

Current Point Differential vs. Historical Final Records

I have compiled each team's current point differential (total points scored minus opponents' points scored). Then, I've generated a list of every team between the 1969-70 and 2018-19 season that had a point differential similar (± 5 points) to the current season's teams through the same number of games played.

For example, the Sixers have a point differential of +30 through their first 12 games this season. The 1995 Seattle SuperSonics had a point differential of +35 through their first 12 games; they get added to the Sixers' list. The 2009 Indiana Pacers had a point differential of +24 through their first 12 games; they are excluded. From this subset of similar teams, the average win count was calculated and normalized to an 82-game season shown in the *Historical Average Wins* column below (I forgot this season is 72 games). This seems like possibly useful information until you peek at the range of teams that were deemed similar. Obviously, the season is young and point differential isn't a perfect metric for this exercise. Teams start slow due to injuries, rust, short offseason, etc. COVID has, and will continue to, have a major impact. And trades and more injuries will affect the remainder of the season.

Team	GP	Point Differential	Historical Average Wins	Standard Deviation	Best Case	Worst Case
76ers	12	+30	45.8	7.2	2011 Bulls 62-20	1980 Warriors 24-58
Bucks	12	+137	56.1	7.3	1992 Bulls 67-15	1998 Knicks 43-39
Bulls	11	-55	32.0	8.8	1994 Bulls 55-27	1992 Timberwolves 15-67
Cavaliers	12	-61	30.7	8.6	2019 Rockets 53-29	1997 Celtics 15-67
Celtics	10	+18	44.2	7.9	1990 Trail Blazers 59-23	1982 Jazz 25-57
Clippers	12	+16	44.6	7.7	2007 Suns 61-21	1982 Jazz 25-57
Grizzlies	11	-15	40.0	7.9	2013 Nuggets 57-25	1996 Raptors 21-61
Hawks	10	+44	50.0	7.9	2013 Heat 66-16	1974 Trail Blazers 27-55
Heat	9	-12	39.6	9.7	2007 Mavericks 67-15	1998 Grizzlies 19-63
Hornets	12	-1	39.7	7.9	2015 Hawks 60-22	1995 76ers 24-58
Jazz	11	+39	46.6	8.5	1996 SuperSonics 64-18	2018 Grizzlies 22-60
Kings	12	-87	28.9	6.5	2014 Nets 44-38	1988 Warriors 20-62
Knicks	12	-66	31.3	8.8	2001 Bucks 52-30	1982 Cavaliers 15-67
Lakers	13	+137	55.2	5.3	2015 Warriors 67-15	1992 Spurs 47-35
Magic	11	-46	32.9	8.9	1991 Jazz 54-28	2008 Heat 15-67
Mavericks	10	+50	51.7	7.0	2018 Rockets 65-17	2012 Trail Blazers 28-38
Nets	13	+74	52.0	6.3	2012 Spurs 50-16	2018 Pistons 39-43
Nuggets	11	+31	47.1	8.3	2000 Lakers 67-15	1976 Hawks 29-53
Pacers	11	+50	50.2	7.9	2013 Heat 66-16	2016 Suns 23-59

Pelicans	10	0	42.0	9.8	1995 Spurs 62-20	2002 Warriors 21-61
Pistons	11	-75	28.1	7.7	1982 Bullets 43-39	1987 Clippers 12-70
Raptors	10	-14	39.7	8.9	2015 Hawks 60-22	1994 Pistons 20-62
Rockets	9	-17	38.6	9.5	2007 Mavericks 67-15	2019 Knicks 17-65
Spurs	11	-10	40.1	7.9	1998 Jazz 62-20	1996 Raptors 21-61
Suns	11	+41	47.3	8.1	1996 SuperSonics 64-18	2018 Grizzlies 22-60
Thunder	11	-75	28.1	7.7	1982 Bullets 43-39	1987 Clippers 12-70
Timberwolves	11	-111	25.1	8.0	1977 Bulls 44-38	1998 Nuggets 11-71
Trail Blazers	11	+25	44.4	7.3	2007 Mavericks 67-15	1972 76ers 30-52
Warriors	11	-38	33.5	9.5	2005 Pistons 54-28	1982 Clippers 17-65
Wizards	11	-9	40.1	8.0	1998 Jazz 62-20	1996 Raptors 21-61

As expected, the more games played, the more we can dial in that range of similar teams and get a better estimate of where teams are headed. This is nothing remarkable; at the start of the season, you can still hope that your team will go undefeated. But when your team is 20-61 going into the final game, you know the two possible unfortunate outcomes.

Just for curiosity's sake, I've ranked the teams based on their historical average wins. This does not factor in current record, and as stated, there is a lot of precedence for movement and varying final outcomes.

Standings

West

1. Lakers
2. Mavericks
3. Suns
4. Nuggets
5. Jazz
6. Clippers
7. Trail Blazers
8. Pelicans
9. Spurs
10. Grizzlies
11. Rockets
12. Warriors
13. Kings
14. Thunder
15. Timberwolves

East

1. Bucks
2. Nets
3. Pacers
4. Hawks
5. 76ers
6. Celtics
7. Wizards
8. Hornets
9. Raptors
10. Heat
11. Magic
12. Bulls
13. Knicks
14. Cavaliers
15. Pistons

Stats are through Jan 13 games and per NBA.com/Stats & Basketball-Reference.com.