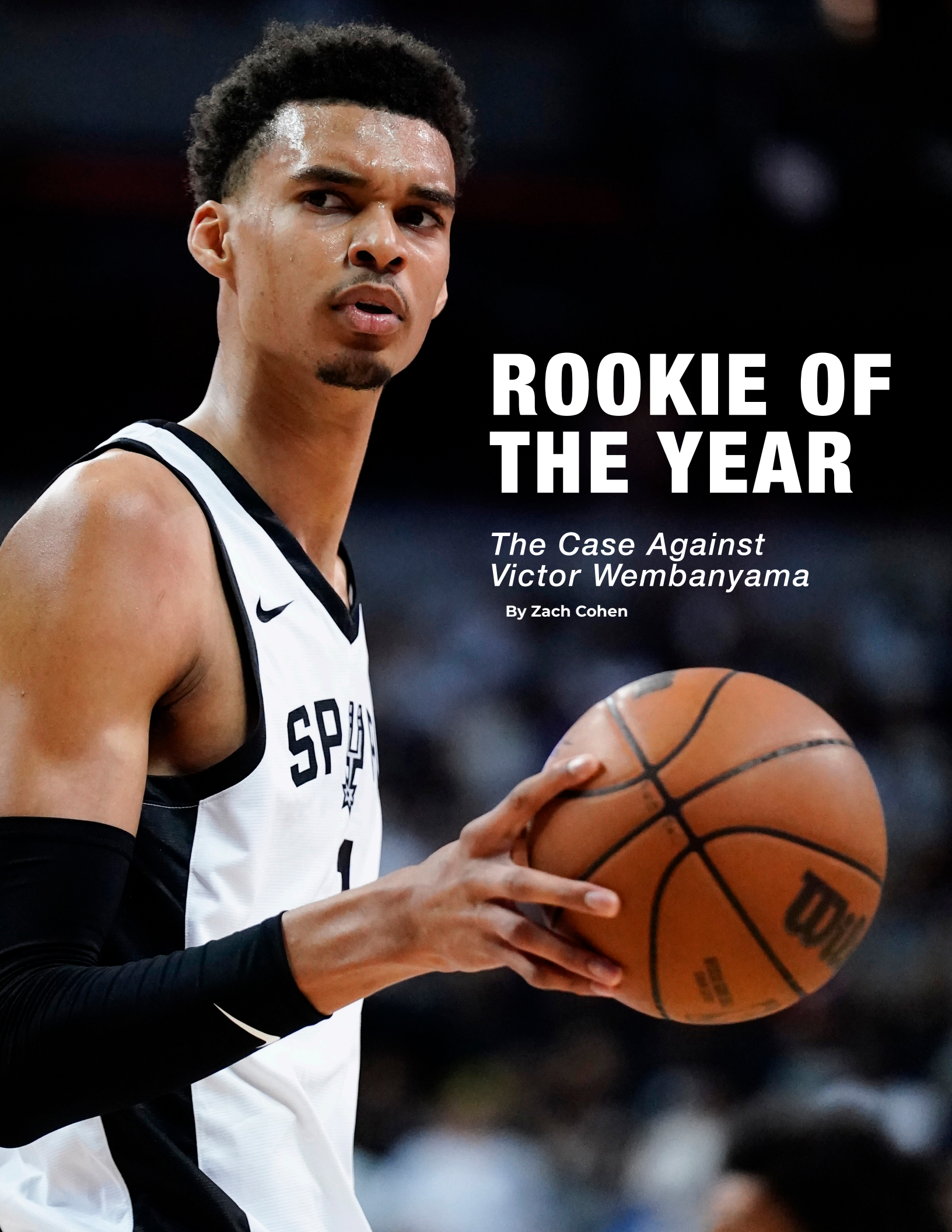




2023 NBA BETTING GUIDE





ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

*The Case Against
Victor Wembanyama*

By Zach Cohen

The hype surrounding Victor Wembanyama, the first pick in the 2023 NBA Draft, is out of this world. The 7-foot-4 big man, with an eight-foot wingspan, is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing prospects to enter the league in quite some time. The 19-year-old has legitimate perimeter skills and a unique ability to move at his size. And Wembanyama has already proven a lot early in his career, as he was a high-level contributor for Metropolitans 92, which plays in the best league in France. Last year, Wembanyama averaged 20.9 points, 10.3 rebounds and 3.0 blocks per game in 44 games. That type of production is hard to ignore in a league with grown men.

