

# Part Two, the Wild, Wild, West

## WESTERN CONFERENCE

The Western Conference will clearly be the force to reckon with as four possible ring bearers take home in the west. Two of the newer rule changes will greatly help the Western teams as well. The new 'no hand-checking' rule, also called the "New York Knick rule" will make people play defence the old-fashioned way, with their feet, and eliminate hand slapping and jersey grabbing. The shortened three point line (decreased to a uniform 22 feet, down from 23'9 on the top) will increase scoring, and help out some of the perimeter threats that the West boasts.

**MVP:** Hakeem Olajuwon, Rockets. Last year's MVP, top defensive player, and playoff MVP will be looking to take his Rockets back to the title this year in a vastly improved Western Conference. "The Dream" has a game that gives opposing centers nightmares, look for him to be in the top five in boards, blocks, and scoring.

**OTHERS:** David Robinson, Spurs; Shawn Kemp, Sonics; Charles Barkley, Suns; Karl Malone, Jazz; Latrell Sprewell, Warriors.

**MIP:** Sam Cassell, Rockets. Cassell was prime time in the playoffs last year, coming up really big in crunch time. He has a sweet stroke, and is as cool as ice under pressure. He should move into the starting lineup passing Kenny Smith early in the season.

**OTHERS:** Terry Dehere, Clippers; Isaiah Rider, T-Wolves; Harold Ellis, Clippers; Rodney Rogers, Nuggets; Nick Van Exel, Lakers.

**ROY:** Donyell Marshall, T-Wolves. Marshall passed up his senior season as a Huskie to enter the draft early, and he's ready to show the league his versatile floor game. He can shoot the three, post up inside, is an excellent leaper and shotblocker, and can flat out score points. His lone weakness is a body which is not ready for the physical play he'll soon be accustomed to. **OTHERS:** Jason Kidd, Mavericks; Cliff Rozier, Warriors; Lamond Murray, Clippers; Brian Grant, Kings.

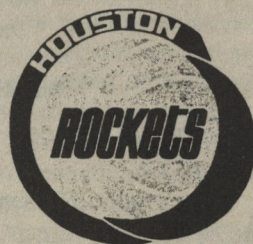
### ALL WEST

F Charles Barkley, Suns  
F Shawn Kemp, Sonics  
C Hakeem Olajuwon, Rockets  
G Latrell Sprewell, Warriors  
G Mitch Richmond, Kings

- Best Shooter:** Dale Ellis, Nuggets  
**Most Exciting:** Robert Pack, Nuggets  
**Most Underrated:** Loy Vaught, Clippers  
**Most Overrated:** Sam Bowie, Lakers  
**Most Versatile:** Danny Manning, Suns  
**Best Leaper:** Shawn Kemp, Sonics  
**Best Shotblocker:** Dikembe Mutumbo, Nuggets  
**Best Rebounder:** Dennis Rodman, Spurs  
**Best Defensive Player:** Hakeem Olajuwon, Rockets  
**Best 6th Man:** Doug West, T-Wolves

## MIDWEST

- 1) Houston Rockets



The Rockets will find their ride to the NBA finals for the second year in a row to have a little turbulence.. they've basically kept a pat hand while everyone else has improved...Hakeem Olajuwon (27.3, 11.9) is the best center in the league...Cassell (6.7), Smith (11.6) and Vernon Maxwell (13.6, 5.1 apg) combined for 235 three pointers last year

- 2) Denver Nuggets

Surprise, surprise. The run that the Nuggets put on in the playoffs wasn't a fluke, they're a legit title contender...Mutumbo (12, 11.8, 4.1 bpg) starts off their running game by blocking everything in the thin air of the mile high city...Pack (9.6) and Mahmoud-Abdul Rauf (18) are a pair of incredibly fast, if small, shooting guards forced to play the point.

- 3) San Antonio Spurs

The Admiral David Robinson (29.8, 10.7, 3.3 bpg) has one of the best low post games in the league and is a perennial MVP candidate...the reacquisition of Sean Elliot (12.1) helps out

their scoring, as does the arrival of Chuck Person (11.6)...the only problem is the attitude of mega-rebounder Dennis "the worm" Rodman (17.3 rbg), which could hurt their fragile team chemistry

- 4) Utah Jazz

- 5) Dallas Mavericks

- 6) Minnesota Timberwolves

## PACIFIC

- 1) Golden State Warriors



Newcomer Rony Seikaly (15.1, 10.3) is the best center the Warriors have had since Robert Parish in the late '70's...the most dangerous scoring team in the NBA...Latrell Sprewell (21.0), Chris Webber (17.5, 9.1), and Chris Mullin (16.8) can hit for 40 any night...will run many teams into the ground

- 2) Phoenix Suns



Talent, talent, talent...Manning (20.6, 6.8, 3.8) and Barkley (21.6, 11.2, 4.6) are two of the most dominating presences in the game...need a center in the worst way...Dan Majerle (16.5, 192 three pointers) needs to rebound from a poor shooting year...Wayman Tisdale (16.7) is yet another talented front liner, but not the answer in the middle

- 3) Seattle SuperSonics

The best regular season team last year was knocked out in the first round of the playoffs, which may give this team something to prove...Shawn "the Rainman" Kemp (18.1, 10.8) is the best young forward in the game...playmaker Gary Payton (16.5, 6.0 apg) was one of last year's most improved players...can run with anyone...often play out of control

- 4) Portland Trailblazers

- 5) Los Angeles Lakers

- 6) Sacramento Kings

- 7) Los Angeles Clippers

NBA  
Preseason  
Preview by  
Scott  
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