

1. Mark the parts that confuse you. Make a marginal note to explain how it confuses you. (Words in bold must be annotated.)
2. Use what context clues you can to make a guess about what confuses you.
3. Comment on the text by connecting to personal experience or previous knowledge.
4. Watch the vocabulary video afterward (on Friday) – this will be part of your grade.

2016 Slam Dunk Contest preview: Can Zach LaVine repeat?

BEN GOLLIVER, *Sports Illustrated*

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Comprehension

Comments

Zach LaVine's showing at the 2015 Slam Dunk Contest in Brooklyn was so dominant and engaging that he immediately received the ultimate compliment from the media afterwards: "Will you be back again next year?"

The high-flying Timberwolves guard is indeed back to defend his crown in Toronto on Saturday. The 20-year-old is the odds-on favorite to become just the fourth player to win back-to-back Dunk Contests, joining Michael Jordan (1987 and 1988), Jason Richardson (2002 and 2003), and Nate Robinson (2009 and 2010).

Although his three challengers—Denver's Will Barton, Orlando's Aaron Gordon and Detroit's Andre Drummond—covers all the bases with their different **physiques** and dunking styles, none has previously competed in the Dunk Contest at All-Star Weekend. LaVine, then, will enter the competition with the best hang time, the deepest bag of tricks, and the most experience on the big stage.

The four participants will (thankfully) be participating in a straightforward Dunk Contest format. There will be no teams. There will be no "freestyle" or "battle" rounds.

Instead, like last year, the contest will feature two rounds without time limits. Each player has up to three attempts to complete each dunk. A panel of five judges will grade each dunk on a scale from 6 to 10, making for a perfect score of 50. Each player will get two dunks in the first round and the two dunkers with the highest combined total will advance to the final round, where they will go head-to-head for two more dunks. The player with the highest combined score in the final round will be **deemed** champion.

While the format couldn't be better, there is a decided lack of buzz around this year's event, in large part because LaVine's competition didn't come together as many hoped.

Andrew Wiggins, a native of Canada who plays alongside LaVine in Minnesota, declined to participate, thereby preventing a Vince Carter/Tracy McGrady Part II north of the border.

The Raptors' deep corps of high-flyers—including former Dunk Contest participants Terrence Ross and DeMar DeRozan—are also sitting out, **circumventing** the possibility of a hometown angle.

Finally, there's simply a lack of star power: While Drummond was selected to his first All-Star Game, he's known more for his **brute** force rather than his **artistry**, and he's certainly not a megawatt attraction like LeBron James, Russell Westbrook, and the other true superstars who continue to duck the competition. Recent Dunk Contests have included the likes of All-Stars Paul George, John Wall, and Damian Lillard. This year's crop just doesn't stack up for the casual fan.

Let's take a look at each of the four competitors.

Zach LaVine, Timberwolves

The 2014 lottery pick has been dazzling crowds for years with his absurd leaping ability. At Barclays Center last year, he repeatedly showcased his ability to **levitate** off the ground, completing complicated around-the-back and through-the-leg moves before finishing with authority. LaVine possesses everything you want to see from a great Dunk Contest champion: he's creative, explosive, forceful, technically precise and a little bit cocky.

Will Barton, Nuggets

Barton, a 2012 second-round pick who is in the running for this year's Most Improved Player award, was dubbed "The People's Champ" during his first two seasons in Portland thanks to his easy-going personality and unpredictable game. The 6'6" wing is all arms and legs, but he rarely looks awkward or gangly once he elevates. The 25-year-old Barton has a number of posterizations to his name, and he has even thrown down a 360 windmill or two during game action.

Aaron Gordon, Magic

The 6'9" Gordon drew some comparisons to Blake Griffin before he was selected in the 2014 lottery. While he hasn't yet delivered on those expectations in Orlando, Gordon has a muscular approach and forceful take-off style that recalls the 2011 Dunk Contest champion. At 20, Gordon has plenty of pop in his young legs, as he gets up high off the hardwood for double-clutch reverse dunks and graceful one-handed pile-drivers.

Andre Drummond, Pistons

Drummond, 22, is listed at 6'11" and 279 pounds, making him the biggest and most imposing Dunk Contest participant since Dwight Howard in 2009. (More recent big man participants like JaVale McGee, Serge Ibaka and Mason Plumlee simply possess different body types.)

While Drummond can't sky Superman-style like Howard, he has sneaky ups. During USA Basketball camp last summer, the Pistons center regularly drew oohs and aahs with his simple, but effective arsenal of slams.