

The Blueprint for Winning in the NBA - 2025 Season

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Introduction

Every NBA season tells a story—not just of talent and highlights, but of the deeper mechanics that separate contenders from pretenders. While some teams light up the scoreboard, others quietly dominate through strategic efficiency. In a league increasingly driven by data, understanding what really leads to winning has never been more important. Traditional basketball statistics such as points and rebounds often fail to capture the full story of team success, whereas teams with superior advanced efficiency metrics, such as Offensive and Defensive Efficiency Ratings and Shot Opportunity Efficiency, are the ones that consistently rise to the top in today's NBA. By comparing these traditional and advanced metrics a clear advantage will be given towards the advanced metrics.

Coaches, basketball analysts, front-office executives, and anyone in business of team strategy and player evaluation would find this information useful and could look to incorporate it to make better decisions. While most people are already familiar with traditional basketball metrics, this comparison will persuade them to prioritize advanced efficiency stats such as Offensive Efficiency Rating (OER) Defensive Efficiency Rating (DER) and Scoring Opportunity Efficiency (SOE) as key indicators of success. For context, OER is the average number of points scored per shot taken, DER is the measure of how many points a team allows per shots and SOE accounts for points per possession and rebounds to see how effective teams are at scoring.

Methodology / Data

The dataset for this project consists of the 2025 NBA regular season games up until March 15th, providing a detailed look at team-level statistics. Using data obtained from NBA game logs, the analysis includes both traditional statistics and advanced efficiency metrics to paint a clear picture of what truly drives team success. The dataset covers key game details such

as whether a team played at home or away, game outcomes, and standard performance indicators like points and rebounds. However, these basic stats often fail to capture the full picture of a team's effectiveness, which is why this project also incorporates advanced metrics such as OER, DER, and SOE. OER was chosen because it incorporates scoring in its calculation so it would be a good comparison to the traditional points statistics.

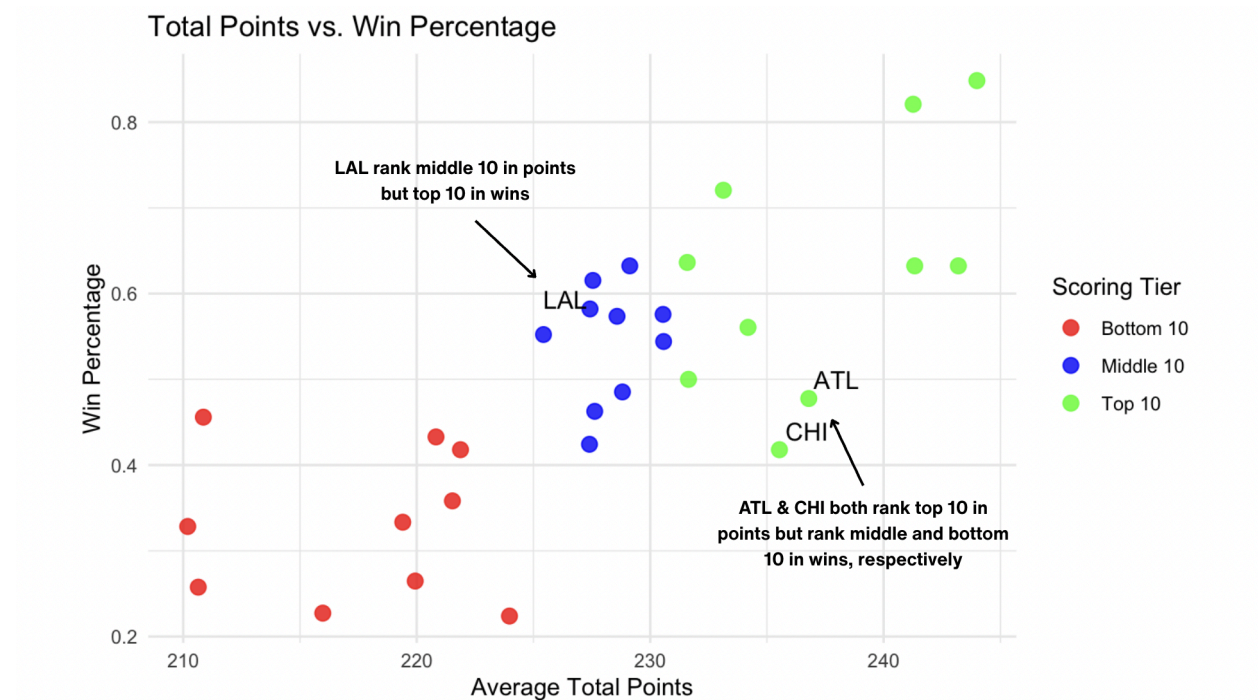
Not all points are created equal — efficiency outpaces raw scoring every time.

