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D'ANGELO
RUSSELL

PATTY
MILLS

ALL-STAR
VOTING

END OF AN
ERA

STEPHEN
CURRY

**YOU DON'T
KNOW J.R.**

COVER ART BY **BAMBAMBAM!**



ISSUE 3 JANUARY 2016

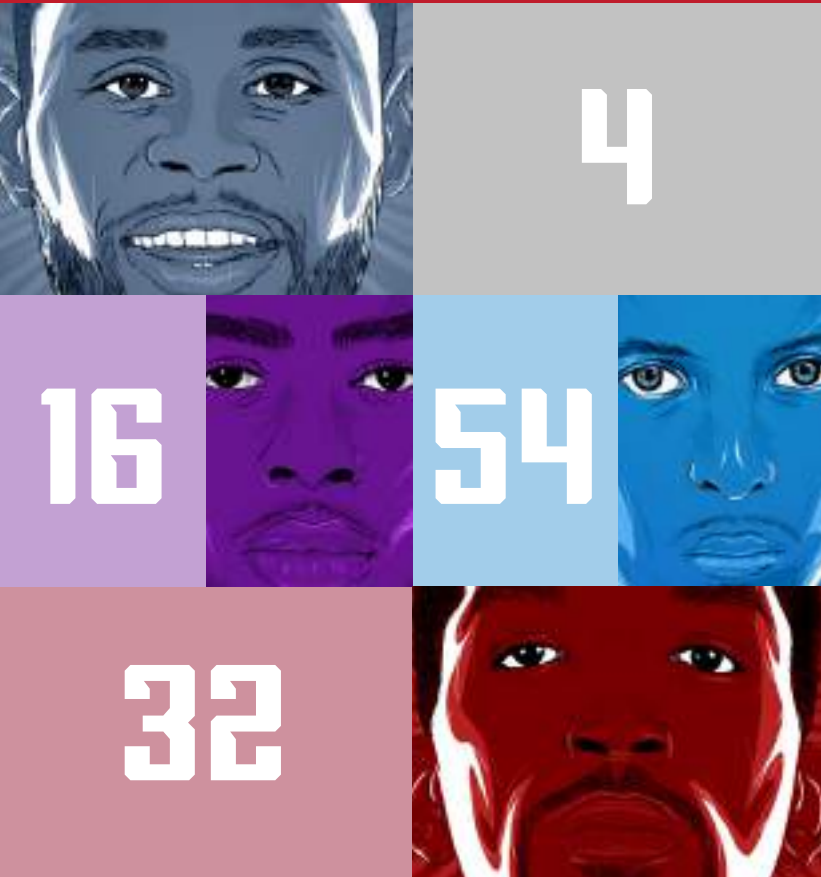


POSTERIZES

POSTERIZES
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ART BY JENNIFER HYNDS

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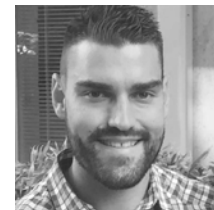
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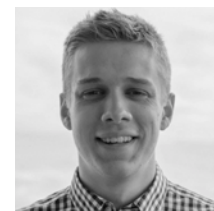
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ZAC DAY



MATT LEONARDO



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PATTY
MILLS

WORDS X INTERVIEW /
NICK METALLINOS
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It's a mild early-November Monday night in New York City. The NBA season has only just recently gotten under way, as teams still try to feel each other out while trying to figure out their rosters.

Inside Madison Square Garden, about 90 minutes before tip-off, Australian Patty Mills is going through his pre-game warm-ups.

There's some free-throw shooting and mid-range exercises that he runs through, but mainly Mills works on his three-point shooting; catch-and-shoots from the baseline, and also work practicing coming off screens from distance as well. Don't call it a comeback because Mills never really went anywhere, but for the first time in a long while, his body finally appears to be at 100 percent.

"It feels good," says Mills. "I think mentally, more than anything, it feels good to have a full preseason and be ready to go from game one. Body feels good, shoulder feels good, it's exciting to know I had all that preparation time, that rehab time in the off-season to make sure it's all right. Now it's just exciting to get after it again."

It was back in July, 2014, that Mills' shoulder problems were first revealed. He was two weeks removed from having being a crucial part of the championship winning Spurs' bench when a torn rotator cuff in his right shoulder was to be operated on.

