

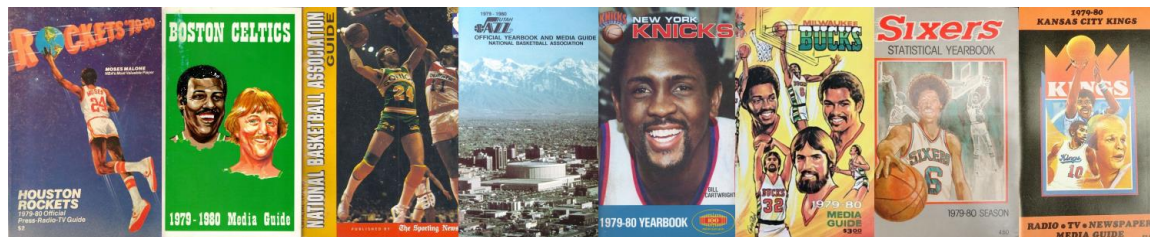


80s Era NBA + 40: Part Four

1979-80 Season Review

By Michael Hamel

1979-80 In Review



Finals: Los Angeles Lakers def. Philadelphia 76ers (4-2)

MVP: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar

ROY: Larry Bird

MVP Voting Top 5: Abdul-Jabbar, Erving, Gervin,

Bird, Tie: Archibald, D. Johnson, Roundfield

All-NBA First Team

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Larry Bird, Julius Erving, George Gervin, Paul Westphal

All-NBA Second Team

Dennis Johnson, Marques Johnson, Moses Malone, Dan Roundfield, Gus Williams

Players of the Week (Month)

October Julius Erving, Micheal Ray Richardson

November Marques Johnson, Magic Johnson, Phil Ford, Walter Davis (Moses Malone)

December Adrian Dantley, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Dan Roundfield, Swen Nater, Mike Mitchell (Abdul-Jabbar)

January Scott Wedman, Greg Ballard, Dennis Johnson, George Gervin (Gervin)

February Rick Barry, Abdul-Jabbar, Calvin Natt (Larry Bird)

March Bird, Cliff Robinson, Magic Johnson, Billy Ray Bates, Kevin Grevey (Erving)

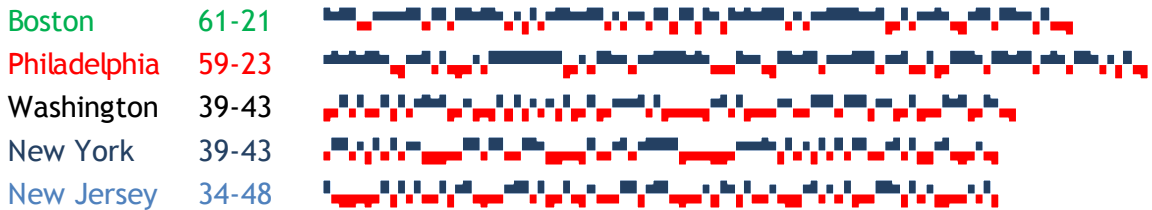
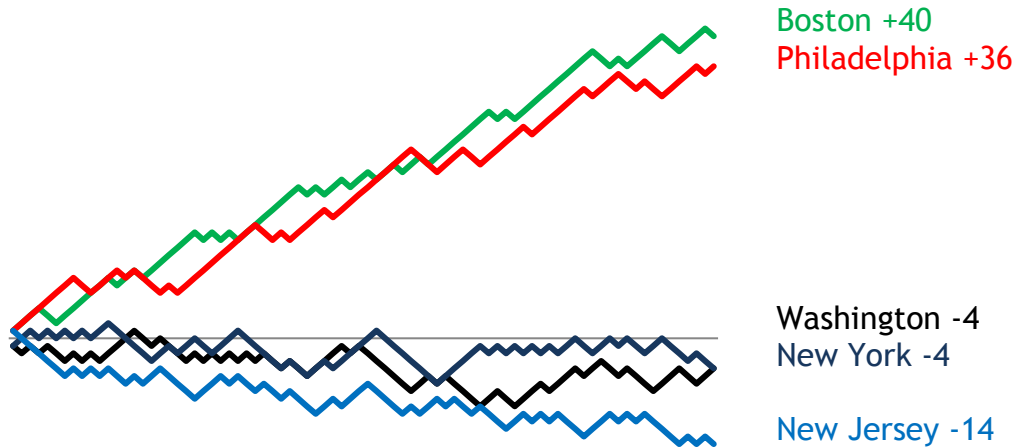
All-Defensive First Team

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Don Buse, Dennis Johnson, Bobby Jones, Micheal Ray Richardson, Dan Roundfield