I'm not going to sit here and tell you that Wembanyama will be a bust, as I simply don't believe that. I think he's going to be a two-way terror for as long as he plays in the NBA — and I do see the path toward him having a Hall-of-Fame-level career. However, I do think he'll mostly impact games on the defensive end early on. The shot blocking and ability to contest shots should translate immediately. But I think it could take him some time to get comfortable offensively, especially with his jumper being a little overrated at this point in his career.

Last October, Wembanyama put on a shooting clinic in an exhibition game in which his French team took on Scoot Henderson and the G League Ignite. Wembanyama hit seven 3s on his way to scoring 37 points in that one, and people were raving about some of the shots he made in that game. But Wembanyama shot just 27.2% from 3 for Metropolitans 92 last season, and he shot below 30.0% in all four of his seasons as a professional overseas. That's a sample size that is hard to ignore, which leads me to believe that he might not shoot it as well as expected early on. If he doesn't, it's going to be hard for him to score efficiently as a rookie.

I'm not quite as concerned about Wembanyama's slender frame as most. He should add weight as he spends more time around NBA coaches and trainers. But early on, he might get pushed off his spots a bit. We saw a little of that in Summer League, where Wembanyama played two games and struggled mightily in one of them. The French phenom played much better in that second game, but I did see enough to question how he'll earn his keep offensively as a rookie. I mostly think he'll be asked to make shots in pick-and-pop situations, and I'm not sure I trust his jumper enough for him to feast on those plays — or San Antonio's point guard play to get him good looks. The rest of his buckets will come with him as a pick-and-roll man or with him simply cleaning up around the basket. I don't think that's enough for him to be some runaway favorite to win the Rookie of the Year award, even if he is a tremendous defender from Day 1.

As of right now, Wembanyama is a +100 favorite to win Rookie of the Year at DraftKings Sportsbook. Earlier in the summer, he was as high as -225 to win. So, the market has come down a bit on him. But even at his current odds, I'd be leaning strongly towards avoiding him completely. Instead, I'd suggest backing Henderson (+250), Chet Holmgren (+300) or Brandon Miller (+1500).

With Damian Lillard no longer with the Portland Trail Blazers, there's nothing preventing Henderson from having a big rookie season. Henderson's outside shot leaves a lot to be desired. But he's a good mid-range shooter, with the quickness off the dribble to get to his spots whenever he wants. He's also built like a linebacker despite being a point guard. That helps him absorb contact on his way to the rim, where Henderson should do a good job of finishing right off the bat. All in all, I think his game translates nicely to the league, and I like that Chauncey

Billups will coach him. A great point guard himself, Billups should be able to relate to Henderson and help him with his approach. That combination of skill set and opportunity gives Henderson a shot at having a great rookie year. And Henderson already thinks the game at a high level. So, I don't see him being too overwhelmed by the types of defenses he'll see — and spending two years in the G League is a big part of that.

Holmgren is another guy who looks like a great bet to win this award. And I honestly think he's the best bet to do it. Earlier in the offseason, I was a little nervous about the possibility of Holmgren being a big load management risk. After all, he missed his entire rookie season after suffering a Lisfranc injury in a Pro-Am last summer. But Holmgren looked to be 100% healthy in four Summer League games this year. He averaged 16.5 points, 9.8 rebounds and 3.5 blocks per game for the Oklahoma City Thunder this summer. And he played 29.8 minutes per game over the course of those two weeks. That was absolutely massive for Holmgren, as it shows he's not limited in any capacity right now. Holmgren was also very active on the scene over the summer, with a lot of videos of the 7-foot-1 big man surfacing — whether he was hooping or just working out.

In many ways, Holmgren offers the same things that Wembanyama does. He's a lanky big man with perimeter skills and the ability to impact the game on both ends of the floor. I think he'll immediately be one of the best rim protectors in basketball. And I think Holmgren will be a bit better than Wembanyama on the offensive end. Holmgren's jumper is a little further along than Wembanyama's right now, and he's also a tough finisher around the basket — despite being built like a stick. The latter is especially important when you factor in that Holmgren is playing for a Thunder team that should push for a spot in the playoffs this year. And his spot in the Oklahoma City rotation is solidified with the team not having a lot of depth at forward or center. That said, Holmgren is going to be putting up decent numbers for a team that should be on the national stage this year. That is going to go a long way in making him a contender to win Rookie of the Year.

I'm also still very much in on Miller, who looked awful for the Charlotte Hornets in Summer League. Miller looked lost as the focal point of the Hornets in Las Vegas, but that's not going to be his role as a rookie. Miller will be playing off the ball in an offense that should play at a fast pace. And when you take a player like Miller, who averaged 18.8 points per game and shot 38.4% on 7.5 3s per game at Alabama, and put him next to an elite distributor like LaMelo Ball, you never know what's going to happen.

