

Final Report: Team Fantasy

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2019 NBA Fantasy Draft Aid

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Introduction

Fantasy sports have been a popular way for fans to get more knowledgeable and interested into the sports they love. One of the most popular fantasy sports people participate in is fantasy basketball for the NBA. Everyone wants to have the best team over the other members in their competitive standard league. Thus, the problem becomes how to select the best player in each round from the remaining list of players? What dataset should we look at from players? Which category is the most crucial for fantasy player to win the top one?

Again, one of the most popular fantasy sports people participate in is fantasy basketball for the NBA. It has a vast number of fans. There is no doubt they all want to get a good team. They can act as owners, managers and coaches of their team by drafting a team. Many of them are new to this game. Once a team has been drafted, the league determines which statistics will be counted as fantasy points and how many fantasy points each statistic is worth. For example, a block counts for 1 fantasy points while a steal counts for 2. After this has been set and the NBA season begins, each night the fantasy points for each participant is totaled and the participant at the end of the regular season with the most fantasy points wins. Therefore, when drafting players one needs to be able to analyze players pasts statistics, predict future player statistics and weigh them based on the determine fantasy point scoring system to draft a team that will make them the optimal amount of points for the season. Thus, it is very helpful for them if they can use some tools or data set of the basketball data. That is why we are going to create a shiny app to help users get familiar with players and their data. We believe it will be a great tool for them to enjoy and select the best players in each round.

Description of Data

The original dataset was found on the website <http://www.basketball-reference.com> and includes all the total statistics of each player in the league for the past five season. The statistics include 3 point shots, 2 point shots, free throws, offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds, steals, blocks, turnovers and fouls. This dataset was then used to create prediction data to be used in the shiny app. The prediction data includes each players predicted statistic for each season based on our linear model as well as the predictions for each statistic in the 2019 season.

Course Connection

Our idea includes many skills from the course which is about the statistical programming. For example, we are using the knowledge of how to import a dataset from the csv file online. There does need the skills of

subsetting data from the course. We divide the position of basketball into our shiny app. Later on, we provide some graphs between many variables to see why such a player is good or bad to pick at this point. We have used many packages, such as ggplot2, readr, and stirngr. We also clean data by the skill of tidy data we have learned from the class. We are providing visual representation of the data in the form of graphs which will compare players, as well as, coding a shiny app for fantasy league participants to easily customize the data pipeline to their personal fantasy league rules. Overall, we have already using a lot of skills from courses.

Related Work

Some people had tried to analyze the data to prepare for the draft strategy for the new season in 14-team basketball league. He took the data from cutting and copying on ESPN.com and NBA.com. He put a flat file of the top 250 players from the previous season. Then he created a binary variable for the top 42 players (3 players per 14 teams). The “1” means the player is a top 3 players, otherwise he is not. He used 28 independent variables from the previous season to identify the “top 42 players”. He came up with conclusions that field-goal percentage, assist and blocks are the difference-makers because most players in NBA are good at points and rebounds. However, assists and blocks are rarer so that they are more valuable to a fantasy team.

Other projects include computing the average stats for each categories of players. Some of the other are having the graph comparing the specific player and league’s average. Or group comes up data calculating the standard deviation to see how far away a player is from average. Comparing to other projects, our group use the bigger dataset. Most projects are using previous year’s dataset for predicting the future data. We use the data in the past five years to make a more precise prediction for player’s future performance. One of the most difference is that our group use the Shiny app in R. Most projects online are only included complex graphs or prolix passages that make reader hard to understand their ideas. For us, we make the Shiny app that looks clear for people to manipulate. For example, we have provided a lot of input table on the left of our app, such as the weight of point, the weight of rebound, player name, the player you would like to compare to and player stat to study. People can input their data in each of them. Then they can look at each player’s trend data whether they are getting better or worse or the graph comparison between players. It is very simple for people to control in the app. Most of the data fantasy NBA participants want it exist in the app. If they want to see the difference between players, they also can type in two players’ name to see the comparison. Thus, user can figure out what type of player they are looking for. Thus, our app is serving as a recommender for fantasy basketball player to select what kind of player they want.

Methods

The methodology for our group project will closely follow the analytical data pipelines phases. As we need to import data related to basketball players off the internet we will need to use SelectorGadget as well as the rvest package to scrape this information offline. We plan to import the data from <http://www.basketball-reference.com> assuming that we have continued success in scraping from that site. Then we will have to tidy the data, so it is likely we will need stringr, rvest, and tidyr.

