Board Woman Gets Paid

Contextualizing Angel Reese's Dominance on the Glass

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Introduction

Chicago Sky forward Angel Reese's sophomore season has slumped out of the gate. Her scoring is down, her turnovers have exploded, her shooting splits are worse, and the Sky have struggled to find their footing. She recently posted her first career triple double in a Sky win against one of the two teams worse than Chicago, but it figures to be an ugly season for the team as a whole. Reese's stats are not always pretty, but one thing has remained constant: She posts some monstrous rebound numbers. Jeff Teague called Reese the "best rebounder ever" and compared her ferocious rebounding to the great Dennis Rodman. She recently responded to the "mebound" jokes by fully buying into the word; that term is meant to scornfully discredit Reese's rebound total by attributing them to her own missed layups and the following put-back attempts[1].

Through year two, is Reese already the most dominant rebounder in WNBA history? Let's compare her to the giants of the present and the past.

I chose eleven players to compare with Reese:

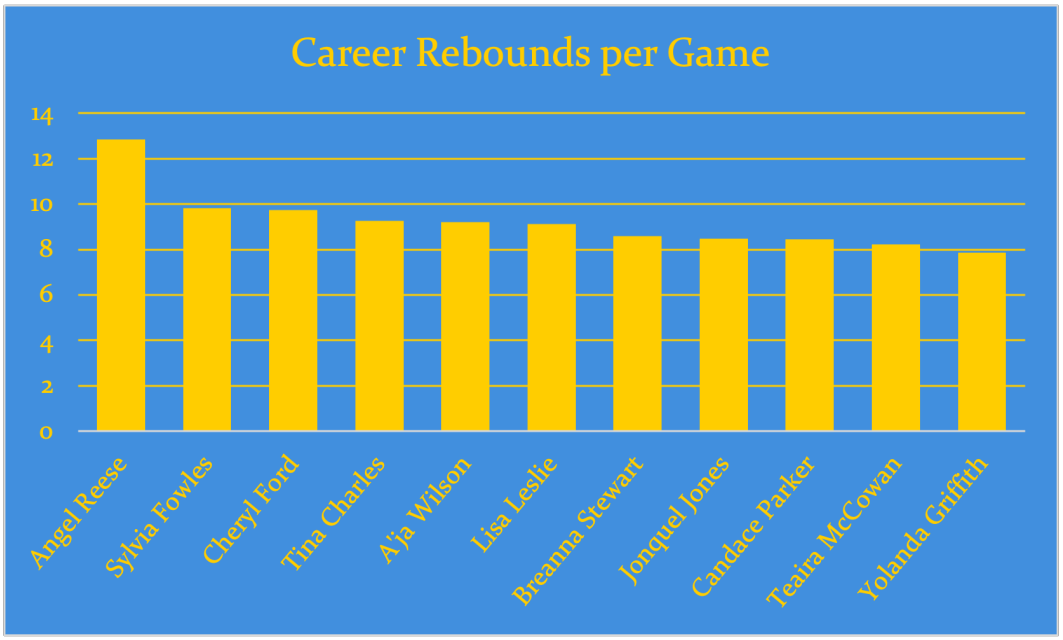
- Jonquel Jones
- Yolanda Griffith
- Sylvia Fowles
- Tina Charles
- A'ja Wilson
- Cheryl Ford
- Lisa Leslie
- Breanna Stewart
- Candace Parker
- Teaira McCowan

That's three Hall-of-Famers (Griffith, Fowles, and Leslie), two future Hall-of-Famers (Charles and Parker), two players on track to be a Hall-of-Famer (Jones and Stewart), the best player in the world (Wilson), a four-time All-Star whose career was cut short by injuries (Ford) and one of the top rebounders in the game today (McCowan).

[1] One of Teague's co-hosts on Club 520 B Hen swears that mebounds isn't meant to be negative, but people on Twitter are not so kind.