DER was chosen because it will show how good teams are defending the ball and it can be used to classify which teams are performing at high levels offensively and defensively. SOE was chosen because it considers scoring and rebounding and will be a good metric to compare towards both traditional stats to see which is more accurate. These metrics adjust for pace, possessions, and the impact of second-chance opportunities while accounting for mistakes like turnovers. By analyzing these statistics across all teams in the league, this project aims to uncover the key efficiency metrics that separate elite teams from the rest. The analysis will compare teams with high winning percentages to those struggling at the bottom and identify the statistical patterns that contribute to success. This insight can be valuable for coaches, analysts, and executives looking to improve their approach to team building and game strategy.

Offensive Efficiency Rating Outperforms Total Points

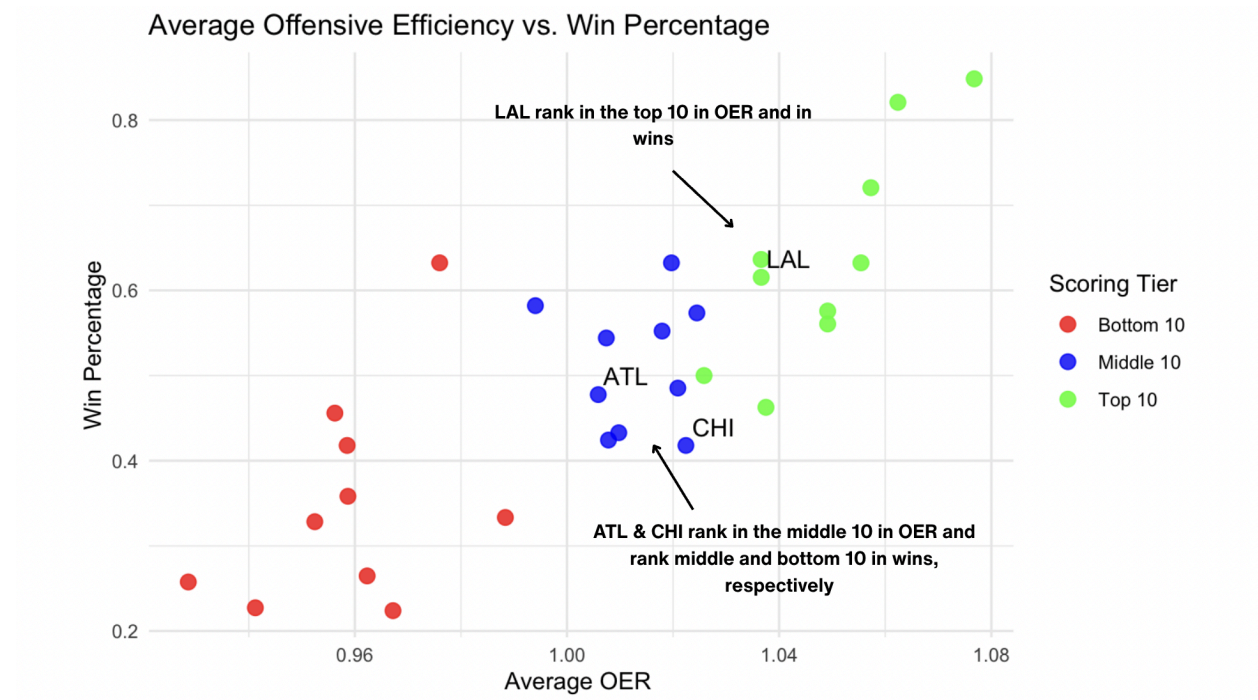
Offensive Efficiency Rating is a stronger predictor of team success than total points scored. Scoring is the most visible aspect of basketball performance, and at a glance, it's easy to assume that teams who score the most points win the most games. However, this assumption often falls apart under closer analysis. OER which accounts the number of points scored per shot taken, paints a more accurate picture of a team's true offensive power. Points scored can be inflated by pace or shot volume, OER isolates quality over quantity. When comparing average