Our goal in tidying the data is to have the data organized so that each player’s average score during a year in the NBA is an observation. So, for every year a player has played in the NBA they would have an extra observation. Each observation would contain the name, organization, position, and age of the player. Along with these three factor variables and one-time variable, likely an integer, we will have statistics variables for the average of the season, likely some form of numeric. The desired statistics follow the most widely used statistics in fantasy NBA under the point-based scoring method, where each statistical category counts for a set number of points. The categories likely to be used are points, rebounds, assists, offensive blocks, defensive blocks, steals, fouls, turnovers, field goal percentage, and free throw percentage.

How we plan to model our NBA league will directly impact how we transform the data, so it must be

discussed. NBA fantasy can be done many ways, but the way we are going to be analyzing is based on the fantasy points method of NBA fantasy. In this method the group playing sets each statistic to have a point value and the points for your fantasy team are calculated real time. At the end of the season those with more points win. This model seemed the most straight forward in implementing our project. It will also allow for a large amount of user customization when the project is done, as a group of friends can decide how many points each statistic is worth, or if they are worth none.

Then we must transform the data of into some sort of prediction for the coming years data. This part was done using a general linear model with age and age^2 as predictors. This ensures that the model follows reality by being parabolic, because in general basketball players improve until they reach a peak and then get worse after that peak. The other predictor in our model is the name of the player, so that each player has an individual parabola defining each statistic as it changes as the players age.

The visualization part concerns how we display this information in graphs, as well as how we display the entire shiny application. At this moment the overall layout for our shiny app consists of a tab for changing settings on one side, a tab for picking players on the other side, and a list of picked players for each team on the bottom. On the side with players we will have rows sorted by players expected total score next year, highest first. These players will descend the page, each player taking up a row. On the players will be a summary of who they are, along with the current years statistics and our predicted statistics. Next to these numbers will be a button that switches to graphs pertaining to this player. By clicking on multiple boxes, we can see different player comparisons.

Regarding the graphs that we will compose using our data, the graphs are either comparative between players, or analyzing an individual player over time. When comparing players, we will use side by side bar plots with the x axis being source of points and the y axis being amount of points. The bars will be sorted by individual statistic, points with points and assists with assists. This allows direct comparison between the two chosen players to determine who is better at what category, as well as who is better. When analyzing an individual player change throughout time we will use a scatterplot graph with age on the x axis and total points on the y axis. This scatterplot will be accompanied by a best fit regression line to be determined while analyzing the data, although we suspect it to be parabolic with players getting worse with age after they peak. Along with normal points from actual years we will highlight our predicted point, which is the point that our best fit line intersects with next year. The last graph in our analysis is a bar plot displaying points from each statistic next to total points, so that a user can obtain a point breakdown for each player.

In summation we wrote code that retrieves the data for current players as well as these players former years. We then must write code that sorts this data into tidy and usable datasets. Then we wrote a time series model that takes players past NBA performances and predicts next years performance. We then must code a shiny interface that takes these predicted and historic point values and displays them along with players name, team, and position. Lastly, our shiny application must have a way to create graphs that explain different players differences as well as the idea behind our prediction.

Results

The final app outputs a table with the top players from a certain positions based on their total projected fantasy points. The app input allows the user to specify how many of the top players will be in the table so in the case that all the players in the output are picked, they can simply increase the input for the amount of players they would like to be shown. Also, the predicted totals have been adjusted to fit the user's input for weight of each statistic. Along with the table, there are also graph tools one can use to view the predicted data for a player compared to their actual statistics for the past five seasons, a breakdown of a 2019 season fantasy point total for each statistic and a comparison graph where a user can compare two players fantasy point totals for a specific statistic.

Discussion

The results come out with the shiny app. We have fifteen input bars on the left of the app. They are position, weight of 3PT, weight of 2PT, weight of free throws, weight of offensive rebounds, weight of defensive rebounds, weight of assists, weight of steals, weight of blocks, weight of turnovers, weight of fouls, number of players shown in table, search player statistics, player you would like to compare to, and player stat to study. Users can put their specific requirement for their league. Under the “Top Fantasy Picks”, they can see the rank of player by adjusting the number of the player shown. Then users are able to select the player with the highest score if he has not been picked. Users will also look at the player’s situation under the column of the “player actual stats and prediction stats graph”. They can check whether the player is going to his prime or being decline over years. It is critical for users to make the decision. Different league will have different distribution on the weight of player stats. For example, some league will count three points as six points per shot. Others will count defensive rebound as three points per one. It is all about the setting. Thus, under the column of the “player fantasy point distribution”, user can see what is the player’s advantage or drawback on each category. Then they can decide whether they want to pick him according to the rules of their league. When they have difficulty on deciding between choosing two players, they can put two player’s name in the select box to see the comparison graph under the column of the “player comparison graphs of predictions stats”. It is helpful for users when they are in dilemma of choosing one of two players. Therefore, the app reflect our goal well that we provide a fantasy nba recommender for fans to select their optimal choice of player. For the results, we are able to see the result from the four columns on the main panel: Top fantasy picks, player actual stats and prediction stats graph, player fantasy contribution, and player comparison graphs of prediction stats. From the first column, we can get the result that who are the top player all over the list. It will be convenience for users to see the rank. For the second column, user will be glad to see player’s overall trend. For the third column, user will understand which parts are player’s weakness or advantage. For the fourth column, user will always be interesting in contrasting two players. Thus, all the results will be useful and helpful for our fantasy nba fans. #Conclusion

In general, our goal is to help fantasy basketball fans draft their players by analyzing players’ past statistics in order to make the optimal team for themselves. We have created the tool for fantasy NBA participants who will use it during the draft to come out the best team selections. Inside the app, we follow the analytical data pipelines phases. We have imported data from website, and then we tidy the data by using stringr, rvest, and tidyr. For the dataset, we organize each player’s average score. Each observation contain the name, team name, position, weight, age, and so on. The scores come out by the algorithm of fantasy inside, likely each statistical category counts for a set number of points. The variable include points, rebounds, assists, blocks, steals, turnovers, field goal percentage, and free throw percentage. We also use the data to predict for the coming years data by time series modeling. The method is to take every individual player’ statistics to a use series model, so we can predict how individuals will perform next year. After that, the user will be able to see the prediction data set multiplied by a vector of user weight inputs. Inside the App, we also include the visualization part. The overall layout for shiny app consist a tab for changing setting on the left side. There are five columns on the right panel: Introduction, Top Fantasy Picks, Player Actual stats and prediction stats graph, player fantasy point contributions, and player comparison graphs of prediction Stats. Inside the shiny, we will have rows sorted by players expected total score in upcoming year in descending order. In each player’s page, we include some graphs. For the graphs, we compare players and analyze individual player over time. For comparing players, we use side by side bar plots that the x-axis represents points and y-axis represents the transferred fantasy points. It is sorted by many categories of statistics, such as points, rebounds, assists, and so on. We can see directly who is better according to the graphs. For the individual player graph, we use the graph with years on the x-axis and the total fantasy points on the y-axis. It is presented by the best fit regression line to be determined. Again, our fantasy team selector tool include the graphical representations of current and past statistics of players and graphical comparisons of players. By looking at some pre-existing projects, I find out that out project’s novelty is the convenience and clear path to the success of the fantasy NBA life. Some articles are being too long or complex analysis of basketball itself. Others are having no graphs or comparisons between players. Our app can help people tidy the data so that they can click whatever player they want to look at inside the app. What is more, when they have trouble at deciding to select player, they can type two players on the bar to see the comparison. Overall, I

think it will be a great tool for fantasy NBA participants to use.

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Appendix

Variable List

Data is organized in two different ways, by year with each player having 6 observations, or by player, with each player having one observation. The data that is organized by player is split into multiple data sets by player position. All data sets mentioned are in the folder Fantasy_Basketball Variables in the data set organized by player and in the set organized by year all contain the following variables; X1: A number representing the players position in an alphabetically organized list

Name: Player's name, one for each player

Age: Players Age in year 2018

Position: Players Position

Year: Year that the statistic was obtained

Predicted values for the following statistics; 3 point shots, 2 point shots, Free throws, offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds, assists, steals, blocks, turnovers.

Predicted Total is calculated as the sum of all of those prediction statistics

The data set that is organized by year contains these variables as well as the aforementioned ones; FG's, 3 point shots, 2 points shot, free throws, offensive rebounds, defensive rebounds, assists, steals, blocks, turnovers. All basketball statistics are actual or predicted amount of the statistic obtained in a year of basketball.

Below is a list of the datasets that have been used in the shiny apps -

graph_data : This is simply a dataset with all the variables listed above for the players in the past five seasons

all_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for the 2019 season.

pg_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for point guards in the 2019 season.

c_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for center in the 2019 season.

f_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for forwards in the 2019 season.

gf_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for guards and forwards in the 2019 season.

pf_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for power forwards in the 2019 season.

psg_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for point and shooting guards in the 2019 season.

sf_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for small forward in the 2019 season.

sg_data: This dataset is a subset of the graph_dataset with only the prediction data for shooting guards in the 2019 season.