

= Houston Rockets =

The Houston Rockets are an American professional basketball team based in Houston , Texas . The Rockets compete in the National Basketball Association (NBA) , as a member club of the league 's Western Conference Southwest Division . The team plays its home games at the Toyota Center , located in downtown Houston . The Rockets have won two NBA championships and four Western Conference titles . The team was established as the San Diego Rockets , an expansion team originally based in San Diego , in 1967 . In 1971 , the Rockets moved to Houston .

The Rockets won only 15 games in their debut season as a franchise in 1967 . In the 1969 NBA draft , the Rockets selected power forward Elvin Hayes first overall , who would lead the team to its first playoff appearance in his rookie season . The Rockets did not finish a season with a winning record until the 1976 ? 77 season , when they traded for center Moses Malone . Malone went on to win the NBA Most Valuable Player (MVP) award twice and lead Houston to the conference finals in his first year with the team . He also led the Rockets to the NBA Finals in 1981 where they were defeated in six games by the Boston Celtics , led by Larry Bird and future Rockets coach Kevin McHale .

In 1984 , the Rockets drafted center Hakeem Olajuwon , who would be paired with 7 feet 4 inches (2 @. @ 24 m) Ralph Sampson , forming one of the tallest front courts in the NBA . Nicknamed the " Twin Towers " , they led the team to the 1986 NBA Finals ? the second NBA Finals berth in franchise history ? where Houston was again defeated by the Boston Celtics . The Rockets continued to reach the playoffs throughout the 1980s , but failed to advance past the second round for the rest of the decade . Rudy Tomjanovich took over as head coach midway through the 1991 ? 92 season , ushering in the most successful period in franchise history . The Rockets would reach the 1994 NBA Finals , where Olajuwon led the team to the franchise 's first championship against Patrick Ewing and the New York Knicks . The team repeated as champions in 1995 as the sixth seed in the West and swept the favored Orlando Magic , who were led by a young Shaquille O 'Neal and Penny Hardaway . Houston became the lowest @-@ seeded team in NBA history to win the title .

The Rockets acquired all @-@ star forward Charles Barkley in 1996 , but the presence of three of the NBA 's 50 greatest players of all @-@ time (Olajuwon , Drexler , and Barkley) was not enough to propel Houston past the Western Conference Finals . Each one of the aging trio had left the team by 2001 , and the Rockets of the early 21st century , led by superstars Tracy McGrady and Yao Ming , followed the trend of consistent regular @-@ season respectability followed by playoff underachievement as both players struggled with injuries . After Yao 's early retirement in 2011 , the Rockets entered a period of rebuilding , completely dismantling and retooling their roster . The acquisitions of franchise players James Harden and Dwight Howard have launched the Rockets back into championship contention in the mid @-@ 2010s . The Rockets , under general manager Daryl Morey , are notable for popularizing the use of advanced statistical analytics (similar to sabermetrics in baseball) in player acquisitions and style of play .

= = Franchise history = =

= = = 1967 ? 1971 : San Diego Rockets = = =

The Rockets were founded in 1967 in San Diego by Robert Breitbard , who paid an entry fee of US \$ 1 @. @ 75 million to join the NBA as an expansion team for the 1967 ? 68 NBA season . The NBA wanted to add more teams in the Western United States , and chose San Diego based on the city 's strong economic and population growths , along with the local success of an ice hockey team owned by Breitbard , the San Diego Gulls . The resulting contest to name the franchise chose the name " Rockets " , which paid homage to San Diego 's theme of " a city in motion " and the local arm of General Dynamics developing the Atlas missile and booster rocket program . Breitbard brought in Jack McMahon , then coach of the Cincinnati Royals , to serve as the Rockets ' coach

and general manager . The team , that would join the league along with the Seattle SuperSonics , then built its roster with both veteran players at an expansion draft , and college players from the 1967 NBA draft , where San Diego 's first ever draft pick was Pat Riley . The Rockets lost 67 games in their inaugural season , which was an NBA record for losses in a season at the time .

In 1968 , after the Rockets won a coin toss against the Baltimore Bullets to determine who would have the first overall pick in the 1968 NBA draft , they selected Elvin Hayes from the University of Houston . Hayes improved the Rockets ' record to 37 wins and 45 losses , enough for the franchise 's first ever playoff appearance in 1969 , but the Rockets lost in the semi @-@ finals of the Western Division to the Atlanta Hawks , four games to two . Despite the additions of Calvin Murphy and Rudy Tomjanovich and the management of Hall of Fame coach Alex Hannum , the Rockets tallied a 57 ? 97 record in the following two seasons and did not make the playoffs in either season . Because of the low performance and attendance , Breitbard looked to sell the team , and in 1971 , Texas Sports Investments bought the franchise for \$ 5 @.@ 6 million , and moved the team to Houston . The franchise became the first NBA team in Texas , and the nickname " Rockets " took on even greater relevance after the move , given Houston 's long connection to the space industry .

