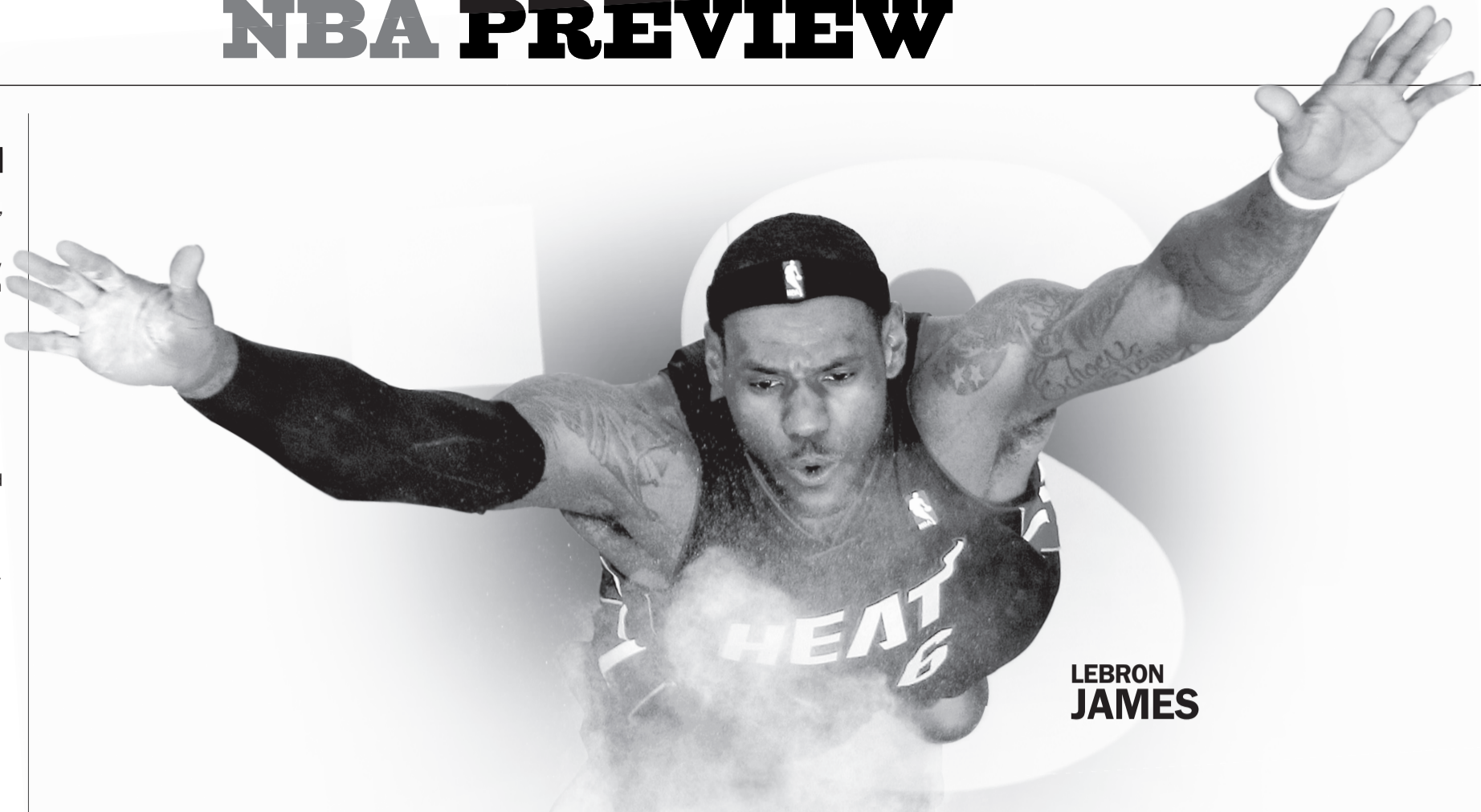


NBA PREVIEW



LEBRON JAMES

Can LeBron bring a title to Miami?

