

Dime Q&A: Dominique Wilkins Always Wanted To Play Against the Best

By Wesley Share



For some, the “Human Highlight Film” **Dominique Wilkins** exemplifies all that was great about the physical, badass aura of ‘80s and ‘90s basketball. For others, memories of his legendary dunk contest performances – most notably, taking down Michael Jordan in 1985 – can’t be beat. But beyond his ultra athleticism, he was also a gifted scorer, dedicated defender and a terrific rebounder. At the **Reebok Classic Breakout** roundtable on the Philadelphia University campus, *Dime* spoke with the Atlanta Hawks’ all-time leading scorer to go over the evolution of the game, dunk contests and why he wanted to “beat” other stars, not team up with them.

In 16 NBA seasons, Wilkins was a 9-time NBA All-Star. He was named to the All-NBA First Team in 1986 while winning his only scoring title — that’s what happens when you play in the same era as MJ. He was also named to the All-NBA Second four times and the All-NBA Third Teams two times while stacked up against some notable all-time small forwards like **Dr. J** and **Larry Bird**. ‘Nique was more than just a high-flying dunker – that much is clear.

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Dime: *The game has obviously changed a lot since you retired, but who in today's NBA do you think plays the most like you did in your prime?*

Dominique Wilkins: I think I'm a mixture of a couple of players. It's a mixture of like [Dwayne] Wade and LeBron [James] and Carmelo [Anthony]. You know just a mixture of things that they do. Wade and LeBron attack, Carmelo scores as a shooter and off-the-dribble. So I think it's a combination of all of that.

Dime: *Now, surprise, surprise, I want to talk about dunking a little bit. Dunkers tend to be defined by their performances in dunk contests rather than how they fare in traffic and live-ball situations when it really counts. Why is that?*

DW: See, that's just how people think. Dunk contests are something I did for fun on the weekends. It really wasn't who I was, it was a small part of who I was. But when you're a great athlete and a great dunker, you are always equated with dunking. But, all my dunks, my favorite dunks, came in game situations.

Dime: *That was my next point actually. Most of the best dunkers tend to showcase their talents in game situations rather than dunk contests.*

DW: No question, the game situation was the most exhilarating for me. Cause it got me up, it got me excited and ready to play the game. You and it always gave the fans something special. But most importantly, it got my adrenaline up.

Dime: *Since most of the best in today's game skip out on the dunk contest, who do you think are the best dunkers in the game?*

DW: Well, you look at LeBron James, one of the best dunkers in the game, and he's never done a dunk contest. For whatever reason.

Dime: *Free agency related question to finish up. You're a player who stuck with one team for a really long time—*

DW:—Well, there was a lot more loyalty then.

Dime: *Yeah, but how much do you think changing teams can impact a player's legacy?*

DW: My thing is, as a player, you're gonna do what's best for you. But, the only way I know I can feel good about myself as a player, as far as being one of the best to ever play, is how I played against the best. I never wanted to play with Magic, I never wanted to play with Jordan. I wanted to play against those guys, because that was the only way that I could measure how great I am.