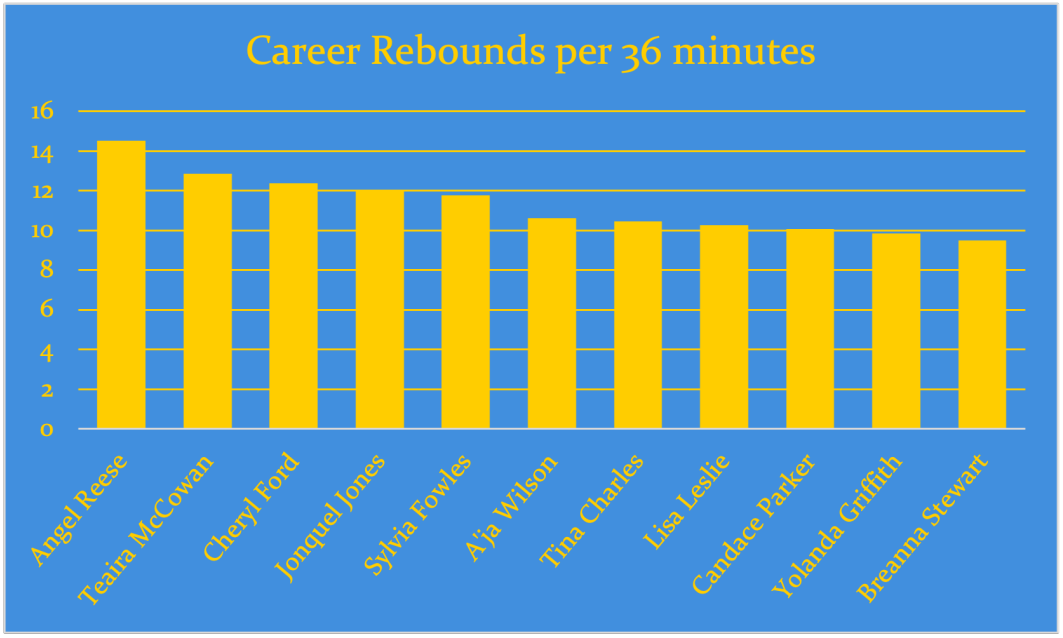
Eye Test

Let's do the simple question first: Who averages the most rebounds per game?



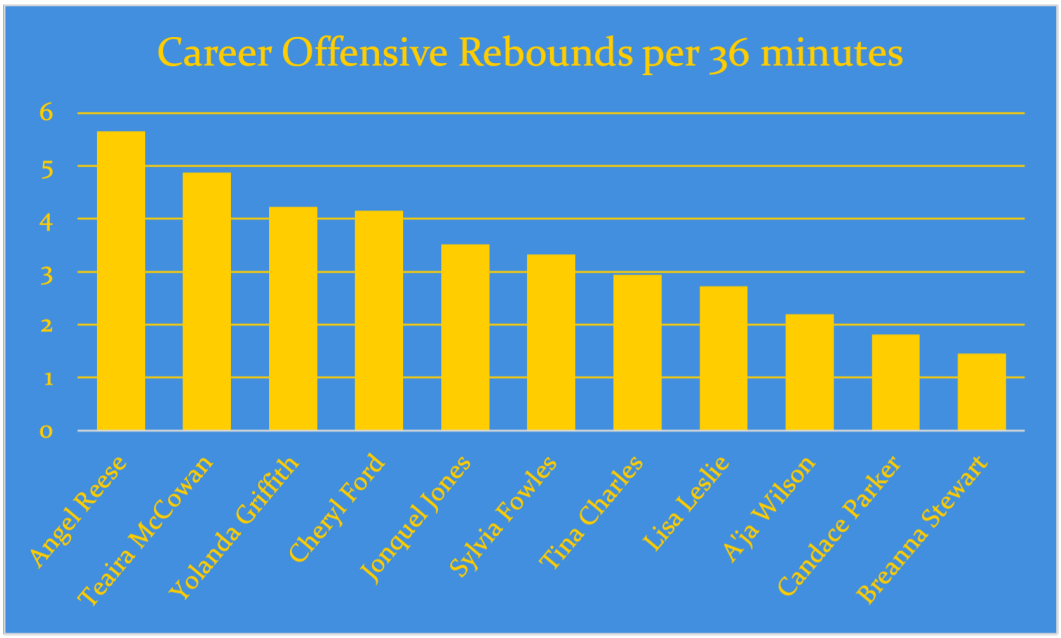
That is an extremely large gap. Upon first glance, that gap alone provides enough credence to seriously consider labeling Reese as the GOAT rebounder. However, Reese is in the middle of her second season and is being compared to players who have played much longer and perhaps less minutes at certain points.

