Sports Spectrum: NBA layoffs, predictive standings

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A lot has happened in the week since I wrote my last column on the NBA playoffs. As the first series comes to a close, there are four series in particular that you should pay attention to.

(Author's note: All series standings as of 3 p.m. April 29. Last night's games were Orlando/Detroit and Lakers/Rockets. Games played on this night were written with an expected outcome.)

Lakers vs. Rockets (LAL 3-1) - The Real Lakers in Five

Game 3 – The Rockets had a chance to at least shift the momentum a little in their favor. They were up by six with less than 30 seconds remaining, on the verge of victory.

Unfortunately for them, LeBron James, who scored 29 points that game, hit a tying 3-pointer with 13 seconds left after Marcus Smart forced a turnover. The Rockets lost in OT to stare down a 3-0 hole.

Head Coach Ime Udoka criticized his team after the loss, stating that they did not "run what was drawn up."

Udoka specifically was referring to the players in the final 30 seconds who were handling the ball: Reed Sheppard, Amen Thompson and Jabari Smith Jr. Gutting the youth excuse, in essence, he's said that they were just basketball players who made a bad read.

Outside of Dorian Finney-Smith, no one on that starting five is above the age of 23. Sheppard is 19th, out of the 28 players selected in the first round of his draft class in total minutes played. Excluding Rob Dillingham, he's played the fewest amount of minutes of a top 10 pick in that draft class in the 2024-25 season.

Bronny James outscored the entire Rockets bench (5 points) in a game the Rockets ended up in. A peek at the box score showed their starters were good. Alperen Sengun had 33 points, Smith Jr. had 24 points and Thompson had 26 points.

They won Game 4 and surprisingly, Game 5. There is a lot of room to see how these games go.

Nuggets vs. Timberwolves (MIN leads 3-2) – Injury, Defense and Legacy Conversation

https://x.com/ChristopherHine/status/2046469039036535149

With Aaron Gordon — widely seen as Denver's best defender — sidelined in Game 3, McDaniels looked prophetic: Jokic started 1-of-8 with no threes in the first quarter. Meanwhile, Gobert was throwing down layups he had no business doing. They were clearly having fun.

Game 4 was a different story. Ayo Dosunmu erupted for 40, and Gobert locked Jokic down to 8-of-22, pushing Minnesota to a 3–1 series lead.

Then Game 5 hit differently — both backcourt stars went down. Edwards hyperextended his knee; DiVincenzo ruptured his Achilles, becoming the fourth player to do so wearing No. 0. Denver surged, winning Game 5. A 3–1 comeback is now in play.

No matter who wins this series, they will face the San Antonio Spurs. That's the highlighted series of the West.

Pistons vs. Magic (ORL leads 3-2) – Top Seeded Fluke?

Detroit's 60-win regular season feels like a distant memory. The Pistons are one loss away from becoming just the seventh No. 1 seed ever to fall to an 8 — and Orlando has earned every bit of it.

The Magic, led by Desmond Bane and Franz Wagner, have played with pure "nothing to lose" energy. They took both games in Detroit to open the series, and after closing Game 4 94-88, they've turned the Pistons into a "Fraud Watch" headliner.

Cade Cunningham is doing his part — 25 points, 8 assists — but it has often looked like 1-on-5. Ausar Thompson's perimeter defense on Bane has been a rare bright spot.

The biggest culprit? Jalen Duren. The supposed anchor of this defense has been outplayed by Orlando's frontcourt, lost in pick-and-roll coverage and outrebounded by smaller guys. In a series Detroit needs to win in the paint, he's been a no-show.

Knicks vs. Hawks (NYK leads 3-2) – Nowhere but New York!

After a good Game 1, the Knicks lost their closing touch. They lost Game 2 and Game 3 by one point.

Game 3 was the lowest point. Mikal Bridges, the best two-way stabilizer, scored nothing in 21 minutes. He was benched for much of the second half due to his -26 plus-minus score.

Since Game 3's sorrow, a huge gap has formed. The Knicks triumphed 126-97 at Madison Square Garden Tuesday night after winning Game 4 in Atlanta by 16 points.

At times, Atlanta's defense looked to have the solution, limiting Jalen Brunson to unproductive performances like his 41% shooting percentage in Game 3. But in Game 5, he was a flamethrower. Brunson blasted 39 points on 15-of-23 shooting, almost establishing a franchise record.

