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Team Record Under 500—No Problem In The NBA

By Paul Mroczka

Of the four major professional sports in America, basketball is the only one where a team with a .500 or under record has a chance of making the playoffs. In the NHL, where like the NBA a little over 50% of the teams go to the playoffs; clubs with losing records don't come close to competing for Lord Stanley's Cup.

This year in the NFL, where even the Wild Card teams sported a .688 winning percentage, the Kansas City Chiefs were left out of the post-season tournament after going 10–6 (.625). Major League Baseball saw the San Diego Padres win their division and earn a 2005 playoff berth with a .506 winning mark, but they were an anomaly. This season all other MLB playoff teams won 90 or more of the 162 games they played. Over the past five years 98% of the baseball teams that have been playoff bound have won 90 (.556) or more games and none have had losing records. The NBA is different.

In the 2003–04 NBA Playoffs four of the eight Eastern Conference teams that had the honor of making the second season earned records of .500 or below. In the Atlantic Division, the 8th seed Boston Celtics, one of the most winning franchises in professional sports history, touted a 36–46 (.439) record as they headed into the playoffs. At 39–43 (.476) the New York Knicks weren't much better. In the Central Division, New Orleans and Milwaukee, 5th and 6th seeds respectively, finished at .500.

The next year no sub–500 teams were in the tournament but New Jersey, the 7th seed with a 43–39 (.524) mark, and Philadelphia, the 8th seed compiling a 42–40 (.521) record, were marginal. This year, as we approach the mid–way point of the professional hoop season, it's clear that there's a good chance that as many as four sub–500 teams—25% of the playoff mix—will be shooting threes and banging the boards in the post–season.

The Milwaukee Bucks, the current 6th seed, are 19–18 (.514); the Philadelphia 76ers, which hold the 7th seed, are 18–20 (.474); and the Washington Wizards, the potential 8th seed are 17–20 (.459). Washington will probably have some stiff competition for that final Eastern Conference position from the 16–22 Chicago Bulls, the 15–23 Boston Celtics, and the 14–22 Orlando Magic.

Although the Western Conference has traditionally been exempt from this dilemma, this year is

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different. The current 8th seed, the Utah Jazz, is one game above .500 and there are at least three other teams—Minnesota, Golden State, and New Orleans/Oklahoma City— with more losses than wins that are in contention for that spot.

Certainly a system that's geared towards making the league competitive has its benefits to owners, players, and fans. While teams continue to stay in the mix, this system has the potential to keep hometown fans interested. However, the system leads to inferior teams making it into a post-season where they don't have a chance to compete.

There are a few reasons why the NBA has this problem. However the major reason is, quite simply, money. The NFL has long had a salary cap; the NHL has just instituted one; and MLB has created a half-hearted attempt at one. The theory behind an effective salary cap, such as the type the NFL and NHL have instituted, is that when teams are allowed to only spend a certain amount of money they will be forced to spend it wisely—doing their best to build a competitive team. The other way a salary cap

works is that it prohibits one or two teams from paying exorbitant amounts of money to hire all of the stars, thus leveling the playing field. (This is why the MLB salary cap doesn't really work; it doesn't do this and is not a true cap. It's more of a salary visor.)

Now this may surprise you— the NBA also has a salary cap. This year it's set at \$49.5 million per team. However the NBA has a "soft" cap, a headband really, which translates into numerous loopholes allowing clubs to still break the bank when it comes to salaries.

Because of how it can be manipulated, the soft cap does very little to control spending. This can have some disastrous results for teams and the league. Some teams capture that one star player with a huge multi-year deal but then, because of their own budget limits, can't afford to support him with role-players. And if that primary guy suffers a season ending injury, the entire team's season is over.

Others with the deepest pockets find their way around the cap and scoop up two or three hallmark names, while teams with small bankrolls don't have the power to attract the best talent. Then there are the organizations that spend money on young talent and that talent just doesn't pan out. If a player has a big contract and he's not performing, he's impossible to trade, and he still has to be paid.

The fact is a salary cap is intended to negate exactly what is happening in the NBA; a soft cap is designed to simply get around the basic provisions and safeguards a salary cap offers.

The final result is an imbalance of power, which means you may have 16 playoff positions but you really only have 12 playoff teams. The last three or four slots are filled by non-competitive teams just because the spaces are there.

This year if the Celtics or the Sixers or the Jazz or any of the other clubs hovering around .500 make the post-season will anyone consider them worthy of being potential NBA champions? There's one of two possible solutions for the NBA—a real salary cap or going to a 12-team playoff scenario.

This article was written by Paul Mroczka sponsored by

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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?

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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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