

Canada doing its part to stock Rising Stars' Team World roster

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TORONTO – For the second straight year the NBA used a Team World vs. Team USA format for its Rising Stars Challenge at All-Star weekend. Canada is certainly doing its part to stock the World roster with talent.

In fact, Canada's recent growth in basketball is a big reason the NBA was able to switch to a format that highlights the sport's international appeal. In the past, there was always a handful of non-U.S. born players in the game but not enough to fill out an entire roster. Thanks to Canada's ascension, it's much easier to find 10 players that fit the bill.

The Rising Stars game itself is still far from a realistic reflection of what these players can do, as Team World lost to the American squad 157-154 on Friday night at the Air Canada Centre, but reigning Rookie of the Year Andrew Wiggins, Dallas Mavericks sophomore Dwight Powell, and Utah Jazz rookie Trey Lyles gave Canada three worthy representatives.

It's the fourth consecutive year there's been at least one Canadian invited to participate, but it wasn't too long ago that having even one Canadian in the NBA's All-Star showcase featuring the league's top rookies and sophomore was a rarity.

Todd MacCulloch (2000) and Steve Nash (1997) were the only Canadians to get the nod from the game's inception in 1994 until 2013. That's right, before Tristan Thompson and Andrew Nicholson played in the 2013 edition, the last two times a Canadian was picked, Vancouver had an NBA team.

"It just shows the rise of Canadian basketball," said Wiggins, who scored 29 points. "Before, no one ever thought

there would be Canadians in this game."

Wiggins, of course, was expected to be here as the No. 1 overall pick in 2014 and the Rising Stars MVP last year in New York. But for Powell and Lyles to also be there shows that there's a team on the come-up here and they're only going to get better.

The Toronto crowd recognizes it, too, showering the three Canadians with loud cheers during player introductions and throughout the game.

In the grand scheme of professional basketball, the Rising Stars game barely registers. But if there's anything to take away from it, that it now serves as an annual reminder for the world that Canada's got next is a pretty good place to start.

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