

In the NBA, most awards are built on reputation. If you can get the media to write it or talk about it. People will believe it.

Most of the stories about players and their abilities have some grain of truth to them when they were attached to the player. Unfortunately, even though the rep has long changed, it's rare to find someone who has put the time in to actually find out what the current truth about a player is.

Where am I going with this... straight to Dirk Nowitzki.

For Dirk's first few years, he really was not a good defender. Teams would go right at him. He would be overmatched playing against other teams' centers, or outkicked playing against small forwards. Dirk got the reputation of not being a good defender.

Those days are gone.

One thing about Dirk, he wants to be a complete player. He wants to excel at every part of his game. Passing, shooting, decisionmaking and yes defense. Every summer he has focused on drills that made him quicker, stronger and better able to defend.

Although his rep said otherwise, Dirk really started to raise his defensive game last year. When he was able to focus on guarding other teams' Power Forwards, he was a good defender.

This year, Dirk has become better than just a good defender. Dirk has become a very good defender, on his way to being one of the best defensive PFs in the league. If that comment makes you laugh, you aren't watching enough games and paying attention to Dirk on the defensive end.

Go down the list of PFs in the NBA. After Garnett and Duncan, who is a better defender?

It's time to give Dirk his due. If you have a vote for All Defensive Team, and you aren't considering Dirk. You aren't paying attention.

The 2nd player on the Mavs that should be a no-brainer for All Defensive Team is Josh Howard. Particularly with Artest out for the season, Josh is right there with Kobe and Bruce Bowen, and with Doug Christie's injuries, he may have passed him by. The only guy I would put ahead of Josh without question is Kirilenko.

Josh always has to guard the superstar guard or small forward. I think he caught some people off guard last year. Not any longer. Scorers know that when they have Josh on him, they are in for a long night. Guarding the other teams' stars mean he gets in some foul trouble, but once Josh gets the respect of the officials, he will be even more of a force on defense than he already is. He has a great chance to be the Defensive Player of the Year in the NBA. More than once.

That's two Mavs that deserve strong consideration for 1st or 2nd team All Defensive honors. I also don't have a lot of doubt that once Devin Harris gets going, he will be right there as well.

The best part is that all 3 guys work so hard, they all will get better and better.

the best is yet to come