

Sports

Giannis wins MVP as Team LeBron dominates 2021 NBA All-Star Game

Stars put on show despite lack of fans

ATLANTA: Damian Lillard nailed a game-ending three pointer from just inside half court as LeBron James improved to 4-0 as an NBA All-Star Game captain with a 170-150 win over Team Durant on Sunday night.

Two-time NBA MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo captured the Kobe Bryant MVP Award going a perfect 16-of-16 from the field for a game high 35 points in Atlanta. "It's fun. I was happy," said Antetokounmpo. "I just love being around great players. It makes it easier to play with them."

Antetokounmpo's 16-for-16 game easily eclipsed the previous All-Star record of the Philadelphia 76ers' Hal Greer, who went eight-of-eight in 1968. Antetokounmpo also made all three of his three point attempts.

James improved to 4-0 in All-Star games he has served as a team captain. He finished with four points in just 13 minutes of playing time. "I always try to pick the right team, and I've been lucky enough for four years to pick the right team," James said. "Guys go out and compete and play to win. I've been on the winning side of all four."

James' participation in the annual showcase was at one time in doubt. Last month James slammed the NBA for holding the contest during the global pandemic calling it a "slap in the face." NBA commissioner Adam Silver responded to the criticism from James and others at a weekend news conference, saying the players he spoke to this week were in favor of holding the contest.

"It would have been a bigger deal not to have it," Silver said. "I know that some players have made public comments suggesting they'd rather not be at All-Star. Many have told me directly they're thrilled to be All-Stars. It should be judged, when people are looking back, as to what

this meant to them as opposed to what some of the initial reactions were from the players."

Antetokounmpo becomes just the second winner of the MVP award named in honor of Bryant who died in a helicopter crash just outside of Los Angeles in January 2020. Kawhi Leonard was the first recipient at last year's All-Star Game in Chicago.

"To have the trophy with the name of Kobe Bryant, it's amazing, and I know he would be happy. Yeah, I know he'd be happy," said Antetokounmpo. "I wanted to win the one last year really bad and I had a chance to win."

The 70th All-Star Game had a different feel to it because there were no fans in the arena due to the global pandemic. But that didn't stop the players from putting on a show at the State Farm Arena including a healthy dose of dunks, alley-oops, behind the back passes and long-range threes like the one by Lillard, who finished with 32 points.

Plenty of dunks

Stephen Curry, who won the three-point shooting contest earlier in the day, hit six threes in the first half en route to a 28 point night for Team LeBron. Jaylen Brown tallied 22 points and Chris Paul dished out 16 assists. Both Curry and Lillard finished with eight baskets from beyond the arc.

Bradley Beal scored a team high 26 points and Kyrie Irving delivered 24 points and 12 assists for Team Durant. In a sign that defense took the night off no player from either team grabbed more than nine rebounds. "When you've got Steph, Dame, those guys shooting half-court threes, threes from the timeline, there's not much



ATLANTA: Giannis Antetokounmpo of Team LeBron dunks the ball against Team Durant during the 70th NBA All Star Game as part of 2021 NBA All Star Weekend on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

you can do. So give credit to them," said Irving.

The NBA and the players union agreed to hold Sunday's modified All-Star Game weekend, salvaging a scaled-down showcase after the pandemic scuttled plans to hold the event earlier in Indianapolis. This is the second straight year using the new scoring format which calls for an

"Elam Ending," which provides a target score during an untimed fourth quarter.

Team LeBron dominated the first three quarters to take a 146-125 lead into the final quarter. That set a winning target score of 170 which Team LeBron easily achieved despite being outscored 25-24 in the fourth by Team Durant. —AFP

Portland's Simons wins Slam-Dunk contest

LOS ANGELES: Portland guard Anfernee Simons won the NBA Slam-Dunk contest Sunday, the first Trail Blazer to win the high-flying competition that is part of the annual All-Star festivities. On his lone final-round dunk, Simons soared to snag a high-bounced ball and jam in a one-handed dunk, leaning his face toward the basket as if to kiss it on the way down. He got the nod from three of five judges over final-round foe Obi Toppin of the New York Knicks, who leapt from just inside the foul line and passed the ball between his legs for a right-handed jam.

