

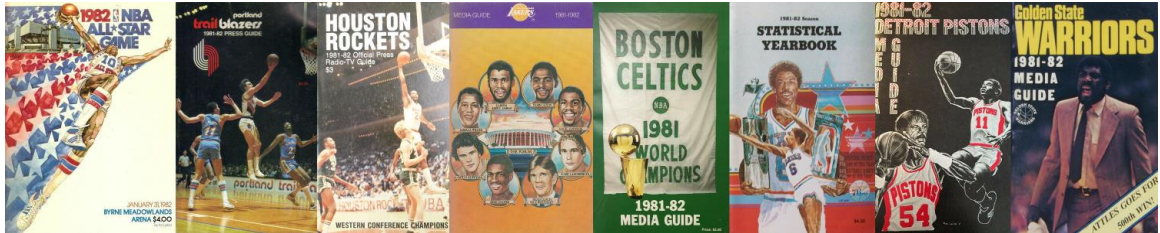


## 80s Era NBA + 40: Part Nine

### 1981-82 Season Review

By Michael Hamel

### 1981-82 In Review



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

**MVP:** Moses Malone  
**ROY:** Buck Williams

**MVP Voting Top 5:** Malone, Bird, Erving, Parish, Gus Williams

#### All-NBA First Team

Larry Bird, Julius Erving, George Gervin, Moses Malone, Gus Williams

#### All-NBA Second Team

Alex English, Magic Johnson, Bernard King, Sidney Moncrief, Robert Parish

#### Players of the Week (Month)

**November** Mychal Thompson, Ron Brewer, Dan Roundfield, Alex English (Julius Erving)  
**December** George Gervin, Artis Gilmore, Bernard King, Larry Bird (Sidney Moncrief)  
**January** Gervin, Gus Williams, Bird, Greg Ballard (Bird)  
**February** Moses Malone, Jay Vincent, Eddie Johnson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (Malone)  
**March** Gervin, Kelly Tripucka, Robert Parish, Malone (English)  
**April** Jack Sikma, Billy Ray Bates, Ray Williams

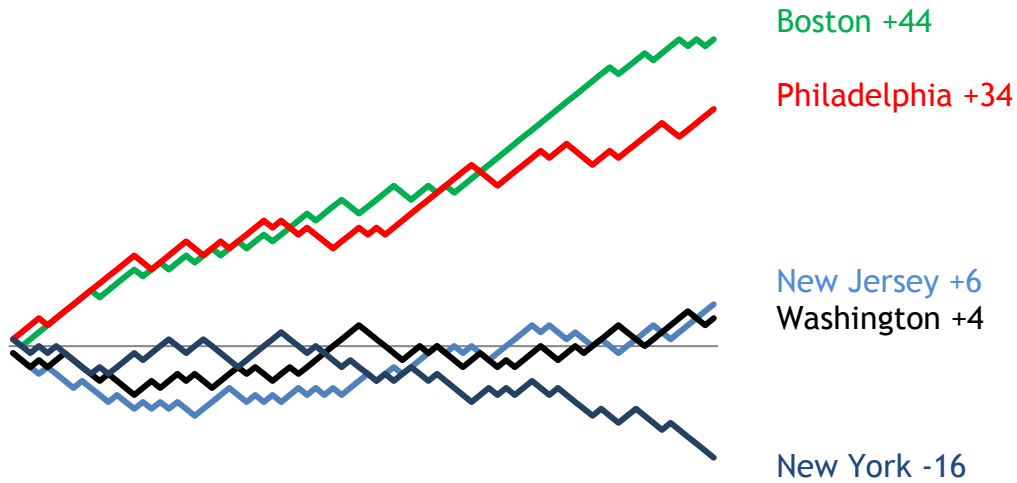
#### All-Defensive First Team

Michael Cooper, Dennis Johnson, Bobby Jones, Caldwell Jones, Dan Roundfield

#### All-Defensive Second Team

Larry Bird, Quinn Buckner, Sidney Moncrief, Lonnie Shelton, Jack Sikma

## 1981-82 Atlantic Division



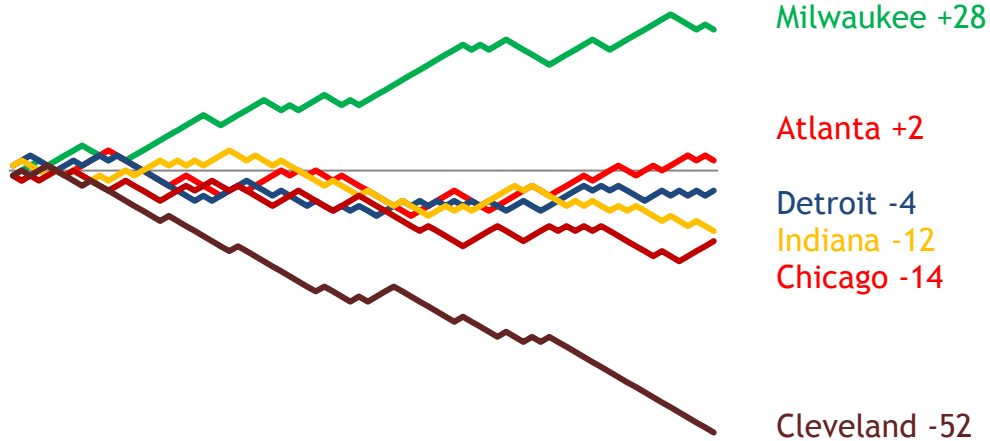
### Streaking

The six longest winning streaks of the 80s Era belonged to the Celtics and 76ers, who were adept at stopping each other's streaks:

Team	Start	End	Games	Stopped by
Boston	2/24/1982	3/26/1982	18	vs Philadelphia
Philadelphia	12/21/1982	1/21/1983	14	at Milwaukee
Boston	3/11/1986	4/4/1986	14	at Philadelphia
Boston	1/4/1981	1/28/1981	13	at Chicago
Philadelphia	12/22/1984	1/16/1985	13	at Boston
Boston	1/8/1986	2/5/1986	13	at Sacramento

The Lakers longest winning streak was 11, 3/26/1987 to 4/16/1987.

## 1981-82 Central Division

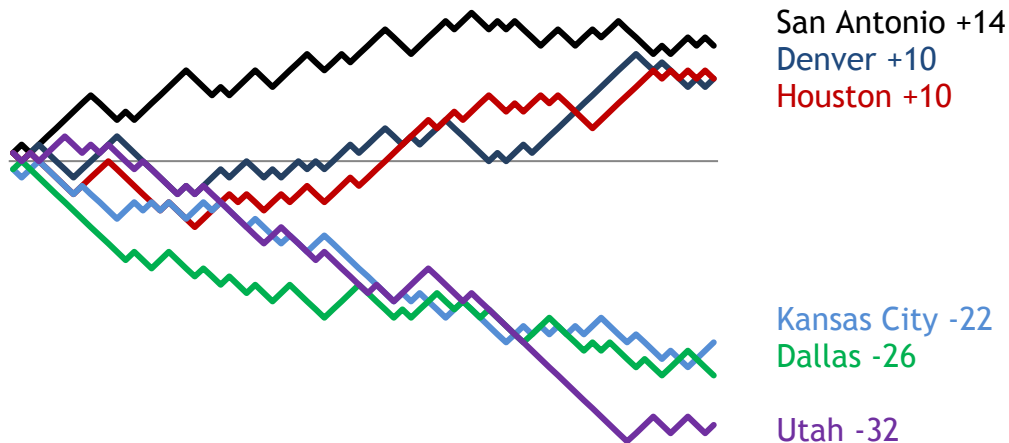


Milwaukee	55-27	
Atlanta	42-40	
Detroit	39-43	
Indiana	35-47	
Chicago	34-48	
Cleveland	15-67	

### A Change Will Do You Good?

The Cleveland Cavaliers went through four coaches, a single-season record for the 80s Era, and the Chicago Bulls used three. Neither made the playoffs. Of the nineteen other teams to switch coaches in mid-season during the 80s Era, just five made the playoffs, and only two, the 1980 and 1982 Lakers, won the title (but they also had Magic and Kareem on the roster). This practice became less prevalent later in the decade; the 1981-82 season was the third straight year in which four teams switched coaches in mid-stream, but over the next five years, just nine teams did the same.

## 1981-82 Midwest Division

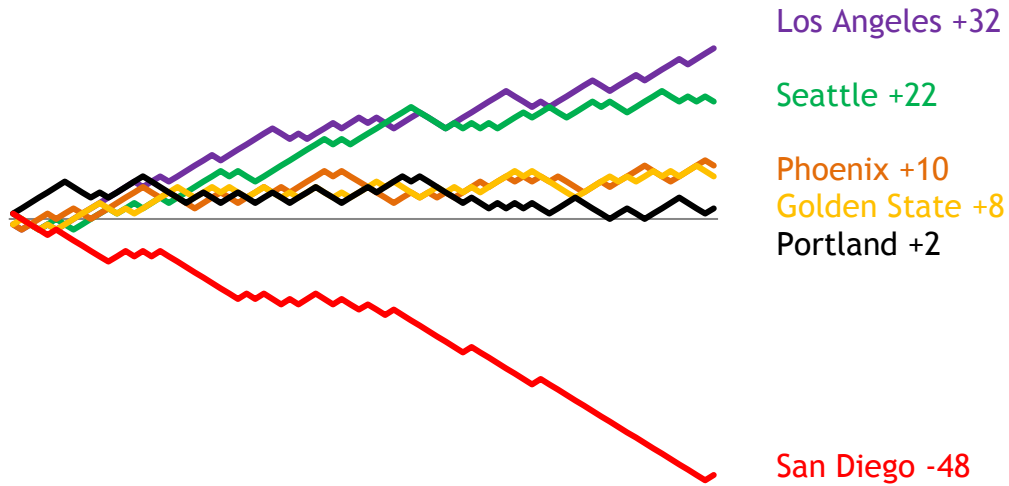


## Keeping it Close

For the second straight year, 39% of the Rockets' games were decided by four points or less. Just six other teams during the 80s Era played a similar number of close games.<sup>1</sup>

Season	Team	Overall	Decided by ≤4 points	W-L	Pct
1980-81	Denver	37-45	33	15-18	.455
1981-82	Houston	46-36	32	20-12	.625
1980-81	Houston	40-42	32	16-16	.500
1981-82	Washington	43-39	32	16-16	.500
1980-81	Atlanta	31-51	32	10-22	.313
1981-82	New York	33-49	31	13-18	.419
1983-84	Golden State	37-45	30	18-12	.600
1983-84	New Jersey	45-37	30	18-12	.600

## 1981-82 Pacific Division



Los Angeles	57-25	
Seattle	52-30	
Phoenix	46-36	
Golden State	45-37	
Portland	42-40	
San Diego	17-65	

**Opening Tip:** Danny Ainge, Rolando Blackman, Larry Nance, Kurt Rambis, Pat Riley (as head coach), Isiah Thomas

**Final Buzzer:** Jim Chones, Chris Ford

### Off the Court

December	Muhammad Ali loses last fight by unanimous decision, to Trevor Berbick
January	Commodore 64 computer announced, Joe Montana wins his first Super Bowl MVP, AT&T agrees to breakup deal <sup>2</sup>
March	Ground-breaking for Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.
April	US officially hands over Panama Canal to Panama <sup>3</sup>
May	Cal Ripken, Jr. begins streak of 2,632 consecutive games played

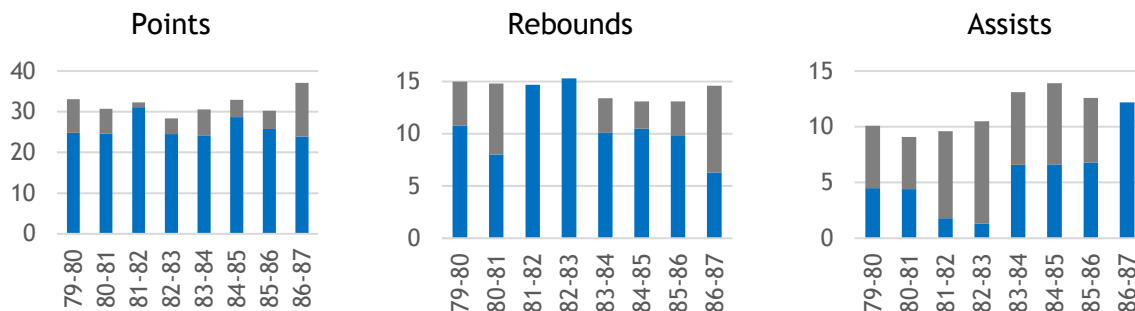
# Most Valuable Players

## 80s Era

MVPs from  
Bos + LA + Phi

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Comparison of **MVP** and **League Leaders** per game, 1980-1987



Highest percentage of MVP vote

98.1 (Bird 1986)

New NBA record for assists by an MVP

(Magic 1987)<sup>4</sup> 12.2

Other than Moses Malone in 1982, the rest of the MVPs of the 80s Era tended to play on the team with the best regular season record, or very close:

Season	MVP	Team	Record	Best Record
1979-80	Kareem Abdul-Jabbar	Los Angeles	60-22	61-21
1980-81	Julius Erving	Philadelphia	62-20	62-20
1981-82	Moses Malone	Houston	46-36	63-19
1982-83	Moses Malone	Philadelphia	65-17	65-17
1983-84	Larry Bird	Boston	62-20	62-20
1984-85	Larry Bird	Boston	63-19	63-19
1985-86	Larry Bird	Boston	67-15	67-15
1986-87	Magic Johnson	Los Angeles	65-17	65-17

31 Points separating Julius Erving and Larry Bird in the 1981 MVP vote (smallest margin in 80s Era)

30 Points inexplicably earned by Adrian Dantley, Phil Ford and Kelvin Ransey from *first-place MVP* votes in 1981

## Money Ball

Official salary figures are difficult to obtain in the pre-Salary Cap years, and fully guaranteed contracts were not yet the norm (reportedly, only \$1 mil of Cartwright’s six-year, \$2.55 mil contract was guaranteed). Here are a few examples of salaries from the 1981-82 season, which show how the dawn of free agency was distorting the pay scale.<sup>5</sup>

Pos	Player	Team	Salary (\$)	\$ per PT+REB+AST
C	Moses Malone	Houston	1,050,000	273
C	Kareem Abdul-Jabbar	Los Angeles	1,000,000	370
<b>G</b>	<b><i>Otis Birdsong</i></b>	<b><i>New Jersey</i></b>	<b><i>1,000,000</i></b>	<b><i>1342</i></b>
F	Julius Erving	Philadelphia	900,000	316
<b>C</b>	<b><i>James Edwards</i></b>	<b><i>Cleveland</i></b>	<b><i>800,000</i></b>	<b><i>402</i></b>
G	David Thompson	Denver	800,000	683
G	George Gervin	San Antonio	650,000	208
F	Larry Bird	Boston	600,000	197
C	Marvin Webster	New York	600,000	548
C	Artis Gilmore	Chicago	500,000	201
G	Magic Johnson	Los Angeles	500,000	170
C	Bob Lanier	Milwaukee	450,000	281
F	George McGinnis	Indiana	450,000	471
F	Buck Williams	New Jersey	450,000	189
C	Bill Cartwright	New York	400,000	259
G	Dennis Johnson	Phoenix	400,000	171
F	Adrian Dantley	Utah	350,000	106

Note: Newly signed contracts for 1981-82 in *bold italics*.

Next Time: The Philadelphia 76ers – How They Were Built

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Chart covers the entire 80s Era. 1979-80 Bucks (29) and Cavaliers (28) came the closest to joining this list. Data obtained using game results from <http://www.shrpsports.com> and Perl scripts written by the author. Results were double-checked using the Team Game Finder on the <http://www.basketball-reference.com> website.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Gertner, *The Idea Factory: Bell Labs and the Great Age of American Innovation*. New York: Penguin, 2012, p301.

<sup>3</sup> April 1 was the official transfer date.

<sup>4</sup> Magic broke his own record two years later in 1988-89 with 12.8 assists per game. That record still stands as of the end of the 2018-19 season.

<sup>5</sup> All salary figures are taken from contemporary newspaper reports and represent base salaries without bonuses. The figures in the right-most column were obtained by adding each players' points, rebounds and assists during the 1981-82 season (as listed on <http://www.basketball-reference.com>) and then dividing their salary by the sum of those statistics. **Malone, Thompson, Webster, Gilmore, Lanier, McGinnis, Cartwright, Johnson, Dantley:** Big Contrast in Pay in N.B.A. and N.F.L.," *New York Times*, August, 20, 1981. **Abdul-Jabbar, Magic:** Bob Ryan, "Bird leads list of 10 really deserving big bucks," *Boston Globe*, July 5, 1981. Magic's 25-year, \$25-million contract did not take effect until 1984. **Birdsong, Edwards:** 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. Birdsong and Edwards were newly signed as free agents for the 1981-82 season. Birdsong had reportedly earned between \$150,000 and \$165,000 the year before in Kansas City and had initially wanted to stay there until a bidding war emerged for his services, stoked by the Cleveland Cavaliers. Bob Woolf negotiated the new contract. See Sam Goldpaper, "Family Ties Still Binding For Birdsong," *New York Times*, June 17, 1981. **Erving:** Roy S. Johnson, "For Julius Erving of the 76ers, It's all a Philadelphia Story," *New York Times*, October 10, 1981. Dan Shaughnessy, "Pro Basketball: Will Moses Lead NBA Into Ruin?" *Boston Globe*, September 19, 1982. **Gervin:** "Spurs' President Would Love To Shell Out Cash," *Boston Globe*, February 19, 1981. **Bird:** May, Peter. *The Big Three: Larry Bird, Kevin McHale, and Robert Parish: The Best Frontcourt in the History of Basketball*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994, p57. Bird's rookie contract was the largest ever signed at that point in time: five years, \$3.25 million. **Williams:** Neil Amdur and Lawrie Mifflin, "Scouting: Rookie of Year Wants Pay Parity," *New York Times*, July 22, 1982.