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HIGH SCHOOL GIRLS BASKETBALL



T.L. Hanna guard **Laira Harrison-Whitner**, left, is defended by Greenville guard **Hailee Wilson-Drawhorn** (5) on Feb. 10 at Greenville High School. ALEX MARTIN/GRENVILLE NEWS

WOMEN'S COLLEGE BASKETBALL

What Staley, Mulkey said decided South Carolina win vs LSU

Lulu Kesin
Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

BATON ROUGE, LA — LSU coach Kim Mulkey was at a loss to explain a key factor in South Carolina women's basketball's 79-72 win on Feb. 14.

What will haunt the No. 6 Tigers (22-4, 8-4) is a lack of success from the free throw line.

LSU was 14-of-23, and the No. 3 Gamecocks (25-2, 11-1 SEC) were 15-of-17.

"I'm not real sure, if I knew that I'd be in psychology," Mulkey said when asked why a team that shoots 74% from the line shot 61%. "Got to the free throw line, so reward yourself."

In the fourth quarter, LSU star Flau'Jae Johnson hit a jumper to make it a one-point game with 1:16 left, but then she missed two free throws with 45.2 seconds left.

"It was two of the best teams in our conference, in the country just trying to get a win," South Carolina coach Dawn Staley said. "I thought LSU got multiple offensive rebounds at the end of the game to put them in a position to close a gap, to go ahead and then at the end, we got lucky, Flau'jae doesn't miss free throws, we actually got a bucket after that and it's those kind of plays that are determining the game."

Of LSU's 18 total offensive rebounds, 12 were in the fourth quarter.

"Eighteen offensive rebounds from LSU means they win basketball games like this," Staley said. "So it's surprising to see just how bad it was after the game."

LSU was 5-of-8 from the free throw line in the fourth quarter. South Carolina was 8-of-8 in the final quarter, including two from Madina Okot and two from Raven Johnson in the last 16 seconds.

"Now you will focus on those two free throws, we missed nine, (that's) the difference in the ball game," Mulkey said when asked about Johnson's performance. "That's where the game was lost. Make your free throws. You win."

The Gamecocks were 47% from the 3-point line, led by Raven and Tessa Johnson who combined for seven, compared to only two total for the Tigers out of 12 attempts (17%).

Kim Mulkey grades MiLaysia Fulwiley vs South Carolina

LSU junior guard MiLaysia Fulwiley played her first two seasons at South Carolina, and this was her first time facing the Gamecocks.

See **BASKETBALL**, Page 3B

Our latest Super 25 rankings entering SCHSL playoffs

Kamryn Jackson
Greenville News
USA TODAY NETWORK - SOUTH CAROLINA

The SCHSL girls' basketball playoffs are finally here. • Five Upstate teams earned first-round byes: Dorman, Mauldin, Greenville, Gaffney and Westside. Playoff games begin Feb. 16 as teams vie for a spot in Columbia come March.

1. Westside (23-1)

Previous ranking: 1
Results: Beat Wren, 67-29
Schedule: Feb. 16 vs Bluffton

2. Dorman (20-4)

Previous ranking: 2
Results: Beat Wade Hampton, 63-34
Schedule: Winner of Rock Hill/Spartanburg on Feb. 20

3. Gaffney (20-6)

Previous ranking: 3
Results: Beat Boiling Springs, 81-48

Schedule: Winner of T.L. Hanna/Woodmont on Feb. 21

4. Byrnes (23-3)

Previous ranking: 4
Results: Beat Riverside, 76-59
Schedule: Feb. 16 vs Boiling Springs

5. Mauldin (20-3)

Previous ranking: 6
Results: Beat Greenville, 57-51
Schedule: Winner of J.L. Mann/Ridge View on Feb. 20

See **RANKINGS**, Page 2B

NASCAR

Daytona 500 winners, losers as Jordan, 23XI Racing reach NASCAR's pinnacle

Nick Gray
Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE

Tyler Reddick and 23XI Racing are Daytona 500 champions.

Reddick took the lead coming out of the final turn on the final lap, driving away from the crash behind him to win Daytona 500 for the first time in his NASCAR Cup Series career on Feb. 15 at Daytona International Speedway.

The team co-owned by Michael Jordan won the sport's biggest race for the first time, a couple months after settling their anti-trust lawsuit with NASCAR regarding the charter system.

Jordan spent a couple weeks in December in the courtroom as the anti-trust trial began before the matter was settled. Two months later, he celebrated with the Daytona 500 trophy in victory lane.

