

# Lakers show DeMar DeRozan downside of respect in disappointing Raptors loss

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By Israel Fehr

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TORONTO – With success comes recognition. And with recognition comes responsibility.

DeMar DeRozan is learning that earning the respect of his peers has created a new set of challenges for him on the basketball court. Along with Kyle Lowry, DeRozan has been a catalyst for the Raptors' surge in the standings since the team traded Rudy Gay to Sacramento six weeks ago.

The 24-year-old is in the midst of a career-season, posting highs in points, assists, rebounds, and steals. His strong play of late has vaulted him into the conversation for his first All-Star Game nod. The rest of the league has taken notice, never more evident than in the Raptors' 112-106 loss to the Los Angeles Lakers.

These aren't the champion Lakers led by Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant that DeRozan grew up rooting for as a kid in Los Angeles in the early 2000s, or the champion Lakers that he faced early in his professional career. These Lakers toil near the bottom of the Western Conference standings, battered by injuries, having played the majority of this season without Bryant or Steve Nash.

They rank in the bottom third of the league in offensive (101.1 points per 100 possessions) and defensive efficiency (106 points against per 100 possessions) but as all Mike D'Antoni-coached teams do, they still push the ball on offence. Los Angeles is third in the NBA in possessions per game, and on Sunday they dictated the style of play on

Toronto's home court, taking the Raptors away from their defence-orientated game plan.

"We didn't play defence. We played their their up-and-down game and that's not who we are. We've got to be a defence-first team," said Raptors head coach Dwane Casey.

"We gave up too many threes, we let them into their comfort zone and they knocked them down," said DeRozan. "We've got to understand that no matter how big the lead is no team is going to lay down. They're going to play extremely hard to try to get back and we've got to understand that and withstand the runs they try to make."

DeRozan finished the game with 23 points, six rebounds, and seven assists, an effort that in the past may have been celebrated but felt hollow after a discouraging loss. The inflated numbers more so the product of the fast-paced nature of the game than an efficient performance.

In the fourth quarter, the Lakers made it difficult for DeRozan to get to the rim, often sending a hard-double team when he had the ball and forcing him to make a tough pass or settle for a contested shot. He went 2/8 from the field in the final period and his frustrations showed up late when he was whistled for a technical foul with less than 20 seconds left to play.

"I understand teams pressuring me harder in the fourth quarter, that's why I'm still trying to create shots for everybody else," said DeRozan.

"Teams are loading up on him, teams are making it rough for him to get those same shots. They're putting their best defender on him and he's working really hard to get the buckets he's getting," said Casey. "We've got to do a better job of screening him, getting him open, getting the ball to the weak side and then coming back because he's expending a lot of energy to get his points.

"That's the respect he's getting from the rest of the league."

It's the kind of respect that's craved by players around the league. The kind of respect that will put his abilities to test. DeRozan will have to battle against increased pressure from opponents when he has the ball in his hands on the offensive side of the floor.

On defence, they'll continue to make him work and tempt him to lose focus and commit cheap fouls , like the Lakers were able to do on Sunday. The respect he's earned this season shows just how far he's come, and how much further he still has to go.

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