OER to average points scored across the league, a clearer and stronger relationship emerges between efficiency and win percentage, suggesting that how a team scores is more important than how much. The scatterplot below illustrates the relationship between average points scored and win percentage across all NBA teams in the 2025 season, with three teams being highlighted for analysis.



As shown in the visualization, teams like Atlanta and Chicago are ranked in the top 10 of average points being scored per game. Despite their ability to score a high number of points they have 32 and 28 wins, which rank 17th and 21st, respectively. On the other hand, the Lakers are in the middle 10 of total points scored but rank 8th in wins with 40. In the next visualization, it will

show average OER vs Win Percentage with the same three teams highlighted.

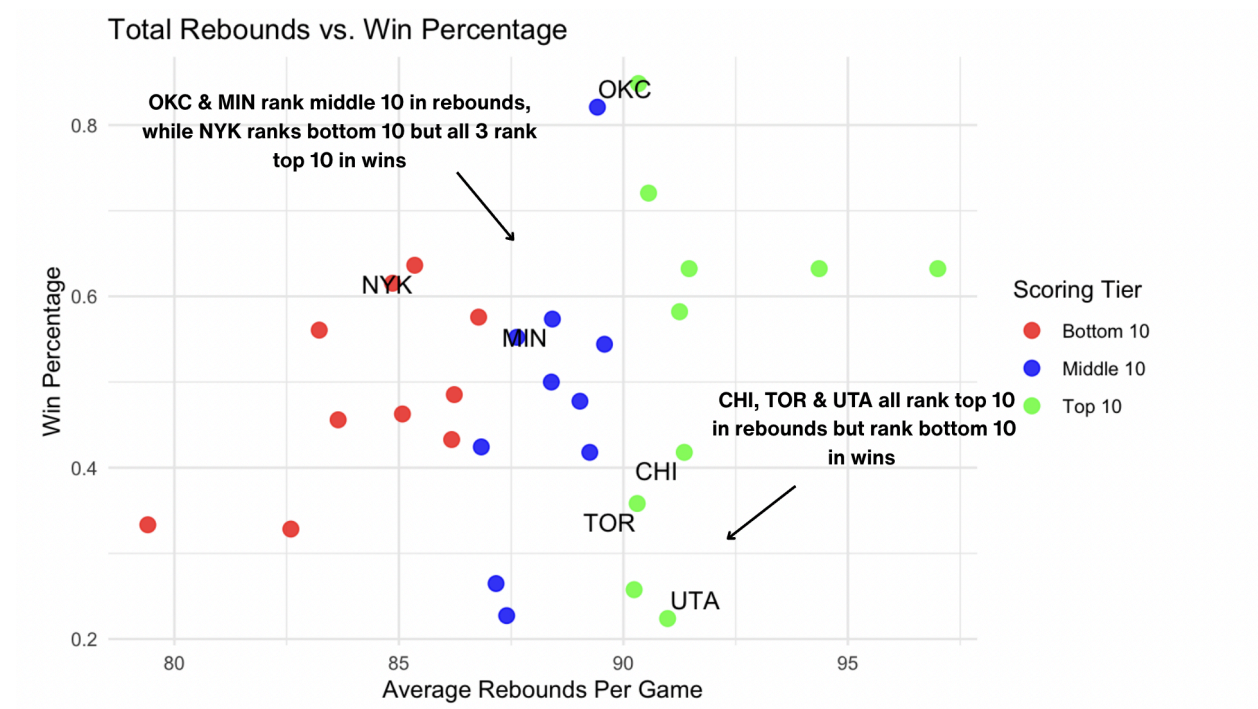


This visualization shows a more accurate representation of where the teams lie in terms of win percentage and offensive output. Atlanta and Chicago both are in the middle 10 of OER which is more accurate regarding where they rank in terms of wins. On the flip side, we see the Lakers are now in the top 10 of OER which is also where they align in terms of wins. While total points scored does show some correlation with success, the points scatterplot reveals a weaker relationship compared to Offensive Efficiency Rating. On average, teams in the top win group post an OER that is 1.6% higher than mid-tier teams and 6.7% higher than bottom-tier teams. While