

Sports

Lakers win 17th NBA title

■ Los Angeles vanquishes Miami in six games to finish most unusual NBA season

By **Tim Reynolds**
AP Basketball Writer

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — The ultimate anguish. The ultimate joy.

This season, for LeBron James and the Los Angeles Lakers, had it all. And it ended in the only fashion that they deemed would be acceptable, with them back atop the basketball world.

For the first time since Kobe Bryant's fifth and final title a decade ago, the Lakers are NBA champions. James had 28 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists, and the Lakers beat the Miami Heat 106-93 on Sunday night to win the NBA Finals in six games.

"Our organization wants their respect. Laker Nation wants their respect," James said. "And I want my damn respect, too."

Anthony Davis had 19 points and 15 rebounds for the Lakers, who dealt with the enormous anguish that followed the death of the iconic Bryant in January and all the challenges that came with leaving home for three months to play at Walt Disney World in a bubble designed to keep inhabitants safe from the coronavirus.

It would be, James predicted, the toughest title to ever win.

"We have a Ph.D in adversity, I'll tell you that much," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said. "We've been through a lot."

They made the clincher look easy. James won his fourth title, doing it with a third different franchise — and against the Heat franchise that showed him how to become a champion.

Bam Adebayo had 25 points and 10 rebounds for Miami, which got 12 points from Jimmy Butler — the player who, in his first Heat season, got the team back to title contention. Rajon Rondo scored 19 points for the Lakers, who put together the elite talents of James and Davis with this moment in mind.

And Davis, as white and gold confetti coated the floor around him, spent his first moments as an NBA cham-



Wally Skalij / Los Angeles Times-TNS

Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James is hit in the face by Miami Heat's Jae Crowder while driving to the basket in Game 6 of the NBA Finals on Sunday.

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— **Frank Vogel, head coach, Los Angeles Lakers**

pion thinking of Bryant.

"All we wanted to do was do it for him," Davis said. "And we didn't let him down. ... I know he's looking down on us, proud of us."

With that, the league's bubble chapter, put together after a 4 1/2-month suspension of play that started March 11 because of the coronavirus pandemic and came with a promise that it would raise awareness to the problems of racial injustice and police brutality, is over. So, too, is a season that saw the league and China get into political sparring, the death on Jan. 1 of commissioner emeritus David Stern — the man who did so much to make the league what it is — and then the shock on Jan. 26 that came with the news that Bryant, his daughter Gianna and seven others died in a helicopter crash.

The Lakers said they were playing the rest of the season in his memory.

They delivered what Bryant did five times for L.A. — a ring, and the clincher was emphatic.

"You have written your own inspiring chapter in the great Laker history," Lakers owner Jeanie Buss said. "And to Laker Nation, we have been through a heartbreaking tragedy with the loss of our beloved Kobe Bryant. Let this trophy serve as a reminder of when we come together, believe in each other, incredible things can happen."

Game 6 was over by half-time, the Lakers taking a 64-36 lead into the break. The Heat never led and couldn't shoot from anywhere: 35% from 2-point range in the half, 33% from 3-point range and even an uncharacteristic 42% from the line, not like any of it really mattered. The Lakers were getting everything they wanted and then some, outscoring Miami 36-16 in the second quarter and doing all that with James making just one shot in the period.

Rondo, now a two-time champion and the first to win NBA rings as a player in the cities of Boston and Los Angeles — the franchises now tied with 17 titles apiece — was 6 for 6 in the half, the first time he'd done that since November 2007. The Lakers' lead was 46-32 with 5:00 left in the half, and they outscored Miami 18-4 from there until intermission.

Ball game. The 28-point halftime lead was the second-

biggest in NBA Finals history, topped only by the Celtics leading the Lakers 79-49 on May 27, 1985.

"We didn't get the final result that we wanted," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "But even what I mentioned to the guys, these are going to be lifetime memories that we have together. This locker room ... we're going to remember this year, this season, this experience and that locker room brotherhood for the rest of our lives."

True to form, the Heat — a No. 5 seed in the Eastern Conference that finished with a losing record last season, a team that embraced the challenge of the bubble like none other — didn't stop playing, not even when the deficit got to 36 in the third quarter.

"We're trending in the right direction," Butler said. "We're going to learn from this."

A 23-8 run by Miami got the Heat to 90-69 with 8:37 left. But the outcome was never in doubt, and before long confetti was blasted into the air as the Lakers' celebration began.

"Laker Nation," Vogel, now a first-time champion who saw his title hopes as Indiana's coach thwarted three times by James and the Heat, bellowed during the trophy ceremony. "We did it."

HALLOWEEN

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The Kiwanis Club of Baker City is partnering with the Sunridge Inn and the Baker County Chamber of Commerce to put on a 3-hour trick-or-treat event the afternoon of Halloween, which is on a Saturday this year.

Businesses and other groups will stack portable tables with sweets in the parking lot between the Chamber's visitors center and The Sunridge Inn. That's just north of Campbell Street and east of Birch Street.

The event will run from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. — 1 hour longer than the downtown trick-or-treating cavalcade that has become a tradition.

That extra hour is one of the changes designed to reduce the number of people congregating during a pandemic when such gatherings have the potential to contribute to the spread of the virus, said Cutler, who is both the president of the Kiwanis Club and the executive director of the Chamber of Commerce.

The expansive parking lot also makes it easier to achieve the goal that is one of the dominant terms of 2020: social distancing.

Cutler said the organizations that hand out candy will each be assigned to one parking space, with an empty space between each.

That creates about 9 feet between each sugar-laden booth, she said.

