



MIAMI HEAT

Head Coach: Erik Spoelstra
Staples Center, Los Angeles, CA
2011-2013 Record: 68-24



"We've played these guys two straight years in the playoffs, and guys automatically make it a rivalry. It's not a rivalry."

-LeBron James

Headlines



Miami Heat center Greg Oden 'a little frustrated' with wait to play.

Dwyane Wade said before the Heat's game against the Kings that Greg Oden has "gotten down" and "a little frustrated" while waiting. Oden's co-captain said he was proud of Oden's patience. The Heat's reserve center, who hasn't played in a regular-season game in more than four years, went through his normal pregame routine Friday. He worked out on the court before shedding his knee brace and practice attire for a sport coat and a spot.



Miami Heat targeting Jordan Crawford in trade with Boston Celtics.

The Miami Heat are again one of the most dominant teams in the NBA but we've come to expect that out of them. But like a champ Heat are never satisfied with their appearance and are always looking to get better in any way they can. According to NBA reporter Mitch Lawrence, one of the ways the Heat could look to get better is by acquiring Jordan Crawford from the Boston Celtics. Heats on Jordan Crawford this year.



Miami Heat interested in signing Hedo Turkoglu?

This past week saw the Orlando Magic cut veteran forward Hedo Turkoglu and that has caused a slew of rumors to surface as to where the aged big man will. Orlando Magic initially the Los Angeles Lakers and Atlanta Hawks extended trades to the Magic to land Turkoglu but both offers were so worthless that the Magic thought just waiving the forward was more beneficial. But now that Turkoglu is on the open market, he's drawing interest from a few teams and some are pondering the thought of the Miami Heat looking into.



LeBron gives old courtside fan a little extra love.

LeBron James sat on the floor waiting for teammates Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh to help him up after sinking a contested layup and drawing a foul in the fourth quarter of the Miami Heat's matchup with the New Orleans Pelicans.

Practice makes perfect, but what happens once perfection is reached? The Miami Heat don't need to keep going over their steps. They've nailed this dance before, all the way to the championship podium in each of the last two seasons, in fact. There's still a motivation for greatness, a drive to climb back up to the mountaintop. But the actual rewards won't show up months.

The championship grind is a tale of two seasons, and Miami is well-versed in this narrative. The Heat haven't even started their jog let alone their top-shelf sprint toward the podium and may not start either for months. There is no way for this team to trick itself. Wake up calls cannot change where the calendar sits. Sleepwalking through some games is nothing new for Miami. But it doesn't always even try to flip the switch to steal a come-from-behind win anymore. Before, the Heat made a slightly reckless but ultimately successful strategy out of hitting the snooze button during games.

They climbed back from seven double-digit deficits during their blistering 27-game winning streak last season alone. Either they're missing the alarm this season or they're just opting not to set it some nights. Of Miami's 10 losses this season, only two have come against teams with a winning record (Indiana Pacers and Golden State Warriors). Sometimes this group gets hit and simply doesn't bother to hit back. But it already knows where it stands. And it knows that regular-season streaks, slumps or anything in between won't change that position. Rarely has Miami puts its best foot forward this season. Without fully committing, the Heat still own the league's fifth-best winning percentage (.730) and fourth-best net rating (plus 7.5 points per 100 possessions), per NBA.com/stats.

People can point to Indiana's size or the Western Conference's depth as the biggest obstacles for Miami's three-peat bid, but the Heat know better. As LeBron James told ESPN's the Heat won't encounter a bigger challenge than the one working its way through this locker room. Motivation would be nice. A clean bill of health would be even better. If you want to know how much the regular season does mean to Miami, look no further than its preservation plan for aging star Dwyane Wade. The Heat have held their second-best player out of nine games already this season due to knee soreness. For someone requiring this kind of maintenance, he looks remarkably fit when he takes the floor: 19.6 points on 54.5 percent shooting, 4.9 rebounds, 4.8 assists and 1.9 steals per game. When he doesn't go, Miami looks lost without him.

