

Former NBA star Kobe Bryant and his daughter Gianna

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Former NBA star Kobe Bryant and daughter among 9 killed in helicopter crash near Los Angeles

Steve Gorman
6-7 minutes

CALABASAS, Calif. (Reuters) - Kobe Bryant, one of the NBA's all-time greatest players whose international stardom transcended basketball, was killed at age 41 on Sunday in a helicopter crash near Los Angeles along with his 13-year-old daughter and seven others on board, officials said.

Bryant rocketed to fame as an 18-year-old rookie and played 20 years for the Los Angeles Lakers - 18 of them as an all-star - winning five NBA championships. His death sent shockwaves through the National Basketball Association, which he helped propel to global prominence, and stunned fans around the world.

The cause of the crash was unknown, and an investigation by the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board could take months.

Bryant was known since his playing days to travel frequently by helicopter to avoid the Los Angeles area's notorious traffic.

His Sikorsky S-76 chopper went down in foggy weather shortly before 10 a.m. (1800 GMT) in hilly terrain just outside Calabasas, California, about 40 miles (65 km) northwest of central Los Angeles, sparking a brush fire, officials said.

"There were no survivors," Los Angeles County Sheriff Alex Villanueva told a news conference, saying the flight manifest showed nine people on board. He declined to identify them.

NBA Commissioner Adam Silver confirmed Bryant and his daughter Gianna were among those killed, and sent condolences to Bryant's wife, Vanessa.

"He was one of the most extraordinary players in the history of our game with accomplishments that are legendary," Silver said, as tributes poured in from players, politicians and entertainers.

The fire and debris field from the crash spread over a quarter-acre of steep terrain in the grass-covered foothills of the Santa Monica Mountains, county Fire Chief Daryl Osby said.

Among the others on board, in addition to the pilot, were a teammate from Bryant's daughter's basketball squad and a parent of the teammate, NBC News reported.

Orange Coast College baseball coach John Altobelli was also one of the victims, the Orange County Register reported, citing assistant coach Ron La Ruffa.

'KOBE WE LOVE YOU'

Reaction to Bryant's death was swift, and moments of silence were observed before some of Sunday's NBA games.

FILE PHOTO: Jul 27, 2019; Las Vegas, NV, USA; Kobe Bryant is pictured with his daughter Gianna at the WNBA All Star Game at Mandalay Bay Events Center. Mandatory Credit: Stephen R. Sylvanie-USA TODAY Sports/File Photo

In San Antonio, the Toronto Raptors and San Antonio Spurs allowed the 24-second shot clock to expire on each of their first possessions, in tribute to Bryant's jersey number, 24.

"I am in shock over the tragic news of Kobe's and Gianna's passing. Words can't describe the pain I'm feeling," said Michael Jordan, who won six NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls.

"Kobe was an amazing dad who loved his family deeply - and took great pride in his daughter's love for the game of basketball," Jordan said.

Stunned fans gathered near the Lakers' home arena - the Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles - surrounding a wreath with the message: "Kobe we love you RIP."

Some in the crowd dabbed tears as others laid flowers and basketball sneakers at the wreath. Fans wore both his No. 24 and No. 8 jerseys, breaking the somber mood with occasional chants of "Kobe, Kobe."

Hours later inside the arena, musicians and performers paid tribute to Bryant from the stage of the Grammy Awards.

One of a handful of internationally recognized athletes known simply by their first names, Bryant was an avid supporter of soccer and women's basketball. He spoke Spanish as well as Italian, having spent part of his youth in Italy, where his father, former NBA player Joe "Jellybean" Bryant, played several seasons professionally.

He also won an Oscar in 2018 as writer-producer of that year's best animated short film, "Dear Basketball," which Bryant also narrated, and he sometimes mingled with show-business stars in Los Angeles.

'MUCH MORE THAN AN ATHLETE'

"Most people will remember Kobe as the magnificent athlete who inspired a whole generation of basketball players. But I will always remember him as a man who was much more than an athlete," Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, the all-time NBA scoring leader and former Laker, said on Twitter.



Slideshow (26 Images)

Bryant was accused of sexual assault in 2003 by a woman who worked at a Colorado hotel, tarnishing his reputation and leading to a media storm surrounding the case. Bryant denied the allegations, and charges eventually were dismissed after his accuser refused to testify.

Bryant and his wife filed for divorce in 2011 after 10 years of marriage, but the couple said in 2013 they had reconciled.

Besides Gianna, they had three other daughters: Natalia, Bianca and Capri, who was born in June 2019.