I think Charlotte could be one of the more surprising teams in the Eastern Conference this year, and a free-flowing offense is a big part of that. If Miller plays roughly 30 minutes per night for the Hornets, what's preventing him from averaging something like 18 points per game? And given the NBA is an offense-driven league, wouldn't that at least put him in the conversation for Rookie of the Year? Crazier things have happened. So, I'm personally taking a flier on him at his long odds.

Overall, I'm just not buying Wembanyama to win this award. I think he'll have a brilliant career, especially considering he'll be learning from the legendary Gregg Popovich, and I'm also confident he'll impact winning immediately. But I don't think his game will be sexy enough for him to win over voters for an award like Rookie of the Year. I prefer some of his more offensive-minded counterparts. Or somebody like Holmgren, who is similar but in a better spot to shine.

Victor Wembanyama	+100	Scoot Henderson	+250
Chet Holmgren	+300	Brandon Miller	+1500
Cam Whitmore	+2000	Amen Thompson	+2500
Jarace Walker	+2500	Sasha Vezencov	+2800

ATTACK LIVE BETTING WITH A VENGEANCE

By Kelley Bydlon

With so many markets now available to bettors, there are a lot of different ways to bet a game in any sport, but live betting should never be overlooked - especially in the NBA. With so many possessions in a game, the NBA provides more opportunities to profitably jump in live on a side or total than any other sport. In fact, for many NBA bettors, including myself, in-game bets can account for the majority of bets you make in a season.

Below, I go through some things new bettors should know as they begin to get involved in live betting games...

BYDLON RULES TO LIVE BY

1

If you're entering a game without a pre-game bet and are looking to solely follow a live betting strategy you have in mind, YOU HAVE TO BE OK WITH IT IF YOU NEVER MAKE A SINGLE BET. I think people often force in-game bets if they enter games they're looking to live bet. You should enter each game with a specific strategy in mind and be on the lookout for the opportunities to present themselves that will offer you a good time/price to jump in live. Simply put, those opportunities you wish for will not present themselves in every game. Sometimes games just go a completely different way than you had thought, and that should be fine with you because you don't have a single dollar invested.

2

If you're not very familiar with live betting, start off by betting the absolute bare minimum or nothing at all. Track how the spread and total move throughout games. You'll want to get a feel for how spreads and totals move based off of scoring and pace. You'll also get a feel for when the live odds really start to shift away from the pregame numbers. You'll usually find this takes until at least the second quarter.

3

Wait for breaks in the action to make in-game bets. Just like any other sport, you really want to wait for a timeout or commercial break to get your bets in. If watching on TV, you'll always be behind what's really happening on the court. Even if the game has hit a time/score and the spread/total you were hoping for, you don't want to risk a bet while the game is still being played. You could be close to a full minute behind the real-time action that's taking place. That's a lifetime in the NBA and before you know it, you might be looking down at a very dumb bet you made. Wait for a break, then you can truly evaluate how best to proceed with betting the game.

4

Know who you're betting against: a computer or a person. Sportsbooks will often utilize technology and computer algorithms to set live odds throughout a game. For a bettor, this is ideal. Those books will have live odds posted throughout most of the game, whereas a sportsbook that is booking the game by hand will usually only post numbers during commercial breaks, and even that may be inconsistent. Betting against a computer will not only give you more opportunities to bet, but those algos might also miss out on accounting for injuries that take place, ejections, players fouling out, etc. - all things a bettor can take advantage of. Whichever state you bet in, familiarize yourself with your live betting options from book to book.

Alright, now that you have all that boring stuff squared away, let's talk about some ways to make some damn money. Below, I go through some of the live betting strategies I utilize regularly.

