#1



Los Angeles Clippers

Offense: **A+   |** Defense: **A-   |** Stars: **A   |**   Clutch: **2**   |Mindset: **Win Now**

At the top of our list, we have the Los Angeles Clippers who made big moves this offseason. The addition of Paul George and Kawhi Leonard in exchange for basically all of their future picks and promising young players, proves that the Clippers are in a win now mindset. Their offense is the best there is. Paul George and Kawhi Leonard will lead the starters in the scoring department. On the bench, you have an experienced scorer in Lou Williams and an athletic big in Montrezl Harrell. Defense is second nature to most of these guys. All of the stars mentioned above are all excellent two players with George and Leonard being amongst the best. Also having defensive specialist, Patrick Beverly, will make this team a defensive nightmare. The Clippers this season are a serious upgrade from the team from last season that pushed the Warriors to 6 games in the first round. This team is a serious contender and can easily win it all this year.

#2\*

Logo, company name

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Golden State Warriors\*

Offense: **A**   | Defense: **A**   | Stars: **A**   | Clutch: **2**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

Coming in at a close second are the Golden State Warriors with Klay Thompson. Assuming Klay Thompson comes back towards the end of the season, the Warriors will still be the only team fielding four all stars. On the offensive end, adding D’Angelo Russell should definitely help with the scoring load and after an offseason of trimming down, Draymond Green will be all over the floor playmaking on one end and defending on the other. With the absence of Klay Thompson and the departure of Kevin Durant, there will be plenty more possessions for Stephen Curry to return to his former MVP self. Defensively, adding the young, athletic Willie Cauley Stein should help with shot blocking at the rim. The Warriors will probably not win as much throughout the regular season, but assuming Klay Thompson returns in time for the playoffs and is a version of his former self, then the Warriors will be a serious threat for whoever they go up against.

#2

Logo

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Utah Jazz

Offense: **A**   |   Defense: **B**   | Stars: **B**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

With their current roster, the real second spot belongs to the Utah Jazz. A very underrated move this offseason was the replacement of Ricky Rubio with veteran all-star Mike Conley. Conley who left the rebuilding Grizzlies, is still a solid player who can play great on both ends of the floor. Another addition to the team is Bojan Bogdanovic, coming off of a breakout season with the Pacers, who will add offense to the team outside of Donovan Mitchell. Mitchell has another year under his belt and should continue to improve into the star that he’s meant to be. The defense this year should continue to be incredible, not to mention the two-time Defensive Player of the Year, Rudy Gobert, who will look to add another to his collection. The Jazz are looking for at least a conference final birth this year, after two years of surpassing expectations but coming up short of winning it all.

#3

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Houston Rockets

Offense: **B**   | Defense: **A-**   | Stars: **B**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

At the third spot, we have yet another Western Conference team, the Houston Rockets. The Rockets are running it back for a third year in a row with pretty much the same squad. However, in this third run at the title, the aging Chris Paul is replaced by former MVP Russell Westbrook. Last year has been a slightly down year for Westbrook in terms of shooting and scoring. Hopefully a team that shoots as many threes as Houston can give Westbrook the spacing he needs to attack the rim. The presence of James Harden, PJ Tucker, and Clint Capela gives this team a good grade on the defensive end. With the West wide open after the change in Golden State, Houston will look to capitalize and finally make a Finals berth in the James Harden era.

#4

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Milwaukee Bucks

Offense: **C+**   | Defense: **A**   | Stars: **A**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

A contender to make the Finals from the Eastern Conference and sitting at the fourth overall spot are the Milwaukee Bucks. Their offense took a hit from the departures of Nikola Mirotic and Malcolm Brogdon. However, they do still have reigning MVP, Giannis Antetokounmpo, and all star Khris Middleton, and brought in Eric Bledsoe. This team is really one sided with heavy dominance in the paint and a mediocre outside presence. Naturally, over the course of a season, better defensive teams will know to crowd the paint like the Raptors did in the playoffs against the Bucks. We will see how much work Giannis has put in over the summer to develop a respectable jumper that will hopefully make him a better clutch player. On the defensive end, the Bucks are a lengthy, athletic team that can block shots and passes with ease. The Bucks have a team of veterans all in their primes, so assuming improvements from last season, we should expect at the very least, another conference final appearance.

