

NBA

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on the court but in the locker room as well. Veteran experience and leadership are qualities Orlando needed badly last season, especially when the Indiana Pacers soundly trounced the Magic in the post-season. Grant will also provide tenacious rebounding, taking some of the burden off of Shaquille O'Neal. Shaq will have a monster season this year, and is virtually a lock to capture the league scoring title this campaign. **Key to the season:** Will the Magic fans forgive Anfernee Hardaway for his contract holdout, or will it affect his attitude and game throughout the season?

3. New Jersey Nets. With a pair of superstars like Derrick Coleman and Kenny Anderson leading the way, the Nets should have another decent year. Chuck Daly stepped down as head coach and was replaced by Butch Beard, formerly of Howard University. This was a major blow to the squad, because Daly is one of the elite basketball strategists. Beard inherits the unenviable tasks of trying to keep Coleman happy and trying to get center Benoit Benjamin to play up to his potential. Draft pick Yinka Dare, the 7'1" center from George Washington, probably won't be an impact player this season, as he needs a few seasons to refine his skills and develop into a force in the league. With Ben-

jamin as his role model, Dare's chances of becoming an impact player are hindered, but hopefully Nets' management knows this. **Key to the season:** More productivity from Coleman and an adaptation to a new coaching style are crucial to any success the Nets may enjoy in 1994.

4. Miami Heat. Something just seems to always be missing for the Heat, who have yet to advance past the first round of the NBA playoffs. Last season was a big one for Miami, however, as the team posted a winning record for the first season ever. Still, mediocrity seems to be the norm for this team. Draft pick Khalid Reeves has the talent to make a major impact, but the Heat are so guard-heavy that Reeves may not get the minutes he needs to develop into a key member of the franchise. However, if Reeves does join the regular rotation and the rest of the team stays injury-free, Miami could move past New Jersey in the division standings. **Key to the season:** Center Rony Seikaly and forward John Salley must give Miami a respectable low-post offense to allow the teams' shooters to remain effective.

5. Boston Celtics. Perhaps the most active man the NBA last summer was M.L. Carr, the Celtics' new head of basketball operations. Carr acquired some instant scoring for the team by signing free agent Dominique Wilkins, the aging but

spry small forward who averaged 26 points per game last season. In addition, talented swingman Blue Edwards and forward/center Pervis Ellison came aboard. Dino Radja was a pleasant surprise last season, as the Croatian forward led the team in points scored and rebounds. Unfortunately, the team as a whole is aging and needs to rebuild. **Key to the season:** Rookie center Eric Montross must develop into a legitimate NBA center in order for the Celtics to have a legitimate shot at a .500 record.

6. Washington Bullets. This is a team on the rise, and one that could win a significant amount of games. That hinges, of course, on whether they can get first-round pick Juwan Howard signed and playing. However, a starting five of Tom Gugliotta, Rex Chapman, Kevin Duckworth, Scott Skiles, and Don MacLean isn't too bad. When Howard eventually joins the team, he may force MacLean to the bench, but that will give the team depth. Gheorghe Muresan, the monstrous 7'7" center who was taken in the second round last season, may become a force this season. Muresan can score, and obviously rebounding and shot blocking aren't a problem. If he could just increase his foot speed, he would be downright frightening. Despite all of these bright spots, Washington shouldn't win more than 35 games this year, and will

likely return to the draft lottery. **Key to the season:** Every season, center Kevin Duckworth "re-dedicates" himself to working hard and getting in shape. If it actually happened, for a change, he could become a true leader for a team in need of one.

7. Philadelphia 76ers. The pieces are slowly coming together for this team but certainly not quickly enough to help this season. John Lucas bailed out of San Antonio and joined the Sixers as head coach and general manager. He should motivate the players and keep them reasonably happy, but lack of experience will limit what Lucas can do. Center Shawn Bradley is a big question mark because of a recurring knee injury. Clarence Weatherspoon, who moves from power forward to small forward this season, is a dangerous player who scores and rebounds. Changing positions will help Weatherspoon immensely, as he will be matched against players closer to his size at the small forward position. Filling in the power forward spot will be rookie Sharone Wright, a 6'11" intimidator who was the sixth player taken in last summer's NBA draft. This trio of front-court players could eventually develop into the most devastating in the league, but that is still years away. **Key to the season:** Will John Lucas be able to provide the same inspiration to the 76ers that he brought to San Antonio two seasons ago?

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