"Pretty nervous coming in," admitted Simons, who has just two dunks this season and 15 in his career. "But a lot of people didn't know that I can jump pretty high. So I kind of calmed down and

just showed my talents."

The contest, usually the highlight on Saturday night of All-Star weekend, was compressed this year and held during halftime of the All-Star Game itself as festivities were limited to one day amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

Toppin led the way in the two-dunk first round, opening with a dunk in which he bounced the ball between his legs on the way to a reverse slam. On his second effort Toppin got some help from his father, Obadiah Toppin Sr, and teammate Julius Randle, leapfrogging over them with a little push off of Randle's back.

Simons opened the first round by having the ball placed in a small plastic hoop attached to the backboard more than a foot above the rim. He leapt to grab it with both hands and dunked it in a smooth move. For his second dunk, Simons donned a Tracy McGrady jersey and delivering a spinning dunk McGrady made in the 2000 contest. Indiana's Cassius Stanley was eliminated in the first round, although he opened the event in scintillating style with a between-the-legs left-handed slam. —AFP



ATLANTA: Anfernee Simons of the Portland Trail Blazers dunks the ball during the AT&T Slam Dunk Contest as part of 2021 NBA All Star Weekend on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

Leonard says ready to play Tokyo Olympics

ATLANTA: Los Angeles Clippers star Kawhi Leonard says he's eager to make his Olympic debut at the rescheduled Tokyo Games in July even if it means flying halfway around the world on tight timeline. If the Clippers make a long run through the NBA post-season and reach the Finals, it might mean Leonard and some of his teammates would have little or no break between the end of the season and the start of the Olympic men's basketball tournament.

"Right now my plan is to go," Leonard told reporters in a virtual press conference on Sunday before the NBA All-Star Game in Atlanta. "It doesn't really matter on the success that we have. If I feel up to it and

feel ready to go around that time then I'm going to play."

The Clippers are one of the top contenders and the playoffs are scheduled to end July 22 if the Finals go a full seven games. The Tokyo Opening ceremony is on July 23, and the United States play their first basketball game on July 25 against France.

Leonard has never represented the United States in an Olympics. In Tokyo, he would also be reunited with his former San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich. Leonard was named a finalist for Team USA last year but the Games were postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic.

His Clippers teammate Paul George, who won a gold medal for the US at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics, was also picked for the team. USA Basketball sent invitations out two months ago to around 60 players regarding their inclusion in the pool from which the team will be selected. —AFP



ATLANTA: Kawhi Leonard of Team Durant smiles and looks on during the 70th NBA All Star Game as part of 2021 NBA All Star Weekend on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

Warriors' Curry wins All-Star 3-point contest

LOS ANGELES: Golden State Warriors sharpshooter Stephen Curry won the 3-point contest Sunday, edging Utah's Mike Conley in the final round of the curtain-raiser to the NBA All-Star Game in Atlanta, Georgia.

Curry, one of the best shooters the NBA has ever seen and the league leader in made 3-pointers in the first half of this season, was the favorite heading into the competition, which sees players shoot from multiple stations around the three-point arc with two balls from a few feet further back worth extra points. Curry put up a red-hot 31 points in the first round, advancing along with Conley and Boston's Jayson Tatum.

But it was close in the final round with Curry, the final contestant, missing his first four shots before getting the victory only after he knocked down his final attempt from the right corner to total 28 points — one more than the 27 Conley had put up. "I knew I had to knock it down," Curry said. "It was a fun battle. I'm glad I got it done." —AFP



ATLANTA: Stephen Curry of the Golden State Warriors poses with the MTN Dew 3-Point Trophy after winning the MTN Dew 3-Point Contest during the NBA All-Star Game 2021 on Sunday at State Farm Arena in Atlanta, Georgia. —AFP

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Chest Hospital	24849400
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Adan Hospital	23940620
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Kaizen center	25716707
Rawda	22517733
Adaliya	22517144
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