

Predicting whether the Lakers will have enough wins to guarantee them a spot in the 2022 – 2023 NBA Playoffs.

About the Project

The NBA can be defined as having 2 distinguished periods throughout a season. The first, is the regular season which consists of 30 teams that play 82 games with the goal of reaching the playoffs, and the second, a postseason tournament to determine the league champion. Prior to the 2020-2021 season, teams that finished within the top 8 seeds in their respective conference, the East and the West, played in the playoffs. However, with the introduction of the play-in tournament¹, the top 6 teams from each conference are now guaranteed a spot in the playoffs while teams that finished the season between 7th and 10th place competed for the final 2 spots. This means that a team with a worse record may go to the playoffs. Therefore, this analysis will look at the statistics of an NBA team to determine whether a team will achieve enough wins to finish the season within the top 6 places from each conference, guaranteeing the team a spot in the playoffs.

This analysis will look specifically at the Los Angeles Lakers.

Key Questions

1. How many wins, on average, does a team that is guaranteed a spot in the playoffs achieve during the regular season?
2. Which variable correlates the most to wins during the regular season?
3. How can we predict the NRtg (net rating) for a team?
4. Will the Los Angeles Lakers achieve enough wins to guarantee them a spot in the playoffs?

Key Insights

1. Teams in the Western Conference that were guaranteed a spot in the playoffs average 55 wins a season. The Los Angeles Lakers are part of the Western Conference. Therefore, the Los Angeles Lakers should have a goal of winning 55 games by the end of the season.

¹ The play-ins, a preliminary tournament that determines the final two playoff seeds in the Eastern Conference and Western Conference, was introduced in the 2020 – 2021 season.

2. The NRtg (net rating) correlates most with wins in the regular season. This means that the Los Angeles Lakers need to finish the season with a NRtg of around 6.3 to have 55 wins by the end of the season.
3. The NRtg (net rating) is the difference between the ORtg (offensive rating) and DRtg (defensive rating). So, by finding the variables that highly correlate with the ORtg and the DRtg, the NRtg can be predicted. The TS% (true shooting percentage) and PS/G (points scored per game) highly correlate with the ORtg. The O_eFG% (opponent field goal percentage) and PA/G (points allowed per game) highly correlate with the DRtg.
4. It is predicted that the Lakers will not be guaranteed a spot in the playoffs for the 2022–2023 season. The Los Angeles Lakers is predicted to have a NRtg of -1.7 and are predicted to achieve 35 wins in the 2022 – 2023 NBA season.

About the Data

The data contains season statistics for the 30 teams in the NBA (National Basketball Association) from the seasons that represent the Modern Era². Three different tables were joined to create one large table that contains 58 columns representing each of the teams season results, offensive statistics, and defensive statistics. The data was pulled from the sources below.

Data Sources:

https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2022.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2021.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2020.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2019.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2018.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2017.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2016.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2015.html
https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2014.html

Tools Used

I used R Studio to create the statistical models using these packages:

1. tidyverse (dplyr, ggplot2)
2. ggpubr

In Depth Analysis

² 2013 to present, a period characterized with more efficient shot selections by rewarding three-point shots compared to the two-point shots

(<https://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-sports-analytics/jsa200525>)

1. How many wins, on average, does a team that is guaranteed a spot in the playoffs achieve during the regular season?

First, I wanted to see how many games, on average, a team that is guaranteed a spot in the playoff wins. This will act as the target for the Los Angeles Lakers to have by the end of the season to be guaranteed a spot in the playoffs.

Since there are 2 conferences, the East and the West, I split up the teams to their respective conferences and created 2 new data frames that contain all the data from teams that finished within the top 6 in previous seasons. Although there is a column that represents that number of wins each team has, it wouldn't be wise to average those values because there were 2 seasons (2019 – 2020 and 2020 – 2021) that had less games due to COVID-19. So, I calculated the win percentage for each team.

$$\text{Win Percentage} = (\text{Total Wins} / \text{Total Games}) \times 100$$

Then, I found the average win percentage for each conference by dividing the sum of the win percentages by the number of teams that made the playoffs from the 2013 – 2022 seasons (54 teams from the West and 54 teams from the East), then multiplied it by 82. This allows us to see how many games a team will need to win in a regular 82 games season to be guaranteed a spot in the playoffs.

