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## Pacers Granger has numbers, support for All-Star Game

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LOS ANGELES His credentials scream All-Star. So do his supporters.

He's fifth in the league in scoring. He has scored at least 30 points in 11 games. His jumper is so pure that New Orleans coach Byron Scott said he thinks it's going in every time he shoots.

Still not sold?

He outscored LeBron James, Kobe Bryant and Chris Paul in games.

At the rate he's playing -- he has scored at least 35 in his past three games -- Indiana Pacers forward Danny Granger will line up alongside LeBron James, Dwyane Wade and Kevin Garnett in next month's All-Star Game at Phoenix.

"I'd be lying if I said making the All-Star team wasn't one of my goals when I first came into the NBA," Granger said. "I wanted to be an All-Star, but the main focus is making a playoff push and being a championship contender. Being an All-Star along the way is one step along the ultimate goal."

Granger might have sealed his first All-Star appearance Wednesday when he made a 3-pointer at the buzzer to beat Phoenix, capping a 37-point performance.

Pacers coach Jim O'Brien certainly thought so.

"If Danny Granger isn't an All-Star," O'Brien said afterward, "then I don't know what an All-Star looks like."

Granger, who is averaging a career-high 25.8 points, will go head-to-head with Bryant tonight at the Staples Center. Granger outscored the Los Angeles Lakers star 32-28 in the Pacers' last-second victory Dec. 2.

Eastern Conference coaches will have to vote for Granger as a reserve; he was eighth among forwards in the latest fan balloting returns. Starters will be announced Jan. 22, reserves Jan. 29.

O'Brien said he would dish out an assist for his \$60 million player by calling opposing coaches.

"Everybody does that," O'Brien said. "You try to make your case for a guy like Danny. If I have to call people, I certainly will to make sure they have the pertinent facts in front of them. He's definitely an All-Star player. I just hope he has a chance to be on the team."

The one knock on Granger is that he's putting up career numbers on a losing team.

O'Brien and team president Larry Bird agree a team's record should factor into the decision.

If history is any indication, though, Granger doesn't need to worry.



Since 1985-86, just three players who were in the top five in scoring at the All-Star break were not selected to play in the game, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

"It doesn't matter if he was playing here or somewhere else, I think he would be averaging between 20 and 25 points," Bird said. "I thought he was settling for too many 3s earlier, but now he's playing with a lot more confidence by taking the ball to the basket and taken more of a leadership role. He's gotten better every year."

Granger, who carries a noticeable swagger when he plays, quickly pointed out that his numbers have come against some of the top teams and often numerous defensive schemes designed to stop the team's only consistent scorer in Mike Dunleavy's absence.

He scored at least 32 points against the Lakers, Detroit, Cleveland, New Orleans, Phoenix and Atlanta this season.

"What shouldn't be overlooked is that he's not only scoring at such a high clip, but he's also doing it on both ends of the court," Dunleavy said. "He's played tremendous on the defensive end, too. It's pretty hard to find any weaknesses right now. Who knows where we would be without him? He's had such a terrific year and deserves all the credit he gets."