

NBA BETTING GUIDE

PRO EDITION



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- REGIONAL TEAM COVERAGE
- PROP AND LIVE BETTING STRATEGIES
- POWER RATINGS

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PLAYER PROP BETTING THE SMART WAY

By Zachary Cohen

As betting becomes more and more popular, we're seeing a huge increase in the number of people that want to bet specifically on player props. There's something about rooting for individual players that is appealing to a lot of fans, and that's especially true of the NBA. A lot of that has to do with the fact that you're often getting national television games that feature some of the league's superstars. And sportsbooks also happen to offer a lot of bet boosts on those stars, making it easy for props to catch the attention of bettors.

I have been hitting NBA player props in my daily best bets column for VSIN, so you'll be able to get some of my favorite props of the day if you're regularly checking out the website. However, I know that part of the fun in betting is doing it yourself. With that in mind, I want to give you some tips on how to go about player prop betting in a smart way.

LEARN FROM THE GAME SPREAD/TOTAL

The first thing I do when beginning to look for props is look at the spreads and totals for the day's slate. If a game has an extremely high total, you're likely going to have a chance to cash some Overs on points and assists. And if one of the teams is a big favorite in that game, you might want to lean towards choosing players from that roster. Similarly, if a game has a low total, you can probably find some good Under plays on the underdog's side. Or you might be able to look to the blocks and steals markets, as lower totals in the NBA are usually reserved for teams that play good defense or sloppy offense. The one caveat there is that a low total could simply mean that one, or both, of the teams in that game play at a slow pace. Pace of play is one of the many things that is available on the official NBA stats page.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Not only is pace available on the NBA's stats pages, but their advanced stats are the ultimate resource for sports bettors. It's amazing the type of information they provide for free and learning how to mine those pages can be crucial when trying to become a profitable player prop bettor. In addition to looking for the spreads and totals on a specific game, I regularly take note of where teams stand in certain advanced stat categories. For example, the Wizards had the lowest rebound percentage in basketball last year. Knowing that helps you look to Washington's opponents as potential Over bets on rebound totals. Meanwhile, the Jazz happened to have the highest turnover ratio in

basketball last year. That generally means that backing the Over on steals for one of the players on the opposing team can be a smart bet. But the overall theme here is that there's a lot out there that can help you. Don't go into this blindly.

We also have a VSIN Daily Prop Analyzer that lists all the players that are playing on any given evening. It tells you what their prop totals are for points, rebounds, assists and 3s made. It also lets you know how they have performed with those totals throughout the season, and it even allows you to sort by which players have been most profitable. That's a tool you'll want to regularly use when betting props.

DON'T BE AFRAID TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

Sometimes a player's statistics don't tell the whole story. For example, a point guard might set their teammates up for great opportunities, but those guys might not be cashing in on them. That could mean that the passer's assist numbers will be a little down. But I like to find teams that are playing against weak defensive opponents and then look at the NBA's "potential assists" numbers. I think this is an even better way of approaching assist props than by looking at assists per game. It's just so important to be betting on players that consistently put their teammates in good positions to score. When combining potential assists with a weak opponent and a game in which both teams play at a fast pace, you're going to have a good chance of hitting your assist Overs. This is one of my favorite angles on the player props market. But there are also other things you do. For example, a known marksman from deep might be in the middle of a cold stretch shooting the ball, which leads to lower 3-point totals than usual. But looking at older percentages will tell you that those stretches are bound to end, which could lead to favorable prices and profitable outcomes. Looking at one-on-one matchups within a game can also be helpful. If a team has a bad defensive center taking on the assignment of guarding Nikola Jokic, what does that mean? Sure, he's the best passing big man in the NBA — and arguably the best passing big ever — but he might look to score more than usual in that situation. These are things you want to be thinking about often. Don't just look at numbers. Try to think about how a game will play out.

BE SOMEWHAT ACTIVE ON X

Nobody needs to sit there refreshing social media nonstop, but you're going to want to follow some of the league's bigger news breakers and check X in the hours leading up to the daily NBA slate. While the NBA is trying to cut down on the "load management" problem, there's simply no way around it. Teams are not going to overlook the benefits of giving their players some extra rest, which means key players will still be rested here and there. When they are, you're going to want to pounce on their teammates to step in and replace some of their numbers.