Reese does average the most minutes per game among these players, so here are these numbers adjusted for minutes played, putting all of these players on an even plane:



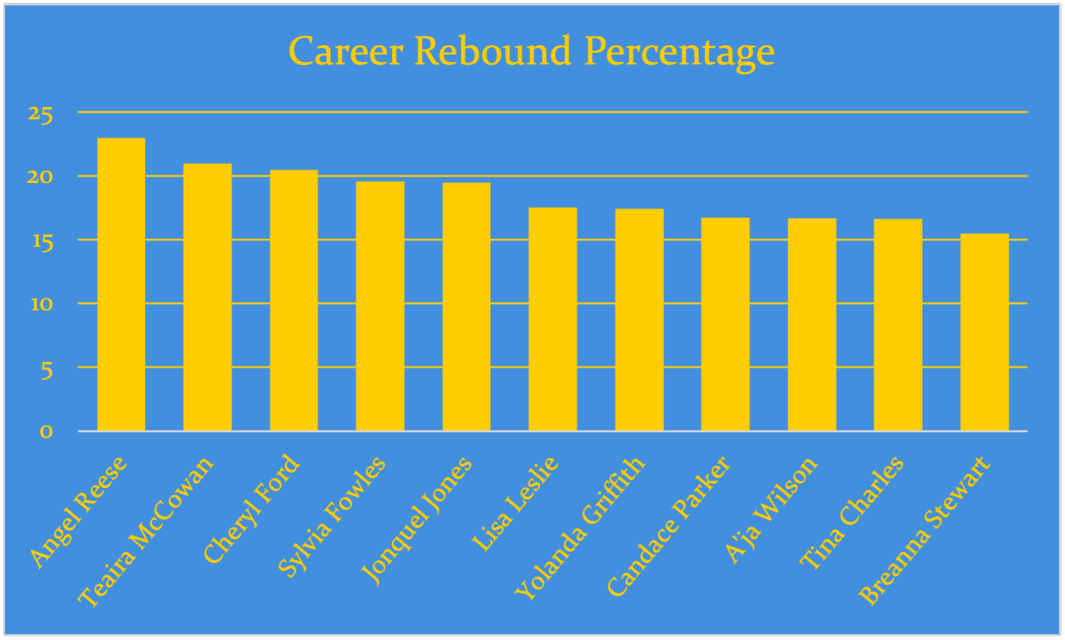
Reese still leads comfortably with a slightly narrower gap between her and the rest of the lot, Ford and McCowan in particular closed the gap.

Now for the "mebounds" per 36 minutes.



This is where Griffith's rebounding prowess shows along with McCowan, but they are still well below Reese. Almost six rebounds per 36 minutes is a staggering average. Reese barely has players in her zip code on all three graphs. She is a dominant and special force on the glass.

