

KUWAIT TIMES NBA POWER RANKINGS

By Ahmad Jabr

**KUWAIT:** In addition to its usual coverage of the NBA, Kuwait Times introduces a new feature this year: the NBA Power Rankings. It is a weekly list ranking each team based on its performance during the week. The Power Rankings return following a one-week break courtesy of the All-Star Weekend. (For any comments or suggestions, e-mail the writer at: a.jabr@kuwaittimes.net)



**1- Golden State Warriors (49 - 9) Last week: 1** - After beating the Nets on Saturday, the Warriors became the first team to clinch a playoff berth for the second straight year. Two nights before, they overcame the Clippers with a dominant performance that saw them score 50 points in the third quarter alone.



**2- San Antonio Spurs (45 - 13) Last week: 4** - The Spurs went 6-2 on their annual Rodeo Road Trip. Kawhi Leonard has been dominant both offensively and defensively during that stretch. Meanwhile, the Spurs managed to adjust and beat the Clippers on Friday despite Leonard's foul trouble.



**3- Cleveland Cavaliers (40 - 17) Last week: 2** - The defending champs have done some retooling to strengthen their bid to defend their title. They signed Derrick Williams, plan to add Deron Williams and are considered a heavy favorite to land Aussie big man Andrew Bogut once he is waived by the 76ers.



**4- Houston Rockets (41 - 18) Last week: 3** - Lou Williams had a seamless transition to the lineup of a Rockets' team that needed a scorer off the bench. A perfect fit in coach Mike D'Antoni's offense-driven system, he scored 27 points in 25 minutes in his debut with Houston; a victory over the Pelicans on Thursday.



**5- Utah Jazz (37 - 22) Last week: 8** - The Jazz survived the trade deadline without trading away any of their young assets (or trading for former point guard Deron Williams). The focus shifts now towards resigning Gordon Hayward in the off-season.



**6- Oklahoma City Thunder (34 - 25) Last week: 12** - Russell Westbrook recorded his 29th triple-double of the season in the Thunder's win over the Pelicans on Sunday. He is on pace for 40 triple-doubles, one shy of Oscar Robertson's single-season record (via ESPN Stats and Info).



**7- Toronto Raptors (35 - 24) Last week: 14** - The Raptors needed a shot-blocking big who can stretch the floor, plus a reserve wing who can defend and shoot the occasional three. GM Masai Ujiri provided the team with exactly that by acquiring starting power forward Serge Ibaka and backup small forward PJ Tucker. And he did all of that without sacrificing the team's core or future assets.



**8- Boston Celtics (38 - 21) Last week: 5** - The Celtics figured out landing a superstar such as DeMarcus Cousins, Jimmy Butler or Paul George was not worth gutting their current roster for - especially since they hold Brooklyn's pick in the upcoming draft. The test now is to keep their hold on the second place in the East as other Conference rivals make their pushes ahead of the playoffs.



**9- Washington Wizards (34 - 23) Last week: 6** - For the second straight season, the Wizards sacrificed a first-round draft pick to address a need in their current lineup - trading for Markieff Morris last year and Bojan Bogdanovic this year.



**10- Memphis Grizzlies (35 - 25) Last week: 7** - Before heading to the All-Star break, 40-year-old Vince Carter (24,371 points) passed Allen Iverson for 23rd on the NBA's all-time scoring list.



**11- Los Angeles Clippers (36 - 23) Last week: 10** - Chris Paul returned to the lineup in Friday's loss to the Spurs after missing five weeks with a left thumb injury. He scored 15 points and dished 17 assists to go with Blake Griffin's season-high 43 points in Sunday's overtime win over the Hornets.



**12- Miami Heat (27 - 32) Last week: 9** - The Heat enter Tuesday only one game behind the Pistons for the eighth spot in the Eastern Conference standings. They scored 100 points for 16 consecutive games; the longest in team history.



**13- Atlanta Hawks (32 - 26) Last week: 11** - The Hawks did not acquire any superstars, but Ersan Ilyasova should provide a spark off the bench and help fill some of the scoring void left by Kyle Korver's departure earlier this season.



**14- Milwaukee Bucks (26 - 31) Last week: 20** - The Bucks are keeping their playoffs hopes alive as they won four of their last five games - all of course thanks to Giannis Antetokounmpo who continues to lead the team in points, rebounds, assists, blocks and steals per game.



**15- Chicago Bulls (30 - 29) Last week: 21** - The Bulls have beaten Eastern Conference powerhouses in the Cavs, Celtics and Raptors during their current four-game winning streak. They look to make a run for the playoffs after opting to keep Jimmy Butler past the trade deadline.



**16- Detroit Pistons (28 - 31) Last week: 15** - Richard Hamilton joined former teammates Ben Wallace and Chauncey Billups as members of the Pistons of the first decade of this century with their



numbers retired by the team. The trio had helped an underdog Pistons team win a championship in 2004 for the first time in 14 years.