Here are the winners and losers from the 2026 Daytona 500:

Winner: 23XI Racing

23XI Racing was strong all

See **DAYTONA 500**, Page 3B



Tyler Reddick, driver of the #45 Chumba Casino Toyota, and Michael Jordan, NBA Hall of Famer and co-owner of 23XI Racing lift the Harley J. Earl Trophy in victory lane after winning the NASCAR Cup Series Daytona 500 at Daytona International Speedway on Feb. 15 in Daytona Beach, Florida.

CHRIS GRAYTHEN/GETTY IMAGES



LSU's Flau'jae Johnson defends a shot attempt on Feb. 14 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

SCOTT CLAUSE/USA TODAY NETWORK

NBA ALL-STAR GAME: WINNERS AND LOSERS

New format a much-needed improvement

Lorenzo Reyes

USA TODAY

INGLEWOOD, CA – The 2026 NBA All-Star Game is officially a wrap.

An entertaining showcase on Sunday, Feb. 15 resulted in a victory for Team Stars – a squad composed of mostly younger U.S.-born players – reinvigorated the event, which has faced repeated criticism over a lack of competitive play.

In the All-Star Game championship, Team Stars defeated Team Stripes, which mostly featured a collection of more experienced veterans like LeBron James of the Lakers, Kevin Durant of the Rockets and Kawhi Leonard of the Clippers.

Minnesota Timberwolves guard Anthony Edwards won the Kobe Bryant Trophy, given to the All-Star Game's Most Valuable Player.

Here are the winners and losers from the 2026 NBA All-Star Game:

Winners

The new format: It wasn't perfect, but the "U.S. vs. World" format the NBA deployed for the 2026 NBA All-Star Game was a marked improvement over previous iterations of the event.

Several players said after the game that it increased motivation and incentive and it helped inject competition into an event that had desperately lacked it.

In essence, the four, 12-minute games converted each contest into its own fourth quarter, ramping up the drama, particularly inside the final minutes. The first three games were decided on the last shot, with two game-winners. The first game went into overtime.

Yet, while the format does deserve ample credit, the real champions were the players who invested their competitive energy into the exhibition.

Anthony Edwards: During All-Star media day on Saturday, Feb. 14, Edwards had more or less shrugged when asked about the lack of competitive behavior in NBA All-Star Games. Apparently, all it took was seeing a fellow future face of the league, Victor Wembanyama, going hard for him to ramp it up.

Edwards scored 32 points across the three games he played and won his first career All-Star Most Valuable Player award.

Victor Wembanyama: He was on the losing side, with Team World being eliminated before the championship game, but Wembanyama was widely seen as the catalyst to inspire more invested, competitive play.

That became obvious from the start, as Wembanyama won the tip-off and then slashed to the basket, sealing off Cade Cunningham (Team Stars) for a quick dunk six seconds into the event. It generated instant attention.

"He set the tone, man, and it woke me up," Edwards told reporters after the game. "For sure."

Wembanyama played extremely well, scoring 33 points on 10-of-13 shooting across two games.

He was also visibly upset after Team World lost the first game of the night in



Team USA Stripes forward Kawhi Leonard of the Clippers goes to the basket against Team World center Alperen Sengun during the NBA All-Star Game on Feb. 15 at Intuit Dome. JAYNE KAMIN-ONCEA/IMAGN IMAGES

overtime, indicating that the league – and All-Star – is in good hands with him as a leader.

Kawhi Leonard: Playing in front of his home fans, Leonard popped off for Team Stripes in Game 3, scoring 31 of the team's 48 points in the game – or 64.6%.

Leonard drew MVP chants from the crowd and at one point scored 11 consecutive points, willing his team to win. The game-winning, stepback 3 over Karl-Anthony Towns represented his greatness in the game.

Think of it this way: scoring 31 points in an NBA game is elite. Doing it in what's essentially a 12-minute quarter, against the world's best players, is a singular achievement.

Adam Silver: As Silver, the NBA commissioner, has taken criticism recently over his handling of several off-court scandals and his management of the NBA All-Star Game, having the jewel of

the weekend succeed is a massively positive step.

There is still work to be done, especially with the Slam Dunk Contest, but there were plenty of fans wondering if the NBA should do away entirely with the All-Star Game. If this is what fans will get, however, the move should be to continue to refine and improve the product.

"Oh, most definitely," 76ers guard Tyrese Maxey, a member of Team Stars, told reporters when asked if the format could set the tone for future All-Star Games. "I think if you have these same type of guys in it, these guys compete."

Losers

Nikola Jokić and Luka Dončić: They are two of the biggest stars in basketball, but they were the lone available players for Team World to record DNP (did-not-play) designations.

