



This year's All-Star Game will mark the first time that LeBron James and Kyrie Irving—past and present faces of the Cavalier franchise—will take the floor as teammates in an NBA game. Irving, like James back in 2005, is a 20 year-old making his All-Star debut one year after being the #1 overall selection in the draft and Rookie of the Year. Compared to the year-long coronation that was King James' incredible sophomore season, however, the frustratingly nickname-less Irving remains just a hair under the national radar—still fighting for his recognition as one of the game's elite point guards, let alone overall players.

No doubt, a major factor in Irving's second tier status is his relatively brief, injury-riddled resume, which has him appearing in just 102 games over his three years in the public eye (11 at Duke, 91 thus far for Cleveland). Another obvious obstacle is the general awfulness of Irving's current ballclub. While no one expected much of anything out of the rebuilding Cavaliers this season, it's still a bit surprising/insulting that the team was handed a grand total of ZERO nationally televised games on the schedule. As a result, star-making performances like Kyrie's demolition of the OKC Thunder on Groundhog Day wind up generating half the buzz that a similar LBJ effort may have garnered eight years ago. (As a side note apropos of nothing, LeBron had to wear a protective face mask for a portion of that 2004-05 season, just as Irving did for much of this year).

Make no mistake; Kyrie Irving is far from a local secret. His first All-Star Weekend will see him appearing in the Rising Stars Challenge and 3-Point Shootout as well as the game itself, and his face is likely to pop up during a few commercial breaks, too—be it as himself or his Youtube-approved alter-ego "Uncle Drew." The question is, does the basketball universe fully recognize the kind of season Irving is having in his second year in the pros? Is the shittiness of the Cavs and long shadow of LeBron clouding over what might be one of the great sophomore campaigns in recent memory?

Well, why not just take the obvious—if admittedly kinda unfair—route, and see just how Kyrie's current year compares, head to head, with the sophomore season of the Great Decider himself?



*\*Irving's Cavs have 31 games remaining this season  
P.E.R. = Player Efficiency Rating (with league average being 15.0)  
WS/48 = Win Shares per 48 Minutes  
USG% = Usage Percentage*

Now it doesn't require much effort to think of reasons why a direct statistical comparison like the one above may be a tad flawed. For one thing, Irving has only played 40 games in the 2012-13 season, with a maximum potential of 31 more left on his docket. James appeared in 80 games in 04-05. As a result—even though we're comparing per-game averages here—the wear and tear of a full NBA season hasn't quite had its full impact on the notoriously fragile Kyrie just yet.

Since the greatest of James' many talents may actually be his durability, that's a mild injustice worth noting, perhaps. Beyond that, Irving and James also clearly play different positions (LBJ

generally being considered a small forward with Cleveland and Irving playing the point). Different things are expected out of different positions, and LeBron's 6-foot-8, 250 pound frame simply operates in different territory than that of the 6-foot-2, 180 pound Kyrie. Still, if we consider that both players were the offensive focal points and field generals of their teams, a lot of the head-to-head comparisons do warrant a fair assessment.

That being said, it should come as no surprise that the "Greatest Player of His Generation" bests the young sharpshooter out of Australia in the majority of these categories. This was never so much a competitive exercise, though, as one of perspective. **Playing a full 7 minutes-per-game less than James**

, Irving is averaging just 3.2 fewer points, 1.7 fewer assists, and 0.5 fewer steals. In fact, if we put them head-to-head in the category of "production per minute," Kyrie actually outscores James .678 PPM to .642 PPM, for whatever that may be worth. He's also a much more advanced shooter than LBJ was at his age, topping the King by a hefty margin from beyond the arc and at the charity stripe.

Both Irving and James were also impacted in their sophomore seasons by a lack of contributions from their teammates (the only carryover in both instances being a briefly available Anderson Varejao). And while James got a bit more out of his rag tag crew than Kyrie has thus far (the '04-05 Cavs went 42-40), that team still missed the playoffs, as well.



... Is it worth noting that Kyrie and LeBron also both did completely separate TV commercials in which they dressed as grey-bearded, silver-tongued old men? Probably not, but my delete button is broken.

Anyway, as Cleveland's first draft choice in the aftermath of The Decision, the last thing Kyrie Irving needs is further comparisons to his predecessor, or unreasonable expectations from a

desperate fan base. What he does deserve, however, is a little more credit for the spectacular season he's currently working on. It might not kick the Lakers' soap opera from the national headlines or the Browns' latest rebuild from the local ones. But so long as numbers don't lie, somebody ought to be singing the kid's praises.