All-Defensive Second Team

Quinn Buckner, Dave Cowens, Eddie Johnson, Kermit Washington, Scott Wedman

1979-80 Atlantic Division*



21-5

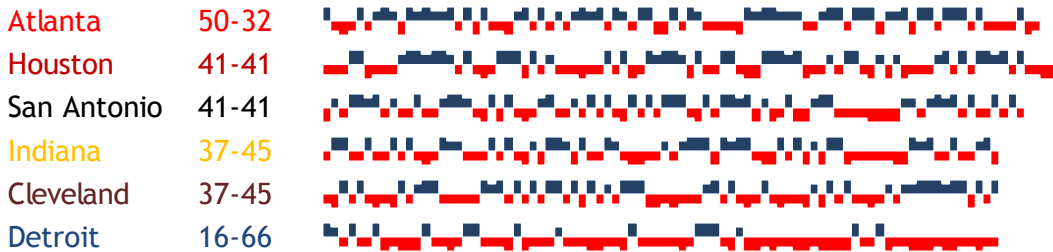
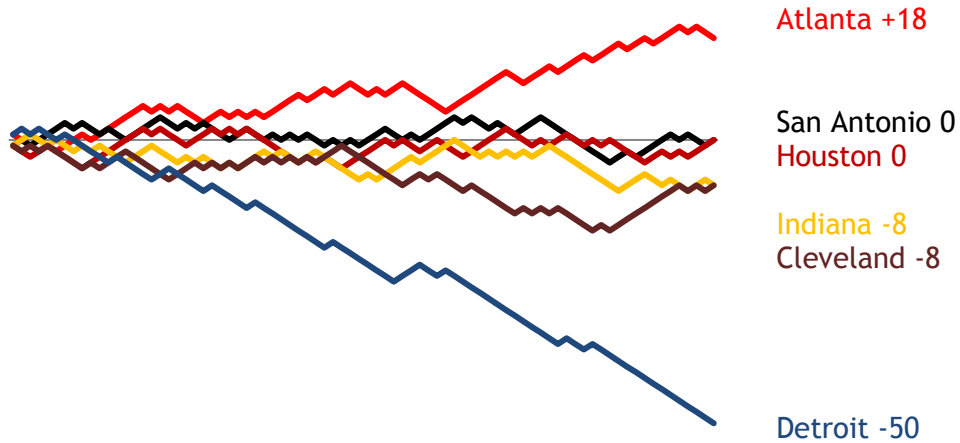
Philadelphia 76ers record in games settled by four points or less (the best winning percentage of 80s Era for a team with 20 or more such games in a season)

3-18

Golden State Warriors record in games settled by four points or less (the *worst* winning percentage of 80s Era, regardless of the number of such games in a season)

* Top: game-by-game chart of games above/below .500. Bottom: Sparkline representation of the team's win-loss record; blue for wins, red for losses. Height of each bar represents location: home (taller) or road (shorter).¹

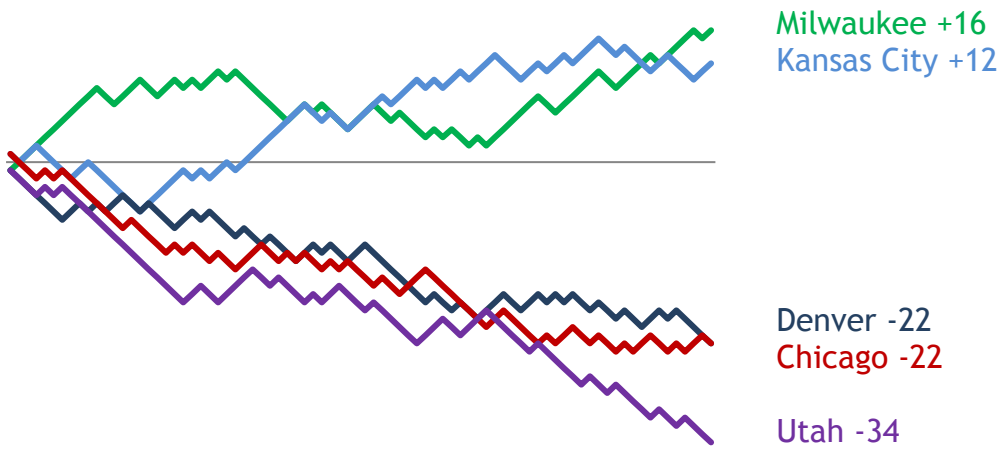
1979-80 Central Division



Off the Court²

October	Pirates rally from 3-1 deficit to defeat Orioles in World Series
November	90 hostages are seized at the US Embassy in Tehran, <i>Nightline</i> debuts on ABC television to cover the events
December	<i>Star Trek: The Motion Picture</i> premieres; USSR invades Afghanistan
February	US Olympic Hockey Team wins Gold at Lake Placid
March - May	Ronald Reagan wraps up Republican nomination for President, winning 15 of 19 primaries, defeating challengers George Bush and John Anderson
April	US announces boycott of Summer Olympics in USSR (see December)

