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**2004–05 NBA Season Preview**

**By Leigh Douglas**

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If there was one single theme to this off–season for the NBA it was `change' not only was there quite a bit of significant player movement, but the league itself underwent a makeover of sorts, finally expanding to a 30th franchise, and realigning to six divisions of five teams each. Of course the biggest headlines this off–season surrounded the ongoing saga that has become the Los Angeles Lakers. Basically the Lakers surrendered to Kobe, and he got all that he asked for - namely the exit of Shaq, and Phil Jackson.

Shadowed by the Shaq move to Miami was what could end up being an even bigger deal with Tracy Mcgrady going from Orlando to Houston for Steve Francis and Cuttino Mobley. Many speculate that the tandem of Mcgrady and Yao Ming will be the new Shaq–Kobe, but what is being overlooked is the potential for Steve Francis to re–establish himself as "the franchise". Other moves of note this off–season, was Phoenix getting a whole new back court of Steve Nash and Quentin Richardson, Dallas having wholesale changes after losing out on Nash in the open market, they proceeded to unload Antawn Jamison and Antione Walker, and replaced Nash with Jason Terry (and rookie Devin Harris) and replaced 6th man Jamison with Jerry Stackhouse. One very interesting move that went relatively unheralded was the trade of Al Harrington from Indiana to Atlanta for Stephen Jackson. Both players and teams should benefit greatly from this trade, especially Indiana, as it now allows Reggie Miller to come of the bench. Then of course there are the defending world champion Detroit Pistons who by all indications should be even stronger this year, having Rasheed Wallace for a whole season, as well as adding Antonio McDyess and Derrick Coleman to their bench (both of whom would probably start for some teams) plus if they get anything at all out of last years lottery pick Darko Milicic it would be a bonus.

When all is said and done this season all of the shuffling will have gotten a lot of teams closer, and it might have closed some gaps, but come next summer the final four should be very similar to what it has been recently, Detroit is still the team to beat in the East, and Indiana is the only team with a chance to do so. In the West San Antonio will once again be a force, and Minnesota should continue

its recent success behind perennial MVP candidate Kevin Garnett.

2004 Forecast:

Atlantic Division Knicks– Marbury is a sleeper for MVP, will not miss Allan Houston at all Celtics– Payton will be on a mission to regain some status, Pierce another MVP candidate Nets– Losses of Martin & Kittles too big to overcome Raptors– How high a ceiling can Bosh have on such a small frame? 76ers– Iverson will be demanding a trade by January Central Division Pistons– Biggest question is if they can sustain the 'drive to win' Pacers– Should be even closer this year Cavaliers– In either other eastern division would contend for 1st Bulls– Slowly getting better, very slowly (and really did they have anywhere else to go Bucks– Will be tough to follow up on last years success Southeast Division Heat– Shaq alone makes them contenders - look for Eddie Jones to re-emerge as all star Magic– Francis looks to return to Stevie Franchise days Hawks– Have some potential young talent, Harrington one of favorites for most improved Wizards– They are just treading water, and should be

very afraid of Bobcats passing them quickly Bobcats– They have to start somewhere, couldn't have asked for a better division Southwest Division Spurs– Adding Barry for depth gives them just another weapon Rockets– Will be interesting to watch how it unfolds Mavericks– New look Mav's probably not any better, still won't stop anyone defensively Grizzlies– Have made great strides, but will be harder to take next step Hornets– Biggest victims of the realignment Northwest Division T-wolves– This could be their year (may have to be) Nuggets– Quietly have put together one of best starting 5 in league Trailblazers– How long before they shake up the roster even more? Sonics– Have to decide what kind of team they want to be, and then commit to it Jazz– Kirilenko is easily the most unheralded player in the league

Pacific Division Kings– Still have one run left in them Suns– Are well on their way to being 'the next team' Lakers– New look Lakers are in for some surprises Clippers– Clippers will battle Warriors and Wizards to stay ahead of Bobcats Warriors– See Clippers

Eastern Conference Finals:

Pacers over Pistons

Western Conference Finals:

Timberwolves over Spurs

Finals:

Pacers over Timberwolves

MVP:

Favorite:Kevin Garnett, Twolves

Sleeper: Stephon Marbury, Knicks

Defensive Player of the Year:

Favorite:Ben Wallace, Pistons

Sleeper:Andrei Kirilinko, Jazz

Most Improved Player:

Favorite: Al Harrington, Hawks  
Sleeper: Drew Gooden, Cavaliers  
Sixth Man:  
Favorite: Bobby Jackson, Kings  
Sleeper: Joe Johnson, Suns  
Scoring Champion:  
Favorite: Kobe Bryant, Lakers  
Sleeper: Shaquille O'Neal, Heat  
Rookie of the Year:  
Favorite: Dwight Howard, Magic  
Sleeper: J.R. Smith, Hornets  
Coach of the Year:  
Favorite: Stan Van Gundy, Heat  
Sleeper: Lenny Wilkens, Knicks

Leigh Douglas is the sports editor of T.E.N Magazine, a social commentary webzine with balls! Check out more articles at

## **NBA Basketball Betting**

**By Sebastien Veilleux**

Do you want to know a little secret? NBA basketball betting can make you a lot of money. NBA basketball is a game that has helped turn sports betting losers into happy sports bettors with larger bankrolls. It's really no secret to winning sports bettors—NBA basketball is the easiest game to make money at. The game itself gives sports bettors plenty of opportunity and the ability to win right up until the end. Unlike Football, Baseball and Hockey, NBA basketball does not have limited scoring. In those other games you might see a handful—or less—of scoring executions per game. If your side gets behind too much, it's over no matter how much time is left. However, in NBA basketball, your team is usually in the game until the end.

Think about it for a moment. If you were to bet a –8 point favorite in football and the game was tied with 6 minutes left and the other team had the ball, would you have a realistic shot at winning? The answer is probably not. However, let's apply the same situation to an NBA basketball game and chop 4 minutes off the clock—so there's 2 minutes left. Would you have a realistic shot at covering the 8 points? You bet! Teams must shoot the ball within 24 seconds and each made basket is worth 2 or 3 points. You would only need 3–4 baskets to make the 8 points. Granted, the other team can score too, but in the NBA, two minutes at the end of a game is an eternity when the teams are close.

Let's look at another scenario. Imagine that it's half time in Basketball and Football, it's the 5th inning in Baseball and it's the 2nd period in hockey. Which of these four following scenarios have the best outcome?

1.The team you bet on in Baseball is down by 6 runs. 2.The team you bet on in Hockey is down by 3 goals. 3.The team you bet on in Football is down by 21 points. 4.The team you bet on in NBA Basketball is down by 22 points.

The answer, of course, is number four. Scores are hard to come by in the first three options. While comebacks happen sometimes, in the NBA, teams always go on runs. Each season is filled with games where a team was down 10,15, even 20 points and came back to win. There are many other games where the underdog was down by a lot and game back to lose by just a few points. With the NBA, you are almost always in the action right up to the end of the game. Can you say that about any other sport?

Finally, let's talk about NBA basketball totals. You might find that betting the total points in a game (under or over) is your thing and you would not be alone. There is a theory out there that those who can get a feel for totals betting are among the most successful sports bettors alive. You could debate that theory, but it does point out a very important idea. Totals betting in NBA basketball is full of winning opportunity and the sports books don't set them as well as the spread. Will this translate into more money in your pocket? That's for you to decide.

If you are not on fire right now for some NBA basketball action, check your pulse. NBA basketball presents one of the greatest opportunities open to sports bettors. Don't miss out of a great thing. Sports bettors and handicappers look forward to the NBA basketball season every year and now you know why.

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