

The sudden death of basketball great Kobe Bryant produces shock and tributes worldwide

By Alan Gilman
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National Basketball Association (NBA) star Kobe Bryant, his 13-year old daughter Gianna, the pilot, and six other passengers were killed Sunday morning in a helicopter crash just north of Los Angeles.

The 41-year-old Bryant was taking his daughter and a teammate to a girls basketball tournament in Thousand Oaks, which is about 80 miles from Bryant's home in Newport Beach, California. His home is about 45 miles south of Los Angeles and Bryant would often travel by helicopter because of the notorious traffic congestion in southern California.

The cause of the crash has not yet been determined, but it occurred in an area where the visibility was so poor, due to fog, that the Los Angeles police and county sheriff's departments had grounded their helicopters. The National Transportation Safety Board began an investigation into the circumstances of the tragedy.

Bryant joined the Los Angeles Lakers when he was just 17, right after finishing high school. During his 20 seasons with the Lakers, he won five NBA championships and was an All-Star 18 times, second most in NBA history. He also won two Olympic gold medals and became the third-leading scorer in NBA history. The night before his death, current Laker star LeBron James surpassed Bryant to drop him to fourth place. Bryant's last tweet was to James, congratulating him for this milestone: "Continuing to move the game forward @King James. Much respect to my brother."

Bryant was born in Philadelphia and was the son of former NBA player Joe Bryant and was named after the famous beef of Kobe, Japan. When he was six, his father left the NBA and went to play professionally in Italy. Bryant lived in Italy for several years, where he

learned to play basketball himself and became fluent in Italian. When Bryant was about to enter high school, his family left Italy and moved to Lower Merion, a suburb of Philadelphia. By his senior year he was considered to be the best high school player in the nation and became the first guard to be drafted into the NBA directly out of high school.

Bryant was considered one of the hardest workers in sports, which helped him to perform at the highest level for two decades. He was one of the game's most intense competitors, an attitude that at times caused conflicts with not only opponents but even some of his teammates, but it ultimately earned him the respect and admiration of fans. "Kobe" was one of the few US professional athletes known by a single name, and recognized around the world.

With a reputation for taking shots in the closing moments of tight games, Bryant was considered the NBA's premier closer for most of his career. For ten consecutive years, NBA general managers voted him the player they would want to take a clutch shot with a game on the line.

Upon retiring Bryant started a number of business enterprises including Granity Studios, a media company that focuses on creative storytelling around sports. Through this company he wrote and narrated a short film called "Dear Basketball," which won the Academy Award for best animated short film in 2018.

Upon news of Bryant's death, the media began non-stop coverage. In part this was due to the shocking suddenness of the famous athlete's death, in part due to his celebrity and wealth: Bryant earned \$323 million in salary alone during his 20 NBA seasons, and an estimated \$350 million from endorsements from

companies such as Adidas, Nike, and Coca-Cola.

But there is no doubt that Bryant's death had a wide popular impact which is not merely the product of media manipulation. By Sunday afternoon thousands of people in Los Angeles had begun to gather outside Staples Center, the home of the Lakers. Later that evening the Grammy Awards were held at that same venue and opened its ceremony with a tribute to Bryant by host Alicia Keys. "We're all feeling crazy sadness right now because earlier today Los Angeles, America and the whole wide world lost a hero," she said. "We're literally standing here heartbroken in the house that Kobe Bryant built."

NFL professional football players honored him at Sunday's Pro Bowl game, and there were other memorials throughout the Los Angeles area and at all NBA games Sunday and Monday.

Bryant's death has also resonated throughout the world. His international popularity may have even exceeded his standing at home, as he became a major figure in elevating basketball's global profile. In China within hours of news of Bryant's death, the hashtag devoted to Bryant's death on Weibo had attracted an astounding 2.4 billion views and tens of millions of engagements, making it by far the most widely read and discussed topic of the day.

In Italy, where Bryant grew up, the Italian Basketball Federation announced that every professional team in all levels of basketball will pay homage to Kobe with a moment of silence in every game for seven days.

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