

Asians in American sports • Asian Americans in world sports

Lin and Spoelstra face new NBA challenges next season

By Mike Street

Special to The Asian Reporter

It was a good, but not great, year for the Asian-American standouts in the National Basketball Association (NBA), but better days should lie ahead. Sparkplug Chinese-American point guard Jeremy Lin and the Houston Rockets reached the playoffs but lost in the first round, while Filipino-American coach Erik Spoelstra and his Miami Heat made the NBA Finals for the fourth straight season, but lost for the second time in that span. Both men will face new challenges next season, as Lin will play for a team in his home state of California while Spoelstra will try to replicate his success without his team's — and the league's — best player.

After Lin's breakthrough season with the New York Knicks in 2011-2012, he signed a three-year, \$25-million deal with the Houston Rockets. They expected Lin to electrify the moribund Rockets with his "Linsanity," since the team had failed to reach the playoffs for three straight seasons. That first year, Lin started all 82 games as the team's point guard, but he didn't build on his numbers from the year before; nearly all of his stats remained the same, while his assists and points per game declined.

Lin still had value to the Rockets, ranking third on the team in points and 22nd in the league in assists, but he also ranked 19th worst in the league for turnovers and was not considered a strong defender. Feeling his skills were too similar to rookie superstar James Harden, Houston moved Lin to the bench last season in favor of a backcourt of Harden and Patrick Beverley.

Even as a bench player, Lin still scored the fifth-most points on the team last season while improving his performance at the free-throw line and beyond the three-point arc. But the Rockets wanted to clear some salary cap room to pursue free agent Chris Bosh, and many expected Houston to trade their Asian-American star.

Lin got the clearest sign of his future when free agent Carmelo Anthony visited Houston, and the team posted a huge sign of Anthony in a Rockets jersey near the entrance to the arena. The sign showed Anthony wearing number 7, his current number in New York — and Lin's current number in Houston.

In the end, Houston traded Lin to Los Angeles, who already have an aging point guard in Steve Nash, but Nash only started 10 games for the Lakers last season due to nerve problems in his back and legs. His mentorship, and any more time lost to injury, could allow Lin to return to the starting lineup and dish to superstar Kobe Bryant and free agent acquisition Carlos Boozer, all under the watchful eye of new head coach Byron Scott. A fresh start could be just the thing to inspire Lin to his former glory.

While Erik Spoelstra wasn't looking for a fresh start for his Miami Heat, a lineup shakeup seemed inevitable after



AP Photo/Greg Wahl-Stephens

the San Antonio Spurs dominated the Heat, four games to one, in the 2014 NBA Finals, winning those four games by an average of 18 points. Miami, for its part, won its lone game by just two points and generally looked like the challenger instead of the defender of back-to-back championships. A three-peat had seemed inevitable for the Heat's star-studded lineup.

In 2010, Miami orchestrated a sign-and-trade deal with the Cleveland Cavaliers for LeBron James, basketball's best player. James joined point guard Dwyane Wade and power forward and center Chris Bosh, both regarded as among the top players at their positions.

Blessed with such a trio, Erik Spoelstra faced heavy expectations to not just win, but dominate and take home a championship. The team reached the NBA Finals in the first season with the Big Three, but fell to the Dallas Mavericks. This created a mini-crisis for Spo, whose contract expired at the end of the 2010-2011 season, and some wondered if the Heat would keep the league's first Asian-American head coach.

Heat team president Pat Riley, who has also served as Spoelstra's mentor, showed his continuing confidence in Spo by inking him to a two-season extension. In those two years, Spoelstra led the Heat to back-to-back championships, and no one was surprised when Miami



AP Photo/Michael Conroy

OFFSEASON ACTIVITY. Jeremy Lin (left photo, #7), a Houston Rocket for the past two seasons, is now a Los Angeles Laker. Erik Spoelstra (right photo), head coach of the Miami Heat for the past six seasons, remains at the helm while the organization endures the loss and gain of players during the offseason.

signed him to yet another extension last year, one that Riley said would make Spoelstra their coach for "a long, long time."

That confidence is sure to be helpful after this year's disappointing finish to another excellent season.

The biggest question after the Spurs won the championship was the fate of LeBron James, whose contract was ending. Rather than continue with his talented teammates in Miami, James chose to return home to Cleveland and help rebuild the Cavaliers.

Scrambling to shore up the team in his absence, Miami quickly re-signed Chris Bosh to a five-year deal, beating out a lucrative four-year offer from the Rockets. Then they inked Wade to a two-year contract, ensuring that two of the Big Three would return for Spo's next season.

Spo and Riley have further choices to make, like re-signing free agents Michael Beasley and Greg Oden, but they are ensured the services of excellent role players like Chris "Birdman" Anderson, Mario Chalmers, Luol Deng, and Udonis Haslem.

Most of all, however, they have the steady hand of Erik Spoelstra at the helm, who has 314 victories in six seasons with the Heat. At that rate, he could become the team's winningest coach by 2018, possibly passing Riley's 454 Miami wins. Bright futures like this will give Asian-American sports fans plenty to look forward to from Lin and Spoelstra in 2015 and beyond.

Chinese man brings gay conversion therapy lawsuit

Continued from page 4

not offer," said Li. "The staff told my client the electric shock felt like 'being bit by a mosquito,' but it turned out not to be."

A man at the clinic in southwest Chongqing city said he had no comment and hung up. Baidu said in an e-mailed statement that it doesn't comment on cases that are in the legal process.

The lawyer said they were asking for compensation of more than 14,000 yuan (\$2,300) to cover the cost of the therapy, the plane journey to Chongqing, and lost earnings due to the trip. In addition, they are demanding an apology on the websites of both companies, he said.

Li said a judgement should be given within six months.

A man from the court's

duty office said he had no information about the case and referred calls to the general office where no one answered.

The Beijing LGBT Center organized a demonstration outside the court ahead of the hearing, with a handful of people holding banners with slogans including "Homosexuality is Not a Disease, We Don't Need to be Cured." Xin played a doctor who pretended to give another demonstrator laying down on the sidewalk electric shock treatment.

Chinese society is increasingly accepting of gays and lesbians, although same-sex partnerships are not recognized and no laws outlaw discrimination against sexual minorities.

AP researcher Fu Ting in Shanghai contributed to this report.

You don't need to be a **SUPERHERO** to manage your diabetes.

You need to control your **ABCs**.

If you have diabetes, you are at high risk for heart attack and stroke. But you can fight back. You can control the ABCs of diabetes and live a long and healthy life. Ask your health care provider what your **A** (A1C), **B** (blood pressure), and **C** (cholesterol) numbers are and ask what they should be. Then talk about the steps you can take to reach your ABC goals. You have the power to help prevent heart attack and stroke. Control your ABCs.

Talk to your health care provider today.

For a free brochure about the ABCs of diabetes, call 1-800-438-5383 or visit www.ndep.nih.gov.

A message from the National Diabetes Education Program, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Find us on **Facebook**

YOU DON'T WANT THEM RESPONDING TO YOUR TEXT.

STOP TEXTS STOP WRECKS.ORG

Ad Council NHTSA

CONSERVE TODAY—REAP THE REWARDS TOMORROW!