia.

AXELROD: And how did that -- how does it change the lens through what you look at, at --

(CROSSTALK)

KERR: Well, I loved the different cultures. I've seen --

AXELROD: You speak Arabic.

KERR: Shwaya [SP?]. (LAUGHS) I did speak it pretty well, enough to get around when I was

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THE AXE FILES

there for a couple years. And I saw Americans in Cairo. We were beloved. This is the late '70s; beloved. What we stood for, our culture. You know, everybody copied us and we were beloved and I think we still are, in, for the most part, in a lot of places around the world, but people are wondering, you know, what the hell happened to us. They don't love our foreign policy. They don't love what's happening with our government, but I think they still love American values; whether we're hanging onto those values or not, we'll see. But I saw all that. I saw different perspectives. I saw how people saw us and then I was in somebody else's backyard having to adapt to their culture and those were great, great things to experience as a human being.

10:11:38 AXELROD: Your dad -- went back to Beirut in the early '80s --

KERR: Yeah.

AXELROD: To become president of the American University in Beirut. It was a really difficult time there.

KERR: Yeah. Well, it was his dream job. Having been raised at the university literally and then going to school there -- speaking fluent Arabic, loving the culture in Beirut. Loving the idea of bringing people, students to the university who can foster peace and understanding amongst all the different religious groups. He loved that, he loved that challenge, he loved the idea and when the job came up, he knew it was dangerous, but I think he felt somewhat protected because of his background and because of his reputation. But obviously that was --

(CROSSTALK)

10:12:57 AXELROD: In a weird, very paradoxical way, it was those very qualities that made him a target.

(CROSSTALK)

KERR: That's right. That's right.

AXELROD: Because he was a force for reconciliation and for understanding.

KERR: That's right, yeah.

AXELROD: He was a positive image for the U.S.

KERR: That's right. And he became the most prominent American in Beirut at the time because -- you mentioned the embassy bombing, there was the Marine barracks that were bombed, I think over 300 Marines were killed -- it was awful. And so the military left the embassy basically after it was bombed. I don't remember, I think it was closed, but it was obviously, you know, basically shut down. For the most part people left -- the American University campus became sort of the next -- most obvious place where you were going to find Americans and he was the president and so he was the target and --

AXELROD: And then you got a call.

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THE AXE FILES

KERR: Yeah.

AXELROD: You were in your dorm room?

KERR: Yeah, 3:00 in the morning, in my dorm room and a man named Baheed Samonian (ph) -- a good Armenian name, he worked at the university; a great family friend -- he called me to give me the news that my dad had been shot and killed and obviously, you know, my whole world changed, our family's whole lives ended in a third way and a new, new life had to begin and it was, it was pretty rough.

AXELROD: You -- you and your dad were close. He was very invested in you and in your aspirations to be a basketball player, helped -- helped you secure your scholarship and so on. What -- I ask you this as someone who lost -- I lost my father when I was in college under different circumstances, but also very difficult circumstances --

KERR: Yep, yep.

AXELROD: Suddenly and unexpectedly and it was like -- I felt completely alone.

KERR: Yeah, yeah.

AXELROD: But you were alone. Your family was overseas. What did you do?

(CROSSTALK)

10:17:51 KERR: Well, I turned to my teammates and that's one of the beautiful thing about sports is like it's a built-in family and kind of a cocoon and you can lose yourself in sports. You can lose yourself in physical activity and so I went to practice the next day and -- my teammates knew what happened, obviously, my coach, you know, knew also (ph) and I spent, I think I slept for three hours on his couch in his office the next day, when it happened. I didn't sleep all night and then, you know, I didn't know what to do and -- but I practiced that afternoon. I need to, you know, think about something else and -- so I just kept playing and kept going to school and you just move on -- you don't --

(CROSSTALK)

10:18:34 AXELROD: You -- you practiced the next day and you had a game the next night.

KERR: It was a few nights later maybe. It was maybe three or four days later.

AXELROD: But that game was something that was sort of noted nationally because the entire arena kind of grieved with you.

KERR: Right, right. It was the kind of thing that back then was kind of it was a local story. You know, if today if that happen, it would be, you know, it would have been miserable to deal with that. You know, there would have been -- it would have been a national story. It would have been unbearable. But at the time, it was at least an era where it wasn't this 24/7 invasion on

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THE AXE FILES

your privacy. It happens all the time now.

But -- so, I dealt with, you know, the local media or whatever and the game itself was very emotional and they were -- you know, the fans were so supportive and from that point on, I became like an adoptive son in Tucson and the people, they were so amazing. They took care of me and the basketball, the coaches, my teammates, and I was lucky. But the team and the guys carried me through a really difficult time because as you said, my family was still overseas.