1979-80 Midwest Division

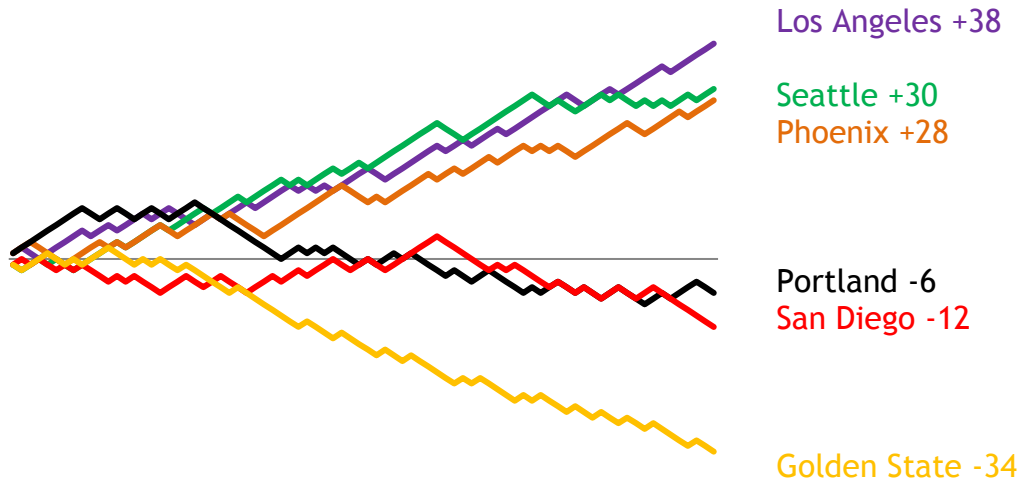


Milwaukee	49-33	
Kansas City	47-35	
Denver	30-52	
Chicago	30-52	
Utah	24-58	

Home Improvement

On June 4, 1979, a one-acre section of the roof of the Kemper Arena collapsed during a storm that dropped three inches of rain in less than an hour and brought 70 MPH winds that blew out windows in some nearby buildings.³ The facility had opened in November 1974 to replace the smaller Kansas City Municipal Auditorium as the home of the Kings, and the team's owners suggested that returning to that arena while Kemper was being repaired could cost them up to \$500,000 in lost ticket sales and concessions.⁴ But on June 29 the team turned down an offer from a Minneapolis-based group to buy the Kings and agreed to play in the Auditorium to start the 1979-80 season.⁵ The Kings returned to Kemper on February 20, 1980.⁶

1979-80 Pacific Division



Los Angeles	60-22	
Seattle	56-26	
Phoenix	55-27	
Portland	38-44	
San Diego	35-47	
Golden State	24-58	

Opening Tip: (Notable Debuts during the 1979-80 season)
 Larry Bird, Bill Cartwright, Magic Johnson, Sidney Moncrief, Salt Lake City (as an NBA city), and the three-point shot (in the NBA)

Final Buzzer: (Notable Exits during/after the 1979-80 season)
 Rick Barry, Dave Cowens, Walt Frazier, Phil Jackson, and Pete Maravich

21,765

Seattle SuperSonics *average* home attendance (new league record)⁷

21,972

Average attendance for Cavaliers, Jazz and Nets *combined*

Three-Point Range

The 80s Era saw the introduction of the three-point shot to the NBA. The American Basketball League (ABL) had used the shot during the league's brief year and a half existence from 1961 to 1962, then the ABA popularized it beginning in 1967. But it took decades for the shot to become the weapon that it has become in the 21st century NBA.

