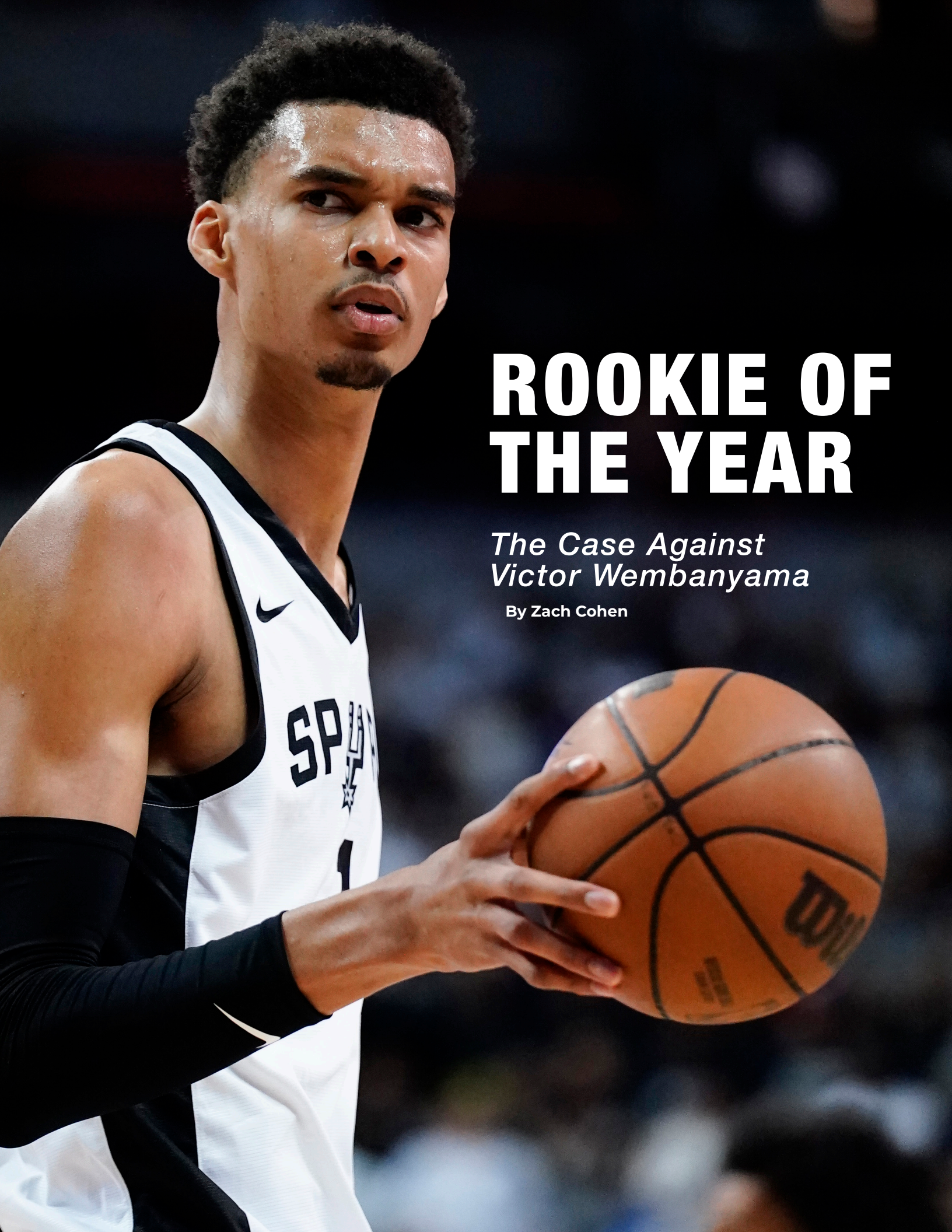




2023 NBA BETTING GUIDE





ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

The Case Against Victor Wembanyama

By Zach Cohen

The hype surrounding Victor Wembanyama, the first pick in the 2023 NBA Draft, is out of this world. The 7-foot-4 big man, with an eight-foot wingspan, is undoubtedly one of the most intriguing prospects to enter the league in quite some time. The 19-year-old has legitimate perimeter skills and a unique ability to move at his size. And Wembanyama has already proven a lot early in his career, as he was a high-level contributor for Metropolitans 92, which plays in the best league in France. Last year, Wembanyama averaged 20.9 points, 10.3 rebounds and 3.0 blocks per game in 44 games. That type of production is hard to ignore in a league with grown men.