10:19:58 AXELROD: I'm sure you think about as I think about sort of the fact that my dad never saw what happened.

KERR: Yes, yes.

AXELROD: He -- what would you -- what would he say about your --

KERR: He wouldn't believe it. He wouldn't believe it. I mean I was not -- I wasn't even recruited out of high school. You know, I didn't secure the scholarship to Arizona until literally about a month before school started. And so, this was -- this would have been so far-fetched. But my dad loved sports. He loved basketball. We used to go to the UCLA games when I was a kid.

10:25:01 AXELROD: But no one would have predicted that you would have the kind of career that you had as a player. And you got to play with some extraordinary like great, great players including Michael Jordan.

KERR: Right.

AXELROD: What, what is your observation of -- I'm so interested in how athletes elevate themselves to be greater than the rest who -- the athletes who cannot -- can't take charge of that moment when everybody else is -- I don't want to take the shot. Why don't you take the shot? What is it about the psyche of Michel Jordan, of Tim Duncan, of David Robinson, the kind of players that you played with that separates them from the rest?

10:26:02 KERR: Yes, it's an interesting dynamic.

AXELROD: You got a few of them now. Certainly Steph Curry was in that category.

KERR: Yes, yes. Yes, it's a really -- one of the fun things about coaching is you get to really see somebody's soul and what they're about. And everybody obviously in the NBA brings something to the table. I mean they're all such talented players or they wouldn't be here. But there are certain guys who just seem to rise above the rest of them. And it's fearlessness, it's lack of self-consciousness, it's work ethic, it's prepping for that moment. And all the best players you mentioned, you know, Tim Duncan, Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, all those guys are the ones that have, you know, the most skill combined with the guts that you're referencing. And that's an amazing combination.

10:26:59 AXELROD: The guts to not worry about making a mistake.

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THE AXE FILES

KERR: Yes, yes. I still remember Michael had this commercial when he was still paying talking about how many times he missed the game winning shot. I can't remember, it was probably a Nike commercial. You know, he was like I've missed the game winning shot 21 times in my career. And that commercial really struck me because you think of Michael Jordan you think, well, he made every shot. He didn't make every shot. And if you can make half of them in the clutch, you're doing really well. But I mean you're going to fail half the time. And so have the time and so you have to be able to accept failure.

That's the hardest thing for me to accept early in my career. I was not a clutch player, not a clutch shooter because I was too self-conscious. I was too insecure about the judgment that would come my way. I didn't want to be the goat (ph). And I finally kind of got over that hump halfway through my career where I just said screw it. Just, you know, you got to go for it.

And that -- so that was something I had to work at. Guys like Steph Curry, I guarantee you, he's never thought one time about oh my gosh, I wonder what happens if I'm going to miss. He just goes out there and play and --

AXELROD: No conscience I think --

KERR: No conscience, no conscience.

AXELROD: Yes, yes.

KERR: And it's actually difficult today in all the judgment that exists for these guys, these young guys. I mean we are getting judged not just daily but by the minute. You know, every single step these guys take, everything they do, everything they say is critiqued and judged. And so that's a big part of being a professional athlete these days is in dealing with all that stuff and still being able to perform at a high level.

10:28:33 AXELROD: Jordan also had this -- an edge that was evident on the court, apparently in practice as well. I think you got into a scrape --

KERR: Yes, yes.

AXELROD: -- with him once. What was that all about?

KERR: Well, Michael was, you know, like the most intense practice player I've ever been around. And his theory was that he was going to put pressure on all of us everyday in practice so that we'd be ready for the playoff and the pressure that comes with adversity. And so it was not easy being his teammate. He challenged you. You had you to stand up to him and prove your worth. And so we got into it one day. It was just a competitive practice. There was trash talking and, you know, we've -- we got into it a little bit. I mean, it's something that happens frankly probably three times a year on every team. But when Michael Jordan is involved, they get a little more.

AXELROD: But I think people didn't think of you as the most likely --

KERR: Yes.

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THE AXE FILES

AXELROD: -- realistic (ph) match for him.

KERR: Yes, yes. I'm not going to beat anybody but I will fight people. I'm going to lose every time but I'm -- I've got a competitive insecure streak in me that, you know, I want to win so badly. When I was playing, I knew I wasn't that good. I knew I was the worst athlete on the floor every night, and so I was insecure. But the only way to succeed was just to compete and work and fight, and scrape and claw, and so that led to a few moments like that.

10:31:25 AXELROD: So you played for all these legendary coaches, for Lute Olson --

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: -- for Phil Jackson.

KERR: Lenny Wilkens, another Hall of Famer.

AXELROD: Gregg Popovich.