$$\text{Average Number of Wins} = \text{Total of Win Percentage} * 54 / 82$$

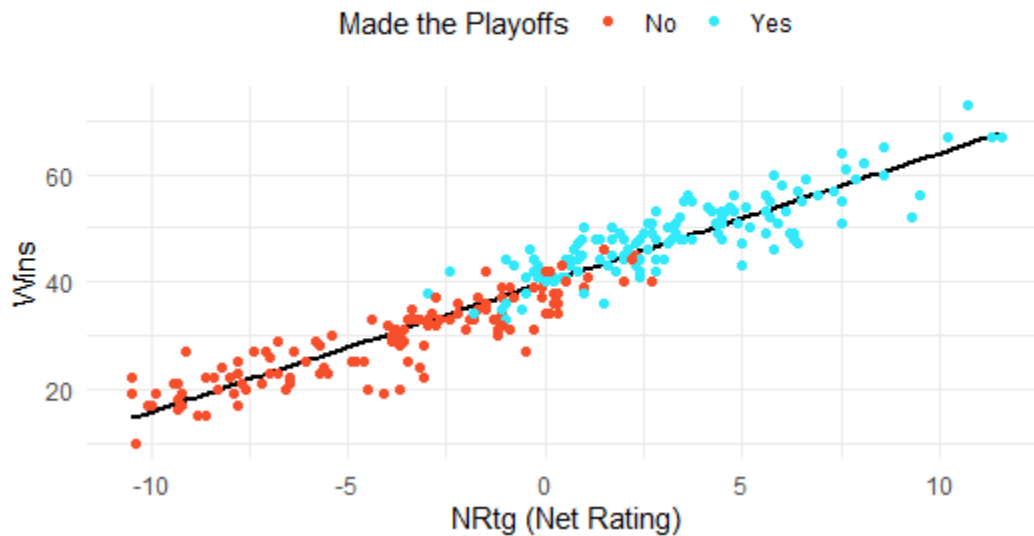
From the results, we see that teams in the East win, on average, 51 games while teams in the West win, on average, 55 games a season. Since I am only looking at whether the Los Angeles Lakers will achieve enough wins to guarantee them a spot in the playoffs, the Los Angeles Lakers should have a goal of winning 55 games by the end of the season.

2. Which variable correlates the most to wins during the regular season?

The Los Angeles Lakers need to win, on average, 55 games in a season to be guaranteed a spot in the playoffs. So, I looked for the variable that correlates most to winning games by performing a simple correlation between 46 variables that represent the offensive statistics and defensive statistics. From these calculations, the NRtg (Net Rating) has the highest correlation with 0.95. The NRtg is the difference in the score per 100 possessions as a combination of 5 players. It will display the quality of play and the quality of the team.

I created a linear regression model to tell us approximately what the NRtg of the team needs to be to secure a spot in the playoffs.

Relationship Between Wins and NRtg



Call:

```
lm(formula = W ~ NRtg, data = df)
```

Residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-11.6338	-2.3582	0.1805	2.6591	9.0763

Coefficients:

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	39.83787	0.23705	168.06	<2e-16 ***
NRtg	2.40815	0.04943	48.72	<2e-16 ***

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 3.895 on 268 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.8986, Adjusted R-squared: 0.8982

F-statistic: 2374 on 1 and 268 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

From the graph we see that teams with a positive NRtg are more likely to win; therefore, make the playoffs.

The linear regression shows that the results are highly significant.

Our regression equation for wins is:

$$\text{Wins} = 39.83787 + 2.40815(\text{NRtg})$$

The Los Angeles Lakers need to average 55 wins during the regular season. So, the formula to finding the minimum net rating is:

$$55 = 39.83787 + 2.40815(\text{NRtg})$$
$$\text{NRtg} = 6.296173$$

This means that the Los Angeles Lakers need to finish the season with a NRtg of around 6.3 to have 55 wins by the end of the season.

3. How can we predict the NRtg (net rating) for a team?

The NRtg is the difference between the ORtg (offensive rating) and the DRtg (defensive rating).

$$\text{NRtg} = \text{ORtg} - \text{DRtg}$$

Since the NRtg is a point differential per 100 possessions, all teams' statistics are based on the same number of possessions creating an equal playing field. Therefore, the NRtg allows a respective team to have a general comparison of their team's performance to other teams. A team will have a positive NRtg if the team won more games than lost.

So, How does a team achieve a positive NRtg?

A team will need a high ORtg and a low DRtg.

To determine which statistics are most important to a high ORtg, I performed another correlation test. The same was done to define which statistics are most important to achieving a low DRtg.