Bryant, who played all 20 of his NBA seasons with the Lakers, also won two Olympic gold medals as a member of the U.S. men's basketball team in 2008 and 2012.

Nicknamed "The Black Mamba," he became eligible to enter the Hall of Fame this year and is certain to be selected when the 2020 class is enshrined.

Bryant demonstrated from an early age he would surpass the accomplishments of his father, who played eight seasons in the NBA.

The Philadelphia native went straight from high school to the NBA, skipping the college ranks. Since he was just 17 years old at the time, his parents needed to co-sign his first contract with the Lakers. He played his first game with the team shortly after turning 18 in 1996.

He was the third-leading scorer in league history with 33,643 points, until LeBron James surpassed him on Saturday. In his final tweet, Bryant saluted James' achievement, writing: "Continuing to move the game forward @KingJames. Much respect my brother."

Reporting by Steve Gorman in Calabasas, California; Additional reporting by Daniel Trotta, Andrew Hay, Mekhla Raina, Andrew Both, Rory Carroll, Jane Ross and Dan Whitcomb; Writing by Daniel Trotta; Editing by Lisa Shumaker and Peter Cooney

usatoday.com

Opinion: Kobe Bryant was one of a kind even in retirement

4-5 minutes

A few days before Christmas, it occurred to me that so much about Kobe Bryant's post-basketball life was not unfolding the way we might have expected.

For somebody who had been quite comfortable as the NBA's most famous and polarizing player for a long period of his career, he was not clinging to the spotlight or using his status as a global basketball icon to stay relevant. He wasn't on TV talking about the NBA, he was making movies. He wasn't hanging around arenas trying to get noticed, he was bringing his daughter to see her favorite players.

Which is where I noticed Kobe sitting courtside in Brooklyn on Dec. 21 with 13-year old Gianna, whom he brought so that she could watch Atlanta's Trae Young, one of her favorite players. The camera, of course, was frequently drawn to Bryant and Gianna during the game because Kobe showing up courtside was always going to be an event

It was so noticeable how happy he was that day, being able to share something like that with his daughter given his place in the history of the sport. But it was also clear he had moved on to a different and completely comfortable phase of his basketball life, one that was no longer about what he could do in basketball but what he knew.

Sadly, those images are going to be shown today for all the wrong reasons. [Both Kobe and Gianna died on Sunday in a helicopter crash outside of Los Angeles](#) as they were traveling to one of her games, an event so shocking and surreal that it's impossible to respond in a way that feels appropriate.

To lose someone as important as Bryant in the basketball pantheon so suddenly before his 42nd birthday means we are entirely unprepared to talk about his loss, even though it's our responsibility to chronicle who he was and what he meant.

MISSING KOBE: [NBA world reacts to Kobe Bryant's shocking death after helicopter crash](#)

CRASH DETAILS: [Investigation underway to determine cause of helicopter crash in Calabasas, California](#)

NEWSLETTER: [The latest news on Bryant's death, delivered to your inbox](#)

In that sense, there are two things that stand out: The clarity about what his job was on the basketball court and the ease with which he left it behind.

Every great NBA superstar has a trait that defines them, and Bryant's was the certainty with which he played the game. He was there to score, he was committed to rise to the stakes of the game, and he was willing to live with the results no matter what they were as long as he had some control of the outcome.

While Bryant's single-mindedness as a competitor late in games might have been a weakness from time to time, he knew exactly who he was and what he was supposed to do when it mattered. And more often than not, he came out on the right end of it. He was the Mamba every time he took the floor.

Bryant will not be remembered as a better player than either Michael Jordan or LeBron James, but he was the bridge between them, carving out a legacy of five NBA titles, two Finals MVPs, an 81-point game and an incredible 60 points the final time he took the floor in 2016.

What was so remarkable, though, was that Bryant's farewell tour really was goodbye. His skills had certainly declined in his final years, and injuries had taken away much of his explosiveness,

but you can imagine someone who thrived on competition the way Bryant did might have struggled with the transition to a new life.

Bryant, from all accounts did not. He wasn't showing up at NBA games trying to hog attention. There was never any talk of a vanity comeback. Instead, he wrote books and won an Academy Award for an animated short film he had written. He coached his daughter's travel basketball team. There was talk that he worked out with a few NBA players behind the scenes in the offseason.

It was so cool to think that Bryant, unlike many superstars who struggle being out of the game, seemed totally content with how everything had worked out in his life. Now, it's hard to believe that it has ended.