The Heat are 23-5 when he suits up and 4-5 when he sits. But Miami isn't going to deviate from its plan just to salvage a handful of regular-season wins. Wade will get as much time off as he needs, probably more than he wants, before the second season starts. Why? Because the second season will start at some point for Miami. Surely as nothing worse than the No. 2 seed in the East, the conference where a passing participation grade comes with a postseason spot. Would Miami like to be working out of the No. 1 overall seed? Of course. No team better grasps the potential payoff of hosting a Game 7. But do the Heat need to be sitting in that top spot? Of course not. They've held the No. 1 seed just once in the last three seasons—and made an NBA Finals run in each of them. They have the fifth-best road winning percentage in 2013-14 (.611) and drubbed the Pacers by 18 points inside Bankers Life Fieldhouse in Game 3 of the 2013 Eastern Conference Finals. It's not as if Miami leaves South Florida and suddenly doesn't have a two-year hold on the Association. Or the best player on the planet. The regular season is, at best, a tune-up for Miami.

This team knows its motor runs better than any it will see on the path to the podium. There's only so much maintenance you can give a pristine machine. So, will Miami ever wake up from this malaise? I'll just say this—B/R's Miami Heat Lead Writer Ethan Skolnick said the Heat should welcome a matchup with the Empire State just to make sure they get up for the opening round of the playoffs. How much does the regular season mean to Miami at this point? Outside of getting and staying healthy, nothing at all. The Heat have memorized their lines; they know all the moves like the back of their hands. They're just waiting for their next turn under the spotlight.

Player Stats



LeBron James #6

PPG: 28.7
RPG: 7.6
APG: 7.0
FO%: 10%
FT%: 760



Dwyane Wade #3

PPG: 24.5
RPG: 6.4
APG: 4.8
FO%: 15%
FT%: 768



Chris Bosh #1

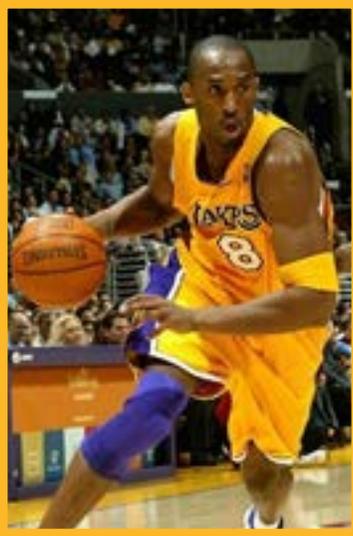
PPG: 24.6
RPG: 8.3
APG: 1.3
FO%: 0.0%
FT%: 816





LA LAKERS

Head Coach: Mike D'Antoni
Staples Center, Los Angeles, CA
2011-2013 Record: 57-25



"I don't know if I'll be ready for opening night. I really don't know. I know I'm really, really ahead of schedule."

-Kobe Bryant

Headlines



Kobe Bryant on his Injury

It's just been a slow in terms of trying to lay off a little bit and letting it heal. Been doing the right things in terms of when you don't have activity, you really have to watch the other parts of your life weight or anything like that. You got to make sure like nutrition and things like that. You don't want to take a step back and gain weight or anything like that. You got to make sure you do the necessary things to stay where you want. Right things in terms of when you don't have activity, you really have to watch the other parts of your life weight.



Shawne Williams Release and Latest out of LA

The Lakers sit at 14-20 with seemingly little to play for other than Andrew Wiggins or Jabari Parker. But with an endless line of injuries, Mike D'Antoni's unwillingness to stick with a starting lineup, and trade rumors running in to rampant, this has been one of the most compelling rosters in the NBA. LA other than Andrew Wiggins or Jabari Parker. It feels like there's some type of move made on a daily basis, and veteran journeyman Shawne Williams found that out.



Kevin Love Opens a new Window to Los Angeles

With Kevin Love venting his frustrations to the Timberwolves team in public, he has established to the NBA world that his focus is elsewhere. What does that mean for the Lakers? Usually, as trade rumors go, players venting out their frustrations head in one of two directions; the player ends up at the team of their choice out of a list of respective choices or, they resign with the current team to maximize contract value. The current Collective Bargaining Agreement rewards players.



Has classy Gasol played final act in L.A.?

