There were more than just a few snubs in the initial 2026 NBA All-Star Game roster. However, Kawhi Leonard's absence was one that gained the most attention. So much attention that he was later added to the roster as a corrective measure for the new format. I do recognize this reform, as key players like James Harden have been left completely off the list. Still, to not include a player like Leonard in the initial voting process was absurd. He had arguably the best statistical season of his career, and for coaches to find that other Western Conference players were better equipped for the challenge felt unfair. This was a decision that many basketball fans, analysts, and even the LA Clippers' head coach, Tyronn Lue, have called out.

As the first half of the 2025-26 season comes to a close, Leonard has undoubtedly proved himself. He is currently averaging a career-high 27.7 PPG (seventh in the NBA), with 6.2 rebounds, 3.7 assists, and 2.0 steals (second in the NBA). These numbers are tangible evidence that not only make him one of the best league performers but also place him on par with, or even better than, players who were initially selected.

There were two key points that critics of the voting highlighted. First, amidst all the players not initially selected for the game, Leonard's scoring average was the highest. It's the first time in NBA history that someone with his averages has not been selected for the team. Second, despite being out a few games due to injury, Leonard was actually on the court more than several selected All-Stars. For example, Damian Lillard is participating in the 3-point contest, although he hasn't played a minute this season. Among all NBA fan communities, Leonard was no doubt one of the most deserving All-Stars, disregarding any sort of fame narrative (...LeBron James).

Clippers head coach Tyronn Lue publicly expressed his dismay about this decision: "But Kawhi, I think, to me, the last six weeks has been the best player in the NBA. Like you said, 50 percent from the field, 40 percent from three, and 90 percent from the free-throw line, averaging 28 points per game, and what he's done to bring his team out of the hole. We started 6-21 and to be where we're at today, it was just tough to see". Lue's attitude was felt by many fans and commentators, lots who felt that Leonard's greatness was looked over to secure legacy picks such as LeBron James.

As I mentioned, Leonard was not initially selected through the traditional voting process, but was later added to the All-Star player pool by Commissioner Adam Silver. So what does this mean? Does a player performing at an All-Star level not get the chance to be recognized until the league steps in? Kawhi Leonard was an obvious pick for the 2026 All-Star game, and his snub is the blueprint example of how reputation and relationships may matter just as much as performance in the league.