Unlike the rather helter-skelter downtown event, this year's trick-or-treating will be more orderly, with kids and their adult escorts proceeding along a serpentine, and one-way, route that, appropriately enough, isn't so different from the path in the board game "Candyland."

There will be separate entry and exit points monitored by volunteers, Cutler said.

They will also ensure that no more than 250 people are going through the parking at one time.

The by now typical COVID-19-related precautions will all be followed, Cutler said.

Everyone will be required to wear a mask. Cutler said that's among the recommendations the Baker County Health Department made in discussions with the Kiwanis Club.

The people distributing treats will also wear gloves, and they will drop the items into kids' containers.

Baker City Manager Fred Warner Jr. said the city couldn't support the usual downtown trick-or-treating due to the pandemic.

Cutler said Kiwanis Club members weren't deterred.

"Our main focus is kids, and we want to make sure they have something to look forward to," she said. "We think it's important."

Cutler, whose view from her office looks across the parking lot between the visitors center and The Sunridge Inn, thought it was a feasible site.

Cutler said that depending on how many groups sign up to dole out candy, some of the lot could be available for parents to park.

There is also parking available nearby on Birch Street.

She said organizers will encourage people to avoid parking on busy Campbell Street.

Cutler said the Kiwanis Club is working with the Baker City Police Department on traffic issues.

She said she understands that sponsoring such an event during the pandemic could bother some people. But Cutler said she's confident that the spacing, mask requirement and other precautions will ensure the trick-or-treating is safe.

"I know there are folks out there who think this is a foolish idea and that we're jeopardizing kids for the sake of candy, but it's not that at all," Cutler said.

The Pac-12 will soon be playing football again, although under strange circumstances forced by the pandemic.

And the Oregon Ducks are one of the favorites to win the league title, as they are most seasons. They are perhaps the top program in the Pac-12.

But it wasn't always so.

Oregon did not suddenly burst onto the national scene. It was a slow, long slog for the Webfoots.

And I was there.

Growing up in Union, my earliest memory of Duck football was when, at age 12, I watched on a black-and-white TV as Oregon (without their star running back/defensive back Mel Renfro) beat SMU 21-14 in the 1963 Sun Bowl, coach Len Casanova's only bowl victory.

It would be 26 years before Oregon appeared in another bowl game. Even when the Ducks had a decent season, which was rare, there was no bowl game because the conference (first AAWU, then the



BOB'S THOUGHTS

BOB BAUM

Pac-8) allowed only the conference champion to appear in the postseason.

Oregon was in its final year as an independent in that Sun Bowl win.

I was there for 16 of those years, two as an Oregon student and 14 as Oregon sports editor for The Associated Press.

I received a degree in journalism (I'd say I earned it but that's a matter of some dispute) from Oregon in 1973. Dan Fouts was in my class. Ahmad Rashad (then known as Bobby Moore) was a year ahead. Even with those two players, the Ducks struggled.

The Pac-8 rescinded its champion-only rule in 1975, but still the Ducks stayed home.

The drought finally ended in 1989, when Oregon bought its way

into the Independence Bowl.

Athletic director Bill Byrne, seeing a chance to finally shed the program's bowl-less image, authorized purchasing what he said was 10,000 to 11,000 tickets to the game against Tulsa.

I hitched a ride to Shreveport, Louisiana, with a plane-load of boosters. I drove from Portland to the Eugene airport, but the fog was too thick to fly so we boarded a bus back to Portland. It was a long day.

The evening of the game was frigid. A numbing breeze blew into the press box, as cold as I've been at a sports event.

Oh, and quarterback Bill Musgrave led the Ducks to victory.

On the trip home, I may have been the only sober passenger. These long-suffering boosters were almost delirious with their joy. So what if it was a lower-tier bowl game, it had been a long time.

Oregon made it to the Freedom Bowl in 1990 but the real breakthrough came unexpectedly in 1994.

Rich Brooks was in his 18th season as coach and he sensed his time at Oregon was nearing an end. It was a suspicion that grew when the Ducks started 0-2. They lost at Hawaii, and, after a home loss to Utah, were booed by their home crowd in a half-empty Autzen Stadium.

The Ducks, unexpectedly, won seven of their next eight to earn their first trip to the Rose Bowl in 37 years. Oregon lost to No. 1-ranked Penn State 38-20.

I spent a wonderful week covering the team ahead of the game, darting across greater Los Angeles, including staffing the meeting of the Oregon Duck and his distant relative Donald at Disneyland.

But, suddenly, the Ducks were no joke.

Brooks left for the NFL and the Ducks named their field after him. Mike Bellotti moved up from offensive coordinator and promptly got Oregon to the Cotton Bowl.

I'm not sure I've ever been treated as well as I was when I covered the team in Dallas. A buffet

always available in a ballroom.

There was a party where you could ride a bull (which sadly looked a bit drugged up). A young girl sang. It was LeAnn Rimes before her breakthrough national success.

Oregon was on its way.

Bellotti had some big seasons in his 14 years as coach. Then, just as Bellotti once did, Chip Kelly moved up from offensive coordinator and nearly won an NCAA championship.

The money keeps coming from Phil Knight. The wins keep piling up. The Ducks have gone to a bowl game in 21 of the last 23 seasons.

So different than those long-ago days of mediocrity or worse.

Bob Baum, who grew up in Union, retired last year after 43 years with The Associated Press, the first 23 in Portland and the last 20 as a senior sports writer based in Phoenix, Arizona. He and his wife Leah live in Island City with their four cats and two dogs.

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