top win teams average more total points, the differences are 3.1% higher than mid-tier teams and 6.4% higher than the bottom tier. Although the difference in average points scored between high and mid-tier teams (3.1%) is slightly greater than the OER gap (1.6%), this does not tell the full story. Again, points scored can fluctuate based on pace and volume, and even teams with inefficient offenses may accumulate high totals. More importantly, when visualizing

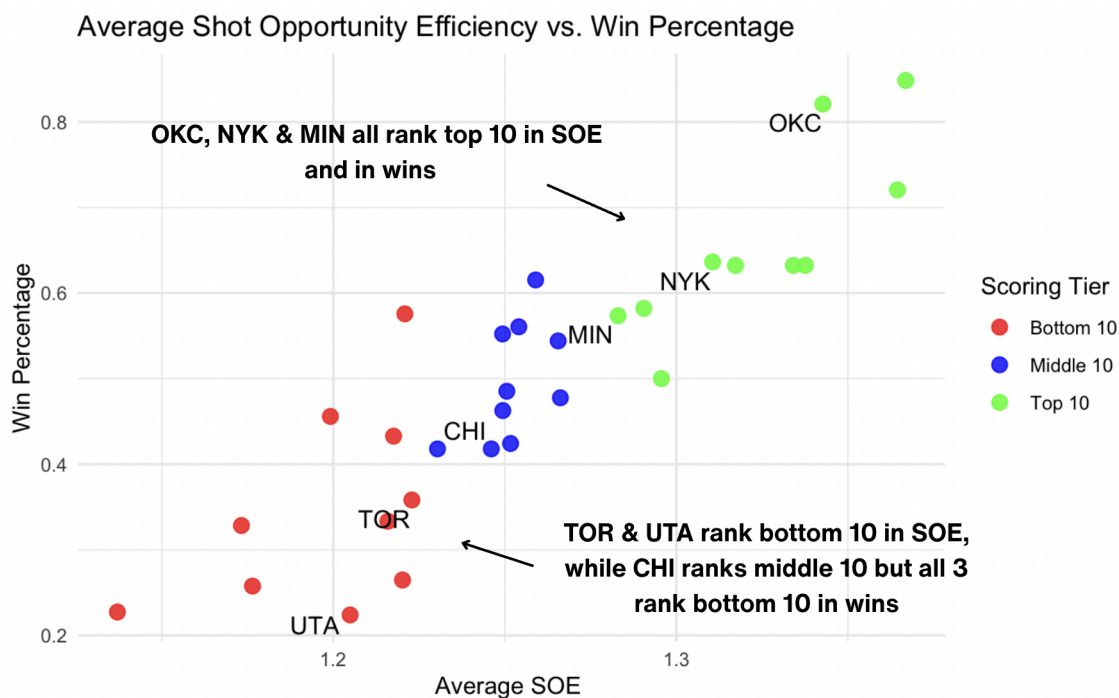
these metrics against win percentage, OER shows a stronger and more consistent trend in identifying teams where they rank in terms of offensive efficiency and winning.

Why Scoring Opportunity Efficiency Matters More Than Rebounding

Scoring opportunity efficiency predicts success better than rebounds. Rebounding is a core part of basketball strategy, often used to gauge a team's hustle and control of the game. However, rebounds alone fail to tell the full story of a team's effectiveness. Scoring Opportunity Efficiency (SOE) goes beyond raw rebounding totals by combining offensive production, rebounding, and turnover rates into a single possession-based metric. This view provides a more holistic understanding of how well a team capitalizes on its chances. While teams that rebound well may extend possessions, it is the teams that maximize possessions that tend to win more consistently. In the visualization below, it will show the relationship between total average rebounds vs win percentage with six teams labeled for analysis.