= = = 1971 ? 1976 : Improving in Houston with Murphy and Rudy @-@ T = = =

Before the start of the 1971 ? 72 NBA season , Hannum left for the Denver Rockets of the American Basketball Association ? later renamed Denver Nuggets , who joined the NBA in 1976 ? and Tex Winter was hired in his place . However , Winter 's clashes with Hayes , due to a system that contrasted with the offensive style to which Hayes was accustomed , made Hayes ask for a trade , leaving for the Baltimore Bullets at the end of the 1971 ? 72 season .

It was also around this time that the Rockets would unveil their classic yellow and red logo and accompanying uniforms used until the end of the 1994 ? 95 season . Winter left soon after , being fired in January 1973 following a ten @-@ game losing streak , and was replaced by Johnny Egan . Egan led the Rockets back to the playoffs in 1975 , where the franchise also managed to win their first round against the New York Knicks , subsequently losing to the veteran Boston Celtics in 5 games . At that time the Rockets gained popularity in Houston , selling out several home games during the regular season as the Rockets battled for a playoff spot and then selling out all of their home playoff games .

= = = 1976 ? 1982 : The Moses Malone era = = =

In the 1975 ? 76 NBA season the Rockets finally had a permanent home in Houston as they moved into The Summit , which they would call home for the next 29 years . During the period , the franchise was owned by Kenneth Schnitzer , developer of the Greenway Plaza which included The Summit . After missing the 1976 playoffs , Tom Nissalke was hired as a coach , and pressed the team to add a play @-@ making guard in college standout John Lucas and a rebounding center through Moses Malone , who he had coached in the ABA . The additions had an immediate impact , with the 1976 ? 77 Rockets winning the Central Division and going all the way to the Eastern Conference Finals , losing to the Julius Erving 's Philadelphia 76ers 4 games to 2 . The following season had the team regressing to just 28 wins due to an injury to captain Tomjanovich , who got numerous facial fractures after being punched by Kermit Washington of the Los Angeles Lakers and wound up spending five months in rehabilitation . After trading Lucas to the Golden State Warriors in exchange for Rick Barry , the Rockets returned to the playoffs in 1978 ? 79 , with " The Chairman Of The Boards " Moses Malone receiving the 1979 MVP Award , but the team was swept 2 ? 0 by Atlanta in the first round . Nissalke was let go , and assistant Del Harris was promoted to head coach .

In 1979 George Maloof , a businessperson from Albuquerque , New Mexico , bought the Rockets for \$ 9 million . He died the following year , and while the Maloof family expressed interest in selling the team , George 's 24 @-@ year @-@ old son Gavin took over the Rockets . A buyer was eventually found in 1982 as businessman Charlie Thomas purchased the franchise for \$ 11 million .

The Maloof period of ownership marked the first dominant period of the Rockets , highlighted by the team 's first NBA Finals appearance in 1981 . Prior to the 1980 ? 81 season , the arrival of the Dallas Mavericks led to an NBA realignment that sent the Rockets back to the Western Conference . Houston qualified for the playoffs only in the final game of the season with a 40 ? 42 record . The post @-@ season had the Rockets beat the Lakers , in @-@ state rivals San Antonio Spurs , and the equally underdog Kansas City Kings to become only the second team in NBA history (after the 1959 Minneapolis Lakers) to have advanced to the Finals after achieving a losing record in the regular season . In the final round facing Larry Bird 's Boston Celtics in the finals round , the Rockets blew a late lead in Game 1 and won Game 2 at the Boston Garden . However , afterwards the team failed to capitalize on the early success against the favored Celtics , and eventually lost in six games .

While new owner Charlie Thomas expressed interest in renewing with Moses Malone , which had been again chosen as MVP in 1981 ? 82 , the Rockets traded him to the Philadelphia 76ers for Caldwell Jones , as a declining regional economy made the Rockets unable to pay Malone 's salary . When the Rockets finished a league worst 14 ? 68 , Celtics coach Bill Fitch was hired to replace outgoing Del Harris , and the team won the first pick of the 1983 NBA draft , used to select Ralph Sampson from the University of Virginia . Sampson had good numbers and was awarded the NBA Rookie of the Year award , but the Rockets still finished last overall , again getting the top pick at the upcoming 1984 NBA draft , used to select Hakeem Olajuwon from the University of Houston .