LIVE BETTING STRATEGIES

- **It's all about shooting percentages.**
Even if it's a game you didn't have plans to bet, some opportunities will present themselves you just can't pass up. Let's say Team A is favored by five pre-game, and is down 12 middle of the second quarter. You check the box score and see that Team A is shooting 39% from the field and 18% from 3, while Team B is shooting 53% from the field and 47% from 3 (yes, I'm completely making up numbers for this example). Well, basketball is a game of shooting and runs, and teams can often start out very hot or cold from the field before finding their true average. In the example above, you should expect by the end of the game for Team A's shooting percentages to look much better and Team B's to look much worse, and in the second quarter you could be betting that pre-game five-point-favorite at a much better number.
- **OK, it's mostly about 3-point shooting percentages.**
That's the number you should be focused the most on. With how many 3s are shot in the NBA today (about 40% of FGA), you can often find teams with drastically different 3P percentages at different points in a game. However, these percentages usually regress to near a team's average by the end of a game. So, if you see a game with outlier shooting percentages on one side, or both, look to capitalize on it with a bet.
- **Guess what? This works for not just sides, but totals too!**
Let's say both teams start out shooting poorly from 3, OR both teams start out shooting way too hot from 3. This can lead to easy in-game bets on the Over or the Under.
- **Timing is crucial.**
OK, we've discussed what you're looking for when it comes to shooting percentages, but WHEN should you make the bet? A couple of minutes into the game, the odds won't have shifted enough off the pregame numbers, and if you wait until too late into the game, you're not going to give the team your betting on enough possessions to make up the points you need. If I'm basing my bet mainly just off shooting, I'm usually not getting involved until the second quarter has started, and I'm usually shutting it down by about midway through the third quarter. Again, you have to leave your team enough time.
- **Know when star players take that first break.**
As a season progresses, get to know when star players usually take their first rest in a game. Is it the end of the first quarter? Beginning of the second quarter? These are good to note as the season goes on and will help you make easier decisions on timing your in-game bets.
- **I like a team tonight, but man, I wish I was getting an extra couple points or laying a couple less!**
You'll often say that every week during football season with not much you can do about it. Well, in the NBA that's what I would call a pre-game lean that I'm looking to bet live. Let's say you're leaning team A, and then the game starts off with a flurry of points from team B. You could wait three minutes into the game, a timeout is called, and boom, all of a sudden you have a live number available to you that you were looking for pre-game. Yes, your team has an uphill climb ahead of them, but there are SO many more possessions left in the game.
- **We don't root for injuries, but they can often lead to betting opportunities.**
We see bettors capitalize on this often in the NBA. Whether it's an injury or a day off for a player, you'll often see big changes in the spread when that afternoon injury report comes out, and you see Kawhi Leonard is taking another game off. The books will look to quickly pull down their numbers or adjust them, and bettors try to beat them to the punch. A similar approach can be taken in-game. If a player is injured, ejected, or fouls out, it might not be reflected in the live odds immediately. This is a major opportunity for bettors.
- **Oh sweet, beautiful middles.**
These aren't for everybody, and it's not even something I dabble in as much as I used to, but there's nothing quite like the feeling of having +points with both teams and the game falling right in the sweet spot. Of course, this is not something you can do with every game, but maybe you bet a big dog pre-game that gets off to an extremely good start that you know they won't be able to maintain. Then come in with a smaller bet on the other side. You never know; you might win both. Of course, this can be applied to totals as well.
- **Live player props.**
This is a new frontier for me, and I don't have a ton of betting advice on it NOW, but it is something I'm hoping to bet more this season if the Vegas books allow me to. Just like all other live markets, it's one you should study to see how you might be able to profit from it.



STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING
BOSTON	103.5
DENVER	103.5
MILWAUKEE	103.5
PHOENIX	102.5
GOLDEN STATE	102.0
LA LAKERS	101.5
PHILADELPHIA	101.0
LA CLIPPERS	100.5
CLEVELAND	100.0
MEMPHIS	100.0
MIAMI	100.0
NEW YORK	99.5
DALLAS	99.0
SACRAMENTO	99.0
NEW ORLEANS	98.5
MINNESOTA	98.5
OKLAHOMA CITY	98.0
ATLANTA	97.5
BROOKLYN	97.0
CHICAGO	96.5
UTAH	96.0
INDIANA	95.5
ORLANDO	95.0
TORONTO	95.0
HOUSTON	93.0
SAN ANTONIO	93.0
PORTLAND	92.5
CHARLOTTE	92.0
DETROIT	91.5
WASHINGTON	91.0

NBA FINALS: +475

CONFERENCE: +250

DIVISION: -475

PLAYOFFS: YES (-4000)



DENVER

Nuggets

NORTHWEST DIVISION • WESTERN CONFERENCE
2023 RECORD: 69-33 SU, 55-46-1 ATS, 46-54-2 O/U

Steve Makinen's Power Rating
103.5 (#2 of 30)

OFFSEASON RECAP

Additions

Justin Holiday
Jay Huff

Losses

Bruce Brown
Jeff Green
Thomas Bryant
Jack White

NBA Draft

1 (29) Julian Strawther
2 (32) Jalen Pickett
2 (37) Hunter Tyson

TEAM PREVIEW

The reigning champions head into the 2023-2024 regular season in a great position to repeat as champions. There are some changes to the depth of this roster, but the best starting lineup in the NBA returns, and with a perennial MVP on the floor in Nikola Jokic the Nuggets are primed to make another run at a championship.