#5\*

Logo, company name

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Brooklyn Nets\*

Offense: **B+**   | Defense: **B**   | Stars: **B**   | Clutch: **2**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

A busy offseason bumps the Brooklyn Nets up to the seventh spot overall. The catch here is that this assumes Kevin Durant is back to playing at a high level. The trio of Kevin Durant, Kyrie Irving, and DeAndre Jordan gives this team a great offensive grade. When healthy, Durant’s length and all-around offense makes him an unstoppable force. Now combine that with Irving’s insane ball handling and playmaking skills and Jordan’s athleticism. Jarrett Allen, Joe Harris, Spencer Dinwiddie, and Caris LeVert form a strong supporting cast. Those players are all capable of starting for most teams, which goes to show how deep this team really is. Unfortunately, with Durant out for the season, this team will only make the playoffs but won’t be enough to contend. This ranking is simply a hypothetical ranking that has a zero percent chance of happening because Durant is ruled out for the season.

#5

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Boston Celtics

Offense: **B-**   | Defense: **B**   | Stars: **B**   |   Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

Sitting at the fifth spot, are the Boston Celtics who had a rough last year with internal conflict and are looking to bounce back this year. The departure of Kyrie Irving and a few others as well as the addition of Kemba Walker should lead to better ball movement. The Celtics hope that Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown will finally play at all-star levels this year and hope that Gordon Hayward gets more comfortable on the floor after coming back from that leg injury. The defense suffered a hit when Al Horford and Marcus Morris left but is still good enough to give teams a scare. Offensively, the team is unproven in how they will gel. There is a lot of upside to this team who are looking to win now. The East is wide open once more after Kawhi Leonard left the Raptors. The Celtics definitely have what it takes to make to the Finals, but whether or not they work together will be the big question mark.

#6

Logo, company name

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Golden State Warriors

Offense: **B-** |   Defense: **B**   | Stars: **B**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

Taking the sixth spot, we have the Golden State Warriors without Klay Thompson. This is an interesting position because there are multiple factors in play. Officially, this team is considered to be a rebuilding team because of all the youth that was brought in. However, this team still fields Steph Curry and Draymond Green who are still in their primes, and D’Angelo Russell who is moving into his prime. Two factors in play will be how well the rookies develop and how well Russell fits into the system, which will ultimately determine whether or not to bring Klay back for the season. Without Thompson, this team drops by a whole letter grade on all three categories. According to this ranking, the Warriors should still do pretty well in the regular season, meaning Klay will be brought back to make a splash in the playoffs.

#7

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Toronto Raptors

Offense: **D+**   | Defense: **A+**   | Stars: **B**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

The Toronto Raptors take the seventh overall spot and rounding out the top three in the Eastern Conference. Losing Kawhi Leonard and Danny Green in free agency was a big loss. Kyle Lowry and Marc Gasol are both great two-way players but are both on the wrong side of their prime. We will see next season whether Pascal Siakam, OG Anunoby, and Fred Vanvleet can take the next steps in their game to be the future of this franchise. This is also another team like the Bucks, who are long and athletic which makes them a tough team to get past on defense. Even though the team is looking pretty young like a rebuilding team would, they still have the talent and experience to make a decent run in the playoffs and should not be slept on.

#8

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Philadelphia 76ers

Offense: **C**   | Defense: **B+**   | Stars: **A**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

At the eighth overall spot, we have the Philadelphia 76ers who are projected to be fourth in the eastern conference. In this past season, they were one buzzer beater away from the conference finals. Some roster changes were made this offseason. J.J. Redick and Jimmy Butler have been replaced by Josh Richardson and Al Horford, who are only slightly worse replacements. Neither Richardson nor Horford offer the sharpshooting skills that Redick offered or the shot making skills that Butler brought, but they do bring a bit more on the defensive end. The two are solid role players which means that this team’s success is counting on the play of Simmons and Embiid. The two have another year of experience under their belt. Simmons has spent the offseason working on his jumper while Embiid is looking to get in better shape. This team has what it takes to make the conference finals and possibly even to the finals.