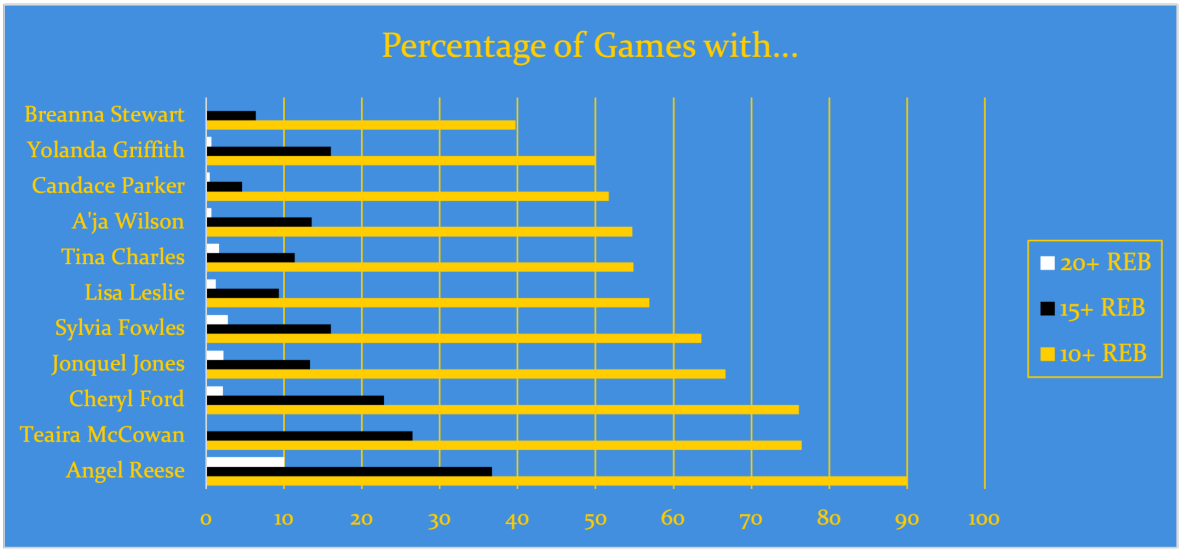
Another rate-adjusted statistic is rebound percentage: an "estimate of the percentage of available rebounds a player grabbed while [she] was on the floor." This metric adjusts for both pace and minutes played, creating a more level environment. How does Reese compare now?



Reese is still on top yet again. The only players near Reese are McCowan and Ford. I would argue that Reese needs to sustain this level of rebounding for several seasons

to cement her GOAT status, but purely as a talent, it's difficult to deny her the label.

Averages aside, let's look at Reese's rates of single-game feats compared to the other players mentioned. How many games does Reese pull down 10, 15, or 20 rebounds?



Once again, Reese on a different level. The minutes requirement is not cherry picked either. Whether it's set at 20, 25, or 30, Reese is on top for all three categories. Focus on that for a second: 90% of Angel Reese's games in which she plays 30+ minutes end with her grabbing ten rebounds. If you lowered the requirement to 20+ minutes, she's still grabbing ten or more boards in $\sim 82\%$ of her games; the next highest is Ford doing it in 56% of her games. Reese is grabbing rebounds at an unprecedented level, combining volume and endurance.

Analysis

Running with 30 minute minimums, I decided to run bootstrapping to compare Reese to these other beasts. I wanted to compare their single game rebounding totals and see which players Reese has a statistically significant rebounding edge over.

Setup

I ran a nonparametric linear analysis contrast test using

$$\mathbf{t} = \begin{pmatrix} 0 \\ 1 \\ -1 \\ \vdots \\ 0 \end{pmatrix}$$

The placement of 1 is static, and the placement of -1 indicates which player Reese is being compared to. This $\mathbf{t}$ is the contrast comparing Reese to Jonquel Jones. I conducted ten individual tests comparing a specific parameter between Reese and a player

from the list:

$Ho : \mathbf{t} = \beta_1 - \beta_i = 0$ where i is the ID of player i
$Ha : \mathbf{t} = \beta_1 - \beta_i > 0$

In English, using rebounds as an example,

H_o: Angel Reese grabs the same amount of rebounds per game as the other 10 players (compared individually 1-on-1)
H_a: Angel Reese grabs more rebounds on average

Results

The first test was rebounds, attempting to prove that there is a significant difference in rebounds grabbed by Reese in the same amount of time:

Player	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Verdict
Jonquel Jones	**0.327**	**2.735**	**Significant Difference**
Yolanda Griffith	**1.339**	**3.65**	**Very Significant Difference**
Sylvia Fowles	**0.418**	**2.701**	**Significant Difference**
Tina Charles	**1.284**	**3.478**	**Very Significant Difference**
A'ja Wilson	**1.055**	**3.285**	**Very Significant Difference**
Cheryl Ford	-0.055	2.334	Barely Not Significant
Lisa Leslie	**1.395**	**3.593**	**Very Significant Difference**
Breanna Stewart	**2.082**	**4.233**	**Very Significant Difference**
Candace Parker	**1.574**	**3.881**	**Very Significant Difference**
Teaira McCowan	-0.582	2.162	Not Significant