= = = 1984 ? 2001 : The Hakeem Olajuwon era = = =

= = = = 1984 ? 1987 : The Twin Towers era = = = =

In his first season , Olajuwon finished second to Michael Jordan in NBA Rookie of the Year balloting , and the Rockets record improved by 19 games , good enough for a return to the playoffs as the third best team in the West , where they were upset by the sixth @-@ seeded Utah Jazz . The Olajuwon and Sampson duo earned much praise , and was nicknamed " Twin Towers " . In the following season , Houston won the Midwest Division title with a 51 ? 31 record . The subsequent playoffs had the Rockets sweeping the Sacramento Kings , having a hard @-@ fought six @-@ game series with Alex English 's Denver Nuggets , and then facing defending champion Lakers , losing the first game but eventually managing to win the series ? the only Western Playoffs defeat of the Showtime Lakers ? to get to the franchise 's second Finals appearance . The NBA Finals once again matched the Rockets up against the Celtics , a contrast to Houston 's young front challenging the playoff @-@ hardened Celtics front court of Larry Bird , Kevin McHale and Robert Parish . The Celtics won the first two games in Boston , gave the Rockets their only home playoff defeat that season in game 4 , and clinched the title as Bird scored a triple @-@ double on Game 6 .

After the Finals , Boston coach K.C. Jones called the Rockets " the new monsters on the block " feeling they had a bright future . But the team had a poor start to the following season amidst players getting injured or suspended for cocaine usage , and during the playoffs were defeated in the second round by Seattle SuperSonics . Early in the 1987 ? 88 season , Sampson , who had signed a new contract , was traded to the Golden State Warriors , bringing the Twin Towers era to an end just 18 months after their Finals appearance . Sampson 's once @-@ promising career was shortened due to chronic knee injuries , which forced his retirement in 1991 . Jones ' prophecy of a Rockets dynasty never materialized until the early 90 's .

= = = = 1987 ? 1992 : Lean years = = = =

In the next five seasons , the Rockets either failed to qualify for the playoffs or were eliminated in the first round . The first elimination in 1988 led to Fitch 's dismissal , with Don Chaney replacing him as head coach . Chaney , also a former Celtic , had his best season during 1990 ? 91 , where he was named the Coach of the Year after leading the Rockets to a 52 @-@ 30 record despite

Olajuwon 's absence due to injury for 25 games . Despite Olajuwon 's usual strong numbers , the underwhelming roster could not be lifted out of mediocrity . However , the attempts to rebuild the team nucleus incorporated players that would later make an impact in the years to come , such as Kenny Smith , Vernon Maxwell , Robert Horry , Mario Elie , Sam Cassell and Otis Thorpe .

Midway through the 1991 ? 92 season , with the Rockets ' record only 26 ? 26 , Chaney was fired and replaced by his assistant Rudy Tomjanovich , a former Houston player himself . While the Rockets did not make the playoffs , Tomjanovich 's arrival was considered a step forward . In the next year , the Rockets improved their record by 13 games , getting the Midwest Division title , and winning their first playoff series in 5 years by defeating the Los Angeles Clippers , before an elimination by the SuperSonics during a game 7 overtime loss .

== == 1993 ? 1995 : Clutch City championships == ==

On July 30 , 1993 , Leslie Alexander purchased the Rockets for \$ 85 million . In Tomjanovich 's second full year as head coach , the Rockets began the 1993 ? 94 season by tying an NBA record with a start of 15 ? 0 . Led by Olajuwon , who was named the MVP and Defensive Player of the Year , the Rockets won a franchise @-@ record 58 games . Aside from the second round which went through seven games against the Phoenix Suns , the Rockets easily beat their Western Conference contestants during the playoffs to advance to their third finals . The New York Knicks opened a 3 @-@ 2 advantage , but the Rockets managed to win the last two games on their home court and claimed their first championship in franchise history . Olajuwon was awarded the Finals MVP , after averaging 27 points , nine rebounds and four blocked shots a game .

The Rockets initially struggled in the first half of the 1994 ? 95 season , which they fixed by sending Otis Thorpe to the Portland Trail Blazers in exchange for Olajuwon 's former college teammate Clyde Drexler . With only 47 wins , the Rockets entered the playoffs as the sixth seed in the Western Conference . Still , a strong playoff run that earned Houston the nickname " Clutch City " had the Rockets defeating the West 's top three seeds ? the Jazz , Suns and Spurs ? to reach back @-@ to @-@ back finals , this time against the Orlando Magic , led by Shaquille O 'Neal and Anfernee " Penny " Hardaway . When Houston swept the series in four straight games , they became the first team in NBA history to win the championship as a sixth seed , and the first to beat four 50 @-@ win teams in a single postseason en route to the championship . Olajuwon was again the Finals MVP , only the second player after Michael Jordan to win the award two years in a row .

