

## SPORTS FACE OFF:

## NBA Finals predictions

Duncan and the Spurs will kick it into high gear

The Heat will burn the competition

McDonnell  
Clackamas Print



The San Antonio Spurs are hands down the best team in the league, and will win the Championship.

The Spurs are a real team; every player contributes and plays a big role in the team's success. They don't just have one or two guys doing it all, it's a team effort. Yes they have superstar Tim Duncan, and fortunately for San Antonio he is a smart player and knows how to use his teammates to perfection. The Spurs are fundamentally sound and don't make many mistakes down the court, they're just solid. They are built for teamwork and play a disciplined style of basketball, and that is key to winning championships, which is why they are their year.

Another reason San Antonio is going to win this year is their coach. The Spurs have a coach who many consider to be one of the best coaches in the NBA in Gregg Popovich. Popovich has been in the NBA numerous times and has seen it all. He is one of the few coaches that has total control over his team at all times, and that is why he'll lead San Antonio to championships once again.

Former MVP Tim Duncan and fellow MVP Manu Ginobili, who the Spurs acquired from New York, make up the rest of the team to get much needed help. Tim Duncan averages 24 points and 11 rebounds per game, which alone will give any team a hard time down low, but it's his surrounding cast that truly makes the Spurs

win. Behind Duncan and Mohammed, San Antonio has two big bodies that will definitely make an impact. Rasho Nesterovic and Tony Massenburg are 7 feet and 6 feet, 9 inches, respectively, and weighing over 250 pounds. To add to that, two huge guys like that is going to be a big when facing big men like Shaq's Steven Hunter and Amare Stoudemire, and potentially the Wallaces from Detroit or Shaq and the Heat in the Finals. They will especially come into play if the "hack a Shaq" strategy came

into plan.

The best thing about these Spurs is their bench, and there is a lot more to it than just Nesterovic and Massenburg. San Antonio has one of the deepest if not the deepest bench in the league. They have a clutch veteran forward who is always a threat to hit the long ball in Robert Horry, and a former all star who provides some offensive spark in Glenn Robinson. Each of them plays a huge role and make tough matchups for most opposing teams' bench players.

Another thing that the Spurs have that nobody else does is Bruce Bowen. Bowen is a defensive specialist that will give them a defensive lift, who just happens to be one of the team's best three-point shooters as well.

With Duncan alone San Antonio is impressive, but with the contributions they constantly get from all these other forwards they are simply dominating. Oh, and what about the back court? The only word I can think of to describe the play of the Spurs' guards this playoff is flawless.

Manu Ginobili and Tony Parker have been amazing and will continue to be so. So far in the playoffs, they have averaged a little more than 40 points per game. They both have also averaged a little more than four assists per game as well, proving to be too much for opposing teams.

The Spurs have shown they are a dominant force and proved to be one of the front-runners for the title. Only time will tell if they truly can do it, but take my advice and put your money on San Antonio.

HEAT

Michael McCormack  
Sports Editor

I watched the first game of the Miami-Detroit match-up and thought to myself, "Do I really think the Heat are going to beat the defending champs?"

Your darn tootin' I do, even after that game one mishap. And not only do I believe the Heat will win the East, they will go on to win their first title in franchise history. But in order for this to happen, they have to feed the ball to the big man down the stretch.

The Heat acquired Shaquille O'Neal for this time of the year; playoffs are coming down to the end, and now is the time for "Shaq Daddy" to shine. O'Neal is bar none the most dominating force in the game, but no one really knows how much that thigh injury is affecting him. If he is going to be out on the floor, he needs to play with the intensity we all know he has.

The big man will have to face tough foes in the final two series, like Ben Wallace and a possible match-up with Tim Duncan and company, but I know he knows he can take over if he wants it.

Shaq's surrounding cast is not too shabby in their own right, led by second year phenom, Dwayne Wade. Wade has averaged 27.2 points per game in the post-season, not to mention 7.9 assists per game.

In game one against the Pistons, Wade had a sub-par game, but he has proved he is a professional and I will look forward to seeing a big series from him. Wade is simply too quick for Chauncey Billups to guard, and when the Heat

gets to finals, Bruce Bowen of the Spurs will have a tough time guarding the slashing "D-Wade." Wade needs to focus on being the leader and create shots for his teammates, and not focus on scoring so much.

At the other guard spot the Heat have a pair of basketball Jonesers in Damon and Eddie. The Jones are both averaging over 14 points per game in the playoffs, while shooting a combined 45 percent from beyond the arc. If the Heat are patient on offense and feed Shaq the ball, he will be able to play off the double-team and will find the open man. Wade also needs to get past his man more often and create a collapse in the defense for the knockout.

The Heat is so deadly from all spots on the court, and just too athletic and versatile to be beaten. It is a tough road to the Finals from here on out, with the Pistons and eventually San Antonio (I don't think the Suns stand a chance in the West), but Shaq has been here before and will take Miami under his wing.

As for a real prediction in the final two series of season, the Heat will get it back together in game two against the Pistons, and find that groove we saw in the first two rounds. The key to winning this series is to get Ben Wallace into foul trouble, and keep the Pistons under 90 points. Miami wins the series in seven games.

In the Finals, the Spurs have no one to guard Shaq; he is just too big for the likes of Nazr Mohammed and Rasho Nesterovic to guard. They can go ahead and throw the "hack-a-Shaq" on, but that will just give Shaq a rest on that ill-fated thigh. And as for the perimeter game, the Heat have great shooters, to go along with flashy players such as Wade and Keyon Dooling. I don't think the Spurs have the legs to keep up with the Heat's floor game. In the end the Heat take the finals in six games, and Kazzam himself will win the MVP.

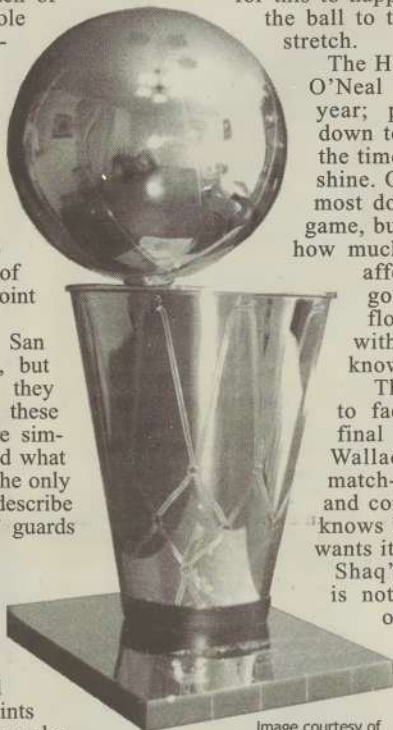


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