BY ROB WHITE | WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Just in case you've spent the past four months locked in a meditative state, we'll go ahead and start by saying the highlight of the NBA offseason was LeBron James "taking his talents" to Miami and joining forces with Chris Bosh and Dwyane Wade, forming the NBA's newest Big Three.

Beyond that, here's a primer on the rest of the NBA season, which starts Tuesday:

WHAT'S NEW

Good thing Rasheed Wallace retired: NBA referees have been instructed to call technical fouls for "overt" player reactions such as aggressive gestures (i.e., air punches), demonstrative disagreement (such as a player showing how he was fouled), running directly at an official to complain and excessive inquiries about a call (even if done politely). Even body language and walking across the court to inquire can lead to a technical. A similar set of rules was in place four years ago but didn't last.

Increase in vertical jumps?: Everyone will be wearing newly-designed uniforms (NBA Revolution 30) by adidas that are 30 percent lighter and dry (as in sweat) twice as fast as the old models. Seams are reduced and friction between the players' skin and the uniform is decreased. The numbers are mesh rather than heavier material. While they may not exactly be the NBA's answer to LZR swim suits, they could be some performance enhancement through equipment.

Old-school looks lead list: The Cleveland Cavaliers, Golden State Warriors, Los Angeles Clippers, Minnesota Timberwolves and Utah Jazz will all have new uniform and logo designs. Golden State and Utah get high marks for their retro looks: The Warriors went with their old-school design featuring the Golden Gate Bridge, and Utah brought back the Jazz style with the musical note across the front, like in the franchise's New Orleans days. The Timberwolves took the green out and the trees out of the neckline. Cleveland's changes are minor — from cursive to block lettering. And, if you're like most, you won't even realize that the Clippers changed.

NEW SIDELINE STALKERS

New head coaches this season:

» Doug Collins, Philadelphia — Will miss his insights as TV analyst, but he'll be back soon enough.

» Vinny DelNegro, LA Clippers — Has a nice trio in Blake Griffin, Chris Kaman and Eric Gordon.

» Larry Drew, Atlanta — Time flies: The former Missouri star has been an NBA assistant for 18 years.

» Avery Johnson, New Jersey — No Dirk Nowitzki here, but will try to match Dallas success.

» Byron Scott, Cleveland — No pressure to win in post-LeBron aftermath.

» Keith Smart, Golden State — Takes over rudderless roster and needs Monta Ellis and Stephen Curry to get along.

» Tom Thibodeau, Chicago — Boston's defensive guru runs his own team for the first time.

» Monty Williams, New Orleans — Former San Antonio assistant gets first gig.

ON THE WAY UP

» Miami (47-35 last year) — No kidding, huh? How many teams would have loved to pick up Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Mike Miller, Jerry Stackhouse and Eddie House this offseason? Oh, and the other guys they got should help a little.

» Milwaukee (46-36) — Could the Bucks have gone further with a healthy Andrew Bogut in the playoffs last year? It's hard to say. But he's back, and they'll have a full season from second-half spark John Salmons. Corey Maggette adds scoring punch, Drew Gooden rebounding. If point guard Brandon Jennings takes off in year two, the Central is there for the taking, regardless of Chicago's moves.

» New Jersey (12-70) — Obviously there is nowhere to go but up after last year's disaster, but there's something to build around in center Brook Lopez. Troy Murphy will help, and newcomers Derrick Favors, Damion James, Travis Outlaw, Anthony Morrow and Jordan Farmar are all upgrades. A coach with a proven track record, Avery Johnson, should get them up over 30 wins.

ON THE WAY DOWN

» Toronto (40-42 last year) — The Raptors weren't very good with Chris Bosh and Hedo Turkoglu, so where do they go now? Leandro Barbosa is exciting, the rest of them not so much.

» Cleveland (61-21) — This is Antawn Jamison's team now, we guess, which probably doesn't inspire much fear. We'll see how good Mo Williams and Anderson Varejao are.

