

## TOP 5 NBA PREDICTIONS

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### 1. Los Angeles Clippers

The Clippers pulled off a heist this offseason, stealing NBA Finals MVP Kawhi Leonard from the Toronto Raptors and somehow convincing the Oklahoma City Thunder to trade all-star Paul George to them. The Clippers are the most well rounded team in the league, with defensive ace Patrick Beverley, up-and-comer Landry Shamet and all-around center JaMychal Green surrounding George and Leonard. Off the bench, they have scoring specialist Lou Williams, 20 points a game last season, along with veterans Maurice Harkless, Montrezl Harrell, Patrick Patterson and Ivica Zubac. These Clippers have the potential to lead the entire league in wins this season and will have the opportunity to hoist the first Larry O'Brien trophy for LA's "other team."

### 2. Philadelphia 76ers

The 76ers are getting bigger while the rest of the league is going towards small ball. With Ben Simmons, Josh Richardson, Tobias Harris, Joel Embiid and offseason addition Al Horford, the Sixers will be able to match up at any position. The signing of Horford was sneakily very good, stealing him from a conference rival, seeing as he's one of the only players who can guard Embiid. Losing Jimmy Butler and JJ Redick hurt, but getting Richardson from the Miami Heat in the Butler trade will benefit Simmons, Harris, and Embiid as they will get more touches. The Sixers have a chance to lead the Eastern Conference in victories this season, and if Simmons can add a 3-point shot, he could be in the MVP conversation.

### 3. Milwaukee Bucks

Giannis Antetokounmpo, the reigning MVP, and co-star Khris Middleton will look to take Milwaukee past the Eastern Conference Finals, where they lost to the eventual champions in six games after blowing a 2-0 lead. The Bucks added veterans Kyle Korver and Robin Lopez to a team that did not have a lot of depth last year. They lost their starting shooting guard Malcolm Brogdon, arguably their second best player in the playoffs, to Indiana, but that is their only position that is currently not as strong. If Antetokounmpo develops a jump shot, there isn't anyone in the league that can stop him, and he could lead Milwaukee to new heights.

### 4. Denver Nuggets

The Nuggets retain their entire starting lineup from the team that advanced to the Western Conference semifinals last season before losing in seven games. The Nuggets have one of the deepest teams in the NBA, with scorer Malik Beasley coming off the bench along with three solid veterans in center Mason Plumlee, forward Jerami Grant, and guard Monte Morris. The key factor for the Nuggets will be the play of Michael Porter Jr., who was once seen as the consensus number one player in his draft class only to get injured and have to sit out his rookie season. If Porter plays as well as he used to, the Nuggets are going to be scary with him alongside MVP candidate Nikola Jokic and rising star Jamal Murray.

### 5. Los Angeles Lakers

LeBron James and Anthony Davis are the two stars of Hollywood this season. Davis was acquired in an offseason trade that sent the majority of the Lakers depth to New Orleans in exchange for a franchise-altering player. The Lakers do not have a lot of depth after this trade, however when you have two stars like LeBron and Davis, you might not need too much depth. Their best offseason pick up was sharp-shooter Danny Green who's shot 40% from three for his career and has two NBA championships to his name. The X-factor for the Lakers will be young star Kyle Kuzma, who will be backing up Davis at the forward spot. If the Lakers want a chance to compete for a championship, Kuzma will have to improve his 3-point stroke from 30.3% last season. The more spacing the Lakers have around James and Davis, the better their odds at shooting for a championship.

BY JACOB THOMPSON  
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### 1. HOUSTON ROCKETS

After back-to-back great regular seasons, the Rockets were once again knocked out of the playoffs by the Golden State Warriors. The failures added to an already souring relationship between Chris Paul and James Harden and led to Paul being traded for Russell Westbrook. The reunion of Harden and Westbrook should be the most exciting basketball to watch this season as Golden State looks to rebound after losing Kevin Durant (now with the Brooklyn Nets) and Klay Thompson (ACL tear.) With Eric Gordon, PJ Tucker and Clint Capela rounding out the starting lineup, Houston could have the highest scoring offense in the NBA this year, but the question lingers: is there enough ball to go around? Houston averaged 102 offensive possessions per game last season. Together, Harden and Westbrook took shots on almost half of those possessions. With both players favoring an isolation style of play, it feels like things will go either wonderfully or terribly in South Texas this season.

### 2. GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS

Even without Durant, the Warriors seemed like they were going to be fine. Steph Curry is one of the most consistent shooters in NBA history shooting 47.7% from the field. With Curry's uncanny ability to score, Draymond Green's ability to step up wherever the team needs him and the addition of D'Angelo Russell, the Warriors looked like they would continue to be one of the best teams in the NBA. Even if Golden State got off to a rocky start, Thompson was going to come back from the ACL tear and help the Warriors return to championship form. That changed Tuesday morning when Head Coach Steve Kerr announced he doesn't think his stellar shooting guard will return this season according to reports per NBC Sports Bay Area. Golden State still has a lot of talent, but No. 2 now seems out of reach.

### 3. MILWAUKEE BUCKS

Before last season, the Bucks hadn't made it out of the first round of the NBA playoffs since 2000, but now there really is a reason to "fear the deer." Giannis Antetokounmpo is coming off an MVP season where he led the Bucks in points per game, rebounds per game and assists per game. During the offseason Milwaukee was able to resign Khris Middleton, who was the team's second leading scorer averaging 18.3 ppg, and added Robin Lopez, Wesley Matthews and Kyle Korver. The Greek Freak and the Bucks should run the Eastern Conference this season, especially with the departure of Kawhi Leonard from the Toronto Raptors.

### 4. LOS ANGELES LAKERS

Never count out King James, especially when he has the most talented big man, Anthony Davis, in the game on his team. Last year was the first time in 14 years that James didn't make the postseason and people were starting to wonder if the King had lost a step in his old age (he's 34.) James missed 27 games in the 2018-19 season, (the most he's ever missed in a single season,) but last season's light workload will lead to LeBron looking fresh and ready to make a run at another title. Speaking of someone who's ready to make a run at a championship, "The Brow" has had a lot of success in the NBA regular season, but in his seven-year career has only played in the postseason twice. Soon, that will change — Davis and James will be deadly in the pick and roll so prepare yourself for the return of Show Time.

### 5. PHILADELPHIA 76ERS

"The Process" brought the 76ers back from the dead and they should continue their run as one of the most dominating teams in the Eastern Conference. If Joel Embiid can stay healthy, he has proven he has all the skills to be an MVP-caliber player. Add Ben Simmons' constant development of skills and Al Horford's veteran leadership and Philadelphia is primed for a top finish in a weak Eastern