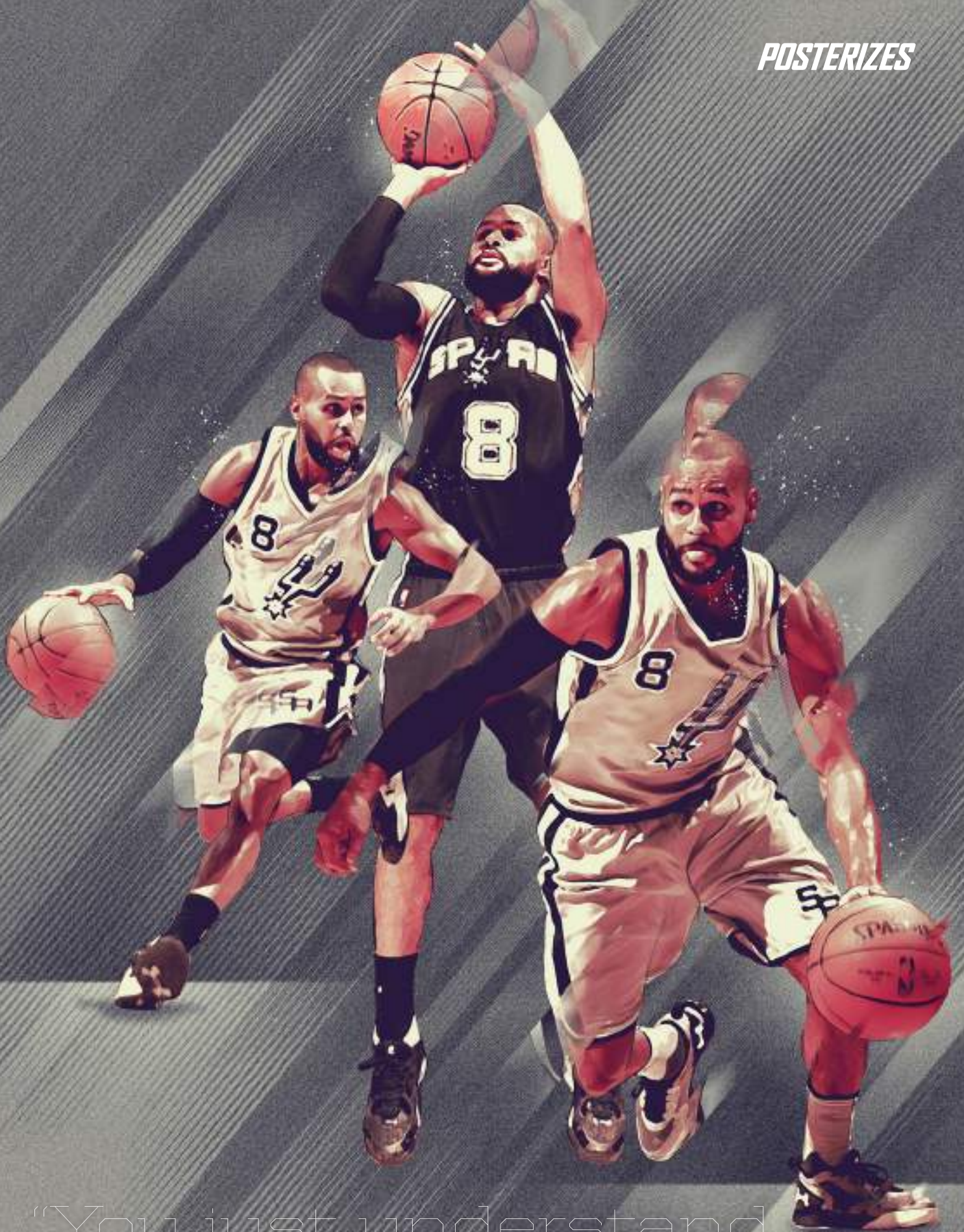
Mills had played through pain for the entire season that year, and scans revealed the extent of the damage shortly after the team's win over Miami in the Finals.

He played in 51 games last season for the Spurs, 57 if you count the playoffs, but the tenacity that he proudly stakes his game on just wasn't there. Mills made his season-debut in the Spurs' 32nd game of the season: their record at the time was 18-13.



ART BY GARY CHEN

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“You just understand
your role more than
anything.”

ART BY MELVIN RODAS

He averaged 6.9 points and shot just 38.1 percent in an injury-shortened campaign, leading many to wonder if he'd made his comeback too soon. Mills says there's multiple ways you can look at it.

"Personal injury wise, yeah, it probably was too early," says Mills. "It was what the team needed at that time. We were kind of dropping like flies there for a little bit; we had a tough schedule in December. We needed bodies. We needed bodies on the floor. So, for me it was whether or not I could re-hurt my shoulder, and once I passed the test of doing that it was a no-brainer to get out there and get ahead."

Boris Diaw, one of Mills' closest friends on the Spurs, recalls it being tough to watch his teammate be out on the court and not be able to perform like he normally could. "Yeah, it was [tough], but he had to work his way back into that [form]. We knew it was not going to be right away."

Not having an opportunity to spend an entire summer and preseason with the team that off-season definitely hindered Mills' rehabilitation.

