



The injury prone label is one of the most dubious honors that can be bestowed on a player. All it takes is for a guy to suffer a few ill-timed injuries before fans quickly slap the injury prone label on him. And once a guy is perceived as injury prone, it's a monumental task to reverse that perception.

As good as Kyrie Irving has been for the Cavaliers since they selected him first overall in 2011, the one fly in the ointment* has been his sketchy injury history. Dating back to his lone season at Duke, Irving has suffered a [myriad of injuries](#) over just a few short seasons. He's suffered enough injuries that he's not even flirting with the "injury prone" label anymore, they're now close to making the relationship

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**Some critics will argue that Irving's defense has been a major issue. But I'm more than willing to give him a pass (for now) on that side of the ball. For one thing, he's been solely responsible for created all of the Cavaliers offense in his short career. It's more than understandable that he would struggle on defense while bearing such a heavy offensive load. Secondly, the NBA rules make it extremely difficult for defenders to keep quick guards in front of them, and Irving is far from the only point guard who struggles in that regard. Factor in his youth, and it's reasonable to think that Irving can and will make strides in his defensive game.*

But before they go ahead and make it FB Official, I want to offer an alternative hypothesis. While Irving has certainly been injury prone to date, there's reason to believe that he can change that, and change it as soon as this season. In fact, I would be surprised if Irving can't begin to reverse this trend and make it on to the court for the lion's share of Cavalier games.

When considering whether or not a player is injury prone, it's not enough to simply count up the games missed and decide that he's injury prone. It's important to consider the contextual factors, such as the type of injury, the actual instance in which the injury occurred, and the situational factors around the injury.

When it comes to Kyrie Irving, many of those factors would support the idea that he can shed the injury prone label. The most glaring thing about the injuries suffered by Irving is that most of them are the result of hard contact from defenders, such as the concussion from [smashing into Dwyane Wade's knee](#)

,
[the shoulder sprain after taking a hard fall in Toronto](#)
, and
[the broken jaw suffered in a collision with Luc Mbah a Moute in Milwaukee](#)
(there was also the silly
[wall-slapping incident](#)

that resulted in a broken right hand). The one constant in all these injuries is Irving taking hard contact from a defender that is much bigger than him.

Now an astute observer may say, "Well Jere, part of Irving's game is driving fearlessly to the basket. As long as he keeps doing that, he will keep getting hit by bigger defenders. If he keeps getting hit by bigger defenders, he will keep suffering these types of injuries, which makes him the very definition of injury prone." Well, luckily for you, astute observer, I have already considered that possibility, and I believe that Irving will be able to adjust his game to avoid those types of hits.

To understand why Kyrie Irving plays the way he does, all one has to do is look at the [2011-12](#) and [2012-13](#)

Cavalier rosters. (The 2011-12 iteration is a lot of fun. Erden! Harris! Harangody! Good times indeed.) Those rosters outside of Irving are downright terrible. The only other guy on either of those teams that even had the possibility of getting himself or his teammates an open look late

in games is Dion Waiters, and he still has a long way to go in that respect.

The past two seasons, Irving had no choice but to force the issue; he was the only guy on the court that could score. The only chance the Cavaliers had was for Irving to dribble around all five defenders and get himself close enough to the hoop that he could get one of those crazy layups of his on the glass.

But this season? [That's not necessarily the case](#) . The Cavaliers finally have some options outside of Irving that can actually make a shot. I think one of the prime motivations for drafting Anthony Bennett first overall was to give Irving a pick and roll partner that can score on more than just dunks. The Cavaliers also added Jarrett Jack, another guy who can break down a defender off the dribble. Combine that with a healthy (for now) Anderson Varejao and some expected growth from Waiters and Tristan Thompson, and all of a sudden Irving has a lot more options to dish the ball to, and that's all before accounting for the possibility that Andrew Bynum suits up this season.

The thing that makes Kyrie Irving so special is that he can get wherever he wants to on the court, whenever he wants to, regardless of who is guarding him and how much time is left on the clock. This ability manifests itself in more than just scoring points. A player with Kyrie Irving's skill set should never finish outside the top three in assists. Now that Irving has options to pass the ball to, he can use his ability to get into the paint to draw in defenders so he can dish to the open man rather than force a shot and subsequently get nailed by a defender.

This is why Kyrie Irving should be able to shed the injury prone tag. By slightly adjusting his game to involve his teammates, he will be able to avoid the big hits that have been a problem for him during his short career. This will in turn help him avoid injury and keep his body fresh for when the Cavaliers (hopefully) play playoff basketball this spring.

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