

LeBron James moves past his idol and into 4th place on career scoring list

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Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James (right) shoots and scores as Denver Nuggets forward Torrey Craig defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game on March 6, 2019, in Los Angeles, California. With the basket, James passed Michael Jordan for fourth place on the NBA's career scoring list. Photo by: Mark J. Terrill/AP Photo

The Los Angeles Lakers lost their game on March 6. Still, it was an important night for Lakers star LeBron James. James moved past Michael Jordan into fourth place for the most points ever scored in the NBA.

The Los Angeles Lakers superstar scored his 32,293rd point on a layup. A layup is a one-handed shot made from near the basket. The short shot came in the second quarter against the Denver Nuggets. James was fouled while shooting and hit the next free throw.

Grew Up Idolizing Jordan

Passing Jordan in scoring was particularly special to James, who grew up in Ohio idolizing Jordan. James tweeted his excitement about passing Jordan's mark shortly before the game. "Can't even front. This is going to be UNREAL!! Wow man."

James now trails only three players. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar had 38,387 points for the Milwaukee Bucks and Lakers, Karl Malone had 36,928 for the Utah Jazz and Kobe Bryant had 33,643 for the Lakers.

At the first break after James' basket, his new Los Angeles fans gave him a standing ovation. They watched a video celebrating James. Meanwhile, the Lakers star was focused on the game. He hardly paid attention to the video after receiving hugs from several teammates.

James finished with 31 points. He had seven rebounds off missed shots. He also had seven assists, which are passes that lead to a teammate's basket. In spite of James' excellent all-around game, Denver beat the Lakers 115-99.

The 34-year-old James is one of the few NBA players left who was old enough to see Jordan at his peak. James grew up watching Jordan on TV and considered the Chicago Bulls star "the best ever." Jordan led his team to six championships in eight years during the 1990s.

"There are certain milestones that it's nice to take a moment and embrace and honor," Lakers coach Luke Walton said. "Michael is a guy that guys like LeBron, myself included, grew up watching. That is THE guy, Michael Jordan. So to pass him in anything, especially scoring, would be something that we aren't going to see very often."

Jordan entered the NBA at 21 years old. He averaged 30.1 points in 1,072 games with the Chicago Bulls and Washington Wizards. James entered the NBA at 18 years old. Before the Denver game, he was averaging 27.1 points in 1,189 games over 16 seasons with the Cleveland Cavaliers, Miami Heat and the Lakers.

Mix Of Shooting, Playmaking And Physical Brilliance

However, James has never been a score-first player like Jordan. He's played with a mix of shooting, playmaking and strong physical brilliance. His way of ruling the league has brought James three titles. Just eight days earlier, James moved into 10th place on the assists list. This made him the first to make the top 10 in points and assists.

James also appeared in his 15th All-Star Game this season.

"To see where he is now is remarkable," said Denver coach Michael Malone, a coach with Cleveland from 2005-2010. "He makes everybody around him better. ... He made us look like really good coaches in Cleveland."

Before the Denver game, James was averaging 27.0 points, 8.7 rebounds and 8.0 assists per game this year. He's hitting 51 percent of his shots. He would have passed Jordan earlier in the winter, but he was injured on Christmas. He missed 17 games over five weeks. That's the most he's ever missed because of an injury.

James' numbers with the Lakers are strong as ever. Yet his first year on the West Coast might end up being the most losses of any of his teams. The Lakers have 30 wins and 34 losses.

James has played in the last eight NBA Finals. He hasn't missed the playoffs since 2004-2005. That was his second NBA season. The Lakers are trying to avoid missing the playoffs for the franchise-record sixth straight season. They'd need an incredible run of wins.

"I knew coming into this year that it would be different," James said after a loss to the Los Angeles Clippers on March 4. "You keep pushing forward."