

5) *LA Clippers*

Will this team ever get it together? They let forward Ken Norman leave LA and top player Danny Manning (22.8) doesn't want to stay in Tinseltown. Guards Mark Jackson (14.4, 8.8apg) and slashing 2 guard Ron Harper will be the focus of the offense if and when Manning leaves. Loy Vaught is a likely MIP candidate with the extra minutes because of Norman's departure, look for him to be one of the top boardsmen in the league.

6) *Golden State Warriors*

On paper this is a championship team, but on paper is where you train your dog. With Tim Hardaway and Sarunas Marciulionis both out for the year, the Warriors lose their top two guards and 40 ppg. Add the fact that all-NBA Chris Mullin (25.9) is out for the first 20 games and you have a team headed down. \$75 million dollar man Chris Webber will be thrown into the NBA head first and expected to provide miracles, his play will either keep Golden State afloat, or drown them. Only speedy recoveries will enable this team to make the playoffs.

7) *Sacramento Kings*

Bobby Hurley may be the point guard to turn things around, but does it matter. The Kings have 3 great players in allstar 2-guard Mitch Richmond (21.9), the L-train Lionel Simmons (17.9, 7.2, 4.5) and rookie star Walt Williams (17.0). This team is a lock for the lottery for the eighth straight year.

Midwest Division

1) *Houston Rockets*

Hakeem Olajuwon (26.1, 13, 4.17bpg) may finally win a NBA MVP title this year as he is the most dominant big man around and this year should have a good supporting cast. Vernon Maxwell (13.8) will shoot from anywhere he wants, and Otis Thorpe (12.8, 8.2) is the most overlooked PF in the game. Small forward Robert Horry (10.1) may be the key player which launches the Rockets to the next level.

2) *Utah Jazz*

If the Jazz don't win it all this year, they will never win it with this team. Karl Malone (27, 11.2) and John Stockton (15, 12apg) are the best pf/pg duo in the game and they are in their primes, but they'll soon start tapering off. Newcomers Tom Chambers (12.2), Felton Spencer,



With Jordan's retirement, Hakeem Olajuwon may be the league's most dominant player.

and 7'2 280lb Luther Wright add size to the biggest front line in the NBA, if little else. Guards Jay Humphries and Jeff Malone (18.1) will help the scoring load, but it won't take them over the hump.

3) *San Antonio Spurs*

The acquisition of Dennis Rodman (18.3rpg) for Sean Elliot replaced scoring with boards and desire, but will Rodman help the Spurs? This is already David Robinson's (23.4, 11.7, 3.2bpg) team and he will be the prime offensive focus. Lloyd Daniels must improve on his rookie season as he becomes the #1 point guard with the departure of Avery Johnson to the Warriors, if not the Spurs may be in for some rough nights.

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4) *Denver Nuggets*

Chris Jackson changed his name and the Nuggets got new uniforms, but they will still be left out of the playoffs. Jackson, now Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf, scored 19.2ppg last year to win the most improved player award. Besides him, the rest of the nucleus resides in the frontcourt with 7'2 Dikembe Mutumbo (13.8, 13), Laphonso Ellis (14.7, 9.1) and All-American draft Choice Rodney Rogers who lead the ACC in scoring as a college junior last year.

5&6) *Minnesota and Dallas*

These two squads combined for 30 wins, half the total of the Knicks. The Mavericks totaling 11 wins, second worst of all time. Dallas added Jamal Mashburn to team with Jimmy Jackson (16.3) giving them two budding superstars, if little else. The T-Wolves meanwhile added Isaiah (J.R.) Rider who should be one of the highest scoring rookies this year to go besides current players Christian Laettner (18.2, 8.7) and Doug West (19.3).

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