I'm not going to sit here and tell you that Wembanyama will be a bust, as I simply don't believe that. I think he's going to be a two-way terror for as long as he plays in the NBA — and I do see the path toward him having a Hall-of-Fame-level career. However, I do think he'll mostly impact games on the defensive end early on. The shot blocking and ability to contest shots should translate immediately. But I think it could take him some time to get comfortable offensively, especially with his jumper being a little overrated at this point in his career.

Last October, Wembanyama put on a shooting clinic in an exhibition game in which his French team took on Scoot Henderson and the G League Ignite. Wembanyama hit seven 3s on his way to scoring 37 points in that one, and people were raving about some of the shots he made in that game. But Wembanyama shot just 27.2% from 3 for Metropolitans 92 last season, and he shot below 30.0% in all four of his seasons as a professional overseas. That's a sample size that is hard to ignore, which leads me to believe that he might not shoot it as well as expected early on. If he doesn't, it's going to be hard for him to score efficiently as a rookie.

I'm not quite as concerned about Wembanyama's slender frame as most. He should add weight as he spends more time around NBA coaches and trainers. But early on, he might get pushed off his spots a bit. We saw a little of that in Summer League, where Wembanyama played two games and struggled mightily in one of them. The French phenom played much better in that second game, but I did see enough to question how he'll earn his keep offensively as a rookie. I mostly think he'll be asked to make shots in pick-and-pop situations, and I'm not sure I trust his jumper enough for him to feast on those plays — or San Antonio's point guard play to get him good looks. The rest of his buckets will come with him as a pick-and-roll man or with him simply cleaning up around the basket. I don't think that's enough for him to be some runaway favorite to win the Rookie of the Year award, even if he is a tremendous defender from Day 1.

As of right now, Wembanyama is a +100 favorite to win Rookie of the Year at DraftKings Sportsbook. Earlier in the summer, he was as high as -225 to win. So, the market has come down a bit on him. But even at his current odds, I'd be leaning strongly towards avoiding him completely. Instead, I'd suggest backing Henderson (+250), Chet Holmgren (+300) or Brandon Miller (+1500).

With Damian Lillard no longer with the Portland Trail Blazers, there's nothing preventing Henderson from having a big rookie season. Henderson's outside shot leaves a lot to be desired. But he's a good mid-range shooter, with the quickness off the dribble to get to his spots whenever he wants. He's also built like a linebacker despite being a point guard. That helps him absorb contact on his way to the rim, where Henderson should do a good job of finishing right off the bat. All in all, I think his game translates nicely to the league, and I like that Chauncey

Billups will coach him. A great point guard himself, Billups should be able to relate to Henderson and help him with his approach. That combination of skill set and opportunity gives Henderson a shot at having a great rookie year. And Henderson already thinks the game at a high level. So, I don't see him being too overwhelmed by the types of defenses he'll see — and spending two years in the G League is a big part of that.

Holmgren is another guy who looks like a great bet to win this award. And I honestly think he's the best bet to do it. Earlier in the offseason, I was a little nervous about the possibility of Holmgren being a big load management risk. After all, he missed his entire rookie season after suffering a Lisfranc injury in a Pro-Am last summer. But Holmgren looked to be 100% healthy in four Summer League games this year. He averaged 16.5 points, 9.8 rebounds and 3.5 blocks per game for the Oklahoma City Thunder this summer. And he played 29.8 minutes per game over the course of those two weeks. That was absolutely massive for Holmgren, as it shows he's not limited in any capacity right now. Holmgren was also very active on the scene over the summer, with a lot of videos of the 7-foot-1 big man surfacing — whether he was hooping or just working out.

In many ways, Holmgren offers the same things that Wembanyama does. He's a lanky big man with perimeter skills and the ability to impact the game on both ends of the floor. I think he'll immediately be one of the best rim protectors in basketball. And I think Holmgren will be a bit better than Wembanyama on the offensive end. Holmgren's jumper is a little further along than Wembanyama's right now, and he's also a tough finisher around the basket — despite being built like a stick. The latter is especially important when you factor in that Holmgren is playing for a Thunder team that should push for a spot in the playoffs this year. And his spot in the Oklahoma City rotation is solidified with the team not having a lot of depth at forward or center. That said, Holmgren is going to be putting up decent numbers for a team that should be on the national stage this year. That is going to go a long way in making him a contender to win Rookie of the Year.

I'm also still very much in on Miller, who looked awful for the Charlotte Hornets in Summer League. Miller looked lost as the focal point of the Hornets in Las Vegas, but that's not going to be his role as a rookie. Miller will be playing off the ball in an offense that should play at a fast pace. And when you take a player like Miller, who averaged 18.8 points per game and shot 38.4% on 7.5 3s per game at Alabama, and put him next to an elite distributor like LaMelo Ball, you never know what's going to happen.

