

Helicopter rotors chopped through the foggy canyon Sunday morning, too loud, too low.

Scott Daehlin was taking a smoke break while setting up the sound at his church in Calabasas. It was 9:44 a.m. He tracked the sound in the sky toward an empty hill across Las Virgenes Road.

The helicopter hit the slope in a violent crush of metal, followed by the boom of an explosion that reverberated across the canyon — and soon enough, around the world.

Kobe Bryant, one of the greatest basketball players of all time — a beloved, at times frustrating star who mesmerized Los Angeles for his 20 legendary years as a Laker — was killed in the wreckage at age 41.

His 13-year-old daughter, Gianna, died alongside him, as did seven others — everyone on board. Bryant appears to have been headed to Thousand Oaks to coach his daughter's basketball team in a travel tournament. He leaves behind his wife, Vanessa, and three daughters — Natalia, 17, Bianka, 3, and Capri, seven months.

Officials did not release the names of the other victims, but Orange Coast College confirmed that its baseball coach, John Altobelli, his wife, Keri, and daughter, Alyssa, were among them. Christina Mauser, an assistant coach of a girls basketball team at the Mamba Sports Academy, also died, her husband said on Facebook.

Los Angeles County Fire Chief Daryl Osby said firefighters responding to a 911 call at 9:47 a.m. found a **debris** field in steep terrain amid a quarter-acre brush fire. Paramedics arriving by helicopter searched the area but found no survivors.

Bryant, who had homes in Newport Beach and Los Angeles, was known to keep a chartered helicopter at Orange County's John Wayne Airport.

A Sikorsky S-76 helicopter, built in 1991, departed John Wayne at 9:06 a.m. Sunday, according to publicly available flight records. The National Transportation Safety Board database shows no prior incidents or accidents for the mid-size helicopter.

Around the city and far beyond, people gasped and struggled to accept the news. Friends texted friends: Are you OK? They cried in bars and churches, on street corners and golf courses and basketball courts. Restaurants closed Sunday night to honor his memory, and people placed basketballs outside their front doors, like flags at half staff. [...]

Many fans drifted toward Staples Center, even as final preparations were underway inside for Sunday night's Grammy Awards. They formed a makeshift memorial. [...]

Around the world, political leaders, athletes and celebrities **registered** their grief and condolences on social media: Presidents Obama and Trump, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Kareem Abdul Jabbar, Trevor Noah and Tom Brady, among many.

"Kobe Bryant, despite being one of the truly great basketball players of all time, was just getting started in life," Trump wrote. "He loved his family so much, and had such strong passion for the future. The loss of his beautiful daughter, Gianna, makes this moment even more devastating."

"Kobe Bryant was a giant who inspired, amazed, and thrilled people everywhere

with his incomparable skill on the court — and awed us with his intellect and humility as a father, husband, creative genius, and ambassador for the game he loved,” Mayor Eric Garcetti said in a statement. “He will live forever in the heart of Los Angeles, and will be remembered through the ages as one of our greatest heroes.”

Those who knew him best **grappled** with how to express the shock of the loss.

“To have been such, particularly when he was young, to be a part of his life and to watch his career grow, watch him grow, this is one of the most tragic days of my life,” Jerry West, who as general manager of the Lakers first signed Bryant in 1996, told The Times. “I know somewhere along the way I guess I’ll come to grips with it. ... This is going to take a long time for me.”

Magic Johnson told KCBS’s Jim Hill: “It’s just amazing that we were blessed to have a chance to know him, but also to see him play. But to me, his greatest joy was really after basketball, was being a husband and a father and being a coach of his daughter’s basketball team.

“The city needs heroes, Jim. We need our heroes to be here. And this is not a good day for the city of Los Angeles because we needed Kobe to still be around our kids who **idolized** him, the fan base who idolized him.”

Shaquille O’Neal, who led the Lakers to three championships with Bryant, tweeted that he was “SICK.” “There’s no words to express the pain Im going through with this tragedy of [losing] my neice Gigi & my brother @kobebryant I love u and u will be missed.”

With Bryant as shooting guard and O’Neal as center, the Lakers won three consecutive NBA championships — in 2000, 2001 and 2002.

But he bickered with O’Neal, who was ultimately traded, possibly costing the team additional titles. He still racked up records, and scored 81 points against Toronto on Jan. 22, 2006 — second in NBA history only to the 100 scored by Wilt Chamberlain in a 1962 game. The Lakers returned to form in 2009, with Bryant leading the team to championships that year and the next and securing his legacy as one of the sport’s best ever.

He won Olympic gold medals in 2008 and 2012. He was an All-Star 18 times, second most in NBA history, and was the fourth highest all-time scorer with 33,643 points — **surpassed** for third place the night before his death by LeBron James.

“Continuing to move the game forward @KingJames.” Bryant wrote in his final tweet. “Much respect my brother.” [...]

Although Bryant’s exact destination was not released, he was scheduled to coach a tournament game in Thousand Oaks at the Mamba Sports Academy, which bears his nickname.

Anthony Nolen, a boys coach from Victorville, said he saw Bryant coach a girls game on Saturday.

“They were down by 10 at the time,” Nolen said. “Kobe being Kobe, he wasn’t screaming at the refs, he wasn’t screaming at the players. He was poised. Him being down by 10, he was upset but as usual, he gave the other coach a Kobe stare to **ensure** him, you could beat me now as a team but not one on one.”

The tournament was canceled upon the news of Bryant’s death. “There were no players that wanted to continue,” Nolen said. [...]