Variables highly correlated to the ORtg:

- TS% has a positive correlation of 0.903844287
 - TS% = a measure of shooting efficiency that takes into account 2-pointers, 3-pointers and free throws
- eFG% has a positive correlation of 0.879423785
 - eFG% = Statistics adjusted for the fact that a 3-point field goal is worth one more point than a 2-point field goal percentage

Variables highly correlated to the DRtg:

- OeFG% has a positive correlation of 0.903844287
 - OeFG% = Opponent's statistics adjusted for the fact that a 3-point field goal is worth one more point than a 2-point field goal percentage
- PA/G% has a positive correlation of 0.879423785

- PA/G% = Opponent's points per game

Now we can use these correlations to predict the ORtg and DRtg.

ORtg (Offensive Rating) Prediction

First, I fit the variables into a linear regression to predict the ORtg for the season.

```
Call:
lm(formula = ORtg ~ TS. + eFG., data = df1)

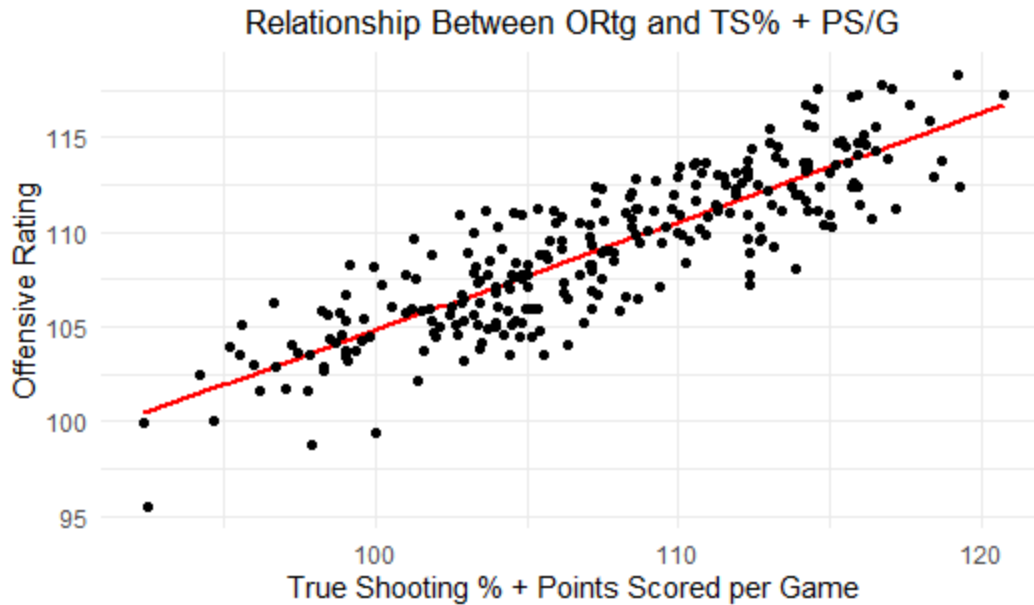
Residuals:
    Min     1Q   Median     3Q      Max
-4.5668 -1.1866 -0.1145  1.1928  5.8777

Coefficients:
            Estimate Std. Error t value Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)  12.390     3.121   3.970 9.25e-05 ***
TS.          195.288    24.274  8.045 2.83e-14 ***
eFG.         -22.341    22.608 -0.988  0.324
---
Signif. codes:  0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 1.72 on 267 degrees of freedom
Multiple R-squared:  0.8176, Adjusted R-squared:  0.8162
F-statistic: 598.4 on 2 and 267 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16
```

From the regression model, we see that the eFG% is not significant, meaning that there is no relationship between the eFG% and ORtg.

Therefore, I created another regression model using the PS/G (points scored per game), the next highest correlation to ORtg.



Call:

```
lm(formula = ORtg ~ TS. + PS.G, data = df1)
```

Residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-4.3440	-1.0509	-0.0255	1.0124	4.5629

Coefficients:

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	19.41223	2.56342	7.573	5.98e-13 ***
TS.	117.25455	8.04738	14.571	< 2e-16 ***
PS.G	0.23086	0.02836	8.140	1.51e-14 ***

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 1.542 on 267 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.8533, Adjusted R-squared: 0.8522

F-statistic: 776.7 on 2 and 267 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