"It did make it tough, obviously, because once you're in the flow of a season it's hard to make gains rehab wise, which is why at the end of the season all the focus was back on the shoulder to have another off-season full of rehab," reflects Mills. "It was almost like it was just out of surgery again. That's what I needed to get it back to 100 percent, like it is now."

“
UNDERSTAND
YOUR ROLE AND
WHAT'S NEEDED
OF **YOU** AS A
BACK-UP POINT
GUARD COMING
OFF THE BENCH.
”





There's an old adage in the NBA - you don't get better during the season, you get better in the summer. And so with that, Mills endured another summer of rehab, and finally, about a month before pre-season camps opened he tested his shoulder out in informal workouts with some of his fellow teammates. A ritual organised by Tim Duncan. Gruelling scrimmages in a hot San Antonio gym ensued, with Mills back in full flight. Duncan called Mills the star of the open scrimmages.

"It's what we do every year," Mills says about his summer workouts. "We get a group of guys in before training camp starts - about a month out, so we get four full weeks almost of just playing games. It's a good environment. It's not structured in a way where there's coaches, it's a free environment so you just kind of go out and hoop.

"You make gains by rehabbing everyday, by working out every day. That's what the summer is, that's what the off-season's for; for a rest and being able to develop. That's over a month's work of individual work - running up-and-down playing games, that's where you get better."

The rehabilitation process was long and painful, but 17 months after surgery, the payoff is worth it: full range of motion in Mills' right shoulder, and playing a crucial role off the bench. So far in 2015-16 Mills is averaging 8.5 points per game on 46.6 percent from the field in 21 minutes per game. His offensive rating, which measures the number of points per 100 possessions that the team scores while that individual is on the court, has increased every month. Currently he has an offensive rating of 106.4, and has also assisted on 17.5 percent of the team's field goals.

Spurs' head coach Gregg Popovich is familiar with Mills' game when he plays for the Australian national team, and says that is the style of play he expects from the diminutive point guard when coming off the bench for San Antonio.

ART BY SAIMONAS LUKOŠIUS



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“That’s what we want him to do when he comes off the bench; we want him to shoot and score, so in that sense it’s similar. It’s not going to be as many minutes, and he’s not going to be the best player on the team, but he’s essential for us to be a good team, and a winning team.”

Mills, Diaw, and Manu Ginobili have pooled their talents to give the Spurs one of the deepest and most productive benches in the league. That three-man rotation is a plus-18 when on the court together.

Diaw agrees that the dynamic of that second unit changes once Mills enters the game: “He’s great because he can bring some rhythm to the second unit, moving the ball, and he’s such a threat with his shooting ability from outside that every team has got to respect that.”

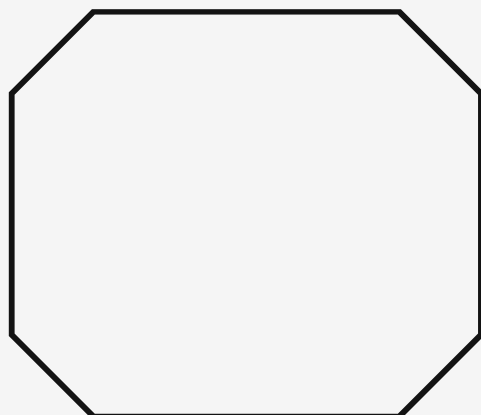
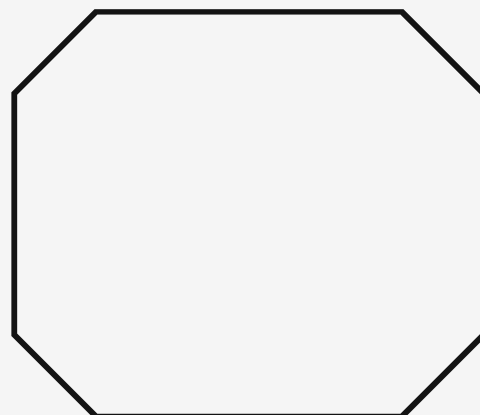
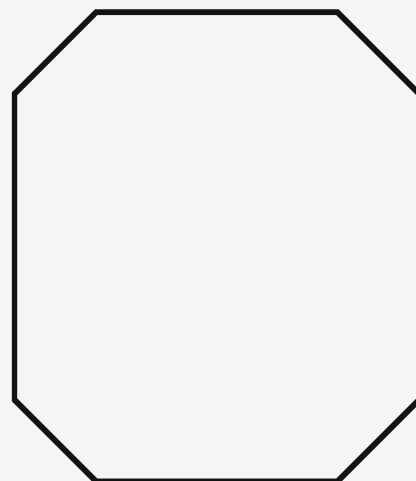
Mills won’t say that he’s set particular expectations for himself with the second-unit, rather, he feels that if every player does their part it will help the team.

“There’s no expectations, I don’t think,” he says. “That’s how you got to look at it. You just understand your role more than anything. Understand your role and what’s needed of you as a back-up point guard coming off the bench.”