== == 1995 ? 2002 : Post @-@ Championship and rebuilding == ==

During the offseason , the Rockets went for a change of visual identity , making navy blue and silver the new primary colors while adopting a new cartoon @-@ inspired logo and pinstriped jerseys . The Rockets won 48 games in the 1995 ? 96 campaign , in which Olajuwon became the NBA 's all @-@ time leader in blocked shots . The playoffs had the Rockets beating the Lakers before a sweep by the SuperSonics .

Before the start of the succeeding season , the Rockets sent four players to Phoenix in exchange for Charles Barkley . The resulting " Big Three " of Olajuwon , Drexler , and Barkley had a strong debut season with a 57 ? 25 record , going all the way to the Western Conference finals before losing to the Utah Jazz 4 ? 2 on a dramatic last @-@ second shot by John Stockton . The following season was marked by injuries , and Houston finished 41 ? 41 and the 8th seed , leading to another elimination by the top @-@ seeded Jazz .

Drexler retired after the season , and the Rockets traded to bring in Scottie Pippen to take his place . In the strike @-@ shortened 1998 ? 99 season , the Rockets lost to the Lakers in the first round of the playoffs . After the 1999 draft , the Rockets traded for the second overall pick Steve Francis from the Vancouver Grizzlies , in exchange for four players and a first @-@ round draft pick . However , after Houston traded a discontented Pippen to Portland , and Barkley suffered a career @-@ ending injury , the rebuilt Rockets went 34 ? 48 and missed the playoffs , for only the second time in 15 years .

In the 2000 ? 01 season , the Rockets worked their way to a 45 ? 37 record . However , in a competitive Western Conference where seven teams won 50 games , this left the Rockets two games out of the playoffs . In the following offseason , a 38 @-@ year @-@ old Olajuwon requested a trade , and , despite stating their desire to keep him , the Rockets reached a sign @-@ and @-@ trade agreement , sending him to the Toronto Raptors . The ensuing 2001 ? 02 season ? the first without Hakeem in two decades ? was unremarkable , and the Rockets finished with only 28 wins .

= = = 2002 ? 2009 : Return to Relevance = = =

= = = 2002 ? 2004 : Yao Ming arrives = = =

After Houston was awarded the first overall pick in the 2002 NBA draft , they selected Yao Ming , a 7 feet 6 inches (2 @. @ 29 m) Chinese center . The Rockets missed the 2003 playoffs by one game , improving their record by 15 victories .

The 2003 ? 04 season marked the Rockets ' arrival to a new arena , the Toyota Center , a redesign of their uniforms and logo , and their first season without Rudy Tomjanovich , who resigned as head coach after being diagnosed with bladder cancer . Led by former Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy , the Rockets finished the regular season with a record of 45 ? 37 , earning their first playoff berth since 1999 , again losing to the Lakers in the first round .

= = = 2004 ? 2009 : Yao & McGrady duo = = =

In the offseason , Houston saw major changes in the roster as the Rockets acquired Tracy McGrady in a seven @-@ player deal with the Orlando Magic . The scoring champion McGrady and the strong rebounder Yao formed a well @-@ regarded pair that helped the Rockets win 22 consecutive games in the 2007 ? 08 NBA season , which was at the time the 3rd longest winning streak in NBA history . Still , the duo was plagued with injuries ? of the 463 regular season games for which they were teammates , Yao missed 146 and McGrady 160 ? and did not win any playoff series , despite gathering leads over the Dallas Mavericks in 2005 and the Jazz in 2007 . After the 2007 elimination , Van Gundy was fired , and the Rockets hired Rick Adelman to replace him .

For the 2008 ? 09 season , the Rockets signed forward Ron Artest . While McGrady wound up playing only half the games before enduring a season @-@ ending microfracture surgery , the Rockets ended the season 53 ? 29 , enough for the Western Conference 's fifth seed . During the playoffs , the Rockets beat the Portland Trail Blazers four games to two , winning their first round since 1997 . During the series , Dikembe Mutombo injured his knee , which forced him to retire after 18 seasons in the NBA . However , the second round against the Lakers had the Rockets losing 4 @-@ 3 and Yao Ming suffering yet another season @-@ ending injury , this time a hairline fracture in his left foot .