» Denver (53-29) — Keep Carmelo Anthony, as well as Kenyon Martin and J.R. Smith, and this is again an uptempo, exciting team capable of knocking off someone in the playoffs. Trade Carmelo and it could go south in a hurry.

DIVISION PREDICTIONS

Atlantic: Boston, New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Toronto

Southeast: Miami, Orlando, Washington, Atlanta, Charlotte

Central: Milwaukee, Chicago, Indiana, Cleveland, Detroit

Southwest: Dallas, San Antonio, Memphis, New Orleans, Houston

Northwest: Oklahoma City, Utah, Denver, Portland, Minnesota

Pacific: LA Lakers, Phoenix, LA Clippers, Sacramento, Golden State

HEAD OF THE ROOKIE CLASS

» John Wall, G Washington — The one-and-done Kentucky point guard is already a rookie of the year favorite ... just wait and see his numbers when and if the Wizards trade Gilbert Arenas.

» Blake Griffin, F, LA Clippers — Round Two for the former Oklahoma All-American, who missed all of last season with an injury.

» Evan Turner, G-F, Philadelphia — Seems a little redundant for a team with Andre Iguodala to draft the Ohio State star, but the guy can play.

» Avery Bradley, G, Boston — Celtics needed a perimeter defender with outside scoring ability, and the one-and-done guard from Texas is the only player they added that fills that bill.

OTHER IMPACT ROOKIES

Derrick Favors, F, New Jersey
Wesley Johnson, F, Minnesota
DeMarcus Cousins, C, Sacramento
Paul George, F, Indiana
Cole Aldrich, C, Oklahoma City

TUESDAY'S GAMES

Miami at Boston, 6:30 p.m. (TNT)
Phoenix at Portland, 9 p.m.
Houston at L.A.
Lakers, 9:30 p.m. (TNT)

WEDNESDAY'S GAMES

Boston at Cleveland, 6 p.m.
Detroit at New Jersey, 6 p.m.
Miami at Philadelphia, 6 p.m.
New York at Toronto, 6 p.m.
Atlanta at Memphis, 7 p.m.
Sacramento at Minnesota, 7 p.m. (FSN)
Milwaukee at New Orleans, 7 p.m.
Chicago at Oklahoma City, 7 p.m. (ESPN)
Charlotte at Dallas, 7:30 p.m.
Indiana at San Antonio, 7:30 p.m.
Utah at Denver, 8 p.m.
Houston at Golden State, 9:30 p.m.
Portland at L.A. Clippers, 9:30 p.m. (ESPN)



JOHN WALL

MIDLANDERS IN THE NBA

ON THE FLOOR

» Chicago: Kyle Korver, G-F, Creighton. One of the NBA's best 3-point marksman, he hit a single-season NBA record 53.6 percent from long range last year, in which he missed time early with an injury and had to fight to get back into the Utah playing rotation. He'll get opportunities in Chicago, thanks to the playmaking ability of Derrick Rose and the inside presence of Carlos Boozer, his former Jazz teammate.

» Minnesota: Wesley Johnson, G-F, originally at Iowa State. Johnson went from excellent Big 12 player to NBA lottery pick after transferring to Syracuse. But it's going to be a long, cold season in Minneapolis.

» Minnesota: Anthony Tolliver, F, Creighton. The overachiever finally got NBA traction last year, averaging 12.3 points and 7.3 rebounds in 44 games — 29 of them starts — for a shorthanded and overmatched Golden State team. The situation is similar in Minnesota, but production has a way of getting noticed.

» Oklahoma City: Nick Collison, F, Iowa Falls, Iowa. The former Kansas star has carved out a nice niche for himself with this franchise, averaging 7.8 points and 6.6 rebounds while primarily coming off the bench, over six seasons.

» Philadelphia: Craig Brackins, F, Iowa State. Keep an eye on how he fits in on a 76ers roster that has several players of his type. A trade could come by midseason, opening up ample playing time.