The visualization shows Chicago, Toronto, and Utah in the top 10 of rebounds per game but this doesn't represent their wins at all. All three of these teams rank in the bottom 10 of wins with Chicago ranking 21st at 28 wins, Toronto ranking 24th at 24 wins, and Utah ranking 29th at 15 wins. This shows that a team could rank high in rebounds, but it doesn't correlate to wins. The graph also shows OKC and Minnesota being ranked in the middle 10, while the Knicks are ranked in the bottom 10. These three teams all rank within the top 10 of wins but are average or below average in terms of rebounds per game. In the next scatterplot, it will show average SOE compared to win percentage with the same six teams labeled.

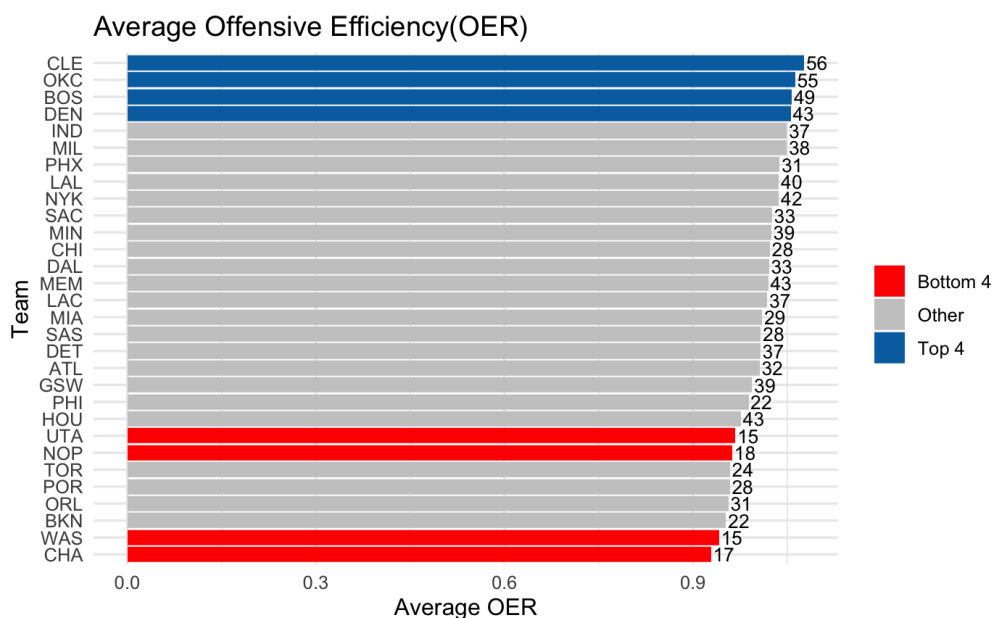


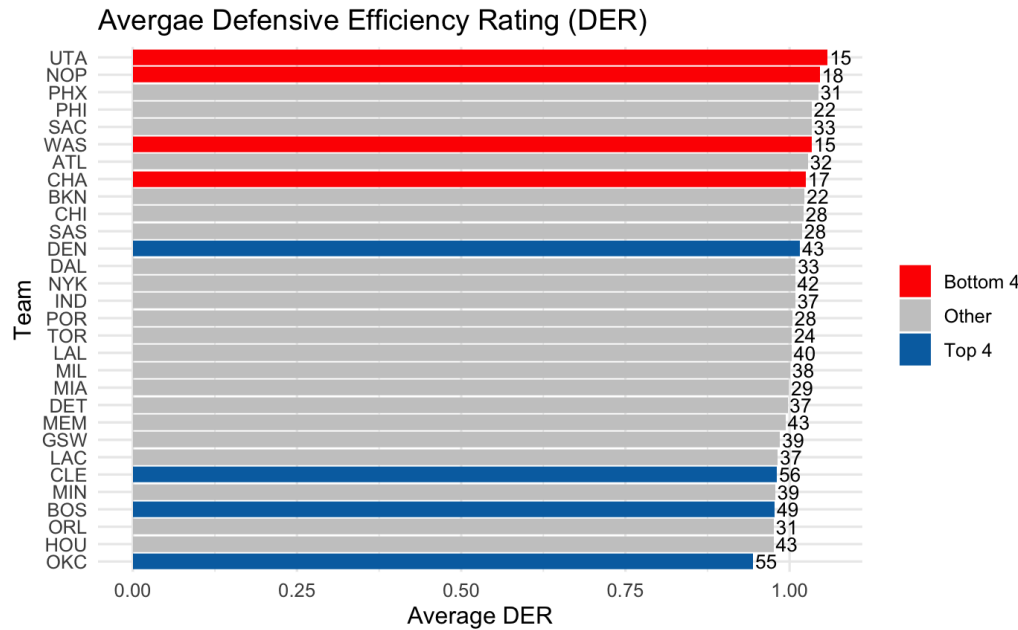
This graph shows teams ranking like where they rank in wins. It has OKC, NYC and MIN all in the top 10 where they also rank in wins. On the other hand, it has CHI in the middle 10 which they rank just outside of and has TOR and UTA in the bottom 10 which is where they rank in terms of wins. From the scatterplots, it is shown that where teams rank amongst SOE is a better indicator of where they rank in terms of wins in comparison to rebounds. In fact, teams in the top

win group post an average SOE that is 5.9% higher than mid-tier teams and 9.4% higher than the bottom tier. Rebounding shows less separation, with top win teams averaging just 4.3% more rebounds than mid-tier teams and only 3.1% more than the bottom-tier teams, further reinforcing that rebounding is not a better predictor. Although rebounding is important, this suggests that it's not just about securing the ball, but about what teams do after they gain possession that ultimately drives winning outcomes.

Offensive and Defensive Efficiency Rating Reveal True Contenders

Offensive and defensive efficiency metrics reveal true contenders and expose pretenders when regarding the top teams in the league. Raw performance can be deceiving, but as it has been shown efficiency metrics provide a lot more clarity. By ranking teams across both offensive and defensive efficiency, we can distinguish those who perform well on both ends of the floor which is a common trait of top-tier teams. In the charts below, the top 4 and bottom 4 teams in wins will be highlighted to see how they rank in these metrics.