Granted, both players have been dealing with injury concerns so it made sense to be cautious. But they are also notorious for loafing through All-Star Games.

More than anything, however, having two players on a nine-player team sit out put an unfair burden on the Team World stars who were available.

Team Stripes runs out of gas: In what was a compelling matchup of younger domestic stars versus grizzled veterans, it was the uncs and old heads who ran out of steam. Team Stripes went brutally cold in the championship game, missing its first 8 shot attempts of the contest before starting just 3-of-16 (18.8%).

It probably didn't help that Team Stripes had to play consecutive games with little rest.

"Yeah, we can make that excuse," Durant joked after the game. "We can go ahead and make that excuse."

Basketball

Continued from Page 1B

She subbed into the game with a standing ovation with four minutes left in the first quarter.

She turned it over as Raven Johnson intercepted a pass for a transition layup, then moments later stole it from Johnson.

Fulwiley had six points in 24 minutes of 1-of-8 from the field with four steals and three turnovers.

"I thought she did typical Fulwiley,

give you some outstanding plays, stripped Raven early in the game, got some layups then she turned it over," Mulkey said. "That's part of who she is and we've got to continue to make pluses when she's in the game not minuses because she has tremendous quickness."

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Daytona 500

Continued from Page 1B

throughout the second half of the race. Bubba Wallace led a race-high 40 laps. Corey Heim led laps for the first time in his NASCAR Cup career.

Tyler Reddick and Riley Herbst were center stage on the final lap. Reddick led the bottom line after Michael McDowell was taken out, while Herbst avoided Erik Jones and others to surge ahead.

While Chase Elliott and Zane Smith jumped out too far ahead the pack, Herbst pushed Reddick forward. The two Toyotas got a major run off of turn 4, with Reddick darting low to pass Elliott and Smith. Herbst darted high, then made contact with Brad Keselowski to trigger the second last-lap melee.

Reddick claimed the win, while Herbst finished eighth after a hard hit. Wallace finished 10th, putting three 23XI cars in the top 10.

Herbst, in his second full-time Cup season following a trying rookie season, got big-time praise from co-owner Mi-

chael Jordan after the race.

"I thought Riley did an unbelievable job by pushing at the end," Jordan said to FOX in victory lane. "It shows you what teamwork can really, really do. He doesn't get enough credit. He won't get enough credit, but we feel the love. We understand exactly what he did."

Winner: Zane Smith

There were two teams in the anti-trust lawsuit, and 23XI got most of the headlines. But Front Row Motorsports also was a part of the lawsuit.

Zane Smith, driver of the No. 38 FRM Ford, had a day to remember at the Daytona 500, even if he dropped from second to sixth in the final half-mile.

Smith won the first stage, his first career Cup stage victory, then positioned himself behind leader Chase Elliott through turns 3 and 4 on the final lap.

Smith and Elliott avoided the first last-lap crash, but not the second after Tyler Reddick took the lead for good.

The 2022 Truck Series champion avoided hard contact, but slipped to sixth.

Smith has the talent to become FRM's top driver, and he's shown good instincts on drafting tracks. This is a good start to 2026 for the 26-year-old.

Loser: Spire Motorsports' final lap

Michael McDowell and Carson Hocevar controlled the front of the field on the final restart, with four laps to go. McDowell stayed out, stretching his fuel tank while the rest of the field pitted earlier under green. Hocevar made up track position during the pit cycle.

"This is a dream scenario," crew chief Travis Peterson told McDowell before the restart.

McDowell and Hocevar continued to lead the field as they took the white flag, with Hocevar leading the top line and McDowell on the bottom. But Hocevar got turned after a push gone wrong from Erik Jones, taking out McDowell in the process.

The final lap could not have gone worse for the two Spire Motorsports drivers who need to maximize their points opportunities to make the Chase.

Daniel Suarez, who never really was a contender, was the top-running Spire finisher in 13th. Hocevar finished 18th, while McDowell was 22nd.

Loser: Justin Allgaier

Allgaier and JR Motorsports were back in the Daytona 500 after a top-5 finish in their NASCAR Cup debut last year.

Things did not go as well in the 2026 race.

Allgaier drove up to the front, then triggered a 20-car crash from the lead on Lap 123 after a late block-gone-wrong of Denny Hamlin through the tri-oval.

It was a mistake from the O'Reilly Auto Parts Series veteran who has not nearly as much experience in the current NASCAR Cup Series car.

"Unfortunately, I'm going to take 100% responsibility for that one," Allgaier said to FOX after the crash.

The crash included several contenders, including Hamlin, Austin Cindric, Kyle Busch, Kyle Larson and Ryan Blaney.