

1. Cleveland Cavaliers

Lebron James and Kyrie Irving have a claim for best duo in the NBA. All the major pieces are back and Cleveland will be staring down Golden State in the Finals when all is said and done.

2. Boston Celtics

Brad Stevens now has Al Horford to mix into his brilliant coaching scheme. It'll be a strong year for the Celtics, especially if Isaiah Thomas can remain an elite scorer.

3. Toronto Raptors

Demar Derozan and Kyle Lowry are both back to terrorize opponents. Dwane Casey will have his team ready to make another deep run in the playoffs.

4. Indiana Pacers

With Paul George one more year removed from his nasty leg injury, there is a lot to like about this Pacers team. Jeff Teague will now be handling point, and newly acquired Al Jefferson will form an imposing frontcourt with the freakishly talented Myles Turner.

5. Chicago Bulls

We will see what an aging Rajon Rondo and Dwyane Wade can do to help Jimmy Butler redeem last year's disappointing season. Do the Bulls have enough depth to have playoff success under Fred Hoiberg? It will be difficult, but achievable.

6. New York Knicks

The Knicks made a flurry of moves this offseason. If Derrick Rose and other new addition Joakim Noah can stay healthy and hungry, Carmelo and Porzingis can lead New York to the playoffs.

7. Miami Heat

Miami seems ready to put the Chris Bosh drama behind them. Hassan Whiteside and Goran Dragic still anchor a strong core, and Justise Winslow is brimming with potential. Expect Erik Spoelstra to

lead the Heat to their seventh playoff appearance in the last eight years.

8. Atlanta Hawks

Can Dwight Howard revive his career in Atlanta? Now that Al Horford and Jeff Teague are gone he must if Atlanta wants to repeat the success of years past. Coach Mike Budenholzer and Paul Millsap will help Atlanta stay in the playoff picture, but don't expect postseason success.

9. Washington Wizards

Washington's hopes to avoid missing the playoffs for a second straight year are contingent on their big money backcourt of Bradley Beal and John Wall. It will be a battle for new coach Scott Brooks in a revitalized Eastern Conference.

10. Detroit Pistons

The East is much stronger than last year. Don't expect Andre Drummond and the Pistons to sneak out an eighth seed again this year.

11. Milwaukee Bucks

There is so much to like about Milwaukee. Jabari Parker, Giannis Antetokounmpo and Greg Monroe are the core of one of the most athletic teams in the league. Yet, they took a huge step back last year and Jason Kidd's Bucks must prove they're up for the challenge in the East.

12. Charlotte Hornets

Somehow Charlotte made it to the playoffs last year, but don't expect that to happen again.

13. Orlando Magic

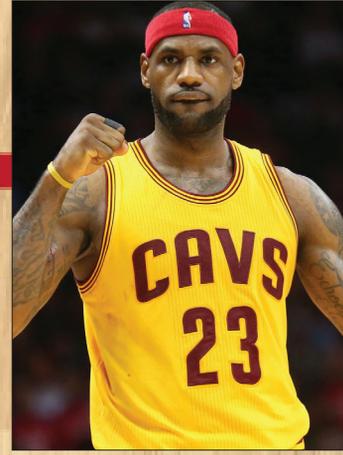
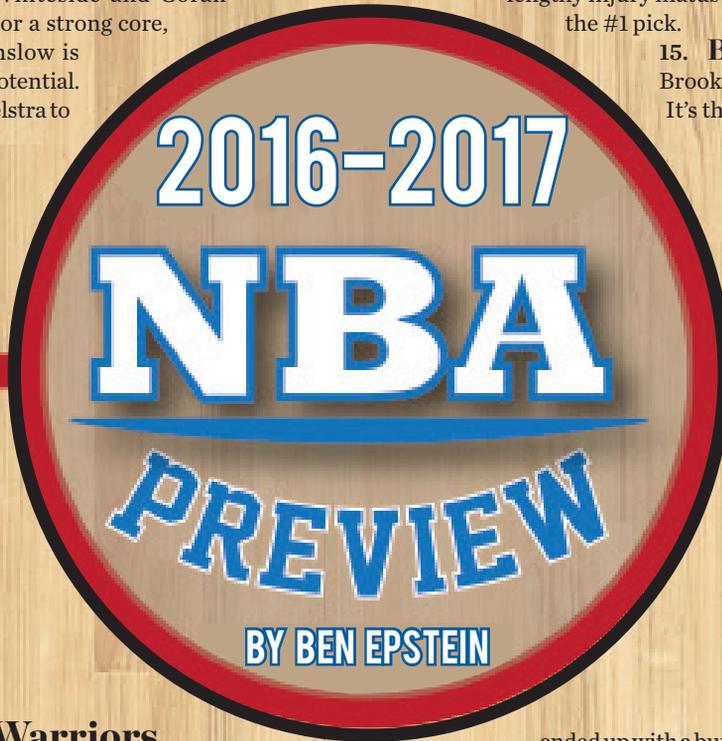
Orlando simply does not have the pieces to compete. The decision to trade away Victor Oladipo will haunt them for years.

14. Philadelphia 76ers

The 76ers have big men with lots of potential, but not much else. It'll be exciting to see how Joel Embiid returns from a lengthy injury hiatus and if Ben Simmons was worthy of the #1 pick.

15. Brooklyn Nets

Brooklyn's in for another brutal season. It's that simple.



1. Golden State Warriors

It's easy to figure out why Golden State will win the West. They won 73 games last year and added Kevin Durant. A Finals rematch with the Cavs is all but guaranteed.

2. San Antonio Spurs

Pau Gasol is a superb addition to pair with LaMarcus Aldridge in the frontcourt, Kawhi Leonard is lethal and Gregg Popovich is one of the best coaches of all-time. The Spurs are the only team in the West who could realistically take down Golden State.

3. Los Angeles Clippers

The Clippers have the talent, but they still need to prove they have the health. This team will go only as far as Chris Paul, Blake Griffin and DeAndre Jordan take them.

4. Memphis Grizzlies

New coach David Fizdale has the same core that made Memphis a tough opponent plus the addition of Chandler Parsons. If health is on their side, Memphis is a tough matchup for anybody.

5. Dallas Mavericks

Can Harrison Barnes reach the potential that everyone has talked about? He and Andrew Bogut look to add more punch to Dirk Nowitzki's Mavs. But Dallas is still a mid-seed playoff team and nothing more.

6. Oklahoma City Thunder

Russell Westbrook now has complete control of the Thunder and that should scare every team in the league. Steven Adams came into his own last year in the playoffs and will need to continue to improve to fill the void left by Durant's departure.

7. Houston Rockets

When James Harden is hot, things go very well for the Rockets. But the rest of the roster doesn't translate into anything more than a low seed and first round playoff loss.

8. Portland Trail Blazers

The Portland Trailblazers broke the bank this offseason, but

ended up with a bunch of overpaid players.

Damian Lillard is a fantastic offensive player,

but this team can't matchup with the elite of the west.

9. Minnesota Timberwolves

Minnesota is a year away from the playoffs. Tom Thibodeau is one of the best coaches in the league and the Timberwolves can finally make progress with their wealth of young talent. Karl-Anthony Towns is on the cusp of greatness.

10. Utah Jazz

Their playoff bid last year was a fluke. Despite solid play from Gordon Hayward, and the additions of Diaw and Joe Johnson, the Jazz do not have the talent to see the playoffs.

11. Phoenix Suns

The Suns have a nice mix of young talent and veterans and seem to be a couple years away from fighting for a playoff spot. But anything can happen with this team, especially if Devin Booker continues his rapid ascent to NBA stardom.

12. Los Angeles Lakers

The Lakers are a mystery. They will certainly improve upon last year's dreadful campaign with Luke Walton at the helm, but aren't serious players in the West yet. But if D'Angelo Russell, Julius Randle and Brandon Ingram continue to progress, this team will flash glimpses of brilliance often.

13. Denver Nuggets

Denver needs Emmanuel Mudiay to continue to progress. But it's all about the future, as Danilo Gallinari and Kenneth Faried lack the surrounding talent to make Denver competitive.

14. New Orleans Pelicans

Anthony Davis is having injury trouble again and the talent is lacking down in New Orleans. But the Pelicans will have to turn things around quickly if they want to keep Davis happy.

15. Sacramento Kings

The NBA's worst franchise will have another rough year. Expect plenty of DeMarcus Cousins yelling and at least one new head coach by the year's end.