

All-Star Game: Team Durant vs. Team LeBron

Sunday, February 20, 2022

Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Team LeBron

LeBron James

Press Conference

Q. What was it like hitting the game winner at the All-Star Game in Cleveland, and then also being celebrated as a member of the NBA 75th Team?

LEBRON JAMES: To answer your first question, I couldn't have dreamt it. I could not have dreamed of that moment any better than the actuality that just happened. For me to be back here, like I keep stating, 35 minutes south of where I grew up here in Akron, Ohio, to hit the game-winner in the All-Star Game where me and my guys back in the back, we used to watch the All-Star Game. I remember 25 years ago we were 12, 11, wishing that we had the opportunity or the means to come up to Cleveland and see some of the greatest basketball players of all time because they inspired us so much.

For me to be here today, for my best friends to be here, for my wife and my kids and my family, my mom. There are so many people that seen me grow from really a young toddler to who I am today. I couldn't even -- I couldn't picture that moment any better.

To answer your second question, to be a part of the 75 greatest basketball players to ever play, it just takes me back to my childhood once again growing up in Spring Hill and having all my inspirations taped on my wall, Allen Iverson and Jason Kidd, Gary Payton, Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Oscar Robertson. To see those guys today and then be on stage with those guys it is -- you guys don't understand. I'm trying to make you understand as much as I can, but it's just crazy.

Q. Hey, LeBron, over the last 19 years whenever you've had a big moment in your career, you tweet "a kid from Akron" or you say "a kid from Akron." What does that phrase mean to you?

LEBRON JAMES: You can look back there. We're literally all kids from Akron. We are a group of young men who always felt like we was looked over because of the



popularity and notoriety that cities like Cleveland and Columbus and Dayton and Canton even gets mentioned because of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and Cincinnati gets mentioned. We always felt like we were the fly-over city.

I just remind myself and remind my following and the group of fans and the people that follow my journey that I'm a kid from Akron or one of the kids from Akron that has made it and trying to make it possible for the next kid from Akron. Yeah, that's what it's about.

Q. What was it like watching Steph, especially in the third quarter? And then you're now 5-0 as a captain of picking All-Star teams. What's your strategy when it comes to picking the team?

LEBRON JAMES: First of all, well, I mean, Steph, come on, man. This guy is from a different planet. He literally has an automatic sniper connected to his arm, and when he lets it go, not only himself, but everybody on the floor, in the stands, on TV, on their phones, whatever you are watching on, you think it's going in every time. Nine times out of 10 and sometimes 10 times out of 10 it does go in.

To be out there and watch that kid from Akron as well shoot the ball the way he shot it, it was unbelievable. It was pretty cool.

Q. LeBron, looked like you sought out Michael after the ceremony. You had a moment with him. What was that like for you, and can you share anything about what you guys said?

LEBRON JAMES: Yeah, because there was so much chaos going on after we all kind of split. I did not want to lose the opportunity to shake the man's hand that inspired me throughout my childhood. I haven't had much dialogue with him in my 20 years or 19 years in this business, but part of me wouldn't be here without MJ's inspiration. I always wanted to be like him growing up.

It's crazy that the game-winning shot tonight was a fadeaway, and it was inspired by MJ. The way he wore his shoes, the way he wore his uniform, I mean, all the way



down to some of the cars that he drove, how much he inspired me. I didn't want to waste that opportunity because we're just not in -- we're not in the same building a lot and haven't been in the same building a lot throughout my career. It meant something to me.

Q. Just with everything that you have done with your old teammates for the whole week, you said this was beyond your dream, but is this something you'll remember for the rest of your life?

LEBRON JAMES: I hope through great health, I hope so. Obviously, health is the most important, but I hope I'll never forget this moment. It would be cool if 25 years from now when they do the top 100 that it's back here.

Yeah, I'll probably never forget this moment. It's something that I'm glad my kids got to witness. Then when my grandkids show up at some point, I'll be able to show them some footage of what their granddad was able to accomplish when he played the game of basketball.

