

Introduction

Usually, this introduction is a place for us to talk about the value of statistical analysis and how it has helped NBA teams win. This year calls for a slightly different tack. The moral of the 2010 postseason, after all, was more about misleading statistics. By no measure did the Boston Celtics look like an elite team after limping into the playoffs with an 11-11 record in March and April. The defending champion Los Angeles Lakers claimed the Western Conference's top seed, meanwhile, but did so with a point differential that ranked third in the West.

Ultimately, those numbers did not matter during the playoffs. The Celtics and Lakers both found additional gears, demonstrating that their regular-season performance painted an inaccurate picture of their ability. While we weren't fooled by the Lakers' middling numbers, both of us picked against Boston prior to the Celtics' upset wins over Cleveland and Orlando.

The lesson here is not to abandon statistics entirely. After all, the Celtics' run was noteworthy precisely because it was so unlikely and unexpected. The NBA's grueling seven-game series leave relatively little room for the kind of fluke outcomes that are commonplace in the MLB and NFL postseasons; more often than not teams perform to their regular-season level during the playoffs. Instead, the takeaway is a healthy humility about the limitations of statistical analysis, which cannot account for every external factor like health or even motivation.

Because there is so much in the sport of basketball that still defies easy quantification, the APBRmetrics community has always been open to incorporating the scouting process. The battle lines have been drawn much less sharply between basketball's traditional thinkers and the progressive-minded newcomers who champion analytics. Often, statistical research has backed up the game's conventional wisdom. Long before he was the Michael Lewis-approved face of basketball's answer to *Moneyball*, Shane Battier was simply the kind of player a coach loved to have on his team.

That kind of common ground has made it easy for statistical analysts to infiltrate NBA front offices in increasing numbers. In March, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that half of the league's teams now have at least one person responsible for statistical analysis. Some, like the Houston Rockets and the Portland Trail Blazers, boast much larger teams of analysts working together. For new general managers like Portland's Rich Cho, an understanding of the numbers has become a selling point.

At Basketball Prospectus, we strive to bring the same level of insight and detail to covering and analyzing the NBA game. After a successful debut edition of the *Pro Basketball Prospectus*, we're back with improvements to our core statistic, Wins Above Replacement Player (WARP), and our SCHOENE projection system. With the addition of D-League Translations to our arsenal, we have 2010-11 projections for more than 500 players as well as every team.

In addition to team essays and player capsules, you'll also find a variety of essays in the back of the book. Fantasy players will want to check out our SCHOENE fantasy projections, which account for player development and some measure of team context, as well as an essay highlighting where those projections differ from conventional wisdom. We also compare the level of play in the best leagues in the world outside the NBA and consider what might be the most important story of the upcoming season--the looming possibility of a lockout next summer.

If you're new to Basketball Prospectus, get ready to enhance your understanding of the NBA game and statistical analysis with detailed information about every player who took the floor in 2009-10 and this year's newcomers. For veteran readers, we hope the quality of our analysis continues to live up to our high standards.

Thanks for reading and enjoy!

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