

Around the Association **Eastern Conference Primer**

By Rob Fischer (Memphis Grizzlies Television Pre / Postgame Host and Sideline Reporter on FOX Sports Southeast)

As NBA teams start to arrive in Orlando for the Association's restart, it's time to refresh your memory on a season that will have had 141 days since its last game was played. We'll look at what the teams have done up to this point, and what to expect from the dash for the cash at Disney. We start with the Eastern Conference.

Eastern Conference

(1) Milwaukee Bucks (53-12)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 5-2 (+250)

The Bucks have been a dominant home team since Fiserv Forum opened. They are 61-11 in two seasons including 28-3 this year. Home court won't be an advantage for the Bucks in Orlando, but they're still loaded. Defense could be ahead of the offense when play resumes, and that's where the Bucks dominate. Their 101.6 defensive rating is by far the best in the NBA. The biggest question surrounding the Bucks is whether or not they can keep the momentum they had 4 months ago. They're arguably the best team in the league, and they need to show it. They've won their games by an average of 11.3ppg. that would be the 5th largest margin in a season all time. The four highest all won NBA titles!



(2) Toronto Raptors (46-18)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 22-1 (+2200)

The Raptors would be a smart and potentially profitable bet heading into the restart. I mean, they are the defending champions. They're locked in at number two in the East despite numerous injuries this season. Now they're healthy and poised for a run at defending their title. Plus, it's the end of contracts for Fred VanVleet, Marc Gasol, and Serge Ibaka who are all looking to cash in with another deep run. Shockingly, the Raptors have a better win percentage than they had in last year's championship season.

(3) Boston Celtics (43-21)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 17-1 (+1700)

The Celtics are in a good spot as the season resumes. They're solidly in the third spot in the East and they have a healthy Kemba Walker. Walker provided stability to a team that was cruising along before play was shut down. With Walker at the helm, the Celtics aren't an easy out for anyone. Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown have taken huge strides this season and the depth of Boston makes them a contender for the Eastern Conference, and a team that should remain there for awhile. One story to watch is Gordon Hayward's availability in



the playoffs. His wife is due to have their 4th child in September and Hayward says he'll leave the bubble to be there. The timing could be during the conference semifinals or finals if Boston gets there.

(4) Miami Heat (41-24)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 30-1 (+3000)

I like the Heat to be a sneaky surprise bet for the Eastern Conference (+900). They have great parts- playmaker (Jimmy Butler), star on the rise (Bam Adebayo), veteran leader (Andre Iguodala and Jae Crowder), young impactful players (Kendrick Nunn, Tyler Herro, Duncan Robinson), and a great championship coach (Erik Spoelstra). This team came together from the beginning of the season with an enigmatic Butler and a young group that needed to perform. Their leadership starts at the top and their defense can be suffocating. The biggest question regarding the Heat is their inability to win away from their home floor. They were 27-5 at home and just 14-19 on the road. How will the neutral site be a factor?

(5) Indiana Pacers (39-26)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 100-1 (+10000)

Here they are under the radar, an unknown team, and a team that struggled with injuries all season including their star (Victor Oladipo) missing most of it. Oladipo will also miss the Orlando restart, but what's new for this Pacers team? They went 32-20 without Oladipo, but their biggest weakness was Oladipo can bring. It'll be tough for the Pacers to advance, but never put it past Nate McMillan's team to give it all they got. Unfortunately, I don't think it will be enough to escape a 5th straight first round exit.



(6) Philadelphia 76ers (39-26)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 28-1 (+2800)

The good news is that the Sixers won't be playing actual road games (10-24 this season). The bad news is that the Sixers won't be playing at home either (29-2). It's been a bizarre season for the Sixers who haven't exactly reached the point that they thought the process would lead them to. Being sixth in the East has been disappointing for Philly, but at least they'll be healthy heading to Orlando. Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons had nagging injuries prior to the shutdown, but should be ready to go. One thing looming over their heads will be whether or not the process worked. Philadelphia has been eager to deal, and how much will they dismantle if things don't go their way. I just can't be confident of this team getting out of the first round.

(7) Brooklyn Nets (30-34)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 100-1 (+10000)

Vegas Odds to Win 8th Seed: 10-11 (-110)

The Nets would have to have a complete disaster to miss the playoffs.....and it's possible. They're without a coach and now without 4 players due to Covid-19 and opting out of



participating. Not to mention, they're still without Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving. It'll be a scrappy young team that will show whether or not they're on board with Jacques Vaughn as the head coach. A surprising showing in Orlando would most definitely make Vaughn the top candidate for the head coaching job. A bad showing by the Nets might not make a difference considering the lineups they'll be throwing out there.

(8) Orlando Magic (30-35)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 300-1 (+30000)

Vegas Odds to Win 8th Seed: 1-1 (+100)

Orlando joins every other team on a long road trip, despite the Magic playing in their home city. Now they're hoping to hold on to their playoff spot and maybe even move up a spot in the East. Plus, this is an opportunity for young players to gain great playoff experience. The final eight games will all have meaning and so will a playoff series. Unfortunately, that's all the Magic will get- experience and a first round exit. The Magic are 0-9 this year against the top three teams in the East. This team is just too young with too many big holes to scare anyone.

(9) Washington Wizards (24-40)

Vegas Odds to Win Title: 300-1 (+30000)

Vegas Odds to Win 8th Seed: 30-1 (+3000)

The Wizards will be without Bradley Beal in Orlando. The Wizards don't have a chance. Barring an epic meltdown from Brooklyn, and I mean epic, the Wizards have just eight games left this season. Already without John Wall (Achilles), Beal will sit out the resumption of the season due to a shoulder injury. He averaged 30.5ppg this season and is a player that can single handedly win games. The Wizards have no one close to picking up that slack. Davis Bertans is their best three point shooter and was on pace to break the franchise record for threes in a season. He'll be sitting out Orlando as well. The Wizards will be underdogs in all eight of their remaining games and come in with the worst defensive rating in all of the NBA. They won consecutive games only four times this season and never won three in a row.



Next week we'll look at the remaining 13 teams in the Western Conference.

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