

CELTICS IN SIX

by Jack Grow
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The last time a team claimed back-to-back NBA Championships was 1968. That team was the Boston Celtics which won 11 titles in 13 years. In the twenty years since then, no team has managed to keep the title of world champion for more than one season. Many people feel that the L.A. Lakers will repeat as champions and become the next true dynasty in the basketball world. I can safely predict that the year 1968, not 1988, will be the last time that a team will repeat as Champions, at least until the Celtics do it again. But wait, I'm getting far ahead of myself. Here are my predictions for the teams in the Eastern Conference (the toughest of the two in the NBA).

The Boston Celtics are too old, too slow and there is no way they can reach the finals again, right? Dead wrong! The positive factors for Boston still outweigh the negative. The first positive factor is the Celtics starting five. Every starter has played in an All-Star game in the last two years, no other team (Lakers included) can say that. Positive factor two is the Boston Garden. The Celtics simply refuse to lose there. A late season trade brought in Jim Paxson (from Portland) who gave the Celtics much needed punch coming off the bench. At the time of this writing the Celtics are one of the hottest teams in the league and are challenging the Lakers for the best regular season record. No matter how old, or how slow, Boston is the team to beat in the East.

Many people feel that the Detroit Pistons are the team to beat in the East. They have improved every year since Chuck Daly became head coach. Even more importantly they have been tested under fire in the playoffs. Detroit has one superstar, Isiah Thomas, one great player, Adrian Dantley, and a great bench, perhaps the best in the league. By losing to Boston in the conference finals last year, the Pistons gained the knowledge of what it takes to get to the championship series. The Atlanta Hawks are in the same boat as Detroit. They too, have one superstar in Dominique Wilkins, one great player in Glenn "Doc" Rivers, and a good supporting cast. They may have more talent than the Pistons, but less of a bench. They also have gained much needed playoff experience, by losing to Detroit last year. Both of these teams has the making of an NBA champion. Only one thing stands in their way, beating the Celtics at the Boston Garden.

Michael Jordan has done just about everything one man can do for his team. He has made the Chicago Bulls interesting, he has also made them winners. The addition of Sam Vincent has given him a perfect compliment at point guard. But until the Bulls get a center they won't get past the first round of the playoffs. The Milwaukee Bucks were picked to finish last in their division, but with the improved play of 7-3 center Randy Breuer the Bucks have become an extremely strong team that can stay with anyone. The Cleveland Cavaliers are quite possibly the team of the 1990's, but they need playoff experience in order to get past the first round. The New York Knicks have a great home record. Unfortunately for Coach Rick Pitino it will be a few years before the Knicks can hope to own home court advantage in any playoff series.

Another decent team at home is the Washington Bullets, any team with Moses Malone is going to be tough to beat. The Bullets just don't have enough talent on the team to advance anywhere in the playoffs. The Indiana Pacers also have a chance at making the playoffs for the second year in a row. With Chuck Person, the 1986-87 Rookie of the Year, they may be able to play a couple of good games in the first round, but not win any.

The Western Conference has finally become more than just a "tune-up" for the Lakers on their way to the finals. A few teams can even challenge L.A. at the Forum. Unfortunately no one has the talent or power to knock off the Lakers, at least not this year. The all-star cast of Magic Johnson, James Worthy, and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar is still

there along with an improved bench and better play from Byron Scott and A.C. Green. What more can I say that hasn't been said before? The Lakers are loaded with talent and experience.

The Denver Nuggets seem to be the surprise team this year. True diehard fans (like myself), remember Denver being picked to finish near last place. Coach Doug Moe kept insisting that this is one of the best teams he has ever had. After a trade with Washington, Denver acquired Jay Vincent and Michael Adams. Vincent is in the running for the Sixth Man Award and Adams has become a 3-point marksman. With these two additions Moe has been able to be flexible with the versatile All-Star Lafayette "Fat" Lever. The Dallas Mavericks will always remember last year's first round loss to Seattle. That memory has spurred the Mavericks to great heights this year. They have enough talent to play with anyone, but Mark Aguirre still has to do too much for them. I think Dallas is one great draft away from a championship, but they will not advance this year.

The Portland Trailblazers have also had an exceptional year. With Kiki Vandeweghe and Clyde "The Glide" Drexler, Portland can do some damage in the playoffs. As long as Akeem Olajuwon is alive, the Houston Rockets are a threat to win it all. The addition of Sleepy Floyd could be the move that may, in a year or two, propel the Rocket past L.A. to the finals.

One of my favorite NBA players is the Utah Jazz's point guard John Stockton. He has been among the league leaders in assists all year. With Stockton and Karl "The Mailman" Malone, the Jazz are good enough to be taken seriously in the first round. The Seattle SuperSonics are one of the most explosive teams in the league. Sale Ellis, Tome Chambers, and Xavier McDaniel all averaged near 20 points a game this year. Seattle needs a point guard to direct this awesome attack, and until they get one they will continue to be talented but also inconsistent. The San Antonio Spurs have made themselves respectable enough to make the playoffs this year, they will be tough when they get David Robinson in a year.

That's a rundown of all the teams in the playoff picture. Detroit will face Boston in Eastern conference finals and the Lakers will play Dallas. Boston will defeat Detroit in only 5 or 6 games. That's right Pistons fans, Boston will end the series early and in Detroit. Last year was Detroit's chance to knock

off the Celtics, when they were hurt by many injuries. With everyone healthy I can't see Detroit beating the Celtics in a series of any length. L.A. will finish Dallas in about 6 games, no surprise there. The Mavericks simply don't have the talent to knock off the Lakers.

