

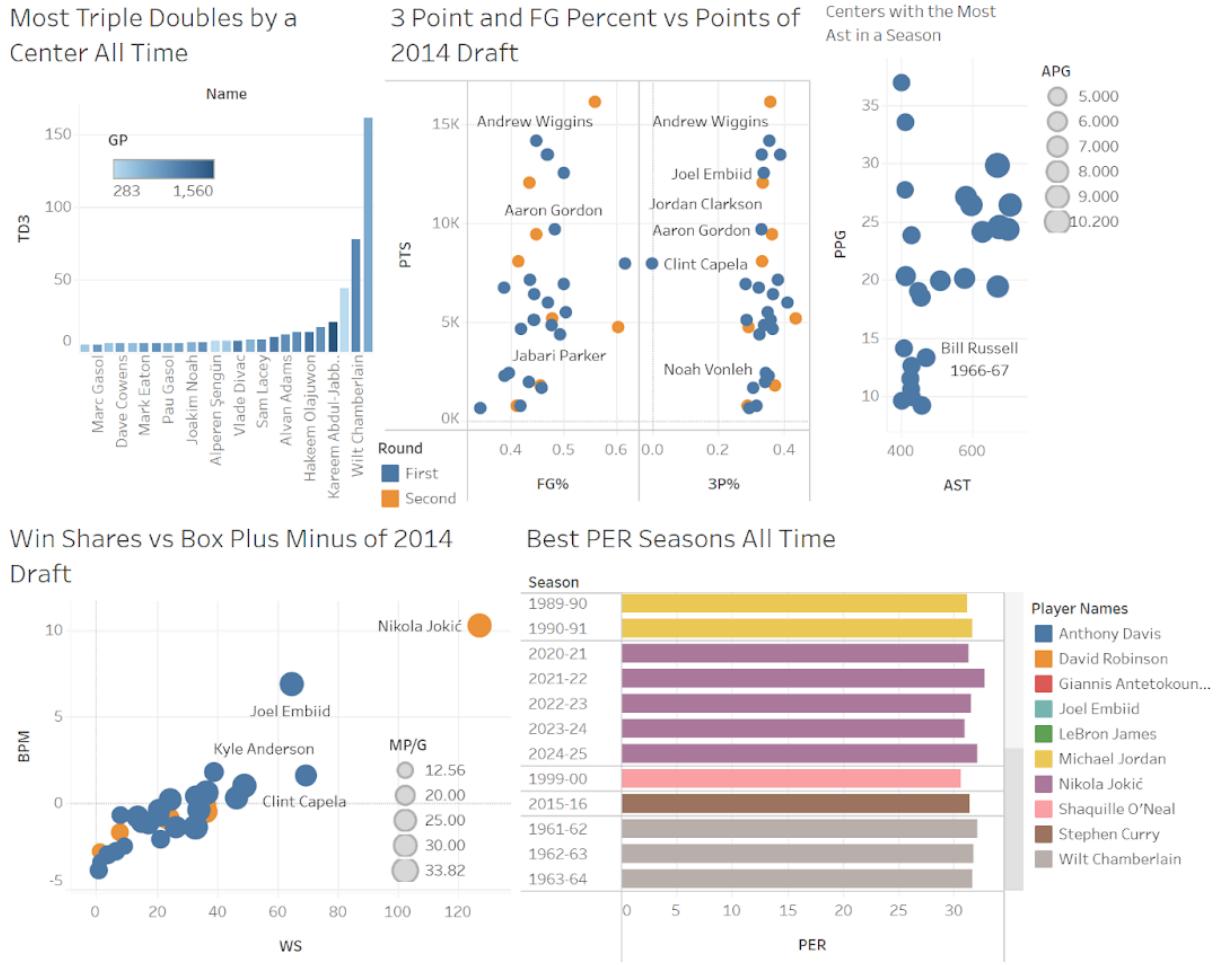
I. Datasets

I chose to take a look at Nikola Jokic and the amazing career he has had. For this I found four separate datasets that were of interest to show just how game changing Jokic has been for the sport. The first of those is from Sports Reference and shows stats for each draft pick in the 2014 draft, where Jokic was picked 41st. It shows basic stats like points, assists, and rebounds as well as more advanced stats like win shares and VORP which are analytical tools to determine a players overall impact (Basketball-Reference, 2014). The next dataset was once again from Sports Reference, this time being a list of the highest individual player efficiency rating (PER) seasons in history (Basketball-Reference, n.d.). The final two datasets both came from Stat Muse and show the centers with the most assists in a single season as well as the centers with the most career triple doubles (these sets also contain other basic stats for the players) (StatMuse, n.d.). A triple double is when a player records ten or more of three separate stats in a game, for example ten points, rebounds, and assists is the most common but steals and blocks can also be included.