#9

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New Orleans Pelicans

Offense: **B**   | Defense: **B**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

 What makes the ranking for this team the most inaccurate is the fact that we didn’t account for rookies. Not including Zion Williamson throws this team off the most because he’s seen as a generational talent that is expected to play a big role on this team. Aside from Zion, the Pelicans picked up Lonzo Ball and Brandon Ingram, in exchange for Anthony Davis, who both have high potential and are not even in their primes yet. The backcourt is well defended by Ball and all-star, Jrue Holiday. Bringing in Derrick Favors adds a nice defensive presence in the front court as well. Sharpshooter, J.J. Redick offer his skills and veteran leadership to this young team. The Pelicans have a well-rounded team but none that have proven to be a dominant star yet. Maybe we will see who fits into that role following the departure of Anthony Davis. This team has what it takes to make the playoffs, but the inexperience and the lack of superstars will most likely lead to a first-round exit.

 #10

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      Orlando Magic

Offense: **B+**   | Defense: **C+**   | Stars: **D**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

Rounding out the overall top ten and the top five in the Eastern Conference, we have the Orlando Magic who are poised to make the playoffs once more. They have a solid group who are all just entering their primes. First time all-star, Nikola Vucevic, will most likely have a great season this year following his breakout season. He is aided by Aaron Gordon, an athletic four who can shoot the three and handle the ball well. Gordon has always been a borderline star, putting up solid numbers yearly, so hopefully this will be his true breakout year. Evan Fournier also aids on the offensive end, hitting clutch shots when needed by the team. The team has been looking for a point guard to complete their starting core. They took a small risk by trading for former number one pick, Markelle Fultz, who may prove to be the answer to their point guard dilemma.

   #11

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     Sacramento Kings

Offense: **A**   | Defense: **C-**   | Stars: **D**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

The Sacramento Kings are another team like the Pelicans who are looking for their young core to take a jump in the next year. De’Aaron Fox had a great sophomore year, becoming the leader of the franchise everyone had hoped he would be. Alongside Fox in the backcourt is sharpshooter Buddy Hield who’s looking to continue making his shot more efficient. Marvin Bagley III is the third of this young core who had himself an impressive rookie season playing mainly as the Kings’ big man. Harrison Barnes and Trevor Ariza will offer this young group mentor leadership. There’s no shortage of offense for the Kings due to the number of threes they shoot and make. This team missed the playoffs by the skin of their teeth last season, but we predict the Kings to make the playoffs this year and possibly win a series if they shore up on the defensive end.

#12\*

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Portland Trail Blazers\*

Offense: **C-**   | Defense: **A-**   | Stars: **C**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

Taking the twelfth spot is the Portland Trailblazers when Jusuf Nurkic is healthy. Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum are an elite duo and will once again bring their A game every night. This team has consistently been on the verge of a breakthrough every year. But without a third star, the Trail Blazers simply can’t get over the strong Western Conference teams. Nurkic possibly could have been that third star. Unfortunately, we’ll have to wait till around the all star break till we get to see him back on the court. Meanwhile, the addition of Hassan Whiteside is a solid replacement for Nurkic on both ends of the court and bringing in Carmelo Anthony should take some of the scoring load off of Lillard and McCollum’s shoulders. This team looks like it will land around the middle of the playoff pack once more, but if the past is any indication, Damian Lillard is one of the best clutch players who can carry his when it matters most.

