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African-American History Museum Displays Kobe Bryant's Jersey

The jersey, which Mr. Bryant wore during the 2008 N.B.A. finals, will be on view at the National Museum of African American History and Culture starting Wednesday.

By **Julia Jacobs**

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Shortly before the National Museum of African American History and Culture opened to the public in 2016, Kobe Bryant took a walk through its sports gallery, which chronicles Black athletes' fight for equality and their cultural contributions.

Mr. Bryant, whose \$1 million donation to the museum gave him the sneak peek, later decided to donate some of his own memorabilia to the collection, including a Los Angeles Lakers uniform and a pair of shoes that he wore during the 2008 NBA finals.

Those items had not yet made it into the museum's gallery, but after Mr. Bryant's sudden death in a helicopter crash in January, which also killed his daughter Gianna Bryant, the museum has decided to put his jersey on display, it said on Monday.

Damion L. Thomas, the museum's sports curator, who walked with Mr. Bryant through the gallery in 2016, said that part of the reasoning for displaying Mr. Bryant's jersey was that after Mr. Bryant's death, he had been seeing visitors congregate by a photo of him that was up in the gallery.

"People were coming and taking pictures there and sharing stories about Kobe," Mr. Thomas said. "It became a place for people to grieve and commune."

The jersey, which Mr. Bryant wore during Game 5 of the 2008 N.B.A. finals, will be on display starting on Wednesday on the third floor of the museum in a gallery called "Sports: Leveling the Playing Field." The museum's collection includes clothing worn by other Black athletes of note, including Colin Kaepernick's jersey, Derrick Rose's shirt reading "I can't breathe," and Muhammad Ali's robe.

Mr. Bryant is considered one of the museum's founding donors because his foundation helped fund the construction of the museum. Congress had pledged to foot half of the bill, but the museum had to find the rest of the financing — \$270 million — in private donations.

The museum had been prepared to put the jersey on display in March, but the pandemic delayed its plans until now. It reopened to the public in September.