

Sports

NBA LEGEND AND HIS DAUGHTER, SEVEN OTHERS KILLED IN HELICOPTER CRASH

Kobe Bryant dies at age 41

By Stefanie Dazio
Associated Press

CALABASAS, Calif. — NBA legend Kobe Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter and seven others were killed in a helicopter crash on a steep hillside in dense morning fog in Southern California on Sunday, his sudden death at age 41 touching off an outpouring of grief for a star whose celebrity transcended basketball.

The chopper went down in Calabasas, about 30 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles. Authorities said that nine people were aboard the helicopter and all were killed. Bryant, an all-time basketball great who spent his entire 20-year career with the Los Angeles Lakers, was among the victims, a person familiar with the situation told The Associated Press.

Bryant's 13-year-old daughter Gianna also was killed, a different person familiar with the case said.

News of the charismatic superstar's death rocketed around the sports and entertainment worlds, with many taking to Twitter to register their shock, disbelief and anguish.

"Words can't describe the pain I am feeling. I loved Kobe — he was like a little brother to me," retired NBA great Michael Jordan said.



Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times-TNS

Kobe Bryant's competitiveness was one of his strongest qualities during his Hall of Fame career.

"We used to talk often, and I will miss those conversations very much. He was a fierce competitor, one of the greats of the game and a creative force."

NBA players were in tears during pre-game warmups as crowds chanted "Kobe! Kobe!" Tiger Woods was unaware of the news during his final round at Torrey Pines in San Diego when he started hearing the gallery yell "Do it for Mamba," referring to Bryant by his nickname.

People were glued to their phones and TV screens all around the world as news of the crash spread and networks broke into programming with live coverage. A visibly shaken LeBron James wiped his eyes with

tissues and walked away alone from the Lakers plane that had just landed in Southern California.

Thousands of people gathered to mourn Bryant outside the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles, where there is a statue of the retired Lakers legend. Mourners in number 24 jerseys mixed with those in fancy dress arriving at the downtown arena for Sunday evening's Grammy Awards.

People carried flowers and chanted "Kobe!" and "MVP!" under giant video screens showing Bryant's smiling face.

"This is where we needed to be," said Naveen Cheerath, 31.

Bryant retired in 2016 as the third-leading scorer in

NBA history, finishing two decades with the Lakers as a prolific shot-maker with a sublime all-around game and a relentless competitive ethic. He held that spot in the league scoring ranks until Saturday night, when the Lakers' James passed him for third place during a game in Philadelphia, Bryant's hometown.

"Continuing to move the game forward (at)King-James," Bryant wrote in his last tweet. "Much respect my brother."

Bryant had one of the greatest careers in recent NBA history and became one of the game's most popular players as the face of the 16-time NBA champion Lakers franchise. He was the league MVP in 2008 and a two-time NBA scoring champion, and he earned 12 selections to the NBA's All-Defensive teams.

He teamed with O'Neal in a combustible partnership to lead the Lakers to consecutive NBA titles in 2000, 2001 and 2002. He later teamed with Pau Gasol to win two more titles in 2009 and 2010.

"There's no words to express the pain I'm going through," O'Neal tweeted Sunday. "(at)kobe Bryant I love u and u will be missed. ... IM SICK RIGHT NOW."

Bryant retired in 2016 after scoring 60 points in his final NBA game.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL CIVIL WAR SERIES

Ducks finish sweep of OSU

By Gary Horowitz
Associated Press

CORVALLIS — Oregon's Sabrina Ionescu played with a heavy heart Sunday against No. 7 Oregon State.

The Ducks' All-American senior guard learned that her close friend Kobe Bryant died in a helicopter crash Sunday morning, a few hours before tip-off of a much-anticipated matchup of Top 10 teams. Bryant attended an Oregon game on Dec. 14 at Long Beach State.

Ionescu was in tears during a pregame moment of silence honoring Bryant, and then scored 19 points and played all 40 minutes to lead No. 4 Oregon (17-2, 7-1 Pac-12) to a 66-57 victory before a sell-out crowd at Gill Coliseum.

Oregon coach Kelly Graves said Ionescu never considered not playing in the game.

"I know it was really hard on her," Graves said. "To see her go out and her teammates battle for her and play (with) the kind of spirit and enthusiasm and intensity that Kobe Bryant always played the game I think was an incredible testament to a really championship-character filled team."

Players from both teams gathered together at mid-court and offered a prayer for Bryant and his family. Oregon State guard Aleah Goodman gave Ionescu a hug.

"Obviously Kobe was a huge influence for all of us," Goodman said. "He's been my favorite player growing up. What he's done for women's basketball alone was huge."

Oregon players were not made available to the media postgame, but Ionescu was emotional after the game in a TV interview about the death of Bryant, who had mentored her.

"Everything I do, I do it for him. This season is for him," she said.

Ionescu also had "Forever 24" and a heart on her shoes.

Less than 48 hours after Oregon defeated Oregon State 76-64 in Eugene behind Ionescu's 23 points and nine assists, it was more of the same in the rematch.

Oregon swept Oregon State (16-4, 4-4) for first time since the 2009-10 season, a year before Rueck became the Beavers' head coach and began to turn the program around. The Beavers had won the previous nine Civil War matchups in Corvallis.

Mikayla Pivec scored 20 points and had 12 rebounds to lead the Beavers (16-4, 4-4), who have lost three games in a row for the first time in 2013-14.

OREGON MEN'S BASKETBALL

Ducks dominate UCLA

EUGENE (AP) — UCLA was in a giving mood and Oregon was only too happy to be on the receiving end.

The 12th-ranked Ducks took advantage of a season-worst 23 turnovers by the Bruins to score 34 points and went on to a 96-75 victory Sunday, the largest winning margin for Oregon in the series since 2003.

"To go on the road against the 12th-ranked team in the country, (with the) best point guard in the country and turn it over 23 times, you've got no chance," UCLA coach Mick Cronin said.

Chris Duarte led the Ducks with 24 points and also had six of Oregon's 15 steals to go with six rebounds and five assists. That followed Duarte's game against USC on Thursday in which he scored 30 points with 11 rebounds and eight steals.

"We definitely need that from him," Oregon's Payton Pritchard said. "Chris has a special talent and defensively this week he's shown what he's capable of."

"We've got to hold him to that standard because this team needs that."

Pritchard added 19 points

and six assists for the Ducks (17-4, 6-2 in the Pac-12) in upping their home record to 12-0. Will Richardson finished with 17 points for Oregon.

Jake Kyman led the Bruins (10-10, 3-4) with 20 points and Jalen Hill added 16 points and a game-high eight rebounds.

Other than the turnovers, the statistics were remarkably similar. The Ducks shot 57% from the field, including 11 of 23 3-pointers. The Bruins finished at 50% including 10 of 24 3-pointers. The Bruins had a 25-23 edge in rebounds.

Lillard leads Blazers

By Anne M. Peterson
AP Sports Writer

PORTLAND — On a night when he set another franchise mark, Damian Lillard's thoughts weren't on his game.

They were on Kobe Bryant.

Lillard had 50 points and 13 assists, becoming the first Portland player with 40-plus points in three straight games, and the Trail Blazers beat the Indiana Pacers 139-129 on a Sunday marked by grief over the death of the NBA great.

"I think it was the right decision for us to go out there and compete today in his honor. I think that's what he would have wanted," Lillard said. "It was a tough game to play as far as your energy and where your heart is, to say the least."

CJ McCollum returned after a three-game absence because of an ankle injury and added 28 points for the Blazers (20-27). Hassan Whiteside had 21 points and 14 rebounds.

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