From the visualization, it can be said that except for Denver that OKC, Cleveland and Boston are elite teams that perform well offensively and defensively which is essential to regular and postseason success. The wins prove this as they have 55, 56 and 49 wins, respectively, suggesting that these metrics do a good job at distinguishing between teams. On the flip side, the graph shows the bottom four teams generally rank towards the bottom of these same metrics, which furthers the points that these metrics are good indicators. For context, top win teams post an average DER of 0.986, while mid-tier and low-tier teams allow opponents to score with 2.2% and 4.2% more efficiency, respectively. This gap in defensive performance further reinforces the importance of efficiency on both ends of the floor. Overall, these ratings go beyond the basics, highlighting bad teams that struggle to win due to inefficiency or good teams that are fundamentally sound and built to win.

Conclusion

In today's NBA, teams should be using more advanced metrics than just the typical points or rebounds that are widely available. Instead, they should focus on advanced metrics that more accurately represent a team's offensive and defensive efficiency. From comparison metrics such as Offensive Efficiency Rating (OER), Defensive Efficiency Rating (DER), and Scoring Opportunity Efficiency (SOE) are more reliable indicators of team performance than traditional stats like points or rebounds. While raw totals can be misleading, efficiency metrics reveal which teams consistently execute at a high level and ultimately win more games. Regarding averages the advanced metrics typically performed better than the traditional stats, with the exception of one comparison. However, through the visualizations it was shown that whether identifying true contenders or uncovering why some high-scoring teams struggle, these metrics provide a clearer, more predictive lens for evaluating success in modern basketball.