As Pau Gasol walked into Staples Center on Sunday night, the thought crossed his mind that it might be the final time he does so as a Los Angeles Laker. He's right. It is all he can whatever is out of his control when it comes. The problem is, he's just about the only Laker who has been able to do that lately. The rest of the team seems discouraged and overwhelmed by the run of injuries, bad luck and incessant losing that has hit the Lakers the past few weeks.

There's never a good time for the Los Angeles Lakers to be terrible, but for this franchise, which prides itself on its tradition of winning, the failings of the 2013-14 NBA season thus far may occasion some unfortunate consequences for the future of the Purple and Gold. Particularly if the team intends to rebuild through free agency. Beyond the immediacy of a 14-23 record, 10 losses in 11 games, persistent injury problems for Kobe Bryant and Steve Nash and the collapse of the supporting cast—none of which is entirely shocking by any means the Lakers must concern themselves with what happens next.

How can the Lakers get back to their usual business of competing for championships? And how can they do so in short enough order to satisfy Bryant, whose desire to win at least one more title (to match Michael Jordan's six) is anything but a secret? Carmelo Anthony has been witness to a frustrating storm that's engulfed his New York Knicks on multiple occasions this season but still seems unlikely to leave behind his team of choice and the millions more the Knicks can pay him. Rudy Gay and Zach Randolph could be available if they opt out of their existing contracts, though neither fits the profile of someone who could propel the Lakers to a Larry O'Brien Trophy, with or without an active Kobe.

Same goes for Luol Deng, whose time as an unrestricted free agent might not even come if he inks an extension with the Cleveland Cavaliers. At this point, the summer of 2015 seems like a much better bet as an opportunity for the Lakers to reload. Kevin Love, LaMarcus Aldridge, Rajon Rondo, Marc Gasol, Tyson Chandler and DeAndre Jordan are among the most prominent players slated to hit the market that July. But of those big names, only Love, who some NBA executives believe has his sights set on a leaving the Minnesota Timberwolves for L.A. per Ken Berger of CBSports.com seems at all destined to ditch his incumbent club and else.

As for the Lakers, it's tough to imagine them being a haven for star free agents if the state of the franchise doesn't shift in some dramatic way over the next year and a half. For all the glitz and glamour that's part and parcel of being a Laker, there seems to be a growing understanding among the game's most marketable players that winning trumps all else in terms of building a personal brand. LeBron James was a burgeoning global brand before he left Cleveland and cemented his status as an icon once he started winning championships in Miami. That change of address constituted a jump from the No. 19 media market in America to the No. 16 media market for James, per Nielsen.

Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook have both enjoyed tremendous success in their off-court endeavors, even though they play in the NBA's third-smallest media market. It certainly helps that both have become fixtures at the All-Star Game and on All-NBA teams, and that they've guided the Thunder through several deep playoff pushes. If the Lakers don't have a clear plan in place for returning to championship contention by the time a given marquee free agent hits the market, they can't necessarily dig deeper into their pockets to compensate. The team's unmistakable brand might matter to some, as might the willingness to spend into luxury-tax territory in pursuit of victory, but neither of those factors carries with it a direct correlation to wins and losses and it's not as though the Lakers will be the only team with money to throw around in 2015.

According to Basketball Reference, there are 10 teams that currently sport smaller salary commitments for 2015-16 than do the Lakers. That collection includes the New York Knicks, the Dallas Mavericks, the San Antonio Spurs, the Phoenix Suns and the Toronto Raptors, among others. That roster of teams will inevitably change as trades and signings come and go. The Knicks' share of cap space will shrink significantly if when Carmelo decides to stay, as will the Mavs' should Dirk Nowitzki stick around beyond this season. The Spurs, Suns and Raptors, meanwhile, will all have to consider extending and/or retaining their own young stars between now and then. Still, the point is, the Lakers won't likely be "lone rangers" in any race for the services of a major free agent. They'll have to compete with franchises at various stages of the contending life cycle off the court, just as they'll have to for victories on the court.

Player Stats



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#6

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FO%: 15%
FT.% 780



Dwayne Wade
#3

PPG: 24.5
RPG: 8.7
APG: 4.9
FO%: 10%
FT.% 730



Chris Bosh
#1

PPG: 24.6
RPG: 9.2
APG: 1.5
FO%: 0.0%
FT.% 816