#12

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Dallas Mavericks

Offense: **B**   | Defense: **C+**   | Stars: **D**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

In a highly anticipated season, we have the Dallas Mavericks taking the twelfth overall rank. This is the season where everything comes together. Kristaps Porzingis is finally back from his injury and if he can return to his former self two seasons ago, this team will look really good. Combine Porzingis with Rookie of the Year, Luka Doncic and now this team has a dynamic duo that can compete at a high level. Along with the duo, we have Seth Curry and Tim Hardaway Jr. who are both solid players who can be relied on for scoring as well. The Mavericks are young and are coming off of a third straight rebuilding year. Making the playoffs this year is something we expect and something that would prove this rebuild to be coming along really well.

#13

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      Denver Nuggets

Offense: **B**   | Defense: **C+**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

The Denver Nuggets are one of the youngest teams in the league but with the talent they have, should be considered a win now. Last season, they surpassed all expectations and went head-to-head against the Golden State Warriors for the top spot in the Western Conference. Gary Harris and Jamal Murray are both young players who were borderline stars last year. An offseason of training may set the two up for break out seasons. One x-factor player not included is Michael Porter Jr. The Nuggets is taking a gamble with him and hopes he can return to the player he was projected to be out of high school before injuring his back. Not to mention, the Nuggets still have MVP candidate, Nikola Jokic. His all-around play is crucial to leading this team to the next level. However, with the West being so competitive and a few teams projected to take a jump, the Nuggets are projected to be fighting for that last spot in the strong Western Conference.

#14

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   Los Angeles Lakers

Offense: **B+**   | Defense: **D+**   | Stars: **B**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The Lakers are lower than expected at the fourteenth spot mainly due to their lack of defense. Both Anthony Davis and Lebron James have tremendous defensive capabilities but played sparingly last season both because of preserving health while playing on lottery bound teams. Now that the two have high expectations to compete for the title, the defense grade will surely change as the season goes. Dwight Howard, the three-time Defensive Player of the Year, and defensive specialist Avery Bradley are both not what they once were defensively but are still solid. On offense, Davis and James are arguably two of the top three of the league on that side of the field. Their strength, their versatility simply cannot be stopped. As a developing young piece with high potential, Kyle Kuzma will have every opportunity to learn from the best. The Lakers are in a win now mode and should make a big splash in the playoffs.

#15

Logo, company name

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       Brooklyn Nets

Offense: **C+**   |   Defense: **C**   | Stars: **C**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The fifteenth spot is occupied by the Brooklyn Nets when without Kevin Durant. The Nets drop a whole letter grade down in all categories without him. However, this team is still deep enough to make one of the lower seeds in the Eastern Conference. This team is basically last year’s Nets playoff team but switch D’Angelo Russell for Kyrie Irving and add DeAndre Jordan. The team has strong young talent in Caris LeVert, Spencer Dinwiddie, and Jarrett Allen. A problem with this group is that it lacks exactly what Kevin Durant provides. Length in the frontcourt that can also shoot. Right now, the two centers Allen and Jordan are both athletic, shot blocking bigs who can’t shoot at all. The lack of shooting there, weighs the offensive grade down a bit but is addressed by the shooting of Irving and Joe Harris. The defense is also weighed down because the two centers are the only real defensive presence on the team.

#16

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      Indiana Pacers

Offense: **B+**   | Defense: **D**   | Stars: **C**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The Indiana Pacers ranking will shift throughout the year. They are starting off the season without their main star Victor Oladipo and have lost Bojan Bogdanovic in free agency. This ranking at seventeen is assuming Oladipo is back to star form. He is a great two-way player just entering his prime. The Pacers did steal former Rookie of the Year Malcolm Brogdon from the Bucks. Also, Domantas Sabonis and Myles Turner should hold down the front court well enough for the time being. This is a young group of guys who all have great potential. Their defense is a little lacking because Turner is the only capable defender in this group. The return of Oladipo should boost the defense in the backcourt a little bit, but for this team to take the next step, everyone must improve defensively. The Pacers will make the playoffs again but will probably be facing a first-round exit, going up against one of the elite teams of the East.

