

NBA all-star break report

Written by Ryan T. Scott
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Though many came into the NBA season thinking that it might be a runaway “3-Peat” championship for the Los Angeles Lakers, the first half of the season suggests that my favorite team is getting old.

Ron Artest obviously hit his pinnacle last year in the playoffs and has not come down mentally since then – or at least that’s what his jumpshot is saying. Kobe Bryant is his usual narcissistic self, and thus can’t will his team to whoop-up on lesser talented teams like Michael Jordan did in the 90s. Bryant wants to engineer games rather than just go out there and “ball ‘em up” and then sit on the bench in the fourth quarter and enjoy the show...like Jordan and Scottie Pippen used to do. Bryant gets the ball stolen from his grasp a little more often, and gets his shot blocked much more as well. These are symptoms of old age (in basketball years). So as I often say, “Kobe! Pass the ball!”

Can the Lakers pull it off come the end of the season? Sure. But it does bother me how light on their young toes the Miami Heat are proving to be.

The Miami Heat team is having a great time destroying other teams with their unmatched threesome of LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, and Chris Bosh. They throw every kind of alley-oop and trick shot that they can muster. And the game-in game-out stat lines of those three are mighty impressive, whether led numerically by James or Wade.

Like everyone else, I’m curious how that 1, 2, 3, but no 4 and 5, or 6 and 7 type of line-up system is going to work in the playoffs. The teams that make the playoffs have a tendency to start playing defense in the playoffs, and that tends to cut down on the Harlem Globetrotters act that teams like Miami may come in with. Don’t get me wrong, the Heat have done remarkably well against all the best teams in the league during the regular season. The playoffs will certainly be super interesting with their team leading the charge from the Eastern Conference.

I may be a prisoner of the moment, but it does currently seem like the Heat are better than the Boston Celtics. The Celtics attacked the first half of the season with the vigor of their youth. Certainly they were driven, coming into the season, by the loss to the Lakers in last year’s NBA Finals. Caught up in that vigor, and the pressure of having to deal with a ridiculously talented Heat team, I think the Celtics forgot that they too are old. This oversight may come back to bite

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the Celtics, and allow the more youthful Heat team to ultimately surpass their much older adversary.

The Celtics don't only have the Heat to worry about, but due to the recent blockbuster trade, they have Carmelo Anthony and Amare Stoudemire to deal with on the New York Knicks. Anthony won a collegiate national championship for Syracuse (in Syracuse, New York) in 2003. Kobe Bryant has referred to Anthony as a "Bear" on the court, and now that bear has a slim gorilla in Stoudemire to compliment his beastly scoring abilities. Once again, things change during the playoffs, and teams all of a sudden get the urge to play defense – perhaps motivated by the extra paychecks during the playoffs. Anthony is not known for his individual defense, but as a Laker fan, I can admit that the iconic Magic Johnson was not "Mr. Defense" either. All I know is that I hope the glut of talent in the Eastern Conference with the Heat, Celtics, Knicks, and even the Chicago Bulls, has a cumulative effect of canceling each other out, and thus paving the way for you know who.

I don't know if the Lakers will win the championship this year, but what I do know is that their dominance over the last four years has resulted in many of the talented players in the Western Conference taking their talents to the Eastern Conference. Dang I hope the Lakers 3-Peat, but there is some satisfaction in that they've run their best opponents out of town.

As for the Timberwolves: they're fun to watch, they're trying hard, they're better than last year, and their management is steady making interesting moves. With Cory Brewer now gone to the Knicks, it's time for rookie Wesley Johnson to step up to the hoop.