KERR: Popovich, yes. Cotton Fitzsimmons who is underrated in the history of NFL or NBA coaching, a great coach. I played for him my rookie year in Phoenix. A real character.

AXELROD: So what did you learn from them?

KERR: Yes. Boy, I learned everything from them. I mean, it's -- they all --

AXELROD: And what makes a great coach?

KERR: I think what makes a great coach is the connection, the authentic connection between player and coach and the awareness of what that player needs, and as a whole, what the team needs and how to keep the ship moving forward. And it's not about X's and O's. That's a part of it, you know, but there's lots of people out there who can draw up a great play. It's about the human connection.

And that's where Popovich and Phil Jackson were so brilliant, I think head to shoulders above everybody that I can think of in terms of that -- of motivating not by, you know, rah-rah, let's go get them team but motivating by finding what's important to you, connecting with you emotionally, learning about your family, keeping things interesting and fun and different.

And the cumulative effect of all that you just, you get this great sort of cruising sensation through the season where everyday is fun and you're building and building and building. And obviously, they would both readily admit when you have great talent --

AXELROD: That helps.

KERR: -- it makes a lot -- my job is so much easier because I patterned myself after those guys in terms of the dynamics I just mentioned, just the joy that comes with playing and the continuity and the relationships. But if we didn't have great talent, you know, I would have been fired by

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THE AXE FILES

now. It's just the nature of the NBA. So, everything is about talent and what you can do with it.

10:33:18 AXELROD: You talk about the arc of a basketball season and, you know, I've thought a lot about this sports and campaign -- presidential campaigns and they are similar in the sense that they are long, they have ups and downs, and there are periods when you're not performing the way you should. And you're doing it under a watchful eye of millions of people who think they could do it better than you.

KERR: Right, right.

AXELROD: And who let you know.

KERR: Yes, yes.

AXELROD: And, you know, social media has made it even more. So it seems to me that part of it is -- part of the leadership role and I saw it in Barack Obama frankly in our campaigns is to help the team through those -- not to get too low, not to get too high, to think long and not short.

10:34:06 KERR: Yes, for sure. And accepting the judgment and the criticism that's coming. Sometimes we make fun of it. You know, we'll -- you know, we might show somebody's tweet or somebody's comment in a film session just as a reminder of, you know, how silly this whole existence is that everything we do is scrutinized the way it is.

So we try to make light of it if we can and then really zero in on what's important which is not just how we're going to pick a role but, you know, what's important to each player. We let family come on flights. Popovich was the first coach I had who did that. It's amazing how powerful it is for a player when he can bring his kids on a road trip. Stuff like that is critical.

We have team dinners all the time on the road. Our ownership is great about understanding the chemistry that comes with team meals. You know, get away from the court, get away from the locker room, get into a restaurant and have a glass of wine with your teammate. You're going to learn a lot more about it because you're going to ask them other stuff. All that stuff matters in the course of a season. And when you can put it all together with great talent, it fits together, and great personalities and guys who are competitive and hungry, now you got something, and that's what we've been able to do here.

10:36:03 AXELROD: Part of it is subjugating I presume your ego to the group. So you're the leader --

KERR: Right.

AXELROD: -- but you don't want to overshadow the group.

KERR: Yes. That's right. And yet you have to maintain your authority over the group. And that's sort of the trick, and that's where Phil and Pop were really powerful. Like I -- when I played for both of them, there was a part of me that was a little afraid of them, just a little. But I knew how much they loved me, how much they respected me, how much they cared about me. And that combination was really powerful. You can't -- your team can't walk all over you.

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So I would say about three times a year, I just snap and I go nuts. And it's almost like, you know, if you're -- you don't want to disappoint your dad, right? And if your dad is very patient with that, my dad -- my dad was very, very patient my whole life, but every once in a while, you know, he would -- he get so upset. And I'd be like, oh my god, I don't want to disappoint him.

And I think that can be a role of a coach or any leader like you're magnanimous and you're supportive and you're emotionally there and you're loving and you're caring but every once in a while, you just got to snap and remind them of the goal and what we're trying to accomplish. And occasionally during the season, that happens and I try to stir them back on course and -- but it has to be natural too. It has to come from the heart. And that's the key. If everything is authentic and you trust each other, then the whole group dynamic will work.

10:41:23 AXELROD: you were absent from the bench for long periods of time over the last couple of years. And you were dealing with chronic pain. What happened?

KERR: I still am. I still deal with chronic pain every day. It's no fun. I had a back surgery, what I thought was a routine back surgery, 2015 right after the finals. And unfortunately there's no such thing as routine back surgery. I didn't really realize that at that time. I've got a lot of friends who've had these surgeries and done great and I thought no-brainer.