Well, for the fourth time in five years, the NBA's two top teams will face each other in the Finals. By picking Boston to go to the finals many may feel I'm really going out on a limb. The simple fact is that Boston doesn't lose on the road as much as Detroit or Atlanta. That's the true sign of any great team; the ability to beat a team in front of its' home crowd. The Lakers do this to, but the Western conference teams just don't match up to Eastern Conference teams. If you don't believe me, look up the records on inter-conference games. After seeing that the teams from the East have dominated these games you can call me and thank me. The Celtics have done everything at the right time this year, they picked up Jim Paxson, won 17 out of their last 20 and have peaked for the playoffs. With a late season injury to Magic Johnson, the Lakers slumped badly. As any fan knows, the worst thing that can happen to a team is a slump right before the playoffs. Conversely, the best thing that can happen to a team is riding a win streak into the playoffs. Boston has done this, and the Lakers have slumped.

Last year Michael Jordan scored the most points but Magic, the best overall player, got MVP. This year Jordan will once again win the scoring title but it is Larry Bird who is the best player this year. More arguments? Look at the stats and thank me again. Magic has had a good year, but something was missing. Perhaps it is the fact that Byron Scott is getting more done, but he has a tendency to slip down a notch in the playoffs. Everyone knows when Larry Bird is at his best. Kevin McHale has made a great comeback from injury and Danny Ainge went to the All-Star game after having a spectacular season. Overall, the situation looks great for Boston to pull off an upset of the Lakers in the Finals. As far as predictions go, the Lakers will win the first game then lose one at the Forum. Series tied 1-1. Off to Boston where the Celtics win 2 out of 3. Series 3-2, in favor of Boston. Game six will be won by the Celtics to the shock of everyone in L.A. Bird will be named MVP of the playoffs and the last team to repeat as champions will be the 1968-69 Celtics.

N.F.L.'s First Round Draft

Team - Player - Position - College

- #1 Atlanta Falcons - Aundray Bruce - Linebacker - Auburn
- #2 Kansas City Chiefs - Neil Smith - Defensive lineman - Nebraska (From Detroit for 3rd selection and 2nd round pick.)
- #3 Detroit Lions - Bennie Blades - Defensive back - Miami
- #4 Tampa Bay Buccaneers - Paul Gruber - Offensive lineman - Wisconsin
- #5 Cincinnati Bengals - Rickey Dixon - Defensive back - Oklahoma
- #6 Los Angeles Raiders - Tim Brown - Wide receiver - Notre Dame
- #7 Green Bay Packers - Sterling Sharpe - Wide receiver - South Carolina
- #8 New York Jets - Dave Cadigan - Offensive lineman - U.S.C.
- #9 Los Angeles Raiders - Terry McDaniel - Defensive back - Tennessee (From Houston for Sean Jones.)
- #10 New York Giants - Eric Moore - Offensive lineman - Indiana
- #11 Dallas Cowboys - Michael Irvin - Wide receiver - Miami
- #12 Phoenix Cardinals - Ken Harvey - Linebacker - California
- #13 Philadelphia Eagles - Keith Jackson - Tight end - Oklahoma
- #14 Los Angeles Rams - Gaston Green - Running back - U.C.L.A.
- #15 San Diego Chargers - Anthony Miller - Wide receiver - Tennessee
- #16 Miami Dolphins - Eric Kumero - Defensive lineman - Ohio St.
- #17 New England Patriots - John Stevens - Running back - Northwestern St.
- #18 Pittsburgh Steelers - Aaron Jones - Defensive lineman - E. Kentucky
- #19 Minnesota Vikings - Randall McDaniel - Offensive lineman - Arizona St.
- #20 Seattle Seahawks - (Lost their 1st round pick when they signed Brian Bosworth in the 1987 supplemental draft.)
- #21 Los Angeles Rams - Aaron Cox - Wide receiver - Arizona St. (From Indianapolis for Eric Dickerson)
- #22 Cleveland Browns - Clifford Charlton - Linebacker - Florida (Passed by Houston)
- #23 Houston Oilers - Lorenzo White - Running back - Michigan St.
- #24 Chicago Bears - Brad Muster - Running back - Stanford
- #25 New Orleans Saints - Craig Heyward - Running back - Pittsburgh
- #26 Los Angeles Raiders - Scott Davis - Defensive lineman - Illinois (From San Francisco for Dokie Williams and two later picks.)
- #27 Denver Broncos - Ted Gregory - Defensive lineman - Syracuse
- #28 Chicago Bears - Wendall Davis - Wide receiver - L.S.U. (From Washington for Wilbur Marshall.)

Courtesy of ESPN

THE N.H.L. PLAYOFF PICTURE

by Rick Cain
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Wales Conference

Patrick Division

New York Islanders
New Jersey Devils
Washington Capitals
Philadelphia Flyers

New Jersey
3-2 at press
Washington time

Division
Champions

Conference
Champions

Stanley Cup
Champion

Adams Division

Montreal Canadiens
Hartford Whalers
Boston Bruins
Buffalo Sabers

Montreal
4-1
Boston

Boston

Campbell Conference

Norris Division

Detroit Red Wings
Toronto Maple Leafs
St. Louis Blues
Chicago Blackhawks

Detroit
3-2 at press
St. Louis time

St. Louis

Smythe Division

Calgary Flames
Los Angeles Kings
Edmonton Oilers
Winnipeg Jets

Calgary
4-0
Edmonton

Edmonton

Prediction: look for the Boston Bruins and the Edmonton Oilers to continue their dominating play and end up facing each other in the Stanley Cup finals. Here, the aggressive checking of the Bruins will be too much for the Oilers and bring the Cup back to Boston for the first time since Bobby Orr.