

## Postseason preview

It may sound like an oxymoron, but the best part of any sports season is its conclusion. As fans we're sad to see games come to an end, but we know this is when the excitement happens. The season has been building to this moment for months, and it's finally here. The start of the NBA playoffs is still a little over a month away, but playoff mode has been activated. There are a number of teams still fighting for a spot — the play-in tournament adds an extra wrinkle to the final weeks of the regular season — while others are jockeying for seeding and home court. The games these teams play over the course of "The League — Basketball Style's" postseason could ultimately decide the fate of their seasons. But for now that bigger picture is secondary to what will transpire over the next three weeks.

Every postseason brings with it a different set of circumstances. What the six teams fortunate enough to be part of the tournament have achieved in that season, what each franchise has been through in the past, and expectations for each for the future shape what's at stake. A championship is a championship regardless of whether it's your first or your fourth, but historical context adds significance to each round, each team, and "The League" as a whole.

Unique seasons are nothing new to "The League," and this season's version was no different. The top-five seeds in the postseason have been comfortably planning for the postseason for some time, we had a wire-to-wire regular-season champion for the first time in league history, and we saw "The League's" two-time defending champion put together a furious rally at the end of the fantasy regular season to get back to the postseason. It's set up another postseason with historical context and major storylines everywhere you look.

So what can past postseasons tell us about what to expect this time around? Well first things first, expect the unexpected. 13 of the last 30 playoff matchups over the last six postseasons have ended in either a tie or 6-5 result, including four of five matchups in 2020, and all but one matchup a year ago finished with a 7-4 result or closer. Eight times a team has gone from quarterfinalist to champion, twice as the No. 6 seed. Only twice have the top-two teams played in the finals — 2012 and 2017 — and only three times has the regular-season champion won it all. Historically speaking, the top-two seeds are just as likely to both lose in the semifinals as they are to both advance to the finals: Three finals — 2014, 2016, and 2024 — featured two quarterfinalists playing for a championship.

One aspect of this season's postseason that is new is the likelihood of ties. While we've had plenty over "The League's" postseason history, the elimination of the offensive rebounding category means ties are more likely with an even number of categories. That means regular season results matter now more than ever because the tiebreaker is regular-season record against your opponent. We witnessed the most ties in a single season since the inaugural season of "The League," which

also had an even number of categories before we eliminated total rebounds and moved to an 11-category league.

This version of the postseason features three former champions, “The League’s” reigning two-time champion, five of the six winningest franchises in league history, and Black Kemba returning to the postseason in its return to “The League.” Considering how tight the season was in the middle of the standings and the inclusion of “The League’s” two most-storied original franchises in Heat Check All-Stars and DBuddaZ, we’re in store for more of the same drama we’ve seen in the past over the next three weeks.

### **Breaking down what’s at stake for the championship hopefuls**

#### **Piece of my Hart**

**Record:** 121-68-1

**All-time postseason record:** 0-2 (.000)

**Stat to know:** Piece of my Hart became the first wire-to-wire regular-season champion in league history, claiming the franchise’s first regular-season title while defeating every team in “The League” at least once.

Piece of my Hart enters its third postseason on the heels of one of the most dominant regular seasons in league history. It topped the standings from start to finish en route to the franchise’s first regular-season championship. It’s a season that follows a steady climb for one of the newest franchises in “The League.” It missed the postseason in year one, lost in the quarterfinals in year two, lost in the semifinals in year three, and now it’s taken another step forward with its first regular-season title. It’s still looking for its first playoff win, but this looks like the roster to do it.

#### **DBuddaZ**

**Record:** 113-74-3

**All-time postseason record:** 9-10 (.474)

**Stat to know:** DBuddaZ is making a league-record 13th postseason appearance, it’s advanced to at least the semifinals in all but two of its 13 postseasons, and a third title would tie it with The Sarge for the most in league history.

“We’ve been on the doorstep of a title ever since the COVID season winning one title and losing in another final, but last year’s semifinal loss to The Drakes was an especially tough pill to swallow considering the historic regular season we had,” DBuddaZ owner David Kiarsis said. “This postseason will be our revenge.”

DBuddaZ has put together quite the five-year run following four straight semifinal defeats and its lone non-playoff season during the COVID-shortened campaign. It’s about to make its fifth straight semifinal appearance, it won two regular-season titles, advanced to two finals, and won the franchise’s second

championship in 2022. It was another business-as-usual campaign for DBuddaZ, losing just five times all season, never losing consecutive matchups, and it finished tied with Comolli by ranking in the top four in seven of 10 statistical categories during the regular season while finishing third in the season-long statistical rankings. Another championship appearance would move it into a tie for the most in league history.

### **Comolli**

**Record:** 101-86-3

**All-time postseason record:** 6-6 (.500)

**Stat to know:** Comolli is back in the postseason for the first time in three seasons following its 2022 title game loss to DBuddaZ, and it remains one of two original franchises to never win a championship.

“Team getting healthy at the right time, cautiously optimistic, first title in basketball would be great,” Comolli owner Jamie Comolli said through text.

Comolli is one of two original franchises starving for its first championship. It’s back in the postseason for the first time in three seasons and it’s advanced to the finals twice in the last six seasons. Comolli’s five-weekly-matchup winning streak during the middle of the season was its longest since the end of the 2021-22 season. It won just six weekly matchups over the last two seasons combined, but this was perhaps its best regular season ever. It finished atop “The League’s” season-long statistical rankings and it lost just three times over the final 11 weeks of the fantasy regular season.

### **Heat Check All-Stars**

**Record:** 100-85-5

**All-time postseason record:** 4-10 (.286)

**Stat to know:** Heat Check All-Stars is in the midst of the longest postseason losing streak in league history, which started in the 2018 championship game, and it hasn’t been back to the semifinal round since 2018.

“Hopes aren’t very high since half my roster just doesn’t play each week and the bums on the wire won’t put up comparable stats,” Heat Check All-Stars owner Matt Pellicane said through text. “Be nice if Adam Silver put an end to the load management and fake injury nonsense that pollutes the NBA now”

Hopes are never high for Pellicane considering the pain it’s been through as a franchise. It’s the winningest regular-season team in league history, it’s tied for the all-time lead with three regular-season championships, and its 12 playoff appearances are second all-time. But that first title still eludes it. It’s lost three championship games, hasn’t advanced out of the first round since 2018, and it’s lost a league-record five straight playoff games. It was another strong regular

season for Heat Check All-Stars as we've come to expect — it finished fourth in the season-long statistical rankings — but the next three weeks is all the franchise cares about. Can it finally get over the hump?

### **Black Kemba**

**Record:** 95-94-1

**All-time postseason record:** 5-6 (.455)

**Stat to know:** Black Kemba is making its sixth straight postseason appearance around a two-year hiatus the last two seasons, and it's looking to become the fifth franchise to win multiple championships.

"Go Pellicane break the curse," Black Kemba owner Ryan Mongillo said through text.

Mongillo's quote is all you need to know about how tormented Heat Check All-Stars is as a franchise. Even its quarterfinal opponent is rooting for it to go win the title. Black Kemba returned to "The League" after a two-year hiatus and is right back where we've come to expect it to be this time of year. Prior to leaving, Black Kemba had its own dominant six-year stretch, making the playoffs all six seasons, winning three regular-season titles, and advancing to two championships. It's been awfully close on several occasions to adding its name to the list of franchises to win multiple championships, and while this isn't its strongest roster never count out one of the fiercest competitors "The League" has ever seen.

### **The Drakes**

**Record:** 91-95-4

**All-time postseason record:** 7-2 (.778)

**Stat to know:** The Drakes has won six straight postseason games, it's made the playoffs every year it's been in "The League" and has won at least one playoff game in each postseason it's played, and it's aiming to become the second team in league history to win three straight championships.

"Happy to be back to defend the title," The Drakes owner Greg Polovin said through text. "I have an extremely tough first-round matchup, but I clawed my way back from dead last to make the playoffs and I'm pretty hot at the moment, so don't count The Drakes out."

What The Drakes did to finish the fantasy regular season was one of the best stretch runs we've ever seen in league history. It looked dead in the water for much of the season after a tough start, and while it was certainly its worst regular season since it joined "The League" it's back in the postseason once again with a chance to defend its title. Getting here is a victory in itself, but The Drakes now has a chance to add even more ink to "The League's" record books. Three straight titles would put it in rarified air.

Statistical Rankings for Weeks 14-19												
Rank	Team Name	FGM	FG%	FT%	3PTM	PTS	REB	AST	ST	BLK	A/T	TOTAL
1	The Drakes	6	2	4	3	5	5	4	5	4	4	42
2	Piece of my Hart	4	3	3	4	4	6	5	6	5	1	41
3	DBuddaZ	5	5	1	5	6	3	6	3	3	2	39
4	Comolli	3	1	6	6	3	4	3	2	3	3	34
5	Heat Check All-Stars	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	4	6	6	32
6	Black Kemba	1	6	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	5	23

Injuries, schedule, matchups, and roster management will obviously all play a huge role in how the next three weeks play out, but looking back at how teams performed over the final six weeks of the fantasy regular season can give us some insight into what could happen. There aren't many surprises, however, when you compare the six playoff teams to each other over the final six weeks of the fantasy regular season. It may seem like a surprise that the number six seed was the best team down the stretch, but that's how it got here. Entering Week 14, The Drakes was in ninth place and 8.5 games back of the playoffs and then finished on a 41-18-1 run including 9-1 and 10-0 victories the last two weeks to punch its ticket. Piece of my Hart, DBuddaZ, and Comolli finished as the top-three teams in the season-long statistical rankings so it's no surprise to see them near the top as well.

## Quarterfinals preview

### (3) Comolli 101-86-3 vs. (6) The Drakes 91-95-4

All-Time Series: The Drakes leads 8-5

- This is the second postseason meeting all-time between these two teams. Comolli defeated The Drakes in the 2022 semifinals. The Drakes hasn't lost a playoff game since.
- The Drakes is the fifth below-.500 team in league history to qualify for the postseason.
- Comolli finished atop "The League's" season-long statistical rankings, tying for the league lead by finishing top four in seven of 10 statistical categories.

#### Previous meetings this season:

**Week 9:** Comolli defeated The Drakes 8-2

**Week 18:** The Drakes defeated Comolli 9-1

## What to watch

Any comparison between The Drakes and another playoff team likely has to come from just the stretch run of the fantasy regular season considering how bad it was for most of the campaign. The problem for The Drakes, however, is everywhere

it's been great is also an area Comolli has thrived all season long outside of the steals department. The Fantasy Hut has always believed that to pull off upsets in "The League's" postseason you need to be efficient and win at least two of the rate categories. The problem there as well is that Comolli was the most efficient team during the fantasy regular season and one of its two major weakness — blocked shots — is also an area The Drakes struggles in. While every week in fantasy is different of course, how you're playing right now matters and no one is hotter than The Drakes.

### **Key matchups**

Naz Reid and Julius Randle vs. Donte DiVincenzo; Shai Gilgeous-Alexander vs. Isaiah Hartenstein; Derrick White vs. Jayson Tatum

### **Tiebreaker: The Drakes**

### **Commish pick: The Drakes**

### **(4) Heat Check All-Stars (100-85-5) vs. (5) Black Kemba (95-94-1)**

All-Time Series: Tied 13-13

- This is the third postseason meeting all-time between these two teams. Black Kemba defeated Heat Check All-Stars in the 2014 semifinals and Heat Check All-Stars defeated Black Kemba in the 2018 semifinals.

- Heat Check All-Stars has lost a league-record five straight postseason games, its last win coming in its 2018 semifinal victory over Black Kemba.

- Black Kemba has lost two straight and five of its last six postseason games.

### **Previous meetings this season:**

**Week 9:** Black Kemba defeated Heat Check All-Stars 8-2

**Week 18:** Black Kemba defeated Heat Check All-Stars 6-4

### **What to watch**

All eyes are on Heat Check All-Stars in another postseason opportunity for the franchise to finally win its first championship. It has struggled of late, going 0-4-1 over the final five weeks of the fantasy regular season which included a loss to Black Kemba just two weeks ago. It has, however, been one of the most consistent teams in "The League" all season long, but these teams are more evenly matched from a statistical perspective than you might think. They each have the advantage in five of 10 statistical categories from a season-long perspective and they rank bottom two amongst playoff teams in five of "The League's" 10 categories over the last six weeks. This feels like a fight-and-claw type of matchup that could go down to the wire.

### **Key matchups**

Toumani Camara vs. Scoot Henderson; Aaron Gordon and Christian Braun vs. Nikola Jokic; Jalen Duren vs. Dennis Schroder; Tyrese Haliburton vs. Myles Turner

## **Tiebreaker: Black Kemba**

### **Commish pick: Heat Check All-Stars**

#### **Taking stock of the quarterfinals and looking ahead to the semifinals**

Both quarterfinal winners are breathing sighs of relief, but for very different reasons. The first postseason win was always going to be the toughest for “The League’s” reigning two-time champion considering the pressure of a potential three-peat, the way it got back to the postseason, and the opponent it was facing. Nothing about The Drakes’ back-to-back titles has been easy and this season has been a microcosm of that. It advances thanks to the tiebreaker rule and now once again must defeat “The League’s” regular-season champion — something it’s done in each of the last two postseasons — in the semifinals to get back to another final. Heat Check All-Stars took the first step in exercising some of its postseason demons by earning its first playoff win since 2018. It wasn’t pretty, and it was likely helped by the fact that Nikola Jokic didn’t play all week, but it can now focus on the task at hand rather than the weight of another potential postseason loss on its shoulders.

The Jokic injury and resulting quarterfinal performance of Aaron Gordon could be the theme of the semifinals. There is a lot of cross over between rosters in both matchups meaning the injury report looms even larger this week. If someone sits out it could mean a boost in production for your opponent’s player. In a perfect world everyone would be healthy so we’d see the best of all four teams, but we know the NBA isn’t perfect. Navigating the schedule and unexpected rest days will be paramount once again as it always is this time of year in the NBA.

#### **Semifinals breakdown**

##### **(1) Piece of my Hart (121-68-1) vs. (6) The Drakes (96-100-4)**

All-Time Series: Piece of my Hart leads 6-3

- This is the first-ever postseason meeting between these two franchises.
- Piece of my Hart has won five of the last six meetings between these two, three of which coming while winning at least seven statistical categories.
- Piece of my Hart is 0-2 all-time in the postseason, losing to lower-seeded teams on both occasions.
- The Drakes has won seven straight postseason games, which is the second-longest streak in league history. Three of the franchise’s eight postseason wins have come as the lower-seeded team.

##### **Previous meetings this season:**

**Week 4:** Piece of my Hart defeated The Drakes 7-3

**Week 13:** Piece of my Hart defeated The Drakes 6-4

#### **What to watch**

If you look at this matchup on paper, it's a mismatch, simply put. The Drakes had more than twice as many losses as Piece of my Hart during the fantasy regular season and Piece of my Hart was better in the season-long statistical rankings in all but one category. The good news for The Drakes, however, is these things aren't played on paper and no one is playing better basketball right now than the reigning two-time champion. Piece of my Hart is getting LeBron James back just in time, but it's still potentially without the services of some key pieces in Jaylen Brown, Ja Morant, and Stephen Curry, but the regular-season champion has navigated adversity all season long to get to this point. It's steadily improved over its four seasons in "The League," but the next step must come now in a place it's never won. One way or another, postseason history will once again be made in one of "The League's" two semifinals.

### **Key matchups**

Brandon Williams vs. Klay Thompson; Payton Pritchard vs. Jayson Tatum and Al Horford; Anthony Edwards vs. Donte DiVincenzo and Jaden McDaniels; Kentavious Caldwell-Pope vs. Paolo Banchero; Jakob Poeltl vs. Scottie Barnes; Kel'el Ware vs. Bam Adebayo; Stephen Curry vs. Draymond Green

**Tiebreaker: Piece of my Hart**

**Commish pick: Piece of my Hart**

### **(2) DBuddaZ (113-74-3) vs. (4) Heat Check All-Stars (107-88-5)**

All-Time Series: DBuddaZ leads 15-12-3

- This is the third postseason meeting all-time between these two franchises. DBuddaZ won the previous two meetings in the 2012 championship and 2019 quarterfinals.

- Heat Check All-Stars had won six of the previous eight meetings between these two teams prior to this season.

- If you exclude the COVID-shortened campaign which ended without a postseason being played, DBuddaZ is making its ninth straight semifinal appearance. It's 2-6 in its previous eight straight trips to this round.

- Heat Check All-Stars is making its first semifinal appearance since 2018. It's 3-2 all-time in this round of the postseason.

### **Previous meetings this season:**

**Week 1:** DBuddaZ defeated Heat Check All-Stars 7-3

**Week 10:** DBuddaZ defeated Heat Check All-Stars 7-2

**Week 19:** DBuddaZ and Heat Check All-Stars Tied 5-5

### **What to watch**

These two franchises are no stranger to this moment and to each other. As two of the four original members of "The League," their 30 meetings are the fourth-most all-time between two teams. They're top two in regular-season winning percentage, top two in regular-season weekly winning percentage, tied for the

league lead in regular-season championships, top two in playoff berths, and each is one finals appearance shy of the all-time league lead. Their playoff experiences have been somewhat different, however. While DBuddaZ went through its own postseason lull following its 2012 title, it's now making a league-record 10th semifinal appearance and has won multiple championships including its second just three years ago. Heat Check All-Stars meanwhile has the worst postseason record among teams with at least one playoff victory. It won three straight regular-season titles from 2013-2016 yet went just 1-3 in the playoffs during that timeframe. Since its 2012 finals appearance, Heat Check All-Stars has lost nine playoff games and six of those losses have come against lower-seeded teams. They're evenly matched from a statistical standpoint and Heat Check All-Stars is the more efficient team so that likely needs to be something it does well this week if it hopes to advance. Late-season free-agent acquisition Anthony Davis remains a huge wildcard, however, for DBuddaZ not just for this week but the postseason as a whole. If he can return and provide really anything close to what he's capable of it could tilt the scales in its favor.

### **Key matchups**

Immanuel Quickley vs. R.J. Barrett; Keyonte George vs. Lauri Markkanen; Max Christie and Kai Jones vs. Spencer Dinwiddie; Anfernee Simons and Deni Avdija vs. Toumani Camara; Giannis Antetokounmpo vs. Brook Lopez; Evan Mobley and Jarrett Allen vs. Donovan Mitchell; Miles McBride vs. OG Anunoby; Malik Beasley vs. Jalen Duren

**Tiebreaker: DBuddaZ**

**Commish pick: DBuddaZ**

### **Championship preview**

#### **(1) Piece of my Hart (131-68-1) vs. (2) DBuddaZ (118-79-3)**

All-Time Series: DBuddaZ leads 8-1

- This is the second postseason meeting all-time between these two franchises. DBuddaZ defeated Piece of my Hart in the 2023 quarterfinals.

- Piece of my Hart's Week 2 victory over DBuddaZ was its first and only win in this series. DBuddaZ won the first seven meetings, but four of those seven were by slim 6-5 margins.

- This is just the third final in league history and first since 2017 to feature the top-two seeds. Piece of my Hart is looking to become just the third regular-season champion to win the title.

- Piece of my Hart is making its first finals appearance, while DBuddaZ is making a league-record-tying fourth finals appearance. A third championship would move DBuddaZ into a tie for the most in league history.

#### **Previous meetings this season:**

**Week 2:** Piece of my Hart defeated DBuddaZ 7-3

**Week 11:** DBuddaZ defeated Piece of my Hart 8-2

## What to watch

Considering the dominant seasons we've seen from franchises over "The League's" 14 seasons, it's shocking this is just the third final featuring the postseason's top-two seeds. It speaks to the unpredictability of the fantasy playoffs where several factors can impact the outcome of one seven-day matchup between two teams. This season has been no different, but the final setup is a different one from a historical perspective. For the first time in eight years "The League's" two best teams all season long will meet with a championship on the line, but they've gotten to this point in history in many different ways.

DBuddaZ is one of the four remaining original members of "The League," and it's done it all. It's the second-winningest franchise in league history, it leads or is tied for the all-time league lead in regular-season championships, playoff appearances, playoff games, championship appearances, and money won. It's making its third finals appearance in the last four seasons — the only season it failed to advance to the finals was last season's dominant regular-season-title roster that finished with the third-best winning percentage of all-time — and the only thing left to check off its resume is a third championship. That would tie it with two other franchises for the most in league history.

"The consistency of my franchise can only be matched by Heat Check All-Stars and while some have had the disadvantage of less seasons under their belt in "The League," doing what we've done over an extended period of time can't be understated," DBuddaZ owner David Kiarsis said. "We've come up short in the postseason more times than we like, but we've always been there and we've always been a title contender. It's the way we play that sets us apart and a third championship would leave no doubt about which franchise is the cream of the crop."

Piece of my Hart on the other hand is one of "The League's" newest members, but all it's done since joining is win and improve year over year. It went from non-playoff participant to the postseason. It followed a first-round exit with a second round-round exit, but that's all led to this season and one of the most dominant regular seasons we've ever seen. It went wire-to-wire at the top of the standings — the first of its kind in league history — and it finally got the postseason monkey off its back to advance to its first final. Nothing would put it on the map more than ending that dominant season with a championship.

"We just want to show we belong with the big boys," Piece of my Hart co-manager Jeff Schulser said through text. "Giddy up."

These two teams finished second and third in the season-long statistical rankings behind Comolli. They combined to rank top three in 11 of 20 statistical category rankings, with DBuddaZ leading "The League" in field goals made and points and

Piece of my Hart leading “The League” in rebounds, assists, and steals. Piece of my Hart finished second in both field goals made and points while DBuddaZ finished third in rebounds and assists so you have to think those will be key categories to swing this matchup one way or the other. Being efficient has always been important come playoff time and these two teams match up pretty evenly there, although DBuddaZ’s second-best field goal percentage during the regular season is the one area of the three ratio categories where one team has a big advantage over the other. DBuddaZ did not shoot the ball well in its semifinal win over Heat Check All-Stars and that likely needs to change for it to come out on top this week.

While both teams have had their fair share of injury and rest concerns down the stretch, both are as healthy as you could hope for with everything on the line this week. That will certainly change as the week progresses and teams jockey for lottery seeding and others prepare for the postseason with the hope of remaining healthy, and navigating those changes will be paramount as it always is this time of year. Making the right moves, making the right lineup decisions, and receiving some good fortune from those injury reports could loom large between these evenly matched rosters and owners. Stars playing like stars is always an x-factor so how LeBron James, Steph Curry and Jaylen Brown play as they continue to work back from recent injuries will be vital while late-season addition Anthony Davis could be a difference maker for DBuddaZ. He wasn’t great in his first week back in the semifinals, but some vintage Davis performances could be what DBuddaZ needs to pull off the mini upset.

The first two meetings between these two this season weren’t particularly close from a final score perspective — they were decided by a combined margin of 15-5 — but if “The League’s” postseason history has taught us anything that won’t be the case this week. DBuddaZ owns the tiebreaker which has already played a factor this postseason, and don’t be surprised if this comes down to the wire with a 5-5 result in the range of possible outcomes. History is at stake for the winner, which will reach out and grab it?

### **Key matchups**

Brandon Williams vs. Anthony Davis; Payton Pritchard and Jaylen Brown vs. Kristaps Porzingis; Kyle Kuzma vs. Giannis Antetokounmpo and Gary Trent Jr.; Donovan Clingan vs. Anfernee Simons and Deni Avdija; Jakob Poeltl vs. Immanuel Quickley

### **Tiebreaker: DBuddaZ**

**Commish pick: Piece of my Hart**