#17

Logo, company name

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 Portland Trail Blazers

Offense: **D+**   | Defense: **B-**   |   Stars: **C**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The Portland Trail Blazers are looking at the seventeenth spot without Jusuf Nurkic. They drop slightly on offense, but miss him the most on defense, dropping one full letter grade. This team does not really have a lot of promising young players to develop as they’re waiting for Nurkic, so this team is in win now mode. Bringing in Kent Bazemore and Hassan Whiteside should give some help on the offensive and defensive side, respectively. We can’t forget that the main guys, Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum, are still healthy. They will bring it night in and night out to make sure this is a winning organization. Without Nurkic, this team is projected to be out of the playoffs. But since Nurkic is returning around the all-star break, this team will be fighting for one of those last seeds due to this competitive Western Conference.

#18

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San Antonio Spurs

Offense: **D+**   | Defense: **C+**   | Stars: **B**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

In the modern NBA, the Spurs receive a lower grade for offense because of their lack of shooting in the perimeter. Their top three players are all 2-point specialists in, DeMar DeRozan, Rudy Gay, and LaMarcus Aldridge. All are capable of making threes but it’s not a skill they came into the NBA specializing in. Now we bring in young point guard, Dejounte Murray, who spent the past season rehabbing from an ACL tear. Murray also came into the league not as a three-point specialist. For this team to be successful, the top four players must improve on their perimeter shooting. Defense is still solid because as long as Pop is there, he will find a way to make sure everyone plays good defense. One last concern for this team is that the top three players are all either at the end of their prime or past it. Last season, the Spurs barely made the playoffs at the seventh spot. They are all one more year older now, so we should look to Dejounte Murray to step up to this opportunity to lead.

#18\*

Logo

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Washington Wizards\*

Offense: **B**   | Defense: **D-**   | Stars: **C**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

It has been three years since we last seen John Wall play for most of the season at a high level without a major injury. Most recently, he ruptured his Achilles last year which is one of the worst injuries an NBA player can get. It’s possible Wall will never be the same level of player he was because his game is based on athleticism. In addition, this team is not really built for success due to the number of mediocre veterans on the team. Wall should be back at some point this season which is the determining factor for whether this team makes the playoffs or not. Wall’s backcourt partner, Bradley Beal is an offensive superstar who is just entering his prime. This team is capable of competing for that last spot in the playoffs if Wall returns to form, but we shouldn’t expect much more than that.

#18

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Detroit Pistons

Offense: **C+**   | Defense: **D+**   | Stars: **C**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

Although the Detroit Pistons are low on the overall rankings, they are projected to make the Eastern Conference playoffs at the last place. The Pistons have Blake Griffin who look more versatile than he ever has after improving his shot and handles. Combine that with his frontcourt partner, Andre Drummond, who is an athletic, rebounding machine who is just entering his prime. In the offseason, the Pistons were also able to get Derrick Rose and Markieff Morris through free agency. After countless devastating injuries, Rose put together a decent season last year with glimpses of his former MVP form. He is still at an age where he can put up big numbers and perhaps even be an all-star if he can continue to regain his step. This core has what it takes to make the playoffs in a lower seed but probably not more than that.

#20

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New York Knicks

Offense: **C**   | Defense: **C-**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

The most valuable franchise in the league, the New York Knicks are on a six-year playoff drought. It looked as though the Knicks have found their new cornerstone piece in Kristaps Porzingis. However, he was traded just after four years of service. Even after a couple years of being in the lottery, the Knicks still haven’t been able to draft a group of guys special enough to end this drought. The most recent draft of RJ Barrett looks like he might have that “special” in him to lift this Knicks team into playoff contention but will need some time to develop. The highly anticipated offseason has been a major let down when there were no superstar free agents willing to sign with the Knicks. Instead, the Knicks have decided to invest in a couple of average, veteran forwards. The Knicks may improve from last year due to these veterans and can compete for the last spots of the playoffs at best. This team might consider another tank year rather than compete for the edge of the playoffs.

#21

Logo, company name

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Oklahoma City Thunder

Offense: **D**   | Defense: **B-**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The Oklahoma City Thunder should be in a rebuild mode soon. They traded Paul George to the Clippers in exchange for five future first round picks along with Danilo Gallinari and Shai Gilgeous-Alexander. Russell Westbrook was shortly traded after to the Rockets for Chris Paul and two more future first round picks. The remaining veterans should be traded soon unless they fit into the Thunder’s future plans. All of the extra picks last till 2026 which means the rebuild process will last until then. Meanwhile, Chris Paul will be a great mentor for Gilgeous-Alexander. Steven Adams is still just entering his prime and has a number of solid years ahead of him. Danilo Gallinari is in his prime and has just recorded season highs last season. Dennis Schroder and Nerlens Noel are solid players on the offensive and defensive side, respectively, who are both just entering their primes. This team is solid all around but don’t have enough talent to compete in the crowded West.

#22

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Chicago Bulls

Offense: **B-**   | Defense: **D-**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

This Bulls team is a rebuilding team yet they can possibly make the playoffs at one of the lower seeds. Posting career highs all across the board, Zach Lavine, has the numbers to make it as an all star. He’s the clear leader of this team yet he’s shockingly only 23 years old. Alongside him on this rebuilding team is sharpshooter Lauri Markannen and big man, Wendell Carter Jr. Otto Porter Jr. is also on the team and can put up solid numbers, but he’s yet to prove that he can do that consistently. Their offense is top of the line, but their defense is in question. None of the players mentioned are seen as defensive stoppers. The only potential defensive player is Wendell Carter Jr. This is a young, promising team that can break out soon but needs one or two more years to be developed to be a true contender.

#23

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Phoenix Suns

Offense: **C**   | Defense: **D**   | Stars: **D**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

After 9 straight years of missing the playoffs and 4 straight years of tank mode to jumpstart their rebuilding, the Suns look like they are going to add another year to both of those streaks. The Suns may actually be improving talent wise but not enough as they are in the Western Conference. They will be sitting at the bottom once more and might just scratch another year off to make a bigger jump in two years. Right now, Devin Booker and Deandre Ayton are the only two clear players who the franchise should build around. Booker’s scoring abilities are off the charts and is a player any franchise would build around. He is only 22, but the Suns need to find him a crime partner soon to keep him happy in Phoenix. Ayton is coming off a solid rookie season that was overshadowed by Luka Doncic. He may grow into the crime partner that Booker needs.

#24

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Atlanta Hawks

Offense: **C**   | Defense: **D**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

The Atlanta Hawks are in the midst of their rebuild around Trae Young. Young has a similar build and skill set like Stephen Curry. That being said, he will bring more offense than defense to the table. To make up for this, the Hawks have drafted defensive specialist De’Andre Hunter who will hopefully develop NBA level defense fast to aid the backcourt. John Collins mans the frontcourt and has shown signs of greatness on both ends of the court. Kevin Huerter is Young’s backcourt partner and is continuing to improve his sharpshooting skills. The Hawks aren’t good enough right now to make it into the playoffs and are likely tanking again. Give this team a couple years to develop and more lottery picks and this team will start looking scary.

#25

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Memphis Grizzlies

Offense: **D-**   | Defense: **C+**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The Memphis Grizzlies have officially moved on from the Grit N’ Grind era after trading Mike Conley to the Jazz. The Grizzlies are technically in a win now mindset but are really rebuilding. They have a promising, young group of guys in Ja Morant, Josh Jackson, and Jaren Jackson Jr. To compliment the trio is Jonas Valanciunas and Jae Crowder who are both veterans that can mentor the younger guys. Valanciunas and Crowder are both still capable of putting up solid numbers to help keep this team competitive. Jaren Jackson Jr. showed great potential as a stretch four that can play on both ends of the floor. Josh Jackson had a down year in Phoenix, but hopefully a new setting can help him revamp his promising career. The Grizzlies are projected to be at the bottom of the Western Conference, but hopefully one more year of development and a high draft pick next year will bring the Grizzlies back to its former glory.

#28

Logo

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Minnesota Timberwolves

Offense: **D+**   | Defense: **D**   | Stars: **C**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The Minnesota Timberwolves are a team that has had so much potential but was never able to put together a successful season to reflect that. They have Karl-Anthony Towns who is living up to his potential and putting up MVP numbers. The only knock against him is that his team’s record doesn’t reflect his skills. For a team to be successful, every star must have a crime partner and right now there is no one to help KAT. Andrew Wiggins came into the league with so much potential but has since fallen off to be an average player. At their height, the Timberwolves also had Jimmy Butler but was only able to barely make the playoffs to show for that. The large contracts that Wiggins and KAT have prevents the Timberwolves from being able to bring in more talent through free agency. For this team to be successful in any way in the Western Conference, Andrew Wiggins must turn it up a notch and be the star that he’s meant to be.

#26

Logo

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Charlotte Hornets

Offense: **D+**   | Defense: **D+**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

The Charlotte Hornets are one of those teams that are still negatively affected by the 16’-17’ salary cap spike. They have five guys that are way overpaid for their skill level. We can’t blame anyone for signing players to multi-year deals in hopes they will stay with the team. However, this should only be done for great players or ascending players. The Hornets struck out on all five of them. They are players who may not even have a buyer if they were to be free agents now. This financial commitment prevents the Hornets from having any effective rebuild or any ability to bring in free agents to help their lone superstar, Kemba Walker. Now, even Walker has left in free agency. Miles Bridges is a solid young piece but does not look like someone the Hornets should build a team around. Neither is Terry Rozier, who is just entering his prime. Rozier had a decent season two years ago and is a solid starter on any team, but is also not someone the Hornets should build around. The Hornets should have a lot more money to work with next off-season when all of these bad contracts expire.

 #27

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Miami Heat

Offense: **D**   | Defense: **C-**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

It is kind of confusing what direction the Miami Heat are heading to. Ever since LeBron left five years ago, the Heat have understandably descended from the top. However, they haven’t descended all the way to the bottom. They have stayed in the middle of the east, jumping in and out of the playoffs from year to year. Instead of breaking the team apart to rebuild, the Heat have decided to double down on its non-playoff team from last year and to add Jimmy Butler. Unfortunately, adding one Jimmy Butler won’t improve the Heat enough to make even the playoffs. They lost Josh Richardson and Hassan Whiteside in the off-season, so Jimmy Butler is coming to a team worse than last year’s. There aren’t any young guys to develop either, so this Heat team is not looking too good for this year or years to come.

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Washington Wizards

Offense: **D+**   | Defense: **D-**   | Stars: **D**   | Clutch: **1**   | Mindset: **Win Now**

This is where the Wizards rank without John Wall, at the twenty-ninth spot. The Wizards will be expecting Wall back, but until then, they have to play at a higher level than this to be able to have a chance at the playoffs for when Wall returns. They miss Wall the most on offense, dropping almost one and a half grade down. This team is filled with a bunch of mediocre veterans outside of Bradley Beal and John Wall. The front office hasn’t done a great job of bringing in new talent. They are taking a gamble on Isaiah Thomas who is looking for a redemption season to show everyone that he can return to a version of himself where he was an MVP candidate. Other than Thomas, the only other player that has potential is the rookie, Rui Hachimura. If the Wizards aren’t close to the playoffs when Wall is clear to return, then he may as well take the rest of the season off and come back strong next season.

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Cleveland Cavaliers

Offense: **F**   | Defense: **F**   | Stars: **F**   | Clutch: **0**   | Mindset: **Rebuilding**

At the last spot, we have the Cleveland Cavaliers. They are in their second year of full rebuild mode in the aftermath of LeBron’s departure. They drafted Collin Sexton two years ago and he’s proven to have a high upside. He has great playmaking skills and can shoot the long ball well. The Cavaliers choosing Darius Garland last year is a questionable choice. They are both small point guards that are expected to start together. This will lead to many teams exploiting that small backcourt on defense. Kevin Love is still here to provide veteran leadership, but he’s only a version of what he was on that championship team. This is another tanking year and hopefully the Cavaliers get one of the top picks next offseason. It will be interesting to see who they draft because right now four out of the projected top five players are guards.