90

Number of 3-pt FG made by league leader Brian Taylor in 1979-80

117

Number of players who made 90 or more 3-pt FG during the 2018-19 season

2687

Number of 3-pt FG made during the 1986-87 regular season by all 23 teams combined

2428

Number of 3-pt FG made by the 2018-19 Houston Rockets and Milwaukee Bucks combined (first- and second-best overall)

Percentage of field goals taken from 3-pt distance

Season	League	%
1961-62	ABL	8.56%
1967-68	ABA	5.16%
1975-76	ABA	4.04%
1979-80	NBA	3.05%
1989-90	NBA	7.57%
1999-00	NBA	16.71%
2009-10	NBA	22.19%
2018-19	NBA	35.89%

80s Era Regular Season Team Averages

Season	2pt FG%	3FGM	3FGA	3FG%	3pt FG / Total FG	League Highs	
						3FG%	3pt FG / Total FG
1979-80	.488	64	227	.280	3.05%	.384	7.25%
1980-81	.491	41	166	.245	2.29%	.324	5.59%
1981-82	.497	49	187	.262	2.58%	.326	4.76%
1982-83	.492	44	185	.238	2.52%	.305	4.20%
1983-84	.499	49	195	.250	2.69%	.319	4.38%
1984-85	.499	73	257	.282	3.52%	.356	6.09%
1985-86	.495	77	274	.282	3.77%	.351	6.15%
1986-87	.490	117	388	.301	5.33%	.367	8.86%

Shooting percentages from inside the three-point line were relatively consistent during the 80s Era, but three-point shooting percentages rose over time, and kept on improving in the years that followed. By 1989-90, three-point shooting percentages had risen to a point where they were as efficient an offensive weapon as the average two-point shot.

Season	2pt FG%	Avg Pts per 2pt Att	3pt FG%	Avg Pts per 3pt Att
1979-80	.488	.976	.280	.840
1980-81	.491	.982	.245	.735
1981-82	.497	.994	.262	.786
1982-83	.492	.984	.238	.714
1983-84	.499	.998	.250	.750
1984-85	.499	.998	.282	.846
1985-86	.495	.990	.282	.846
1986-87	.490	.980	.301	.903
1987-88	.490	.980	.316	.948
1988-89	.490	.980	.323	.969
1989-90	.488	.976	.331	.993

Three-pointers were used more frequently in the playoffs, but not by much:

80s Era Team Averages

Season	Regular Season				Playoffs			
	3FGM	3FGA	3FG%	3/FGA	3FGM	3FGA	3FG%	3/FGA
1979-80	64	227	.280	3.05%	8	29	.256	4.11%
1980-81	41	166	.245	2.29%	4	19	.220	2.55%
1981-82	49	187	.262	2.58%	4	18	.239	2.59%
1982-83	44	185	.238	2.52%	5	19	.252	2.94%
1983-84	49	195	.250	2.69%	10	35	.279	4.12%
1984-85	73	257	.282	3.52%	10	35	.273	4.55%
1985-86	77	274	.282	3.77%	12	37	.319	4.92%
1986-87	117	388	.301	5.33%	15	49	.307	6.38%

Showtime @ Three

The Los Angeles Lakers were an example of a team who initially shunned the three-pointer: why take three-pointers when the Lakers fast break offense was so effective at creating layups and easy midrange jumpers?

But during the 1983-84 season their philosophy changed.

1982-83 Los Angeles Lakers

10-96 (.104) Regular Season
(Ranks: 3FGM 23rd, 3FGA 23rd, 3FG% 23rd)

7-27 (.189) Playoffs

1983-84 Los Angeles Lakers

58-226 (.257) Regular Season
(Ranks: 3FGM 7th, 3FGA 9th, 3FG% 8th)

21-74 (.284) Playoffs

“[In 1983], I detested the three-point shot,” head coach Pat Riley later said. “Our first options were to go to Kareem (Abdul-Jabbar) and James (Worthy) down low—we never looked for the three. But Coop and Byron (Scott) and Magic (Johnson) started practicing on their own. They’d shoot three-pointers for something like a dollar in practice. They did it for 15 minutes a day, then they started dropping them in games.”⁸ The Lakers had made just 60 three-pointers over the first four seasons of the three-pointer, but hit 58 in 1983-84. Michael Cooper made 38 of them; his 121 attempts in 1983-84 were more than any Lakers *team* had ever tried since the rule had been adopted. To grasp just how slowly the Lakers adopted the shot, consider this: during the 1979-80 season the San Diego Clippers made a league-high 177 three-pointers; it took the Lakers until February 26, 1985, when Cooper made a three-pointer in a game against the Rockets, for the Lakers to accumulate 177 successful regular season three-pointers *in their history*. The presence of the three-point adverse Lakers (and 76ers) in the Finals in the early 80’s created some statistics that would be unbelievable today.