Ford and McCowan, the two players closest to Reese in the previous graphs, were the only players who did not produce a significant result. Ford is on the prepice, but H_o in McCowan's case was comfortably not rejected.
Now the same test for offensive boards:

Player	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Verdict
Jonquel Jones	**0.041**	**1.333**	**Barely Significant Difference**
Yolanda Griffith	-0.404	0.789	Not Significant
Sylvia Fowles	-0.006	1.205	Barely Not Significant
Tina Charles	**0.122**	**1.247**	**Barely Significant Difference**
A'ja Wilson	**0.349**	**1.597**	**Significant Difference**
Cheryl Ford	-0.274	1.005	Not Significant
Lisa Leslie	**0.212**	**1.371**	**Barely Significant Difference**
Breanna Stewart	**0.673**	**1.826**	**Significant Difference**
Candace Parker	**0.465**	**1.638**	**Significant Difference**
Teaira McCowan	-0.776	0.683	Not Significant

Again, Griffith's dominance on the offensive glass shines through alongside Ford,

McCowan, and now Sylvia Fowles. Fowles's test is a hair away from being significant, but the other three nulls are very safe.

Only a few of both sets of intervals include zero, meaning that you can reject the null hypothesis that Reese's rebounding is equal to a certain player's rebounding given equal amount of time. The only players who did not produce statistically significant results for both tests were McCowan and Ford; McCowan is a rebounding beast when she plays significant minutes (over 12 rebounds per game when she plays 30+ minutes) and Ford was also a rebounding machine (11.9 RPG given 30+ minutes) when she played.

Teaira McCowan is going to be a recurring figure for the rest of the article, so I'm going to address her test results now. On a rate basis, McCowan is very comparable to Reese; she's lead the league in rebound percentage four times since entering the W. McCowan's issue is volume; she averages about ten less minutes per game than Reese, which causes her to be absent from leaderboards for both total and average rebounds. Since Reese has the volume and greater accumulation, I will give Reese the edge in rebounding. Rebounding is a taxing component of basketball that relies on tenacity and effort, and the ability to average more than 30 minutes per game and rebound at the rate Reese does is so impressive.

Moving on, here are the bootstrap results for median rebounds per 36 minutes. The test is slightly different:

H_o: $\frac{\text{Reese's median rebounds per 36 minutes}}{\text{Other player's median rebounds per 36 minutes}} = 1$

H_a: $\frac{\text{Reese's median rebounds per 36 minutes}}{\text{Other player's median rebounds per 36 minutes}} > 1$, meaning Reese has a higher median rebounds per 36.

Player	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Verdict
Jonquel Jones	**1.071**	**1.289**	**Barely Significant Difference**
Yolanda Griffith	**1.242**	**1.49**	**Significant Difference**
Sylvia Fowles	**1.108**	**1.306**	**Significant Difference**
Tina Charles	**1.25**	**1.473**	**Significant Difference**
A'ja Wilson	**1.208**	**1.439**	**Significant Difference**
Cheryl Ford	**1.028**	**1.232**	**Barely Significant Difference**
Lisa Leslie	**1.27**	**1.499**	**Significant Difference**
Breanna Stewart	**1.393**	**1.655**	**Significant Difference**
Candace Parker	**1.318**	**1.554**	**Significant Difference**
Teaira McCowan	0.964	1.186	Barely Not Significant

This time it's only McCowan. McCowan is a monster on the glass; she simply plays less minutes than Reese.