DON'T GO OVERBOARD

As with anything, you want to be careful when betting player props. There are so many options available on any given night, so you might be tempted to spray the board. But try and limit yourself to the few that you're very confident in and use a consistent unit size throughout — unless you feel like somebody being out gives you a bigger edge than usual. Also, I'd personally suggest staying away from parlays with more than two or three legs. I know people post tickets to X in which they're turning \$5 into \$50,000 and whatnot, but those are fool's gold and extremely difficult to hit. You're better off being consistent and earning small profits over an extended period of time.



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RULES AND LIVE BETTING STRATEGIES TO LIVE BY

By Kelley Bydlon

With so many markets now available to bettors, there are a lot of different ways to bet a game in any sport. However, live betting should never be overlooked — especially in the NBA. With so many possessions in a game, the NBA provides more opportunities to profitably jump in live on a side or total than any other sport. In fact, for many NBA bettors, including myself, in-game bets can account for the majority of bets you make in a season.

Below, I go through some things new bettors should know as they begin to get involved in live betting games...

RULES TO LIVE BY

1. IF YOU'RE ENTERING A GAME WITHOUT A PRE-GAME BET AND ARE LOOKING TO SOLELY FOLLOW A LIVE BETTING STRATEGY YOU HAVE IN MIND, YOU HAVE TO BE ALRIGHT WITH NOT MAKING A SINGLE BET.

I think people often force in-game bets if they enter games looking for action. You should enter each game with a specific strategy in mind and be on the lookout for the opportunities that will offer you a good time/price to jump in live. Simply put, those opportunities you wish for will not present themselves in every game. Sometimes games just go a completely different way than you had thought, and that should be fine with you because you don't have a single dollar invested.

2. IF YOU'RE NOT VERY FAMILIAR WITH LIVE BETTING, START OFF BY BETTING THE ABSOLUTE BARE MINIMUM OR NOTHING AT ALL. TRACK HOW THE SPREAD AND TOTAL MOVE THROUGHOUT GAMES.

You'll want to get a feel for how spreads and totals move based off of scoring and pace. You'll also get a feel for when the live odds really start to shift away from the pregame numbers. You'll usually find this takes until at least the second quarter.

3. WAIT FOR BREAKS IN THE ACTION TO MAKE IN-GAME BETS.

Just like any other sport, you really want to wait for a timeout or commercial break to get your bets in. If watching on TV, you'll always be behind what's really happening on the court. Even if the game has hit a time/score and the spread/total you were hoping for, you don't want to risk a bet while the game is still being played. You could be close to a full minute behind the real-time action that's taking place. That's a lifetime in the NBA and before you know it, you might be looking down at a very dumb bet you made. Wait for a break, then you can truly evaluate how best to proceed with betting the game.

4. KNOW WHO YOU'RE BETTING AGAINST: A COMPUTER OR A PERSON.

Sportsbooks will often utilize technology and computer algorithms to set live odds throughout a game. For a bettor, this is ideal. Those books will have live odds posted throughout most of the game, whereas a sportsbook that is booking the game by hand will usually only post numbers during commercial breaks, and even that may be inconsistent. Betting against a computer will not only give you more opportunities to bet, but those algos might also miss out on accounting for injuries that take place, ejections, players fouling out, etc. Those are all things a bettor can take advantage of. Whichever state you bet in, familiarize yourself with your live betting options from book to book.

Alright, now that you have all that boring stuff squared away, let's talk about some ways to make some damn money. Below, I go through some of the live betting strategies I utilize regularly.

LIVE BETTING STRATEGIES

1. IT'S ALL ABOUT SHOOTING PERCENTAGES

Even if it's a game you didn't have plans to bet, some opportunities will present themselves that you just can't pass up. Let's say Team A is favored by 5 pre-game and is down 12 in the middle of the second quarter. You check the box score and see that Team A is shooting 39% from the field and 18% from 3, while Team B is shooting 53% from the field and 47% from 3 (yes, I'm completely making up numbers for this example). Well, basketball is a game of shooting and runs, and teams can often start out very hot or cold from the field before finding their true average. In the example above, you should expect by the end of the game for Team A's shooting percentages to look much better and Team B's to look much worse, and in the second quarter you could be betting that pre-game 5-point-favorite at a much better number.

2. OKAY, IT'S MOSTLY ABOUT 3-POINT SHOOTING PERCENTAGES

That's the number you should be focused the most on. With how many 3s are shot in the NBA today (about 40% of FGA), you can often find teams with drastically different 3PT percentages at different points in a game. However, these percentages usually regress to near a team's average by the end of a game. So, if you see a game with outlier shooting percentages on one side, or both, look to capitalize on it with a bet.

3. GUESS WHAT? THIS WORKS FOR NOT JUST SIDES BUT TOTALS TOO!

Let's say both teams start out shooting poorly from 3, or both teams start out shooting way too hot from 3. This can lead to easy in-game bets on the Over or the Under.

4. TIMING IS CRUCIAL

Okay, we've discussed what you're looking for when it comes to shooting percentages, but when should you make the bet? A couple of minutes into the game, the odds won't have shifted enough off the pregame numbers, and if you wait until too late into the game, you're not going to give the team you're betting on enough possessions to make up the points you need. If I'm basing my bet mainly just off shooting, I'm usually not getting involved until the second quarter has started, and I'm usually shutting it down by about midway through the third quarter. Again, you have to leave your team enough time.

5. KNOW WHEN STAR PLAYERS TAKE THAT FIRST BREAK

As a season progresses, get to know when star players usually take their first rest in a game. Is it the end of the first quarter? Beginning of the second quarter? These are good to note as the season goes on and will help you make easier decisions on timing your in-game bets.

6. I LIKE A TEAM TONIGHT, BUT MAN, I WISH I WAS GETTING AN EXTRA FEW POINTS OR LAYING A COUPLE LESS!

You'll often say that every week during football season with not much you can do about it. Well, in the NBA that's what I would call a pre-game lean that I'm looking to bet live. Let's say you're leaning Team A, and then the game starts off with a flurry of points from Team B. You could wait three minutes into the game, a timeout is called, and boom, all of a sudden you have a live number available to you that you were looking for pre-game. Yes, your team has an uphill climb ahead of them, but there are so many more possessions left in the game.

7. WE DON'T ROOT FOR INJURIES, BUT THEY CAN OFTEN LEAD TO BETTING OPPORTUNITIES

We see bettors capitalize on this often in the NBA. Whether it's an injury or a day off for a player, you'll often see big changes in the spread when that injury report comes out and you see a star player taking another game off. The books will look to quickly pull down their numbers or adjust them, and bettors try to beat them to the punch. A similar approach can be taken in-game. If a player is injured, ejected, or fouls out, it might not be reflected in the live odds immediately. This is a major opportunity for bettors.

8. OH SWEET, BEAUTIFUL MIDDLES

These aren't for everybody, and it's not even something I dabble in as much as I used to, but there's nothing quite like the feeling of having +points with both teams and the game falling right in the sweet spot. Of course, this is not something you can do with every game, but maybe you bet a big dog pre-game that gets off to an extremely good start that you know they won't be able to maintain. Then come in with a smaller bet on the other side. You never know; you might win both. Of course, this can be applied to totals as well.

9. LIVE PLAYER PROPS

This is a new frontier for me, and I don't have a ton of betting advice on it now, but it is something I'm hoping to bet more this season if the Vegas books allow me to. Just like all other live markets, it's one you should study to see how you might be able to profit from it.



STEVE MAKINEN'S POWER RATINGS

TEAM	POWER RATING
BOSTON	104.0
OKLAHOMA CITY	103.5
NEW YORK	103.0
DENVER	102.0
PHILADELPHIA	102.0
DALLAS	101.5
MINNESOTA	101.5
MILWAUKEE	101.0
PHOENIX	100.0
CLEVELAND	99.5
INDIANA	99.5
ORLANDO	99.5
MEMPHIS	99.0
NEW ORLEANS	99.0
SACRAMENTO	98.5
GOLDEN STATE	98.0
LA LAKERS	98.0
MIAMI	98.0
HOUSTON	97.0
LA CLIPPERS	97.0
SAN ANTONIO	96.5
ATLANTA	96.0
TORONTO	95.0
CHICAGO	94.5
CHARLOTTE	93.5
UTAH	93.5
DETROIT	93.0
PORTLAND	92.0
BROOKLYN	91.5
WASHINGTON	91.0

MIAMI HEAT

CONFERENCE: EASTERN • DIVISION: SOUTHEAST
2023-24 RECORD: 48-41 SU, 43-43-3 ATS, 38-51 O/U

The Heat have ranked in the Top 10 in adjusted defensive rating in each of the last four seasons, a testament to Erik Spoelstra's ability to motivate his players. Despite having guys in and out of the lineup, Spoelstra's teams remain strong defensively, especially on the perimeter, where they held opponents to 35.7% shooting from beyond the arc on non-heaves last season, the third-best mark in the NBA. That ability to defend gives Miami a high floor, reflected in their -500 odds to make the playoffs. However, surpassing their season win total of 44.5 and making a deep playoff run is more of a question mark.

Last season, the Heat won 46 games despite Jimmy Butler missing 22 games, Bam Adebayo missing 11 and Tyler Herro sitting out 40. For the Heat to thrive in an increasingly competitive Eastern Conference, these key players, along with role players, need to be healthier. Simply limping into the playoffs and hoping for the right matchup may no longer be sufficient for Miami.

Butler and Adebayo are crucial to the Heat's identity. With both on the court, Miami allowed just 110.8 points per 100 possessions and had a net rating of +4.8. However, the team's overall net rating was only +1.7, with 112.7 points allowed per 100 possessions. Butler and Adebayo embody "Heat Culture," driving Miami's intensity. Butler guards top opposing wings, while Adebayo disrupts pick-and-rolls as one of the most switchable centers in the league. Offensively, both players wear many hats. Butler can score 30 points on any given night or act as a facilitator, while Adebayo has developed into a reliable 20-point scorer and remains an elite passer for a big man.

The main concern for Miami is whether there's enough firepower outside of Butler and Adebayo to compete in the Eastern Conference. Herro, despite his flaws, is crucial to the Heat's success. While Miami made a Finals run without him two years ago, the team isn't good enough offensively to survive without someone who averaged 20.8 points and 4.5 assists per game on strong shooting splits last season. Miami's offense struggled last year, ranking just 21st in adjusted offensive rating, partly due to Herro's prolonged absence.

Another key piece is Terry Rozier, acquired from the Hornets last season. Rozier averaged 16.4 points and 4.6 assists per game after joining Miami. Though criticized as a "chucker" for his shot-heavy tendencies — especially when it comes to pull-up jumpers — Rozier's scoring ability fills a void on a team that has struggled to generate offense in recent years.

The development of young players like Jaime Jaquez Jr., Nikola Jovic and rookie Kel'e Ware could also be critical to Miami's success this season. Jaquez, who made the All-Rookie First Team last year, averaged 11.9 points, 3.8 rebounds, and 2.6 assists in his first season. The Heat will rely heavily on him, though his shooting — 32.2% from 3 during the regular season, dipping to 23.1% in the playoffs — needs improvement. Jovic, while not a regular contributor yet, shows promise as a 6-foot-10 forward with shooting and ball-handling ability. Ware, a 7-foot center with both rim-running skills and 3-point shooting range, is seen as a potential long-term fit next to Adebayo.

If Jaquez and Jovic show significant improvement, Miami's championship window might reopen. However, there is concern that the team may be heading in the wrong direction, especially as the rest of the Eastern Conference strengthens. Much of Miami's fate depends on Butler, who turned 35 before the season. His numbers last year showed a decline, with his Offensive EPM being well below his OEPM in 2023 and his Defensive EPM being the lowest since 2015. If Butler can't return to peak form, Miami might not even make the playoffs.

Perhaps a shift in offensive philosophy can help this team out. Spoelstra has been emphasizing 3s — even allowing Adebayo to launch some — and devaluing the mid-range shot in training camp. Miami was first in the NBA in mid-range frequency (35.6%) last year, and Spoelstra wants a more modern offense.

While Miami's defense provides a solid foundation, their playoff hopes are reliant on health, offensive development and whether their veteran stars can continue to perform at a high level. The Heat have the potential to win any single playoff series, but winning multiple with this current roster might not be in the cards anymore. Perhaps Miami will change that with a move or two at the deadline.

THE ODDS

NBA FINALS
45-1

CONFERENCE
20-1

DIVISION
+180

PLAYOFFS (MAKE/MISS)
-500/+360

OUTLOOK

A lot of teams are getting better in the Eastern Conference, and that means that others are due for some regression. The Heat are as good a pick as any to slide down the pecking order a bit. The wheels probably won't fall off in Miami as long as Spoelstra is around, but the talent just isn't there when looking at this team. When you add in the high probability of injuries, this looks like a team that will win 44 or fewer games. Maybe Miami sneaks into the playoffs through the Play-In Tournament again, and that would then put a higher seed on upset watch. But that feels like the ceiling for this group.

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LEAN UNDER 44.5

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