**17- Indiana Pacers (30 - 29) Last week: 13** - Paul George was not shy in expressing his disappointment from the team's performance ahead of the trade deadline; not necessarily because he was not traded, but because the Pacers' front office did not bring him help needed for the late season playoffs push.



**18- Denver Nuggets (26 - 33) Last week: 17** - New Orleans' acquisition of DeMarcus Cousins adds more pressure on current eighth seeded Denver in the Western Conference. Meanwhile, Miles Plumlee has fit nicely with the team, going with a near triple-double (12 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists) in Friday's win over the Nets.



**19- Dallas Mavericks (23 - 35) Last week: 16** - Mark Cuban has summed up best what Nerlens Noel's addition brings to the Mavs: "The goal has been to get younger and build an athletic core to take some of the defensive pressure off of Dirk and prepare us for the future."



**20- Portland Trail Blazers (24 - 34) Last week: 18** - The Blazers have lost four of their last five games, and have some difficult tests in the next two weeks including matches against the Thunder (twice), Pelicans and Spurs, putting their playoffs hopes in jeopardy.



**21- Minnesota Timberwolves (23 - 36) Last week: 22** - A reported deal that would have brought Derrick Rose to Minnesota in exchange for Ricky Rubio fell through. Meanwhile, Andrew Wiggins broke records, becoming the first player in Wolves history with six straight games of at least 25 points while shooting at least 50 percent, and before that became the fourth player under 22 to record consecutive 40-point games.



**22- Sacramento Kings (25 - 34) Last week: 19** - GM Vlade Divac explained his decision to trade away DeMarcus Cousins by saying that the team needed to start over, and that he needed to act quickly as Cousins' trade value started to regress with time. According to Divac, earlier talks had the Pelicans send two first round picks to Sacramento before the two teams eventually settled on a first and a second.



**23- New York Knicks (24 - 35) Last week: 24** - Carmello Anthony is still a Knick past the trade deadline, and the All-Star forward responded by hitting the game winner in Saturday's victory over the 76ers.



**24- Philadelphia 76ers (22 - 36) Last week: 23** - Philadelphia traded Nerlens Noel instead of Jahlil Okafor to free up some of their logjam at center which started after the emergence of Joel Embiid. GM Bryan Colangelo also acquired a conditional first-round pick from Dallas, further expanding his stockpile of draft picks for the coming years.



**25- New Orleans Pelicans (23 - 37) Last week: 27** - New Orleans have lost three straight games since trading for DeMarcus Cousins. Cousins and Anthony Davis have put some monster numbers, but their supporting cast leaves a lot to be desired.



**26- Charlotte Hornets (25 - 34) Last week: 25** - Frank Kaminsky played well at center to help his team beat the Kings on Saturday; their only win in their last seven games. They came close to beating the Clippers on Sunday, but fell short and lost in overtime.



**27- Orlando Magic (22 - 38) Last week: 29** - The Serge Ibaka trade has created balance in the Magic's lineup. It freed up the starting power forward spot for Aaron Gordon, and brought in Terrence Ross who can start at shooting guard and fill a hole that coach Frank Vogel had struggled to address all season.



**28- Phoenix Suns (18 - 41) Last week: 28** - The Suns ended up trading away PJ Tucker while keeping Tyson Chandler and Brandon Knight past the trade deadline. They eventually settled with two second round picks from Toronto after initially asking for a first round pick for Tucker.



**29- Los Angeles Lakers (19 - 41) Last week: 26** - Decades after battling each other on the court, Magic Johnson and Larry Bird find themselves competitors again, but this time in front office roles. Johnson did not waste the opportunity to call his old friend and inquire about the availability of Paul George ahead of the trade deadline.



**30- Brooklyn Nets (9 - 49) Last week: 30** - The Nets were able to snatch a first round pick - albeit protected - from the Wizards in the trade that sent Bojan Bogdanovic to Washington. However, they could not find a partner willing to take Brook Lopez in exchange for one (or more) first round pick.



OKLAHOMA CITY: Oklahoma City Thunder forward Taj Gibson, right, and center Steven Adams, left, and New Orleans Pelicans forward DeMarcus Cousins (0) reach for a rebound during the first half of an NBA basketball game in Oklahoma City, Sunday. — AP

WESTBROOK SCORES 41 PTS AS THUNDER TOP PELICANS

OKLAHOMA CITY: Russell Westbrook notched his 29th triple-double of the season to lead the Oklahoma City Thunder to a 118-110 victory over New Orleans Pelicans at Chesapeake Energy Arena. Westbrook scored 41 points on 14-of-29 shooting from the field. He also posted 11 rebounds and 11 assists. Enes Kanter came off the bench to add 20 points and nine boards. Steven Adams and Alex Abrines each had 13 points for the Thunder. Anthony Davis led the Pelicans with 38 points and seven rebounds. DeMarcus Cousins added 31 points and 10 rebounds before fouling out.