I didn't want to overdo the testing, so here is the last one: testing for the rate of games with 30+ minutes played and 10+ rebounds:

Player	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Verdict
Jonquel Jones	**1.15**	**1.585**	**Significant Difference**
Yolanda Griffith	**1.529**	**2.154**	**Very Significant Difference**
Sylvia Fowles	**1.231**	**1.6**	**Significant Difference**
Tina Charles	**1.426**	**1.867**	**Significant Difference**
A'ja Wilson	**1.41**	**1.933**	**Significant Difference**
Cheryl Ford	**1.022**	**1.347**	**Barely Significant Difference**
Lisa Leslie	**1.375**	**1.794**	**Significant Difference**
Breanna Stewart	**1.889**	**2.701**	**Very Significant Difference**
Candace Parker	**1.503**	**2.001**	**Very Significant Difference**
Teaira McCowan	0.982	1.429	Barely Not Significant

That damn McCowan again. It's incredibly close to being significant, only short by less than two tenths this time. Reese is something entirely different. Here is the summary of the four tests and if Reese had statistically significant results compared to each player in a given test:

Player	RPG	ORPG	REB/36	10+ REB
Jonquel Jones	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yolanda Griffith	✓	✗	✓	✓
Sylvia Fowles	✓	✗	✓	✓
Tina Charles	✓	✓	✓	✓
A'ja Wilson	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cheryl Ford	✗	✗	✓	✓
Lisa Leslie	✓	✓	✓	✓
Breanna Stewart	✓	✓	✓	✓
Candace Parker	✓	✓	✓	✓
Teaira McCowan	✗	✗	✗	✗

Getting Defensive

I conducted a bootstrapping test similar to the first one, but the parameter was defensive rebounds instead. Reese has the highest defensive rebound per game average among the player pool, but the gap is less than the other comparisons:

Player	DRB/36
Angel Reese	8.86
Jonquel Jones	8.45
Sylvia Fowles	8.45
A'ja Wilson	8.41
Candace Parker	8.27
Cheryl Ford	8.23
Breanna Stewart	8.02
Teaira McCowan	7.99
Tina Charles	7.54
Lisa Leslie	7.52
Yolanda Griffith	5.62

This does support the theory that Reese's numbers are more reliant on offensive rebounds than other players, but offensive rebounds are more difficult to secure and more valuable than defensive rebounds, so that shouldn't be seen as a negative thing. As expected, the bootstrapping results for defensive rebounds did not bear fruit:

Player	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Verdict
Jonquel Jones	-0.874	0.651	Not Significant
Yolanda Griffith	**0.496**	**2.012**	**Significant Difference**
Sylvia Fowles	-0.762	0.843	Not Significant
Tina Charles	-0.257	1.242	Not Significant
A'ja Wilson	-0.644	0.884	Not Significant
Cheryl Ford	-0.583	1.027	Not Significant
Lisa Leslie	-0.266	1.252	Not Significant
Breanna Stewart	-0.509	1.113	Not Significant
Candace Parker	-0.54	0.924	Not Significant
Teaira McCowan	-0.416	1.261	Not Significant

So Reese's defensive rebounding isn't greater than the pool's, but her overall and offensive rebounding was significantly above most of these contemporaries. The large gap in offensive rebounds adds to her case as the GOAT.

Concluding Remarks

Upon inspection of the rebounding numbers, the visual results supported Jeff Teague's declaration, and the statistical results were largely in Reese's favor, too. McCowan was an exception, but I explained how Reese's greater volume and durability across greater minutes gives her the edge. If Reese can continue this rebounding pace for several seasons, she will very easily be the rebounding GOAT. As a talent, it's difficult to

argue that she's not the best rebounding talent in WNBA history. The fact that she beats out legends like Griffith, LEslie, Parker, Ford, etc. is incredible.

I have a note on my process and takeaways for future analysis. For the first bootstrap test, if the minutes threshold is lowered to 15, all tests are statistically significant. I chose 30 minutes as a threshold because I typically use it for NBA analysis, but given the shorter games in the WNBA, I might opt for 25 minutes as a threshold in the future. It makes more sense, given 30 minutes in the NBA is equivalent to 25 minutes in the WNBA (62.5% of total minutes played in a regulation game).

References

[1] Statistics taken from Basketball Reference.

[2] Statistics and game logs were scraped and converted into dataframes using Python packages Beautiful Soup and Pandas. Bootstrapping was done with NumPy.