

NBA

Simmons, Mitchell and young NBA phenoms set for Rising Stars

By BRIAN MAHONEY
AP Basketball Writer

Ben Simmons thought he should be an All-Star by now. Yet each time Commissioner Adam Silver needed to tab an injury replacement from the Eastern Conference, he looked in another direction, to Simmons’ disappointment.

Simmons expressed disappointment he didn’t get the call.

Be patient, rookie. Simmons will likely get his chance someday. Maybe a bunch of them.

“He’s a young player that has a bright future that is going to have a long and steady All-Star career,” Hall of Famer and TNT analyst Reggie Miller said.

Same with Donovan Mitchell and a few other first-year phenoms.

Those two guards head up a deep rookie class and might be neck-and-neck in this year’s NBA rookie of the year race in which both are worthy of winning.

“I’m going to throw it out there, I like the whole Grant Hill and Jason Kidd co-rookie of the years,” Miller said. “I’ll throw that out there now because I think both are well-deserving of it.”

Hill and Kidd shared the award in 1995 and might enter the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame together this summer.

Perhaps Simmons and Mitchell will be similarly linked years from now.

They will be together Friday night when the NBA’s best first- and



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File

Utah Jazz guard Donovan Mitchell (45) and Philadelphia 76ers’ Ben Simmons, the leading rookie of the year candidates, will play together Friday when the NBA’s best first- and second-year players compete in the Rising Stars in Los Angeles to tip off All-Star weekend.

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Simmons, the versatile 6-foot-10 point guard from the Philadelphia 76ers with six triple-doubles and size and statistics that call to mind a young Magic Johnson, and the high-flying Mitchell from the surging Utah Jazz will garner much of the attention. But the rosters for the game, which pits a U.S. team against the World, show just how deep the league is with young talent.

There’s Simmons’ teammate Joel Embiid, who joins him on the World squad, while the U.S. has

Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown, who helped Boston lead the East most of the season. Brandon Ingram and Kyle Kuzma will play for the U.S., though the hometown Lakers lost out on a third player when Lonzo Ball had to pull out because of injury.

Dennis Smith Jr. of Dallas, who like Mitchell will compete in the Slam Dunk contest, also will suit up for the Americans.

The rest of the rosters:

— U.S.: Kris Dunn (Chicago), John Collins and Taurean Prince (Atlanta) and De’Aaron Fox (Sacramento). Rookie of the Year

Malcolm Brogdon of Milwaukee was picked for the game but is injured.

— World: Lauri Markkanen (Chicago), Dario Saric (Philadelphia), Buddy Hield and Bogdan Bogdanovic (Sacramento), Jamal Murray (Denver), Domantas Sabonis (Indiana), Frank Ntilikina (New York) and Dillon Brooks (Memphis).

The youngsters are winning games and admirers with skills well beyond their years. Clippers coach Doc Rivers raved about Simmons and Embiid — and said not to forget the second-year Saric — after his team was beaten in Philadelphia last week.

“I’m still very impressed sometimes,” he said. “I’ve still (had) great first impressions.”

The only guys who don’t seem impressed are the players themselves.

Not Simmons, the No. 1 pick of the 2016 draft from LSU who had to sit out a year with a foot injury but expected to hit the ground running once he could play.

“I mean I’m here for a reason and obviously Philly chose me for a reason, and I’ve spoken to Brett (Brown) a lot when I was hurt and he wanted me to run the team and be the point guard,” the Australian said. “So I know he trusts me and has faith in me, and for myself I know I definitely trust and believe in myself.”

Same with Kuzma, even though he came into the league from Utah with far less fanfare after being

taken with the No. 27 pick, which belonged to Brooklyn and was traded to the Lakers. He’s gone on to average nearly 16 points and join Hall of Famers Jerry West and Elgin Baylor as the only Lakers rookies with three straight games of 25 or more.

“It’s pretty cool any time you’re mentioned with guys that are Hall of Famers or very important to this game’s history,” Kuzma said.

“I kind of knew I was going to play well,” he added. “If you don’t have that confidence then you shouldn’t be playing really.”

More important than just playing well, they’ve helped their teams have success. The 76ers have won five straight and look like a playoff team after a few dismal years. Utah is even hotter, winning an NBA-leading 11 in a row, and Mitchell became the first rookie to lead his team in scoring during a streak that long.

The rookie leader with 19.6 points per game acknowledges getting distracted earlier this season by thinking too much about rookie of the year and paying too much attention to what his classmates were doing after not being taken until the No. 13 pick.

“So I kind of shut all that out and just said I’m here to contribute to my team in any way that I can and help in any way that I can,” he said.

Once he did, his game — and the Jazz — took off.

The league’s rising stars will likely take off when they share the spotlight Friday night.

BEAVERS: Head to USC next

Continued from 1B

Alfred Hollins led Oregon State (13-12, 5-8) with 24 points. Stephen Thompson Jr. had 13 points. The Bruins held Beavers’ leading scorer Tres Tinkle to 4-of-7 shooting and 11 points to snap Oregon State’s two-game winning streak.

UCLA was able to overcome its shooting woes by out-rebounding the Beavers 51-33.

Prince Ali hit added 11 points off the bench for UCLA, which has won five of its last six.

The Bruins had their fast-break rolling early, going up by as many as 13 points with 7:50

left in the first half.

Oregon State’s defense tightened, however, and the Beavers pulled to within 38-34 before UCLA settled for a 42-36 lead at the half.

BIG PICTURE

Oregon State: Will have to finish strong in its last five games to get above the .500 mark in conference play and decent seeding for the conference tournament.

UP NEXT

Oregon State: The Beavers head across town on Saturday to play at USC, a team they lost to in their first meeting 74-67 in Corvallis.

Donato scores twice as US downs Slovakia 2-1

GANGNEUNG, South Korea (AP) — Ryan Donato scored two power-play goals and Troy Terry dominated with his speed as college players led the United States to an important 2-1 victory over Slovakia on Friday at the Olympics.

Donato, who plays for his father Ted at Harvard, delivered the kind of offense USA Hockey wanted when it picked four NCAA players for its no-NHL Olympic roster. Donato, Terry and American Hockey League scoring star Chris Bourque were all additions to the U.S. after the pre-Olympic Deutschland Cup in November, during which the

BRIEFLY

U.S. struggled to score, particularly against Slovakia goaltender Jan Laco.

Laco was on top of his game, stopping 29 of the 31 shots he faced. Only this time, the Americans’ young skill that coach Tony Granato hoped would bring energy and spark the team came through.

Goalie Ryan Zapolski made 21 saves for his first Olympic victory, which is crucial considering only the top four of 12 teams avoid the qualification round Monday. With the regulation win, the U.S. vaults to the top of Group B with four points. Slovakia was second with three, followed by Slovenia and Russia.

The U.S. faces Russia in each team’s final preliminary-round game Saturday night.

Jokic records triple-double in first half as Nuggets topple Bucks

MILWAUKEE (AP) Nikola Jokic had a triple-double wrapped up in the first half, and the Denver Nuggets put together one of the best 3-point shooting nights in league history in a 134-123 victory over the Milwaukee Bucks on Thursday night.

Denver matched a franchise record with 24 3-pointers, one shy of the NBA record, on 40 attempts.

Jokic finished with 30 points, 15 rebounds and a career-high 17 assists, reaching a triple-double with 1:54 remaining in the second quarter.

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