SPURS 119, LAKERS 98

Kawhi Leonard scored 25 points and San Antonio hammered Los Angeles at Staples Center. LaMarcus Aldridge had 16 points and nine rebounds and Pau Gasol added 15 points and seven boards for the Spurs, who have a four-game winning streak. Brandon Ingram scored a career-high 22 points to lead the Lakers, who lost their fourth straight. Jordan Clarkson had 19 points and D'Angelo Russell scored 18.

BUCKS 100, SUNS 96

Malcolm Brogdon came off the bench to score all 15 of his points and deliver five of his seven assists in the second half to lift Milwaukee over Phoenix. Giannis Antetokounmpo had 28 points, eight rebounds and six assists for the Bucks, which won for

the fourth time in their last five games. T.J. Warren led Phoenix with 23 points and Alan Williams scored a career-high 17 points off the bench.

GRIZZLIES 105, NUGGETS 98

Mike Conley scored 32 points and Marc Gasol had 23 as Memphis beat Denver. Zach Randolph had 20 points and 11 rebounds off the bench to help Memphis sweep the season series from Denver. Danilo Gallinari scored 24 points and Gary Harris had 19 for the Nuggets, who have lost three of their last four.

JAZZ 102, WIZARDS 92

Gordon Hayward scored 30 points and Rudy Gobert had 15 points and 20 rebounds as Utah handed Washington a rare home loss. George Hill finished with 21 points for the Jazz, who led by as many as 24 points en route to their third straight win. Utah finished with a dominating 52-27 rebounding advantage. John Wall had 23 points and 11 assists for the Wizards, who had won 19 of their last 20 home games and scored at 100 points in 23 straight games overall. Bradley Beal scored all of his 22 points in the second half for Washington.

CELTICS 104, PISTONS 98

Isaiah Thomas scored 33 points and rookie Jaylen Brown made a go-ahead three-pointer in the final minute as Boston beat Detroit at The Palace. Thomas extended his franchise

record for consecutive 20-point games to 43. Jae Crowder collected 14 points, 11 rebounds and five assists, and Marcus Smart had 14 points and five rebounds for Boston. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope led the Pistons with 18 points. Andre Drummond had 17 points and 15 rebounds but missed 10-of-11 free throws.

RAPTORS 112, TRAIL BLAZERS 106

DeMar DeRozan scored 33 points as Toronto topped Portland. It was the third win in a row for the Raptors, the past two without their All-Star point guard Kyle Lowry, who has a wrist injury. Serge Ibaka added 18 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for Toronto, which got 15 points from Jonas Valanciunas. Damian Lillard scored 28 points for Portland. Maurice Harkless added 18 points, and CJ McCollum had 17.

CLIPPERS 115, HORNETS 113 (OT)

Blake Griffin scored 43 points and collected 10 rebounds, lifting Los Angeles to an overtime victory over Charlotte. DeAndre Jordan contributed 20 points and 19 rebounds for the Clippers. Chris Paul had 15 points, 17 assists and nine rebounds, while JJ. Redick scored 22 points for Los Angeles. Kemba Walker led the Hornets with 34 points, and Nicolas Batum added 31 and eight rebounds. Jeremy Lamb chipped in 19 points, while Frank Kaminsky finished with 16 points and five rebounds before fouling out with 4:21 left in regulation. — Reuters



LOS ANGELES: Charlotte Hornets guard Kemba Walker, left, shoots as Los Angeles Clippers center DeAndre Jordan defends during the second half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, in Los Angeles. — AP

NBA results/standings

LA Clippers 124, Charlotte 121 (OT); Oklahoma City 118, New Orleans 110; Toronto 112, Portland 106; Boston 104, Detroit 98; Memphis 105, Denver 98; Utah 102, Washington 92; San Antonio 119, LA Lakers 98; Milwaukee 100, Phoenix 96.

Eastern Conference				Western Conference			
Atlantic Division				Northwest Division			
W	L	PCT	GB				
Boston	38	21	.644	Utah	37	22	.627
Toronto	35	24	.593	Oklahoma City	34	25	.576
NY Knicks	24	35	.407	Denver	26	33	.441
Philadelphia	22	36	.379	Portland	24	34	.414
Brooklyn	9	49	.155	Minnesota	23	36	.390
Central Division				Pacific Division			
Cleveland	40	17	.702	Golden State	49	9	.845
Chicago	30	29	.508	LA Clippers	36	23	.610
Indiana	30	29	.508	Sacramento	25	34	.424
Detroit	28	31	.475	LA Lakers	19	41	.317
Milwaukee	26	31	.456	Phoenix	18	41	.305
Southeast Division				Southwest Division			
Washington	34	23	.596	San Antonio	45	13	.776
Atlanta	32	26	.552	Houston	42	18	.700
Miami	27	32	.458	Memphis	35	25	.583
Charlotte	25	34	.424	Dallas	23	35	.397
Orlando	22	38	.367	New Orleans	23	37	.383