

LeBron James is first in the NBA to score 50,000 points. Does that make him the GOAT?

Warm-up question: Who do you think is the greatest athlete of all time? What makes them stand out?

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A MARTÍNEZ, HOST:

For decades, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's all-time scoring record of 38,387 points was deemed unbreakable until LeBron James, who surpassed it two years ago. And now LeBron hit a new milestone.

MACDONALD: Twenty-two seasons, 40 years of age. LeBron James - 50,002 points.

MARTÍNEZ: That's combined playoffs and regular season. Now, with numbers like that, can LeBron James now be called the greatest basketball player of all time - the GOAT? Let's ask Jesse Washington. He's with ESPN's Andscape. So what are some arguments for and against LeBron claiming that title?

JESSE WASHINGTON: Yeah, well, what LeBron has done is really, really **unprecedented**. The man is 40 years old - four zero - and I'm not a math guy, but that's four times 10.

And what he's doing is just amazing at that age. Michael Jordan, who is the other contender for the GOAT crown, when he was 38 and 39 playing with the Wizards, he did not look like this. So just the counting stats - what LeBron is doing at his age is pretty amazing.

MARTÍNEZ: Yeah, what tends to be the thing that would divide someone either picking one or the other? Because it seems to me, when I've had these arguments, when I used to be a sports radio host, Jesse, is that - championships. Jordan went to six NBA finals and never lost. LeBron has been to 10 finals and lost six of them.

WASHINGTON: Yeah, that's the thing, you know? It's the rings - the rings and things. Bring them out. Bring them out. And so Michael is perfect in that. Michael's got six finals MVPs. You know, he's the ultimate winner. He **made an everlasting joke** of Bryon Russell when he sat him down for the series winner against Utah Jazz - so those kind of moments. And

also, the thing that really separates Michael is people who saw him play. I mean, it's really hard to describe. He was like an alien from another planet - and I'm not talking about Wemby - like, a relatively normal-sized human being doing things that no physical person should be able to do. Flying - I mean, he flew. Let's not get it **twisted**.

And so just the eye test with Michael, his competitiveness, sort of his legend grows over time, all the stories you hear about him just turning it on at will and utterly **annihilating** other folks - those legends grow perhaps to unrealistic dimensions as the years pass. But the rings and the legend and just the **mythos** of Michael Jordan is what really puts him at the top of a lot of people's lists.

MARTÍNEZ: The thing is, though, Jesse - I think you probably know this too - any GOAT debate is 100% **subjective**. So why do you think this **resonates** so much with sports fans?

WASHINGTON: Yeah, 'cause it's fun.

MARTÍNEZ: (Laughter) Yeah. Right.

WASHINGTON: 'Cause we get to crack on the young guys, 'cause we get to tell them they don't know what they're talking about. I'm official **OG**. And so we get to - oh, you - back in my day, it was - we played with one hand behind our back in the winter and still scored 30, you know. So it's just fun, man. I mean, what else have we got to do while we're waiting two hours for a barbershop cut on a Saturday? That's what we do.

MARTÍNEZ: And that **generational divide**, too. You mentioned people that have seen Michael Jordan play. I grew up in LA in the '80s, so no one's going to tell me that Magic isn't the great - I mean, that's my greatest of all time. So I think it's one of those things where you're kind of in the moment and you make that emotional decision.

WASHINGTON: Yeah, Magic and LeBron are pretty close. You know, LeBron is fourth all-time in assists. He's the only non-point guard anywhere in the top 20, so that's pretty amazing. And also let's not **short** LeBron for what he's done and continues to do. Anybody who saw that windmill left-handed dunk that he had earlier is like, what are we really looking at? We're looking at something we've never, ever seen before.

MARTÍNEZ: **Defying time**. That's Jesse Washington, senior writer with ESPN's Andscape. Jesse, thanks for joining us.

Vocabulary and Phrases:

1. **Unprecedented** – Never done or seen before; without previous example.
2. **Made a (everlasting) joke of** – Completely embarrassed or humiliated someone in a way that people will remember.
3. **Twisted** – Misrepresented or changed in a way that is not true.
4. **Annihilating** – Completely destroying or defeating someone or something.
5. **Mythos** – The set of stories or legends that create a person's or group's reputation.
6. **Subjective** – Based on personal opinions, feelings, or interpretations rather than facts.
7. **Resonates with** – Has a deep emotional or personal impact on someone.
8. **OG** – Short for "original gangster"; used to describe someone who is highly respected or influential in a field and has been respected for a long time.
9. **Generational divide** – Differences in attitudes, beliefs, and preferences between people of different age groups.
10. **Short (someone)** – To undervalue or not give enough credit to someone.
11. **Defying time** – Doing something that seems impossible for one's age; continuing to perform at a high level despite getting older.

Comprehension Questions:

1. What record did LeBron James recently break?
2. Why is LeBron's achievement considered unprecedented?
3. What is one argument people use to claim Michael Jordan is the GOAT?
4. How does Michael Jordan's mythos contribute to his GOAT status?
5. What makes the GOAT debate subjective?
6. Why do sports fans enjoy GOAT debates, according to Jesse Washington?
7. What role does the generational divide play in the GOAT discussion?
8. How does LeBron James' passing ability compare to other players?
9. What does Jesse Washington mean when he says LeBron is defying time?

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think sports debates, like the GOAT discussion, will ever have a clear answer? Why or why not?
2. How much do statistics matter in determining greatness compared to intangibles like leadership or influence?
3. Do you agree with the idea that older generations tend to favor players from their era? Why do you think this happens?
4. Who is the GOAT in another sport you follow? What makes them stand out?
5. Is longevity in a sport more impressive than peak dominance? Why or why not?