Q. You've played here since you left, but the reaction tonight when you were introduced and you kind of threw up your arms and kind of let out that roar, how did that feel to you to sort of hear the way that you were embraced here?

LEBRON JAMES: When they said "from Akron, Ohio, the kid from Akron, Ohio," that was pretty cool. And then just hearing the ovation that I got from these fans here, they seen 11 years of my NBA career, and they saw pretty much, I mean, four years of my high school career, and some of them even followed me all the way back to when I started playing basketball at Summer Lake at the A.R.B., that's Akron Recreational Bureau, if you don't know. I'll tell you that anyways.

I mean, these guys have followed my journey. For me to be back here, like I said, today, and for them to give me that warm welcome, didn't only mean something to me, but it meant something to my family and friends that are here, and my kids from my school are all over this place. It's just super dope. Super, super, super dope, and I was very humbled and appreciative of that.

Q. You're right, we don't understand what that's like. If it's possible for you to try to explain what it was like to be in the middle of that grouping with every -- well, not every player, but so many players of significance over the last 50, 60 years?

LEBRON JAMES: Even with the guys, David, that was not here, you still felt their presence. You felt their presence on that stage. I don't know. It would be like going to your

favorite musician's concert in the greatest stadium, and you are literally on stage with them while they're performing, and the sense of "I can't believe that I'm here." That's the best way that I can put it. I can't believe I'm sitting next to Bruce Springsteen while he is playing in a stadium in London with 160,000 people, or I'm in the Garden with Jay-Z or whoever that person is. I'm sitting here with Whitney Houston onstage in a coliseum with 90,000 people and you're on stage. That's kind of what it felt like for me. I just couldn't believe it.

Every time they would announce another name, I didn't even get an opportunity to, like, rejoice in the player that they had named. It was, like, Gary Payton. I was, like, wow. Then J Kidd showed up, and then A.I. showed up, and then it was D. Wade, C.P., and Steph. I was just tripped out. I was tripped out.

Q. We've talked a lot this year about how tough and draining this season has been for you. Can you describe sort of the joy that you felt tonight and how much did you need that?

LEBRON JAMES: You can tell this is the most you're going to get out of me for a long time because once I get back to the season, I'm getting back to my shelter mode. But, listen, man, the joy of just being home, we stayed back home in Akron all weekend while I was here, seeing my guys. Even though I see them when I come back home in the summer, we always link up. There's just something special. We've never spent an All-Star Weekend all of us together. Every last one of them was here, Sian, Willy, Dru, Frankie, Brandon, we were all here together for the first time. Then having my mom in the building and having my wife and my kids here, it's just -- how much more can a man ask for really when you have an opportunity to live this moment with everybody that has seen you come up?

Let me not forget Maverick, Rich and Randy as well. We all spent All-Star Weekend together for the first time in my career, and I don't know if that will ever happen again. So, there's no reason for me not to have joy.

Q. So many great players were here this weekend, 75th Anniversary, but only a few guys have had to carry the league. You're one of them. What does that responsibility mean to you, and do you see anybody coming down the pipeline here that are willing to do all of the things that you have done as an ambassador?

LEBRON JAMES: It's a responsibility, for sure. Somebody did it before me and put it in a position where it was my responsibility to make sure I kept it where it was and also make it even more grand and make it better than what it was and represent this league with the utmost respect. I'm

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

seeing my brother Carmelo walk down the hall right there.

But just not only play the game the right way, but also mean something off the floor as well because there are so many generations that look for inspiration. It's always pretty cool to see the guys that come into our league and they say their favorite player growing up was LeBron James. That means something to me because I feel like I have so much more to do than just playing the game of basketball. I hope it was also how I inspired them off the floor, how to break the narrative of keeping your friends around and them being able to work a room without my presence, being able to give back to your community in a way if you feel passionate about it.

I've held that title of the ambassador of the league for -- nobody ever told me to do it, but I felt like if I wasn't going to do it, who was going to do it? I took that with a lot of responsibility, and I'll continue to do it until I'm done playing the game.

It will fall in the hands of the next one, whoever that may be. We'll see. Appreciate it, guys.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports