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## 2023-02-01 Non-Human is Not Neutral: The Ethics of ChatGPT

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# OPINION: 2023 NBA Midseason Takeaways: Playoff Picture Tightens, LeBron Nears All-Time Points Mark

Qasim Ali, Sports & Opinion Editor

There's a reason the National Basketball Association (NBA) season is described as a marathon. Actually, likening the grueling 82-game regiment to five marathons would be more accurate, as some players run upwards of 100 miles in a given season.

In those five marathons, teams weather injury, disappointment, controversy and inconsistency. Meanwhile, a chosen few see unexpected success that rejuvenates their respective fanbases. But even as this chaos of an NBA season has become standard protocol, there are still some surprising dynamics playing out as the league approaches the All-Star Game (Feb. 19) and trade deadline (Feb. 9).

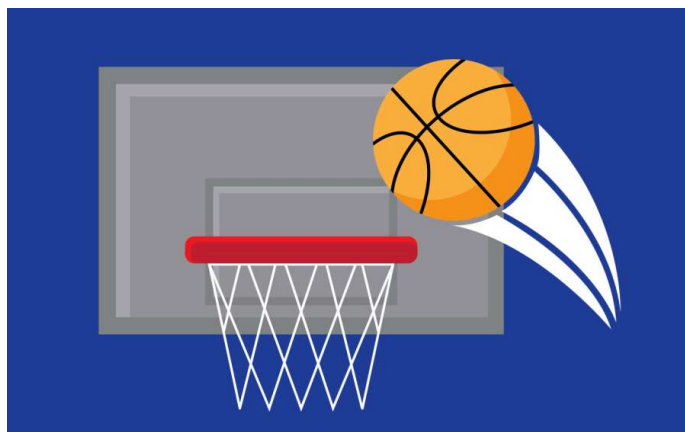
The Sacramento Kings, who won just 30 games last season, are quickly becoming one of the most loved teams in the NBA. With 29 wins already, the franchise has recently been dubbed the "Beam Team" for the four lasers they light to form a single purple beam in the northern Californian night following each win—a fan favorite ritual.

Led by stars De'Aaron Fox and Domantas Sabonis, the Kings are playing for more than just this season. In the whole of North American sports, the Kings possess the longest playoff drought at 16 years. Currently sitting at third in the Western Conference, Sacramento is closer to the postseason than it has been in almost two decades.

Unfortunately, the theme of the season has been its volatility. For example, the 13th seed Los Angeles Lakers are just three games away from being a top-four seed in the west. This means the Western Conference is so closely contested in its middle class that one bad week for any squad in the playoff mix could knock them out and subsequently let another in.

In short, don't pop the champagne just yet, Kings fans.

With the new playoff system, teams only need to break the top ten in their conference by the end of the regular season to have a shot at the postseason. The seventh through tenth seeds then compete in the Play-In Tournament, while the top six teams are guaranteed their spots in the playoffs. Needless to say, those guaranteed sixth seeds will be hotly contested this season as almost



Natalie Schorr

half of the league is within three games of a .500 winning percentage mark currently.

A few teams have put themselves out of reach of the scrum, but only five squads possess a winning percentage over .600. Even among this upper class, no team is infallible. The reigning Eastern Conference Champions, the Boston Celtics, currently possess the best record in the league association thanks to a mix of a top-five offense and top-ten defense. This balance of hard play up and down the floor has taken a toll. However, the C's have been dealing with injuries to key players like Robert Williams and Marcus Smart all year. Whether Boston's balance and star performances from the likes of Jayson Tatum and Jaylen Brown can keep this wrecking machine going is a major plot point going forward in the east.

The Philadelphia 76ers and Milwaukee Bucks follow close behind in the standings, but both are simply too reliant on their stars. The Sixers are among the worst in the NBA in bench scoring, getting little from their role players on a nightly basis. This puts pressure on their Most Valuable Player (MVP) candidate, Joel Embiid, and has proven to be an unsustainable model for winning in the past. Likewise, the Bucks are just 4-5 (win-loss) when their own MVP candidate Giannis Antetokounmpo scores 25 or less.

Out west, the first-seeded Denver Nuggets, led by two-time reigning MVP Nikola Jokić, are the hottest team in the league. They have won with slow, well-executed offense thanks to their model of starting multiple willing ball-handlers. Despite that, they have a negative turnover differential, giving away the ball far more than their opponents.

While these teams all have aspects and stars that set them apart from the rest of the league, no team is unbeatable. Given the right gameplan, any playoff series could end in an upset if these weaknesses are properly exploited, setting fans up for an exciting postseason slate.

The most notable event of this season may not be the playoffs. In fact, it could be here in as soon as a few days.

Lakers star LeBron James is currently 89 points away from becoming the NBA's all-time points leader. James recently passed Steve Nash and Mark Jackson to move into fourth in the all-time assists leaderboard as well. Passing Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who has held the scoring record for nearly 40 years, will give James perhaps the greatest distinction of longevity a player can receive.

In the 20-year career of "The King," the day he leads the league in all-time scoring will be his coronation.

But after all the history that is being made and all the preconceptions that have been shattered, the league still has two more marathons left to run. The home stretch will show who had a lucky start and who is built to sprint the finale.