

Rebecca Lobo

WNBA Professional Basketball Player

Born in Hartford, Connecticut, on October 6, 1973, Rebecca Rose Lobo was the youngest of Dennis and RuthAnn (McLaughlin) Lobo's three children. Son Jason and daughter Rachel were avid athletes as they grew up, and their younger sister often joined her siblings in games of basketball, soccer, softball, and football as they grew up in Southwick, Massachusetts. At Jason Lobo's urging, the Lobos put up a basketball hoop at the family home, and shooting hoops became Rebecca Lobo's favorite pastime. "Sometimes I played because I wanted to get out of a bad mood, sometimes because I was worried about an upcoming test. Sometimes basketball was just a great way to forget myself," she wrote in her 1996 memoir *The Home Team*, "When I stepped out into the driveway, I was no longer Rebecca Lobo. I was Larry Bird or I was Dr. J."



In addition to practicing her skills on a co-ed team at the Southwick Community Center, Lobo attended summer basketball camps beginning in fifth grade. She was also helped by her father, who coached basketball in the Granby, Connecticut school system, where both he and his wife worked as teachers. Her parents' career meant that Lobo was expected to take school seriously, and she almost always lived up to those expectations. "From the time I was a kid, they emphasized how important school work was," Lobo recalled in a 1998 interview with *NEA Today*, "It had to get done before everything else. I played on a team when I was in fourth grade, and I remember the teacher calling home because my grades had slipped. The first thing my Mom said was, 'If your grades don't improve, basketball is the first thing to go.'"

Although a career as a professional athlete seemed to be an unrealistic goal for a girl growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, Lobo's parents always encouraged her not to set aside her dream of someday playing professional basketball. When she was in the third grade, Lobo wrote a letter to the general manager of the Boston Celtics to inform him that she would be the first woman to play for the team. During her adolescence, Lobo had a run-in with her fourth-grade teacher, who told her to stop playing with the boys in her class at recess and to start wearing dresses and acting more feminine. The teacher's attitude infuriated the Lobos, who let their daughter know that the teacher was wrong in her attitude. The incident was a defining moment for Lobo. As she later wrote in *The Home Team*, "There's nothing masculine about being competitive. There's nothing masculine about trying to be the best at everything you do, nor is there anything wrong with it. I don't know why a female athlete has to defend her femininity just because she chooses to play sports."

As an academically and athletically gifted student, the six-foot, four-inch Lobo was recruited by one-hundred different colleges. She chose to enter the University of Connecticut because it was fairly close to home and the program encouraged athletes to take their academic work seriously. In her senior year at Connecticut, the coaching and teamwork all came together to produce a rare perfect season. The Huskies went undefeated in twenty-eight regular season games and in its NCAA final against the University of Tennessee pulled out a 70-65 victory. Lobo was named Female Athlete of the Year by the Associated Press, Women's Basketball Player of the Year by the NCAA, and Woman of the Year by the Women's Sports Foundation in 1995.



As a member of the U.S. Women's Basketball Team sent to the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta, Lobo helped the squad win the gold medal, although as a younger player she spent most of her time on the bench. Although she considered playing professional basketball in Europe after the Olympics, a new professional league, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) announced that it was gearing up for the 1997 season. Sent to the New York Liberty for the inaugural season, Lobo was one of the best-known players to join the league.

Lobo suffered a devastating injury to the anterior cruciate ligament in her left knee at the start of the 1999 season; after re-injuring herself during a practice session, Lobo ended up sitting out the 1999 and 2000 seasons. She returned to the Liberty lineup for sixteen games in the 2001 season and was traded to the Houston Comets in April of 2002. Still recovering from her injury, Lobo slowly built up her court time and remained hopeful of her future in the WNBA. As she told the *New York Daily News* in July of 2001 in the midst of her recovery, "I think every time I go in a game, I have added something positive. I have gotten a rebound or made a defensive play. That is what I try to focus on. I hope that I will be able to look back on this and say it was a learning experience, too. I hope one day, I will be able to use this to better understand my role in games and understand the role of players coming off the bench. I hope this will one day be a positive experience for me."

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