= = = 2009 ? 2012 : " Competitive Rebuilding " = = =

During the 2009 ? 10 season , the Rockets saw the departures of Artest in the offseason and McGrady , Joey Dorsey and Carl Landry during mid @-@ season trades . Despite great play by Kevin Martin , who arrived from the Kings , and Aaron Brooks , who would eventually be chosen as the Most Improved Player of the season , the Rockets could not make it to the playoffs , finishing 42 ? 40 , 3rd in the Southwest Division . At that time , the Rockets set an NBA record for best record by a team with no All @-@ Stars . The Rockets would also finish ninth in the Western Conference for the following two seasons , with Yao Ming getting a season @-@ ending injury seven games into the 2010 ? 11 season and deciding to retire during the 2011 offseason . Said offseason , which saw the NBA going through a lockout , had Adelman dismissed , and general manager Daryl Morey deciding to start a revamp of the Rockets based on advanced statistical analytics (similar to sabermetrics in baseball) in player acquisitions and style of play . Kevin McHale was named head

coach , and the roster saw significant changes .

= = = 2012 ? present : The James Harden era ; resurgence and inconsistency = = =

After the roster moves made by Morey during the 2012 NBA offseason , only four players were left from the 2011 ? 12 Rockets roster : Chandler Parsons , Greg Smith , Marcus Morris and Patrick Patterson , with the latter two leaving through trades during the 2012 ? 13 NBA season . The most important acquisition was reigning sixth man of the year James Harden , who Morey called a " foundational " player which he expected to be Houston 's featured player after a supporting role in the Oklahoma City Thunder . Harden caused an immediate impact as part of the starting lineup for the Rockets , with 37 points , 12 assists , 6 rebounds , 4 steals , and a block in the season opener against the Detroit Pistons , and an average of 25 @.@ 9 points a game through the season . Combining Harden 's performance and McHale 's up @-@ tempo offense , the Rockets became one of the highest scoring offenses in the NBA , leading the league in scoring for the majority of the season . In the post @-@ season , the Rockets fell to the Oklahoma City Thunder in the first round , losing the series 4 ? 2 .

Eager to add another franchise player to their team , the Rockets heavily pursued free agent center Dwight Howard in the 2013 offseason . He officially signed with the Rockets on July 13 , 2013 . Led by the new inside @-@ out combination of Howard and James Harden , and with a strong supporting cast including Chandler Parsons , Jeremy Lin , and Ömer A??k , the Rockets were expected to jump into title contention in the upcoming season . However , in the post @-@ season , the Rockets were defeated in the first round by the Portland Trail Blazers , losing the series 4 ? 2 . Still , in the 2014 ? 15 season , without Lin and Parsons but reinforced by Trevor Ariza , the Rockets started the season well , winning the first four games of the season for the first time since 1996 ? 97 , and winning each of their first six games by 10 points or more , the first team to accomplish this feat since the 1985 ? 86 Denver Nuggets . While the Rockets had many key players miss time throughout the entire season , James Harden took it upon himself to keep the Rockets near the top of the conference , turning him into an MVP front @-@ runner . He became the first Rocket to score 50 points in a game since Hakeem Olajuwon , as well as the only player in franchise history to record multiple 50 point games in a season . On April 15 , 2015 , the Rockets beat the Jazz to claim their first ever Southwest Division title and first Division crown since 1994 , and by completing 56 wins finished with the third @-@ best regular season record in franchise history . During the playoffs , the Rockets beat the Mavericks 4 ? 1 in the first round , and overcame a 3 ? 1 deficit against the Los Angeles Clippers to win the Western Semifinals and return to the Conference Finals for the first time in 18 years . In the Conference Finals , the Rockets were defeated by the Golden State Warriors 4 ? 1 .

The 2015 ? 16 season saw Kevin McHale fired after a bad start where the team only won 4 of its first 11 games , and assistant J. B. Bickerstaff took over coaching duties . Inconsistent play led to the Rockets struggling to remain in the playoff qualifying zone , and surrounded by trade rumors . Houston only clinched its 2016 playoffs spot by winning its last game , finishing the season 41 ? 41 to earn an eight seed and a match @-@ up against the Warriors . Like in the previous year , the Rockets were once again defeated by the Golden State Warriors in 5 games .

On June 1 , 2016 , the Rockets named Mike D 'Antoni as their new head coach .

= = Season @-@ by @-@ season record = =

List of the last five seasons completed by the Rockets . For the full season @-@ by @-@ season history , see List of Houston Rockets seasons .