I think Charlotte could be one of the more surprising teams in the Eastern Conference this year, and a free-flowing offense is a big part of that. If Miller plays roughly 30 minutes per night for the Hornets, what's preventing him from averaging something like 18 points per game? And given the NBA is an offense-driven league, wouldn't that at least put him in the conversation for Rookie of the Year? Crazier things have happened. So, I'm personally taking a flier on him at his long odds.

Overall, I'm just not buying Wembanyama to win this award. I think he'll have a brilliant career, especially considering he'll be learning from the legendary Gregg Popovich, and I'm also confident he'll impact winning immediately. But I don't think his game will be sexy enough for him to win over voters for an award like Rookie of the Year. I prefer some of his more offensive-minded counterparts. Or somebody like Holmgren, who is similar but in a better spot to shine.

Victor Wembanyama +100

Chet Holmgren +300

Cam Whitmore +2000

Jarace Walker +2500

Scoot Henderson +250

Brandon Miller +1500

Amen Thompson +2500

Sasha Vezenkov +2800

ATTACK LIVE BETTING WITH A VENGEANCE

By Kelley Bydlon

With so many markets now available to bettors, there are a lot of different ways to bet a game in any sport, but live betting should never be overlooked - especially in the NBA. With so many possessions in a game, the NBA provides more opportunities to profitably jump in live on a side or total than any other sport. In fact, for many NBA bettors, including myself, in-game bets can account for the majority of bets you make in a season.

Below, I go through some things new bettors should know as they begin to get involved in live betting games...

BYDLON RULES TO LIVE BY

1

If you're entering a game without a pre-game bet and are looking to solely follow a live betting strategy you have in mind, YOU HAVE TO BE OK WITH IT IF YOU NEVER MAKE A SINGLE BET. I think people often force in-game bets if they enter games they're looking to live bet. You should enter each game with a specific strategy in mind and be on the lookout for the opportunities to present themselves that will offer you a good time/price to jump in live. Simply put, those opportunities you wish for will not present themselves in every game. Sometimes games just go a completely different way than you had thought, and that should be fine with you because you don't have a single dollar invested.

2

If you're not very familiar with live betting, start off by betting the absolute bare minimum or nothing at all. Track how the spread and total move throughout games. You'll want to get a feel for how spreads and totals move based off of scoring and pace. You'll also get a feel for when the live odds really start to shift away from the pregame numbers. You'll usually find this takes until at least the second quarter.

3

Wait for breaks in the action to make in-game bets. Just like any other sport, you really want to wait for a timeout or commercial break to get your bets in. If watching on TV, you'll always be behind what's really happening on the court. Even if the game has hit a time/score and the spread/total you were hoping for, you don't want to risk a bet while the game is still being played. You could be close to a full minute behind the real-time action that's taking place. That's a lifetime in the NBA and before you know it, you might be looking down at a very dumb bet you made. Wait for a break, then you can truly evaluate how best to proceed with betting the game.

4

Know who you're betting against: a computer or a person. Sportsbooks will often utilize technology and computer algorithms to set live odds throughout a game. For a bettor, this is ideal. Those books will have live odds posted throughout most of the game, whereas a sportsbook that is booking the game by hand will usually only post numbers during commercial breaks, and even that may be inconsistent. Betting against a computer will not only give you more opportunities to bet, but those algos might also miss out on accounting for injuries that take place, ejections, players fouling out, etc. - all things a bettor can take advantage of. Whichever state you bet in, familiarize yourself with your live betting options from book to book.

Alright, now that you have all that boring stuff squared away, let's talk about some ways to make some damn money. Below, I go through some of the live betting strategies I utilize regularly.