80s Era Three-Point Shot usage by Championship Teams

Season	Champ	Regular Season						Playoffs			
		3FGM	3FGA	3FG%	Rank	3/FGA	Rank	3FGM	3FGA	3FG%	3/FGA
1979-80	Lakers	20	100	.200	19	1.36%	21	3	18	.167	1.22%
1980-81	Celtics	65	241	.270	7	3.39%	2	10	45	.222	3.09%
1981-82	Lakers	13	94	.138	23	1.24%	23	2	12	.167	0.94%
1982-83	76ers	25	109	.229	14	1.51%	22	1	10	.100	0.91%
1983-84	Celtics	55	229	.240	13	3.17%	8	21	62	.339	3.08%
1984-85	Lakers	90	295	.305	8	4.07%	8	29	78	.372	4.44%
1985-86	Celtics	138	393	.351	1	5.37%	5	45	115	.391	7.37%
1986-87	Lakers	164	447	.367	1	6.17%	6	43	119	.361	7.70%

The 1982-83 season was the nadir for the three-point shot in the NBA. Only four players made the 25 shots required to qualify for the league lead, and only four others made more than 20. It was the worst season for average three-point shooting percentage, and not coincidentally, the worst for percentage of three-point attempts, during the 80s Era. The San Antonio Spurs led the league in every three-point-related category that year, making 94 of 308 as Mike Dunleavy shot a league-best 67 for 194 (.345, the worst-ever leading mark) while his teammates were barely making 24 percent of their attempts. San Antonio won 53 games, lost to Los Angeles in the Western Conference Finals—Dunleavy made 4 of the Spurs 12 threes while the Lakers hit just 3—then the Spurs let Dunleavy leave after the season as a free agent. The next year, the Spurs still finished in the top five in all three-point categories, but collapsed to 37 wins. It was hardly a ringing endorsement of the three-point shot.

However, league-wide three-point shooting percentages continued to climb, and when the Celtics and Lakers, especially Larry Bird, turned the three-pointer into a psychological weapon, the shot gained more acceptance. Bird later wrote in his autobiography *Drive* that timing was everything when he was choosing when to take a three. “You’re the road team, you’ve got maybe a five-point lead with a couple of minutes to go and you’re wide open. That’s when I love to crank that thing up there because if you make it you simply *destroy* a team at that point.”⁹ The NBA acknowledged its growing popularity by including a three-point shooting contest as part of the 1986 All-Star Weekend festivities. By 1987, even the formerly skeptical Pat Riley was convinced of the shot’s value; after Michael Cooper set an NBA record with six three-pointers in Game 2 of the NBA Finals, Riley told reporters, “I think it’s the second-biggest psychological advantage—after the offensive rebound—in the game.”¹⁰

Next Time: The Boston Celtics and Philadelphia 76ers battle in the 1981 Eastern Conference Finals.

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Notes

¹ The Above .500 charts and Win/Loss sparkline charts were inspired by the baseball season charts found in Tufte, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, p174. These charts were created by the author

using data from <http://www.shrpsports.com>, processed by custom Perl scripts written by the author, and drawn using Microsoft Excel 2013.

² Events in these sections took place during the corresponding NBA season. Notes are provided for selected events only.

³ "Kansas City Arena Roof Caves In During Storm," (AP and UPI), *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 5, 1979.

⁴ "Kings' fate in K.C. to be decided today," (AP) *Lewiston Morning Tribune*, June 29, 1979.

⁵ "Kings will stay in Kansas City next season," (AP) *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 30, 1979. The team's owners cited financial concessions from business owners and the city as the primary reason they stayed. St. Louis, Missouri, which had hosted three Kings games in 1978-79 and four in 1979-80, was also considered as a temporary home.

⁶ "Kings reopen Kemper in style," (UPI) *The Nevada Daily Mail*, February 21, 1980.

⁷ Attendance figures from http://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_1980.html. Seattle averaged 18,225 fans during their championship run in 1978-79, but reportedly lost over \$700,000 that season; see Dan Shaughnessy, "The National Basketball Affliction - The NBA: A Major League With Major Problems; High Salaries For Players Wipe Out Gate," *Boston Globe*, March 31, 1982. By the end of the 80s Era, Seattle had averaged under 9,000 fans per game for three consecutive seasons; after drawing just 7,399 fans per night in 1983-84, the team moved from the Kingdome back to the 17,000 seat Seattle Center Coliseum for the 1985-86 season. Attendance rebounded to 12,008 for 1987-88 but would not be filled to capacity except for four years in the late 1990's. In 2008 the team moved to Oklahoma City to become the Thunder.

⁸ Lesley Visser, "Cooper on Offensive with 3-Point Barrage," *Boston Globe*, June 5, 1987. The original quote begins: "Four years ago, I detested the three-point shot..."

⁹ Bird, Larry with Bob Ryan. *Drive: The Story of My Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1989, p202-203. The italics are in the original text.

¹⁰ Visser, "Cooper on Offensive with 3-Point Barrage."