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**BASKETBALL FOR THOUGHT** by Kris Gardner, e-mail: KGardner@TheHRR.com

## What's Goin' On?

**T**he more I read the scores from NBA games, the more I realize I'm not missing much when I don't watch the games. Point totals in NBA games have declined for the last few years; but, this season, many of the games have been simply pathetic. No NBA game should feature two teams not scoring above 80 points! However, two games took place on New Year's Eve — Detroit beat Portland 78 to 71 and the Rockets beat the Sixers 80 to 72. What's going on?

I've been writing about the NBA's decline for years; and, in all honesty, I'm tired of discussing this garbage **David Stern**, the coaches, and the players are attempting to pass off as "NBA basketball". But, hey discussing basketball is a part of what I do; so, here's another rant...

I love NBA basketball! However, the quality of the game has deteriorated so much since the 1990s, I hardly watch the games anymore which makes it very difficult for me to do a good job analyzing the "ins and outs" of the NBA. In years past, I blamed expansion on the inferior product. More teams in the league just meant more

opportunities for players who are lacking legitimate NBA-skills. Basically, more teams equals less talent



of missed shots (re: bricks) taken each game is enough to build enough town homes to shelter the homeless in America!

*...96 points per game is 2 points per minute.*

per team. However, the effects of expansion *should* have worn off by now.

Coaches today over coach. I've hammered that point home before. The higher salaries NBA coaches receive seems to have impacted the flexibility and creativity of NBA coaches. Apparently, the coaches feel the need to justify their larger payrolls; so, they want to coach (and call) **every single play** their players execute on the court which means when a team grabs a defensive rebound, instead of running a fast break, the players look to the sideline to see what play their coach wants to run. Give me a break! Bring back the fast break! Please!

Players simply cannot shoot. Period. The number

(Actually, the number of shots taken per game has decreased because the coaches have the players holding the ball more in order to limit the number of possessions per game. Say what?) Players miss open jump shots at an alarming rate each and every game; but, that's because of "the great defense teams play today". Uh...no. Open shots are missed today because today's players don't take the time to make them in practice. They'd rather work on their dunks and their three-point shots (which some will never attempt in an actual game).

Where have the fundamentals gone? Players travel practically every time they receive the ball. If

they're not traveling, then, they're palming (carrying) the ball when they dribble. Players no longer move without the ball, they just stand on one side of the court waiting for a pass. Players no longer set solid screens. Instead, players set moving picks like they're lead-blocking in a football game.

The influx of international players is supposed to return the NBA to the fundamentals. Be careful what you wish for. Today's international players grew up watching the NBA in the early 1990s which means they grew up watching the decline of the NBA game. More and more international players are picking up the bad habits of the American players.

But, the "athleticism is much better today" than in years past. Big deal. Better athletes does not mean better basketball players. I'm waiting for signs the game is getting better; however, I just don't see signs of improvement on the near horizon. College teams spend too much time "jacking up" way too many three-pointers. High school teams watch the college teams. Plus, many of the high school players play summer ball where learning the fundamentals seems to be taboo.

NBA action used to be "Fantastic!" Now, it's fan-repellent.