He's gone from trying to establish his rhythm to becoming the unquestioned best player on the floor. The Clutch Captain is still here, but to seal Game 6, the offense would need to go through Karl-Anthony Towns, who recorded a triple-double in Game 4.

While CJ McCollum was the engine for Atlanta early on, guarding and restricting Brunson. Most Improved Player of the Year Nickeil Alexander-Walker has been a revelation for the Hawks, bringing a spark off the bench (16 pts in Game 5), while Jonathan Kuminga (21 pts in Game 3) was catching the Knicks off-balance with his agility early on. However, New York ultimately adjusted.

The victor of this series is simply waiting for the smoke to clear in the Boston vs. 76ers series (Celtics lead 3-2).



Ayo Dosunmu on the court during a game. He scored 18 points in a game on April 28, 2026. PHOTO COURTESY OF @TIMBERWOLVES ON INSTAGRAM

SOFTBALL: UCONN HEADS TO D.C. SEEKING STRONG FINISH TO THE REGULAR SEASON

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This weekend, the Huskies will travel to Washington, D.C., to wrap up the regular season with a three-day series at the Mount Vernon Athletic Complex against Georgetown University. The first game will take place on Friday at 3 p.m. The next game will take place on Saturday at 1 p.m. The series will conclude with a game on Sunday at 12 p.m.

The Huskies will look to carry the same momentum they had against Creighton, where they took a 2-1 series win. The Huskies narrowly took the win in the first game of the series, finishing 12-11. The Bluejays took the second game in another close matchup, finishing 7-5. The series came down to the last matchup, where the Huskies pulled away, ending in a 4-2 win.

Offensively, the Huskies have been powered by multiple players, most notably, sophomore infielder Cat Petteys. Petteys delivered an outstanding performance in the opening game of the series with three doubles and four RBIs, setting the tone early on for the Huskies. She continued to dominate throughout the series, extending her hitting streak and contributing to crucial moments. Junior outfielder Caitlyn Breslin was the power behind the offense, highlighted by her two-homerun performance in game two of the series, which kept the Huskies in the game.

Key contributors have also aided in UConn's offensive depth. Senior infielder Savannah Ring serves as a dependable presence on the plate, recording multi-hit games. Senior Haley Coupal has proven to be a clutch hitter, delivering a base-clearing double in game one that ultimately gave the Huskies the win. Freshman Emma Willers also contributed offensively, delivering both timely RBIs and a home run in the series. Sophomore catcher Heidi Barber has also stepped up in key moments, delivering the game-winning two-RBI single in the finale to secure the series win.

In the circle, graduate pitcher Jessica Walter has emerged as the backbone of the defense. Walter was dominant throughout the series, earning her ninth save of the series in the opener and tying a program record before delivering four scoreless innings with five strikeouts in game two. Walter concluded the series with three more shutout innings. Freshman Caprice Bohmer provided further stability, striking out six over four innings in the series finale.

The Hoyas will look to bounce back after dropping a series 2-1 against Providence College. The Friars took the win in six innings, winning 9-1. The Hoyas powered through to narrowly take the 2-1 win in the second game, concluding the series with a close 5-4 loss.

Despite the series loss, the Hoyas have had multiple stand out players. Senior outfielder Gabby Park has been the leader of the offense, delivering a clutch 2-for-4 performance with two RBIs. Sophomore outfielder Dani Koo and senior outfielder Claire Turner have also been consistent at the plate, each recording multi-hit games and contributing to Georgetown's run production. Junior Abby Kozo has added further depth with timely hitting.

In the circle, freshman Catherin Larson has dominated, pitching a complete game in the series finale and keeping the Hoyas competitive. Graduate student pitcher Marina Egbert proved she can deliver under pressure, pitching a complete-game win in the doubleheader. The Hoyas will look to take advantage of their contact hitters and steady pitching in the matchup against the Huskies.

The Huskies last played against the Hoyas last season, where they earned a three series sweep. The series started with a doubleheader where they first secured a close 2-1 win, followed by a five-inning 12-4 win. The series ended with another five-inning win by the Huskies, finishing 12-3.

The Huskies will look to bring the same dominance displayed last season, while the Hoyas will look to seek revenge. Husky fans can tune into the last regular season matchup on FloSports.



The UConn softball team took on the Creighton at Burrill Family Field on April 25 in Storrs, Conn., for Senior day. The Huskies fell to the Blue Jays 7-5. PHOTO BY BENJAMIN LIAO, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS