#1



Golden State Warriors\*

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

At the top of our list is 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 on both ends. 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. Assuming Klay Thompson returns for the playoffs and is a version of his former self, then the Warriors are still a contender for the title and should not be underestimated.

#2



Los Angeles Clippers

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

Coming up in extremely close second, we have the Los Angeles Clippers who made big moves this offseason. The addition of Paul George and Kawhi Leonard in exchange for future assets 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 with the scoring load. 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 adding 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.

#3



Utah Jazz

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

In third place is 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 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.

#4



Houston Rockets

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

At the fourth spot, we have yet another Western Conference team, the Houston Rockets. The Rockets are running it back for 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. A respectable jump shot will be crucial for Westbrook in spreading the floor out to allow for more iso opportunities. The presence of James Harden, PJ Tucker, and Clint Capela is what gives this team such 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.

#5



Boston Celtics

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

Rounding out the top five and leading in the Eastern Conference, there is the Boston Celtics who had a rough last year with internal conflict and under performing to their expectations. The departure of Kyrie Irving and a few others as well as the addition of Kemba Walker should see that there is more balls to go around. The Celtics hope the improvements of Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown continue and hope that Gordon Hayward gets more comfortable on the floor. 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 gel will be the big question mark.

#6



Milwaukee Bucks

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

A contender to make the Finals from the Eastern Conference and sitting at the sixth overall spot, is the Milwwaukee Bucks. Their offense took a hit even though they have reigning MVP, Giannis Antetokounmpo, and all star Khris Middleton. This team is really one sided with heavy dominance in the paint and a mediocre outside presence. Naturally, over the course of a game, better defensive teams will know to crowd the paint like the Raptors have in the playoffs. We will see how much work Giannis has put in over the summer to develop a respectable jumper that will hopefully make him a more clutch player. On the defensive end, the Bucks are a team of athletic, lengthy 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.

#7



Brooklyn Nets\*

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

A busy offseason lands the Brooklyn Nets at the seventh spot. 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 offense 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 and Jordan’s shot-blocking skills offers good defense on the inside. Taurean Prince and Durant’s length will offer good wing defense. A solid bench from last year should place this team high up in the Eastern Conference. Unfortunately, with Durant out for the season, this team is simply a hypothetical ranking that has a zero percent chance of happening.

#8



Golden State Warriors

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

Taking the eighth 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 almost a whole letter grade on all three categories. According to our analysis, the Warriors should do pretty well in the regular season, meaning Klay will be brought back to make a splash in the playoffs.

#9



Philadelphia 76ers

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

At the ninth spot, we have the Philadelphia 76ers who, here are projected to be third 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 solid replacements. They offer a more reliable defense but are a downgrade on the offensive end. Neither Richardson nor Horford offer the sharpshooting skills that Redick offered and the shotmaking skills that Butler offered. 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.

#10



Toronto Raptors

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

Rounding out the top ten, we have the defending champs, the Toronto Raptors. Losing Kawhi Leonard and Danny Green in free agency was a big loss, especially on the offensive side. 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 or not Pascal Siakam and OG Anunoby can continue off of their great seasons last year and take on more of the offensive load. 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.

#11



Portland Trail Blazers\*

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

Taking the eleventh spot is the Portland Trailblazers including Jusuf Nurkic when healthy. Damian Lillard and CJ McCollum are an elite duo and will bring their A game every night. This team has consistently been on the verge of a break through 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 should give a solid presence in the paint on both sides of the court until Nurkic comes back. This team looks like it will land around the middle of the playoff pack once more. However, if the past is any indication, Damian Lillard is one of the best clutch players that can carry his team and hit big shots when it matters.

#12



Dallas Mavericks

Offense: **B**   | Defense: **C+**   | Stars: **C**   | 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 compete at a high level. Along with the duo, we have Seth Curry and Tim Hardaway Jr. who are both solid players that 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



New Orleans Pelicans

Offense: **B**   | Defense: **B**   | Stars: **D**   | 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 who both have high potential and are not even in their primes yet. Ball and Jrue Holiday offer a great defensive backcourt. 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 has proven to be that 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.

   #14



     Sacramento Kings

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

The Sacramento Kings have a very nice young group of guys to build around for the next couple years. De’Aaron Fox had a great second 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. This team missed the playoffs by the skin of their teeth last season. We predict that the Kings should make the playoffs this year but will have to be fighting for the last two spots in this tough Western Conference.

#15



   Los Angeles Lakers

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

The Lakers are lower than expected at the fifteenth 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 playing on lottery bound teams. Now that the two have high expectations to compete for the title, the defense grade should surely change. Dwight Howard, the three time Defensive Player of the Year, and defensive specialist Avery Bradley are both not what they once were defensively. They may still have those defensive skills from time to time, but don’t completely rely on that. 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.

   #16



      Orlando Magic

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

Building off of a surprisingly strong season last year, the Magic are poised to make the playoffs once more in the Eastern Conference. 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 the handle the ball really well. Gordon, in his fifth season is not in his prime age wise, yet most players who become stars prove themselves within their first couple seasons. He has always been a borderline star player, 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. Unless this trio have each improved to their next levels this offseason, it will probably be a first round exit once again.

   #17



      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.

   #18



      Denver Nuggets

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

The Denver Nuggets are one of the youngest teams in the league but should technically be considered a win now team for the next couple years. 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. The Nuggets are currently projected to be fighting for that last spot in the strong Western Conference.

   #19



       Brooklyn Nets

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

The nineteenth spot is occupied the Brooklyn Nets without Kevin Durant. The Nets drop a whole letter grade down in all categories without him. However, this team is still talented 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 in the team.

   #20



 Portland Trail Blazers

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

The Portland Trail Blazers are looking at the twentieth spot without Jusuf Nurkic. The 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 their waiting for Nurkic, so this team is a win now team. 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. However, they will be looking to fight for one of those last seeds due to this competitive Western Conference.

#21



Oklahoma City Thunder

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

The Oklahoma City Thunder should be in a rebuild mode soon. They traded Paul George to the Clippers 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 take until then. Meanwhile, Chris Paul would be a great mentor to develop 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



Washington Wizards\*

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

It has been three years since we have last seen John Wall play at a high level for most of the season. These past two years he has been hit with season ending injuries that require surgeries. 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. Wall should be back at some point this season and hopefully he has enough time to get back into the groove. This team is not really built for success due to the number of mediocre veterans on the team. Two things go in favor for the Wizards to make the playoffs however. First thing is that it’s the Eastern Conference and the second is Wall’s backcourt partner, Bradley Beal, an offensive superstar who is just entering his prime. This team can compete for that last spot in the playoffs, but we shouldn’t expect much more than that.

#23



San Antonio Spurs

Offense: **D+**   | Defense: **C+**   | Stars: **C**   | 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. Not to say that this team hasn’t tried to address this situation, however, because the Spurs still have Patty Mills and Bryn Forbes. But for this team to be successful, the top four players must improve on their perimeter shooting. Defense is still solid because as long as Coach Pop is still there, he will find a way to make everyone play 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.

#24



Detroit Pistons

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

Although the Detroit Pistons are so 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 was 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 trio has what it takes to make the playoffs in a lower seed but probably not more than that.

#25



Chicago Bulls

Offense: **B-**   | Defense: **D-**   | Stars: **D**   | 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 night in, night out or in the clutch. 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. who can perhaps become a shot blocker for this team. 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.

#26



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 seeing as they are in a newly reformed Western Conference, they will be sitting at the bottom once more and might just scratch another year off to tank. Right now, there are only two clear players who the franchise should build around, and they are Devin Booker and Deandre Ayton. Booker is the sole player that can make this team go. His 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.

#27



New York Knicks

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

The most valuable franchise in the league, the New York Knicks is on a six year playoff drought. It looked as though the Knicks has found their new cornerstone piece in Kristaps Porzingis. However, he was traded just after four years of service. After a couple years of being in the lottery, the Knicks hasn’t been able to draft a group of guys special enough to be able 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 but definitely don’t have enough to get into the playoffs or to contend.

#28



Minnesota Timbeerwolves

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

The Minnesota Timberwolves is 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 put 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 has 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.

#29



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 be able to develop NBA level defensive skills in the near future to aid the backcourt. John Collins mans the frontcourt and has shown signs of greatness, playing 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, but give them a couple years to develop and this team will look scary.

#30



Washington Wizards

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

This is where the Wizards rank without John Wall, at the thirtieth spot and the twelfth in the conference. 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 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 Rui Hachimura, the rookie. 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.

#31



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 them is Jonas Valanciunas and Jae Crowder who are both veterans that can really give great mentorship to the young guys. Valanciunas and Crowder are both still capable of putting up solid numbers to help keep this team competitive. Jaren Jackson Jr. at age 19 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 in last place in the west. Hopefully one more year of development and a high draft pick next year will bring the Grizzlies back to its former glory.

#32



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 offseason 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.

#33



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 an effective rebuild or any ability to bring in free agents to help their 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 a playoff team, but also is not someone the Hornets should build around. The Hornets should have a lot more money to work with next season when all of these bad contracts expire.

#34



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 chose Darius Garland in a questionable choice. They are both short guards and 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.