II. Preparing Data

I had to do a few small things to get the data ready. First the draft data is filtered so only players with 2000 or minutes played were in the dataset. I did this so only players who got any significant playing time were included and to exclude unimportant data points. I also added a minutes per game column by dividing minutes played by games played. For the PER data a number of players have an asterisk next to their name indicating they are in the Hall of Fame, this bothered me so I created an updated name column that removed the asterisk with the REPLACE function. For the other two datasets no preparation was required to get the data how I desired.

III. Visualization



IV. Visual Storytelling

Nikola Jokic is one of the most interesting players currently in basketball. Not only is he a six foot eleven inch Serbian who possesses one of the most well rounded and versatile skill sets in league history but he is also an extreme enigma. In 2014 Jokic was drafted with the 41st by the Denver Nuggets, making him a second round pick. Very few second round picks end up being good players much less all stars. They certainly had never become an MVP, an award which Jokic now has three of and is looking to add a fourth this year. What makes Jokic's story even crazier is the fact that his selection was not even aired live during the broadcast of the NBA draft. Instead the selection occurred while a Taco Bell commercial was playing on ESPN. 99% of the time a player like this would be lost to the annals of basketball history and never talked about again. But Jokic overcame the odds and blossomed into an NBA legend.

Outside of his interesting draft night Jokic is one of the most nonchalant players of all time and many fans often question if he even likes basketball. After winning the NBA championship in 2023 Jokic was seen visibly distraught after learning he would have to stay in America for a few more days to attend Denver's victory parade. The reason for this being a horse

he owns was racing that Sunday and he wanted to be in Serbia for the race (The Guardian, 2023). The idea that the best basketball player in the world would rather go home to race horses rather than celebrate his championship was baffling to much of the basketball community.

Despite his oddities Nikola Jokic has changed the sport of basketball in drastic ways. He is the quintessential point-forward in the sport today and while not the first he has done it better than anyone before him. A point-forward is a player who has the size of a forward, or in this case center, but also possesses the skills of a point guard such as playmaking and shooting. Most players Jokic's size, 6'11" and over 280 pounds, are back to the basket and traditional post players, meaning they rarely leave the area around the basket known as the paint and excel at dunks, layups, and blocking shots. While Jokic can do all of this well he also can function as Denver's defacto point guard at times.

These claims are backed up by the visualizations. First when comparing him to the rest of his draft class it is clear he is one of if not the greatest steals in draft history. The value he has provided despite being a seemingly random pick is immense. He has far and away the most win shares and highest box plus minus of anyone in his draft class. Win shares represent the total number of wins a player has directly contributed to their team over their career and box plus minus represents the number of points above average a player contributes per 100 possessions. This alone shows just how impactful Jokic has been.

When looking at more basic stats Jokic has over 2000 more points than anyone else in his draft class while having the third best shooting percentage. Being that efficient while scoring so many points is extremely difficult, especially when he does not solely score close to the basket (like Clint Capela who has the highest FG%). His versatility is further on display with his three point shooting. While not the best shooter Jokic more than holds his own against others, some who are even known as shooters such as Jordan Clarkson.

PER attempts to represent a player's per-minute pace-adjusted statistical output. While it does not take into account things not on the stat sheet it is still a very useful tool. Nikola Jokic not only holds the top two seasons in PER all time but he also holds five of the top 25 seasons. The fact that half of his NBA seasons are some of the greatest of all time is simply mind blowing and it is likely he will continue to add great seasons to that list. Only four other players in NBA history even have three seasons in the top 25; Michael Jordan and LeBron James who have four as well as Wilt Chamberlain and Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Finally Jokic's versatility is on full display when it comes to his passing and triple double stats. While there have been shooting big men before such as Dirk Nowitzki there has never been a big with the vision and playmaking of Jokic. He has by far the most triple doubles by a center all time, more than doubling second place Wilt Chamberlain and nearly quadrupling third place Domantas Sabonis. He also has seven of the top ten seasons for most assists by a center. Furthermore despite his insane assist numbers he did not sacrifice points like some other players. For example Wilt Chamberlain was known as an amazing scorer however later in his career he decided to become a better passer which caused him to score significantly less. Jokic is actually the opposite, scoring more points and more assists almost every year.

Most would have expected Nikola Jokic to be a forgotten name but he refused to let that happen. Despite his odd nature and quirks Jokic has become one of the best, most beloved, and most impactful players in the history of basketball. His impact will be felt for generations and kids years from now will admire the kid from Serbia who just wants to race his horses.