LIVE BETTING STRATEGIES

- **It's all about shooting percentages.**
Even if it's a game you didn't have plans to bet, some opportunities will present themselves you just can't pass up. Let's say Team A is favored by five pre-game, and is down 12 middle of the second quarter. You check the box score and see that Team A is shooting 39% from the field and 18% from 3, while Team B is shooting 53% from the field and 47% from 3 (yes, I'm completely making up numbers for this example). Well, basketball is a game of shooting and runs, and teams can often start out very hot or cold from the field before finding their true average. In the example above, you should expect by the end of the game for Team A's shooting percentages to look much better and Team B's to look much worse, and in the second quarter you could be betting that pre-game five-point-favorite at a much better number.
- **OK, it's mostly about 3-point shooting percentages.**
That's the number you should be focused the most on. With how many 3s are shot in the NBA today (about 40% of FGA), you can often find teams with drastically different 3P percentages at different points in a game. However, these percentages usually regress to near a team's average by the end of a game. So, if you see a game with outlier shooting percentages on one side, or both, look to capitalize on it with a bet.
- **Guess what? This works for not just sides, but totals too!**
Let's say both teams start out shooting poorly from 3, OR both teams start out shooting way too hot from 3. This can lead to easy in-game bets on the Over or the Under.
- **Timing is crucial.**
OK, we've discussed what you're looking for when it comes to shooting percentages, but WHEN should you make the bet? A couple of minutes into the game, the odds won't have shifted enough off the pregame numbers, and if you wait until too late into the game, you're not going to give the team your betting on enough possessions to make up the points you need. If I'm basing my bet mainly just off shooting, I'm usually not getting involved until the second quarter has started, and I'm usually shutting it down by about midway through the third quarter. Again, you have to leave your team enough time.
- **Know when star players take that first break.**
As a season progresses, get to know when star players usually take their first rest in a game. Is it the end of the first quarter? Beginning of the second quarter? These are good to note as the season goes on and will help you make easier decisions on timing your in-game bets.
- **I like a team tonight, but man, I wish I was getting an extra couple points or laying a couple less!**
You'll often say that every week during football season with not much you can do about it. Well, in the NBA that's what I would call a pre-game lean that I'm looking to bet live. Let's say you're leaning team A, and then the game starts off with a flurry of points from team B. You could wait three minutes into the game, a timeout is called, and boom, all of a sudden you have a live number available to you that you were looking for pre-game. Yes, your team has an uphill climb ahead of them, but there are SO many more possessions left in the game.
- **We don't root for injuries, but they can often lead to betting opportunities.**
We see bettors capitalize on this often in the NBA. Whether it's an injury or a day off for a player, you'll often see big changes in the spread when that afternoon injury report comes out, and you see Kawhi Leonard is taking another game off. The books will look to quickly pull down their numbers or adjust them, and bettors try to beat them to the punch. A similar approach can be taken in-game. If a player is injured, ejected, or fouls out, it might not be reflected in the live odds immediately. This is a major opportunity for bettors.
- **Oh sweet, beautiful middles.**
These aren't for everybody, and it's not even something I dabble in as much as I used to, but there's nothing quite like the feeling of having +points with both teams and the game falling right in the sweet spot. Of course, this is not something you can do with every game, but maybe you bet a big dog pre-game that gets off to an extremely good start that you know they won't be able to maintain. Then come in with a smaller bet on the other side. You never know; you might win both. Of course, this can be applied to totals as well.
- **Live player props.**
This is a new frontier for me, and I don't have a ton of betting advice on it NOW, but it is something I'm hoping to bet more this season if the Vegas books allow me to. Just like all other live markets, it's one you should study to see how you might be able to profit from it.



STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING
BOSTON	103.5
DENVER	103.5
MILWAUKEE	103.5
PHOENIX	102.5
GOLDEN STATE	102.0
LA LAKERS	101.5
PHILADELPHIA	101.0
LA CLIPPERS	100.5
CLEVELAND	100.0
MEMPHIS	100.0
MIAMI	100.0
NEW YORK	99.5
DALLAS	99.0
SACRAMENTO	99.0
NEW ORLEANS	98.5
MINNESOTA	98.5
OKLAHOMA CITY	98.0
ATLANTA	97.5
BROOKLYN	97.0
CHICAGO	96.5
UTAH	96.0
INDIANA	95.5
ORLANDO	95.0
TORONTO	95.0
HOUSTON	93.0
SAN ANTONIO	93.0
PORTLAND	92.5
CHARLOTTE	92.0
DETROIT	91.5
WASHINGTON	91.0



CHARLOTTE Hornets

SOUTHEAST DIVISION • EASTERN CONFERENCE
2023 RECORD: 27-55 SU, 37-43-2 ATS, 34-48-0 O/U

Steve Makinen's Power Rating
92.0 (#28 of 30)

OFFSEASON RECAP

Additions

Frank Ntilikina

Losses

Dennis Smith Jr.

