

Toronto comes out a big winner from NBA's All-Star weekend

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TORONTO – Through chattering teeth the 2016 NBA All-Stars talked at length about Toronto being a terrific city, one of the favourite stops in the league, with one obvious exception: if only it wasn't so darn cold outside.

Saturday was the coldest Toronto day since 1994, with the lowest-recorded temperature coming in at -26 Celcius. For those complaining, and there were more than a few, commissioner Adam Silver issued a quick history lesson.

"Yes, it's a bit cold here, but I've been reading up on James Naismith, Dr. James Naismith, who, of course, was born in this very province of Ontario," said Silver. "And what I read is when he founded this game 125 years ago, it was because he thought there was an activity needed to keep young boys, young men active on these very cold winter days. And of course, he planned it as an indoor activity. So when I keep hearing about how cold it is, I keep reminding people that's true, but our events are inside, so no big deal and we're all enjoying it here."

The weekend, freezing cold and all, was one for the history books. There was a lot of praise for Toronto during the day and partying at the city's many establishments at night, and the basketball had its moments, too. The NBA's first All-Star Game held outside of the United States delivered the goods.

The future Canadian basketball was on display at Friday's Rising Stars Challenge, with three Canadians – Andrew Wiggins, Dwight Powell, and Trey Lyles – on the Team World roster. Canada's recent hoops ascension is a big reason the NBA has switched to a Team World vs. Team USA format.

All-Star Saturday night could have been taken place anywhere on the planet and it would have been a success because when done right, the dunk contest still reigns supreme. We were treated to a scintillating slam show between Zach LaVine and Aaron Gordon. LaVine was the winner according to the judges, but the real winners were those who watched and the NBA, because it got its marquee individual event back.

That's not to mention the Golden State Warriors' superb Splash Brothers, Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson, living up to the hype for the three-point shootout. Kobe Bryant got his goodbye on the All-Star stage, as the future Hall of Famer takes his final steps toward retirement while the game itself was a blowout, with the West winning the highest scoring All-Star Game of all-time 196-173.

"I think that the real big difference is just probably they had to check our passports at the airport," said Curry, the league's reigning MVP. "But other than that, Toronto's just a fun city and has such a great culture, great people and did a great job of hosting the All-Star Game."

It was a weekend that was over 20 years in the making. The NBA's experience in Canada hasn't been perfect, with superstars leaving the Raptors over the years and a franchise leaving Vancouver. But basketball has never been stronger in this country, and that was never more obvious than it was this weekend.

"I think everybody got the feel of the energy that we witness every single night when we play as Raptors players," said Raptors All-Star guard DeMar DeRozan. "I think all the guys really got insight on how in tune the city of Toronto and all of Canada is to basketball. So I think just the energy. I think all the guys really enjoyed it."

As they always have. We know the NBA stars flock to the city each summer for Caribana and Drake's OVOFEST. The only difference is that in this instance, they had to bundle up. It wasn't just about the All-Stars, either. Silver estimated that 120 players made the trip to Toronto, which is close to a third of the active players in the NBA.

"Toronto didn't need the all-star game to announce itself to the league," said LeBron James, the most powerful and influential player in said league. "The league knows all about Toronto and has for a while."

Toronto was a terrific All-Star host and – not but – it was so darn cold. Oh, what a time.

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