» Toronto: Reggie Evans, F, Iowa. That's right, he's still here ... and he's only 30. And as long as he keeps pulling down an average of 16.8 rebounds per 48 minutes, he'll keep making rosters.

» Washington: Kirk Hinrich, G, Sioux City West. The former Kansas star took a solid, but supplemental, role behind Derrick Rose in Chicago and will do the same behind John Wall with the Wizards. But if Gilbert Arenas gets moved, playing time could increase.

CALLING THE SHOTS

» Golden State: Keith Smart, former Omaha Racer, head coach. The Indiana Hoosier, who hit the game-winner in the 1987 NCAA championship game, played for the Omaha Racers as one of several stops as a CBA player. He's been a Warrior assistant for seven years. Few remember his 9-31 mark as Cleveland's interim head coach 2002-03 (the last year pre-LeBron).

» Houston: Rick Adelman, former Kansas City-Omaha King, head coach. He scored 18 points in 30 games for the K.C.-Omaha Kings, his final playing stop, in 1974-75. He's 902-557 (.610) as an NBA head coach.

» Milwaukee: John Hammond, former Pawnee City High coach and Nebraska assistant, general manager. The NBA's executive of the year in 2009-10, the Illinois native got his first basketball break in Nebraska as a prep coach in the late 1970s, then as a graduate assistant under Joe Cipriano (and interim coach Moe Iba) in the early 1980s. He coached under Gene Iba, Moe's cousin, at Houston Baptist and was on the staff of former Nebraska assistant Charlie Spoonhour at the former Southwest Missouri State before going to the NBA in 1989. He served as an assistant coach and scouting director with several teams and is in his third season as the Bucks' GM.

» New York: Mike D'Antoni, former Kansas City-Omaha King, head coach. Averaged 3.5 points in 119 games with Kansas City-Omaha from 1973-74 through 1974-75, and eventually carved out a nice career as a European player and coach. He's 603-328 (.544) as an NBA head coach.

BEHIND THE SCENES

» Boston: Tyronn Lue, Nebraska, director of basketball development. Averaged 8.5 points and 3.1 assists in 11-year NBA career. Friendship with Kevin Garnett said to be part of reason Garnett agreed to join Celtics in 2007. Lue, who played briefly for Boston coach Doc Rivers in Orlando, took Rivers up on offer to join his staff if he ever decided to get into coaching, and Lue was frequently spotted behind the Celtic bench last season. Considered making a comeback as a player over the summer.

» Philadelphia: Michael Curry, former Omaha Racer, associate head coach. After stint with Racers, eventually averaged 4.5 points in 11 NBA seasons, three of which he spent as a starter with Detroit. Coached the Pistons to 39-43 record in 2008-09.

» Portland: Michael Born, UNO and Iowa State, director of NBA scouting. Transferred to Iowa State after starting playing career at UNO in 1984. Played professionally in Europe and spent time as an NAIA assistant before working his way through basketball's low minors (the IBA and ABA) as a coach and executive. Got an assistant coaching gig in the NBDL in 2002 and joined the Blazers in 2004.

» Sacramento: Bobby Jackson, Western Nebraska CC, ambassador/scout. After playing at the University of Minnesota, averaged 9.7 points in 12-year NBA career, highlighted by five-year run as Sacramento's sixth man beginning in 2000-01. He averaged between 11.1 and 15.2 the final four seasons of that stretch.

» Utah: Phil Johnson, former Kansas City-Omaha Kings coach, assistant coach. In his 18th year as Jerry Sloan's right-hand man with the Kings, Johnson was just 27 when he took over as the Kansas City-Omaha head coach in 1973-74. He took them to the playoffs the following year. He's 236-306 (.435) overall as a head coach.

KEEPING THEM HEALTHY

Charlotte: Steve Stricker, Iowa State, trainer

New York: Greg Brittenham, UNK, director of team conditioning

Phoenix: Aaron Nelson, Manning, Iowa and Iowa State, trainer

Washington: Eric Waters, Iowa, trainer

OLD FACES, NEW PLACES

(An unscientific ranking of the players who will make the biggest impact on new teams this season, keeping in mind that a complementary player on a good team could be rated higher than a great player on a poor team.)

» LeBron James, F, Miami (free agent from Cleveland) — Anything less than an NBA championship would be a major disappointment for the Heat, and other than his apparent disinterest at the end of Cleveland's series with Boston last spring, James has been a leader and winner.

» Amare Stoudemire, F-C, New York (free agent from Phoenix) — Cashed in by jumping from a good situation as Steve Nash's go-to guy in Phoenix for a little more dicey proposition in New York, but the big city and a reunion with coach Mike D'Antoni was probably tough to resist.

» Chris Bosh, F, Miami (free agent from Toronto) — Dwyane Wade has won a title and LeBron James has played in the Finals, so only Bosh's postseason résumé is sketchy. But really, we're nitpicking now aren't we?

» Carlos Boozer, F, Chicago (free agent from Utah) — If not for the offseason moves made by the Heat and Boston's veteran additions, the talk of the NBA would be Chicago's roster retooling, led by the addition of Boozer, a solid veteran performer used to winning.

» David Lee, F, Golden State (trade from New York) — Unsung talent averaged 20.9 points and 11.7 rebounds last year. If few noticed that in New York, will anybody pay attention now that he's in Oakland?

» Corey Maggette, G-F, Milwaukee (trade from Golden State) — This could blow up in the Bucks' faces or it could be a move that takes them to a Central Division title. He's been a big-time scorer on some truly awful teams, but he could provide major firepower off the bench for a good one.

» Al Jefferson, C, Utah (trade from Minnesota) — Could Jefferson — a 23-point, 11-rebound player two years ago — be poised to move into the elite level of NBA centers? Having Deron Williams running the show could help get him there.

» Hedo Turkoglu, G-F, Phoenix (trade from Toronto) — His personality rubs some people the wrong way, but he should thrive in the Phoenix system run by Steve Nash.

» Jermaine O'Neal (F-C, free agent from Miami)/Shaquille O'Neal (C, free agent from Cleveland), Boston — The name so nice the Celtics acquired it twice, the veterans give Boston frontcourt depth and experience for a potential title run. Too bad it's 2010-11 and not 2004-05.

» Tyson Chandler, C, Dallas (trade from Charlotte) — Chandler's offense has become non-existent the past two years, but with a Mavericks team that could compete for a Southwest Division title, he could be rejuvenated. Either that or Mark Cuban will blow up the roster again.

» Matt Barnes, F, LA Lakers (free agent from Orlando) — Defending champions added an underrated athletic defender and perimeter shooter to a core group that was already good enough to return to the Finals.

» Troy Murphy, F, New Jersey (trade from Indiana) — His back could be an issue, but he could help an improved team with his production and ability to take some pressure off Brook Lopez inside.

» Raymond Felton, G, New York (free agent from Charlotte) — The Knicks should be better and Felton is a much better fit at point guard than Chris Duhon was last season.

» Michael Beasley, F, Minnesota (trade from Miami) — Somebody has to score for the Timberwolves.

12 MORE NAMES TO NOTE

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|------------------|-----|-------------|
| Mike Miller | F-G | Miami |
| Drew Gooden | F | Milwaukee |
| Kyle Korver | F-G | Chicago |
| Anthony Morrow | G-F | New Jersey |
| Trevor Ariza | G-F | New Orleans |
| Leandro Barbosa | G | Toronto |
| Al Harrington | F | Denver |
| Samuel Dalembert | C | Sacramento |
| Courney Lee | G | Houston |
| Keyon Dooling | G | Milwaukee |
| Willie Green | G | New Orleans |
| Tracy McGrady | G | Detroit |