NBA Draft

1 (2) Brandon Miller
1 (27) Nick Smith Jr.
2 (31) James Nnaji
2 (41) Amari Bailey

TEAM PREVIEW

It isn't quite a free agency addition for the Hornets, but Miles Bridges will be back after he serves the final 10 games of his suspension. Bridges is two years removed from a career year, which saw him average 20.2 points, 7.0 rebounds and 3.8 assists per game on 49.1%/33.1%/80.2% shooting splits. And Bridges did all of that while providing Charlotte with a good bit of defensive versatility. And if you're trying to figure out the reason the Hornets went from a Play-In team in 2021-22 to a lottery team in 2022-23, you might as well start with Bridges' absence.

With Bridges back in the mix, playing alongside LaMelo Ball and P.J. Washington, this is a team that we need to take more seriously in 2023-24. Ball is one of the game's better offensive engines, as he averaged 23.3 points, 8.4 assists and 6.4 rebounds per game in 36 games last season. Ball has also become a much better 3-point shooter than he was as a rookie, as he shot 38.9% in his second year and then 37.6% in his third year (on 10.6 attempts per game). Ball just needs to figure out a way to lock in defensively, at least a little. His effort on that end of the floor is flat-out embarrassing. As for Washington, Charlotte brought him back on a steal of a contract, inking him to a three-year, \$46.5 million deal. Washington averaged a career-high 15.7 points per game last season, and he's a guy that can do a lot of things at the power forward spot.

If all three of those players stay healthy, it isn't outrageous to think that Charlotte can exceed expectations by quite a bit. Second-year center Mark Williams should become a reliable rim-running big man in short order, making him a perfect pick-and-roll partner for Ball. And veterans Terry Rozier and Gordon Hayward are two very reliable players, capable of playing complementary roles or shouldering the load when other key players are out.

The Hornets also had the second pick in the draft last year, when the front office opted to select Alabama wing Brandon Miller. Many people questioned the decision to pass on Scoot Henderson, but there's no denying that Miller is the better immediate fit. With Ball already on the roster, Henderson wouldn't have been able to play his natural position right away. But Miller can play alongside most of Charlotte's key pieces. Last year, Miller averaged 18.8 points and 8.2 rebounds per game for the Alabama Crimson Tide, and he shot 38.4% from 3 on 7.5 attempts per game. His jumper should translate immediately and that'll be big for the Hornets, as there is always good looks to go around in a Ball-led offense. But Miller also has a lot of wiggle to him, despite standing at a lanky 6-foot-9. He grew up idolizing Paul George and you can see a lot of the eight-time All-Star in Miller if you just squint a little.

If Miller can flush a poor Summer League performance down the drain and give Charlotte a good 25-30 minutes per game, there isn't much stopping the Hornets from getting back into the Play-In mix. I even think 27th overall pick Nick Smith Jr. can give Charlotte a little juice off the bench as a rookie. Smith never quite figured things out with the Arkansas Razorbacks last season, but he was the third-ranked player in the ESPN 100 in the 2022 class. He oozes talent as both a scorer and a playmaker. I'm also pretty high on what he'll be able to accomplish defensively. And Smith was one of the few standouts on Charlotte's Summer League team, so perhaps his game is a better fit for the NBA than it was for college. It has happened before.

All in all, there's more talent on this roster than meets the eye. And Charlotte was eighth in the league in offensive rating two years ago, when Ball and Bridges were both healthy. Last year, the Hornets were dead last in the NBA in offensive rating. I'm counting on a lot of positive regression, and I can see this being a top-15 offense in 2023-24. And with an old-school head coach like Steve Clifford at the helm, you can probably count on the Hornets being about average defensively. They were 20th in the NBA in defensive two years ago and fell to 22nd last year. But a full season with Bridges, along with some improvements from Williams in Year 2, should make things better. Even Miller is a solid defender on the wing, where he knows how to use his length to his advantage and is smart within the team concept.

WIN TOTAL ANALYSIS

Betting the Over on the Hornets is a bet on Ball staying healthy, which is a risky proposition. The talented guard played just 51 games as a rookie, bounced back to play 75 games in his second year and then played just 36 games in 2022-23. But his injury last year was extremely fluky, so I don't want to make the mistake of labeling him injury prone. And even if he plays something like 65 games this season, it's hard to see Charlotte not winning at least 32 games — especially with Rozier and Smith being good options to fill in for him off the bench. With that in mind, I'd suggest playing the Over on this.

It might be hard to just ignore what we saw out of a miserable Charlotte team last year, but this was one of the more exciting up-and-coming teams in basketball two years ago. Since then, the Hornets have only added more seasoning and more talent. And I believe that the new crop of talent fits the modern NBA style extremely well. So, I'm expecting Charlotte to bounce back and start showing some promise again.

WIN TOTAL RECOMMENDATION

OVER 31.5

Preview By
Zach Cohen



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