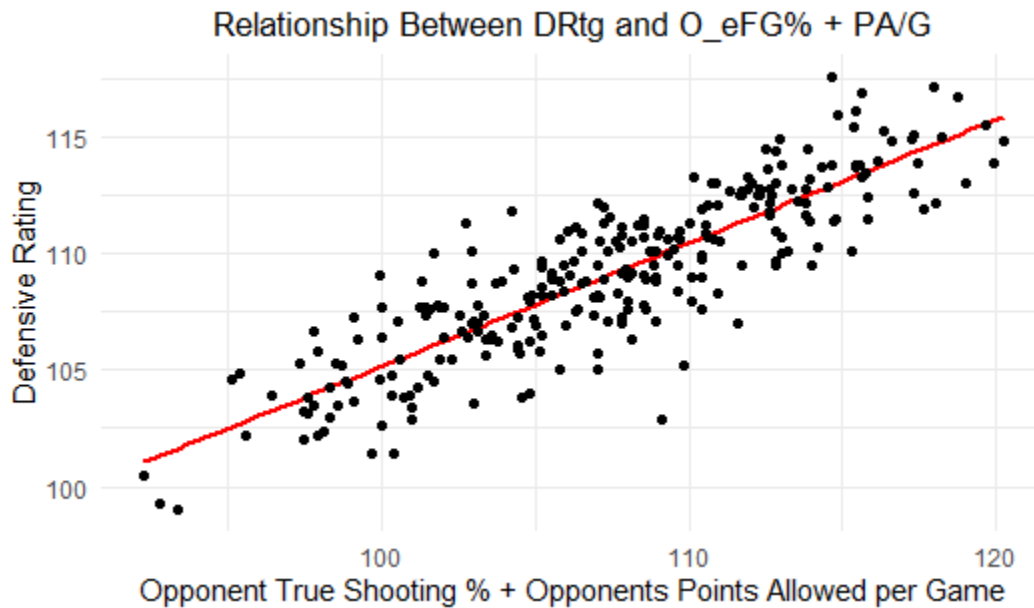
From the model, we see that both variables are significant, and teams with a higher TS% and PS/G will have a higher ORtg.

$$\text{ORtg} = 19.41223 + 117.25455(\text{TS}\%) + 0.23086(\text{PS/G})$$

This formula will be used to determine the Los Angeles Lakers's ORtg.

DRtg Prediction

Next, I needed to create another regression model to determine the Los Angeles Lakers's DRtg.



Call:

```
lm(formula = DRtg ~ O_eFG. + PA.G, data = df1)
```

Residuals:

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-3.5615	-0.7996	-0.0682	0.8688	3.1836

Coefficients:

	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	28.47503	1.95587	14.56	<2e-16 ***
O_eFG.	112.27513	6.46080	17.38	<2e-16 ***
PA.G	0.21032	0.02259	9.31	<2e-16 ***

Signif. codes: 0 '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1 ' ' 1

Residual standard error: 1.243 on 267 degrees of freedom

Multiple R-squared: 0.8803, Adjusted R-squared: 0.8794

F-statistic: 981.9 on 2 and 267 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16

From the model, we see that both variables are significant, and teams with a higher O_eFG% and PA/G will have a higher ORtg.

$$\text{DRtg} = 28.47503 + 112.27513(\text{O_eFG}\%) + 0.21032(\text{PA/G})$$

This formula will be used to determine the Los Angeles Lakers's DRtg.

Now that I know which variables can be used to calculate the ORtg and DRtg, I can predict the NRtg for the Los Angeles Lakers; therefore, concluding whether they will finish the regular season with a guaranteed spot in the playoffs.

4. Will the Los Angeles Lakers achieve enough wins to guarantee them a spot in the playoffs?

Finally, I can predict a team's NRtg using data from the current season using the 2 formulas:

1. $ORtg = 19.41223 + 117.25455(TS\%) + 0.23086(PS/G)$
2. $DRtg = 28.47503 + 112.27513(O_eFG\%) + 0.21032(PA/G)$

$$NRtg = ORtg - DRtg$$

$$NRtg = [19.41223 + 117.25455(TS\%) + 0.23086(PS/G)] - [28.47503 + 112.27513(O_eFG\%) + 0.21032(PA/G)]$$

Statistics from the 2022-2023 season:

ORtg variables:

$$TS\% = 0.557$$

$$PS/G = 116.9$$

DRtg variables:

$$O_eFG\% = 0.536$$

$$PA/G = 117.9$$

$$NRtg = [19.41223 + 117.25455(0.557) + 0.23086(116.9)] - [28.47503 + 112.27513(0.536) + 0.21032(117.9)]$$

$$NRtg = -1.740679$$

Now that the NRtg is predicted, the number of wins a team will achieve by the end of the season can also be predicted using the first regression model:

$$Wins = 39.83787 + 2.40815(NRtg)$$

$$Wins = 39.83787 + 2.40815(-1.740679)$$

$$Wins = 35.64605$$

It is predicted that the Lakers will not be guaranteed a spot in the playoffs for the 2022–2023 season. The Los Angeles Lakers is predicted to have a NRtg of -1.7 and is predicted to achieve 35 wins in the 2022 – 2023 NBA season.