

NBA Finals: Does It End Tonight?

Written by {ga=noahpoinar}

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Last season's NBA Finals will go down as the greatest of all time strictly because of the circus it was, and the palooza it became. The weight of the world was on LeBron James, and not just on him, but geared against him. It propelled what I consider to be the height of the internet era as we knew it and represented the pinnacle of social connectivity. It was Tebowmania and Linsanity before Tebowmania and Linsanity existed. The media and any person with blogging capabilities turned LeBron into a self-conscious puppet. He had fueled a beast when he left Cleveland and we returned the favor. Admittedly, it was a really fun time to be a sports fan, and really, it had little to do with James' propensity to wilt under pressure and the supposed joy people derived from seeing this. Rather, it was the fact that we were the honorary observers of a full-blown drama. It was un-comparable to anything we had ever seen in sports.

After losing to Dallas, it was no longer just Cleveland against LeBron, or basketball purists vs LeBron's copout decision." It was worse.

On a scale of 0-10, (0 being I could care less, 5 being moderate hate, 8.5 being Scott Raab, and 10 being crazy enough to commit a hate crime) I'd consider my level of disdain towards LeBron James to be a 3, below the average. I've never been one to take part in the constant bashing, nor have I ever rooted for the guy to fail. I've simply sat back and enjoyed the ride for what it was. For me, the sum of the whole has always been greater than its parts. It was about the experience of sitting back from afar and witnessing something unprecedented and remarkably bizarre, trying to digest and make sense of it all. Watching Skip Bayless' face turn purple day after day. Reading "The Whore of Akron." Debating the whole idea of what it is to be "clutch." Attempting to be LeBron James' personal shrink. Wondering, does the guy have a shrink? Seeing LeBron win his third career MVP and realizing the award was a back-handed slap to the face. Listening to everyone say, "Jordan would have never joined a trio of stars" and realizing, *Wait, isn't Jordan the one who retired from the game after '93 because the media caught wind of his gambling addiction and started grilling him?* For me, ultimately, it was all about coming to the realization of just how crazy this entire saga of LeBron has

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increasingly become. Truthfully, it has gotten a tad out of hand.

Tonight, that hysteria may finally come to an end. (Well, at least by next week it should; you know, after we go through the whole process of re-writing LeBron's legacy and catapulting him back into Jordan statis.) The Heat go into game five just one win away from clinching a World Championship. Do they get it done? Let's start with the question that is on everyone's mind.

What's the deal with these refs? □ Is there a deal?

During the 2006 Finals, Dwyane Wade attempted 97 free throws in six games, a record for a six-game series. In game 5 of that series he attempted 25 free-throws; more than the Mavericks as a team. That series, he came within two attempts of tying Elgin Baylor's record (99) set in the 1962 Finals, a seven-game series.

This is what Dwyane Wade does. He doesn't "get calls" because he's a star, he gets them because of the aggressive, slashing nature of his game—which ultimately makes him a star. To the aggressor goes the call. Miami has been the aggressive ones on the attack, the Thunder have not. When they have, it's been Russell Westbrook. The thing about Westbrook is that—like any other guard under 6'6—he initiates lower body contact to create separation from the defender in order to get off a clean look off. He's one of the best in the game at doing this and converting. It always looks like he's being fouled near the rim, but he rarely is.

The biggest difference from this Heat team and last years? Through 4 games James has 37 attempts at the line to Kevin Durant's 26. Compare that to last year against Dallas when LeBron had 20 total FT attempts to Dirk Nowitzki's 46. Just know that last year Chris Bosh had 45, doubling LeBron's six game total. Look, the outcomes of games in this sport are very much reliant on the three officials. It's the nature of the game. Miami has taken full grasp of this reality, exerting themselves in a manner that we didn't see last season. The Thunder are doing what they've always done, rely on their three stars to create offense via the spot up shot. The shots aren't falling like they were when they shocked the world and took down the Spurs.

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Did the Thunder already peak?

There's a reason so many people picked the Thunder to win this series before it began. Oklahoma City had arrived on the biggest stage by virtue of beating the Lakers and Spurs while Miami had barely gotten past the youthful Pacers and aging Celtics. Now, OKC finds themselves in a 3 to 1 hole to this team. How'd this happen?

As just mentioned, they haven't shot the ball particularly well.

When OKC is hitting shots, they're unbeatable; when they're not, they're very beatable. That's how this team's largely built. Let's go back to the first round against Dallas where they almost dropped games 1 and 2 at home all because they were in a cold shooting spell. It wasn't until they went to Dallas that they found their groove and embarrassed the reigning champions on their own home floor. The same thing happened in the conference finals against San Antonio. They looked terrible in the first two games for the same reason, but they flipped the switch in game 3 and never looked back. We sat there in disbelief as this team took down what we thought to be the greatest team ever constructed. Might they do the same against Miami? That all depends on if they can flip that switch again. Your guess is as good as mine as to whether or not they will. If they can, they'll come back and win this series; but that's a pretty big "if" we're talking about.

Can Oklahoma City still win this thing?

No team in Finals history has ever overcome a 3-1 deficit. For some reason we've made this a

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relevant statistic as we handicap the chances of an OKC comeback.

Prior to this series, EVERYONE was taking the Thunder. Now, everyone has written them off. Remember last round how, after game 6 in Boston and Game 5 in San Antonio, the entire country did a flip-flop? Over the years, this has been the common theme of the NBA playoffs. Knee jerk reactions and premature coronations have become the mantra. I can't help but to feel we're due for another drastic one. All it takes is one game.

Couldn't you see Oklahoma City winning game 5 and everyone buying into the Thunder again? We would have to. Not only will games 6 and 7 be in Oklahoma City, but Miami losing game 5 would mean one thing...LeBron James couldn't get it done while the series was in Miami. The LeBron James questioning (and bashing) would begin. After that, who knows what might happen. This afternoon, Mike Wilbon jumped the gun and published [this token jinx](#). Uh-oh

It's not inconceivable to think they can still pull this off. The three games they've lost have been by a margin of 4, 6, and 6 points. When you consider how many alleged "bad calls" they've received and how Shane Battier and Mario Chalmers can't possibly remain as hot as they (can they?), I like Oklahoma City's chances a lot. The best thing they have going for them is the 2-3-2 homecourt structure, but it won't mean anything if they can't come away with a win tonight.

If the Heat win it, what will it mean?

It'll probably mean Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook take LeBron James' place. They'll become the guys who can't get it done. They'll enter next season as prohibitive favorites to win the title, and we'll spend a giant chunk of the season picking them apart. We'll overreact to their performances on a game-to-game basis. We'll keep a cumulative tally of everything they do (and don't do) in the last two minutes of games. We'll burden them with impossible expectations and suffocate them with pressure. We will do our best to try and create a rift between Westbrook and Durant, as we conjure up trades such as the Thunder flipping Westbrook over to Minnesota for Rubio. Throughout all of this, we'll continue to admire James Harden and his beard, completely forgetting how he has disappeared in this series.

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