

Basketball Weekly – BY MATTHEW HATFIELD
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In this edition we are going to pick our Hatfield Sports NBA all-stars for the big event coming up in February at the Pepsi Center in Denver, Colorado

Western Conference:	* indicates starter	
Steve Nash	Phoenix Suns	PG*
Ray Allen	Seattle Super Sonics	SG*
Kevin Garnett	Minnesota Timberwolves	SF*
Tim Duncan	San Antonio Spurs	PF*
Yao Ming	Houston Rockets	C*
Kobe Bryant	Los Angeles Lakers	G
Tracy McGrady	Houston Rockets	G
Manu Ginobili	San Antonio Spurs	G/F
Shawn Marion	Phoenix Suns	F
Elton Brand	Los Angeles Clippers	F/C
Dirk Nowitzki	Dallas Mavericks	F
Amare Stoudemire	Phoenix Suns	C/F

As much as I wanted to put Yao Ming in the starting lineup, I didn't..... initially Why? Well, fact of the matter is 18-8 just does not beat 25-8, period. After pondering it for awhile I came up with this conclusion: you need one international player in the starting lineup so that puts him over the American born Stoudemire. My sound under appreciated player from this team is not Manu Ginobili as many would suspect, but the Clippers' Elton Brand. He gets the nod over Chris Webber of Sacramento and Seattle's Rashard Lewis, both of whom have had nice seasons thus far. Despite all the talent out west, it'll be a terrible shame if this man gets left off the squad. Who do I want to coach this team? Pop would not be a bad choice and D'Antoni has done a fine job in Phoenix. Having that said, my guy is Mike Fratello. He's got the Grizzlies back where they belong --- in the playoff picture, which is where Hubie Brown, now an ABC basketball analyst, had them.



Kobe Bryant, Ray Allen and Shawn Marion all are destined to punch their tickets to the 2005 NBA All-Star game in Denver, Colorado.

Eastern Conference:

Gilbert Arenas	Washington Wizards	PG*
Dwyane Wade	Miami Heat	SG*
LeBron James	Cleveland Cavaliers	SF*
Jermaine O'Neal	Indiana Pacers	PF*
Shaquille O'Neal	Miami Heat	C*
Allen Iverson	Philadelphia 76ers	G
Steve Francis	Orlando Magic	G
Richard Hamilton	Detroit Pistons	G
Al Harrington	Atlanta Hawks	F
Grant Hill	Orlando Magic	F
Antawn Jamison	Washington Wizards	F
Zydrunas Ilgauskas	Cleveland Cavaliers	C

Wait isn't Dwyane Wade a point guard? Technically, yes, but we can make an exception in this game of starts. Allen Iverson is having another stellar season from a statistical point of view, though Arenas and Wade have been the two best guards (when you consider LeBron a forward) in the conference. Jason Kidd has not been healthy, neither has Baron Davis (oh wait that's right the Hornets are in the West now), Paul Pierce has not done enough in my mind to get the vote and Reggie Miller is near the end of his career. Biggest question mark on this team? Gotta' be Al Harrington from Atlanta, but he's here because of how he has matured since first entering the league in 98-99. Harrington is having career highs in points, rebounds, assists and steals as a member of the Hawks this year. The guy that would have easily been in the starting five had he stayed healthy --- Richard Jefferson of the New Jersey Nets.

Best Team without an All-Star: Chicago Bulls --- Did you know that in a recent affair with the 76ers, Scott Skiles' crew had 31 assists on 40 made baskets? That's excellent teamwork and defensively they get it done, too. On Tuesday night they allowed 100+ points for the first time since losing to the Heat 105-81 (then dropped to 2-11) on December 3rd. Still, the Bulls beat the Nuggets, 111-107, despite not keeping their opponent under 100 for the 27th consecutive time. **Bottom Line: No stars on this team yet..... just ones in the making.**

Around the Association:

Baby Bulls: The Baby Bulls started the season 0-9; enter Thursday 21-19, winners of fourth straight and nine of their last ten. Credit their defense for getting the job done right; Chicago ranks near the top of the league in defensive field goal percentage. Tyson Chandler and Eddy Curry are finally coming along after coming directly out of High School to the pros. Five players with two years of NBA experience or less have also, been instrumental and they are as follows: Kirk Hinrich, Andres Nocioni, Luol Deng, Chris Duhon and Ben Gordon. Gordon and Hinrich played in the last two National Championships, while Duhon and Deng have great chemistry since they were teammates last season at Duke.

Wolves Wilting? Or at least Flip Saunders' Minnesota Timberwolves were.... that is prior to winning four in a row to give them a 23-19 record (7th seed) on the campaign. Minnesota, whose 11-11 road mark has fans shaking their heads, went 2-4 (prior to the win streak) and trade rumors involving Wally Szczerbiak and Latrell Sprewell re-emerged. This one season after earning the top spot in the Western Conference playoffs. In my mind Kevin Garnett and company need to make up serious ground on Seattle in the division so that they can have home court advantage for at least the first round.

Are the Wizards for Real? Eddie Jordan is unquestionably a big time choice for Coach of the Year; coaching a team that's 18-8 in conference competition and 16-5 at the MCI Center. Gilbert Arenas and Larry Hughes are a big reason why Washington is 26-15. In fact, Hughes and Arenas are currently the top scoring guard tandem in the league. Plus, the addition of Antawn Jamison during the off-season proved to be a better one than the Jerry Stackhouse deal years ago. Jamison's game-winner vs. Indiana was another big win for a team that has the second best record in the Eastern Conference. Is it me or does every team that Doug Collins coaches does well after he leaves. Don't get me wrong, I like Collins as a coach and broadcaster, but the Bulls won a title after he left, Detroit won one after he left and could the Wizards do it too?

Can Washington Win the East? That's a simple question with a simple answer. No, unless Shaq gets hurt. Understand? Thought so.

Denver Coaching Carousel: Where will it stop --- nobody knows. From Jeff how do you spell his last name, to ex-LA Sparks headmaster Michael Cooper to now George Karl, former coach of the Sonics and Bucks (which preceded the ESPN gig). Finding a coach who will yield results seems to be the only problem for this talented, yet under achieving ball club.

The Knicks: A Team in Total Disarray --- Where do you begin? How 'bout let's not. To make it short and sweet --- Isiah Thomas has a complete mess on his hands and he can't say I failed to warn him. I was very skeptical of the trade to get Stephon Marbury, who's clearly not the best point guard at this time in all of basketball, and the deal actually helped Phoenix moreover. In addition to freeing up 'cash' room, the Suns had a backup plan in case Milos Vujanic was not ready for the pros. That backup plan was to sign the league's mid-season MVP Steve Nash, Quentin Richardson and be able to make another trade if need be. They did, swapping Casey Jacobsen and two other players to New Orleans for soon to be grizzled veteran Jim Jackson, a guy that shoots the rock equally as well as he defends.



Can Jamal Crawford and the Knicks (17-24) salvage their season by getting back to basic under interim Head Coach Herb Williams?

Top 5:

1. San Antonio Spurs - Rookie Beno Udrih (Slovenia) is #2 among rookies in 3-point %.
2. Phoenix Suns - The top scoring team in the league went 0-3 without PG Steve Nash.
3. Miami Heat - Are only 3.5 games ahead of Washington for best record in the East.
4. Seattle Sonics - Not real high on them since they are 6-4 in last ten, but they'll shoot.
5. Tie - Dallas & Washington - Each play games in the 100's, though can either stop Mr. Duncan and Shaquille O'Neal come playoff time?