But I had a spinal fluid leak which is -- can cause a lot of problems with equilibrium and cause a lot of pain. And I've been dealing with it ever since. I've had -- I've made some improvement but I'm not all the way better. I'm sure you can watch games and see me on the sidelines, I'm rubbing my eyes and holding my neck. And so I'm still dealing with a lot of pain, and it's no fun,

AXELROD: how does that impact on your ability to do what you do?

KERR: Well, if more than anything, it just impacts my ability to just enjoy the day, you know? It doesn't impact my coaching. It doesn't like -- cognitively, it doesn't do anything. It's just discomfort. It's pain and discomfort. So, you know, I love to be outdoors. I love to be play golf, I love to hike and surf and I haven't been able to do as much of that.

AXELROD: I think marijuana was one of the things that --

KERR: It didn't help, yes.

AXELROD: It didn't help.

10:43:18 KERR: I tried it. Oh, it was amazing. I was -- I learned so much during those two years. I've been prescribed painkillers, opioids.

AXELROD: Yes, and have you used them?

KERR: Never. I shouldn't say never. I tried one pill and it was disconcerting. And it didn't help with my pain. And so I stopped. But I started reading about it. It was terrifying. And then -- and so I tried medicinal marijuana and that didn't help either unfortunately. But I became an advocate for it which is it's very ironic because I was a kid in high school who never -- I took a

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puff of marijuana for the first time on my 40th birthday. And it didn't do anything for me.

I was a drinker, you know, in college and I still am, I like my beer and wine, but never even tried pot until I was 40. It didn't do anything for me. I tried it again and a medicinal way, didn't help with pain, and haven't tried it since. But I'm a proponent of it as a painkiller because I know it has helped a lot of people and it's much healthier than the stuff that were being prescribed all the time.

10:44:28 AXELROD: Do you see yourself on the bench for -- is this what you want to do?

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: Do you have other things that you can see yourself doing that you want to do in the future? Have you -- is that the job of your dreams?

KERR: This is what I love to do. And I would love to be Gregg Popovich and coach for the next 20 years and with the same organization. I have no desire to leave Warriors, leave the Bay Area. I realize how far-fetched that idea is because NBA coaches don't last for, you know, a long period of time in one city. Pop is the exception rather than the rule but that would be my dream.

10:45:08 AXELROD: Well, you know, the -- you probably -- it seems that there are a lot -- there are people who have an idea for both of you guys --

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: -- which is this -- called the Popovich-Kerr 2020 tickets. So I mean, are you pondering this? Are you mulling it over? There are a lots of people who are thinking of running for president.

KERR: I will campaign for Pop. I will absolutely campaign for Pop. I would not be his running mate. We'd have to find another running mate for him.

AXELROD: And here is why I want to sign this shirt for me.

KERR: OK, we can do that.

AXELROD: Yes.

KERR: We can do that. Do you want me to get Pop to sign it too?

AXELROD: We should do that, yes.

KERR: You know, I told him -- when these shirts came about, we were laughing about it. And I told him, I said, if we do it, I'll take care of California, but you're going to have to take --

AXELROD: That's very generous of you.

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KERR: Yes, yes. So --

AXELROD: That's very generous of you.

KERR: Yes.

AXELROD: Do you see yourself being actively involved on behalf of candidates in the future, assuming Popovich isn't running. You've already said you work for (ph) him?

KERR: Yes. Not really. I really shied away from -- I'm not afraid to talk about politics. I don't like our system. I hate our system. I have the campaign financing, I hate the money that's involved. So I have a hard time just, you know, supporting a candidate, period. It's just I wish we can change the whole system.

AXELROD: Well, Steve, it's good to be with you. Happy holidays to you and your family.

KERR: Thank you. Can I point one thing out?

AXELROD: Yes, go ahead.

KERR: So we're in a hotel in Philadelphia.

AXELROD: You've blown that cover.

KERR: I know. Sorry. You know, we agreed --

AXELROD: Yes, absolutely, yes.

KERR: You know, we've done an interview in the past.

AXELROD: Yes.

KERR: I enjoy your company. And of course, I'm going to in with you, Axelrod. And I show up in room 781 and I'm looking at my whole life --

AXELROD: This is your life. Yes.

KERR: This is my life that you guys put together. And so now I'm in here like -- and people are watching going, man, (INAUDIBLE) himself, didn't he? He just goes -- he's everywhere, pictures of himself.

AXELROD: Yes. You're exonerated. This is purely for our --

KERR: Thank you.

AXELROD: -- our use. But we're going to over and take a look over here --

KERR: OK.

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AXELROD: -- with some of the stuff, yes. So if we can get up and do that.

KERR: Yes. All right, all right. This is embarrassing.

AXELROD: This is another picture that you want to be circulating around.

KERR: No, no, I don't know. I'm trying to see what that is.