Last season, when Denver had Jamal Murray, Kentavious Caldwell-Pope, Michael Porter Jr., Aaron Gordon and Nikola Jokic on the floor, the Nuggets outscored opponents by 12.7 points every 100 possessions. That net rating was the best among lineups that played at least 1,000 possessions together, according to Cleaning The Glass. In the postseason that crew posted a +10.0 net rating and averaged 121.0 points per 100 possessions.

That starting lineup will be among the best in the NBA again this season, so it is safe to assume that Denver will compete again for a top seed in the Western Conference. However, the changes to this team - while minimal - could have a massive impact on their place in the standings.

Bruce Brown's departure is the most obvious change to this roster. Brown was incredible in his time with the Nuggets. He averaged 11.5 points, 4.1 rebounds and 3.4 assists in 80 games last season. His efficiency differential on Cleaning The Glass ranked in the 21st percentile (-6.3), but that is a symptom of playing with the best player in the NBA. Denver still outscored opponents by 1.1 points per 100 possessions with Brown in the regular season, and his postseason impact was insane.

The Nuggets outscored opponents in the playoffs by 9.4 points per 100 possessions with Brown on the floor. When he played with the starting lineup in place of Caldwell-Pope, they posted a +50.9 net rating and averaged 1.463 points per possession. He even closed out a win in the Finals over Miami, dropping 21 points on 8-of-11 shooting from the floor.

Not only is Brown gone, but so too is Jeff Green who averaged 7.8 points, 2.6 rebounds and 1.2 assists in 56 regular season games last season. And while Brown and Green might not register as massive losses for some, their departures are magnified by who is taking on their roles this season.

In the frontcourt behind Gordon and Jokic is a mix of unproven talent, as Zeke Nnaji and Peyton Watson are currently penciled in as the primary backup options for Jokic and Gordon.

Nnaji averaged only 14.7 minutes last season, and when he played center, which were 80% of his minutes, the Nuggets were outscored by 7.8 points per 100 possessions. Nnaji is athletic enough to get up the floor in transition on offense, and he is good enough from distance that he needs to be respected from the perimeter, but he is slight for a five and has never been an effective rebounder. Watson appeared in only nine games his rookie season and is a massive unknown from a production standpoint.

Bettors might remember Christian Braun playing impactful minutes in the Finals, but the reality is Braun averaged only 4.7 points and 2.4 rebounds in 15.5 minutes per game. His role will be exponentially larger this season. Of the three players penciled in on the two deep only one - Nnaji - has more than two years of experience. Rookie Jalen Pickett, who signed a four-year, \$8.3 million deal, will even play a role for this team in the regular season.

There is a core of veterans on this bench too. However, they do come with their flaws.

It has been eight seasons since DeAndre Jordan positively impacted a team's net rating (-17.2 efficiency differential last season). Reggie Jackson will also take on a much bigger role for the Nuggets this season now that Brown is gone. Jackson can be an effective offensive player and off-ball guard, but having him as the primary scoring guard is not ideal. He has not finished better than the 29th percentile in points per shot attempt in the last two seasons.

Once the postseason begins, this team will be as formidable as it was last season. But, this regular season will be about developing young players for larger roles once the postseason begins, and that could lead to an overall decline from the production this team had last season.

WIN TOTAL ANALYSIS

The bench might be worse than it was last season, but Denver's schedule might allow it to still finish as one of the top three seeds in the Western Conference.

According to Positive Residual, the Nuggets have the lowest strength of schedule (.485). Denver's net rest advantage is even, with only nine games with an advantage and nine with a disadvantage, and it is also among the 10 teams with the fewest back-to-backs (13) this season.

As bettors also know, they have one of the stronger homecourt advantages in the NBA. Last year the Nuggets went 44-8 SU/30-21-1 ATS in both the regular and postseasons. Denver outscored opponents by 11.0 points per 100 possessions at home in the regular season in non-garbage time. That was the second-best net rating at home in the league. Should they hold serve at home once more this team will push to surpass its win total.

But, this is not the same team. At the top, the elite talent remains, but the depth is unproven. It is likely that the Nuggets will make sure the young role players on this roster get plenty of run throughout the regular season, as they will need to be ready for what Denver hopes to be another run at a championship.

Those factors and the highest win total on the board equate to a play on the Under. The Nuggets are a threat to win the NBA Finals once again, but to ask this team to win 55 or more games when there are so many unknown factors on the bench is not a wager worth making.

WIN TOTAL RECOMMENDATION

UNDER 54.5

Preview By
Jonathan Von Tobel



VSiN

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