So, let’s not call this a comeback, it’s more a revival of sorts, but the Spurs are chasing their sixth NBA title in franchise history. San Antonio have transitioned smoothly from Tim Duncan to Tony Parker to now being led by Kawhi Leonard and LaMarcus Aldridge. They haven’t missed a beat as they sit second in the Western Conference with a 36-6 record, and Mills figures to be a central part of their journey towards another title.

“We all understand that we need to have patience to get this thing to click,” he says. “Leadership, obviously not only from the main three guys, but from everyone else including myself to help them get everyone on the same page. I think that’s the biggest key, time and patience, and knowing that it will come and we clicked.”

NICK METALLINOS



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“ **ALL**
WE UNDERSTAND THAT
WE NEED TO HAVE
PATIENCE TO
GET THIS THING TO
CLICK. ”

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WORDS NICK METALLINOS
ART BAMBAMBAM!

L.A.
BIG CITY **L.A.**
OF DREAMS

BUT EVERYTHING
IN L.A.
AIN'T ALWAYS WHAT
IT SEEMS

PRODIGY FIRST SPIT THOSE LYRICS BACK IN 1997 ON CAPONE N NOREAGA'S SEMINAL ALBUM, THE WAR REPORT. THE LYRICS WERE IN RESPONSE TO WEST COAST RAPPER SNOOP DOGG'S DIS TOWARDS NEW YORK, BUT EVEN IN THE NBA WORLD IN 2015, THEY RING TRUE. ESPECIALLY FOR THE LAKERS' D'ANGELO RUSSELL.

R

ewind back to draft night in June. Russell became the overall No. 2 pick when selected by Los Angeles, and immediately proclaimed himself ready to bear the burden of becoming the franchise's next star, and playing with a storied franchise.

"I try to stand out wherever I go and be that star," Russell proclaimed back in June. "I'm just a kid from Louisville with a big dream. To be in this position, with that franchise on the West Coast, in one of the most beautiful cities in the world, is a great opportunity to take my game to the next level."

Now, six months later, and Russell is navigating his way through the difficult process of learning to run an NBA offense, gain the respect of his coaches and teammates, and recently, having to deal with life under the intense microscope of the big market media, the attention of whom has been magnified even more since Kobe Bryant's retirement announcement.

Russell is an intriguing long term prospect considering his package of attributes. It's a package that yielded numbers of 19.3 points per game, 5.7 rebounds, 5.0 assists in just under 34 minutes per game during his lone season at Ohio State. In the NBA, however, Russell still has to earn his stripes while mastering the point guard position.

Through his first 39 NBA games, he's dropping 11.8 points per (4th among rookies), 4 rebounds and 3.4 (3rd among rookies) dimes a night.

“
**BEING A
ROOKIE
TRYING TO
RUN THE
OFFENSE
IS THE
HARDEST
THING**
”





“Being a rookie trying to run the offense is the hardest thing,” he said. “If coach isn’t calling the play— being a rookie point guard, you gotta be the coach on the floor, so when you make a play that coach is giving you the keys to make, everybody has to react like coach said it, not just because I’m a rookie [and] I said it you can’t look at me like I spoke a foreign language.”

“You’re trying to run a group of veteran guys. We’ve got a young team, and some older guys too, so it’s tough to make everybody happy from the point guard position.”

Lakers’ coach Byron Scott has seemingly been harder on Russell than any other player on his roster, often singling him out to media, noting things that the rookie could have done better. Perhaps he’s expecting more from the point guard position given that Russell has not been as NBA-ready as two point guards Scott coached in the past - Chris Paul and Kyrie Irving.

“As a coach you want them to get it now, Scott said of both Russell and teammate Julius Randle while in New York recently. “You also have to be realistic and understand that you’ve got a 19 and a 20-year old in your starting lineup that played one-year of college basketball. It’s going to take those guys some time.”

Repetition and consistent minutes are vital to a young player still trying to learn the game, and even though he won't outwardly criticise the coach, you can sense a tinge of frustration in Russell's answer as he tries to reconcile with the fact that Scott tends to sit him in critical late-game stretches.

"It's even tougher because you're not given an opportunity to learn from your mistakes," he says. "Coach is making the decision, I'm just riding along with it."

Of the top four lottery picks in the 2015 Draft, Russell is averaging the least minutes per game, and also averaging less than another point guard who the Lakers were rumoured to be looking at in June, Emmanuel Mudiay. When in Brooklyn recently, Bryant, who also played with Scott as a rookie back in 1996, felt that seeing some of the responsibility and minutes handed out to his peers may frustrate Russell at times, but Bryant believes it's just another part of his learning curve.



"YOU CAN'T
GET TOO
HIGH OR
TOO LOW.

AFTER A BIG GAME YOU
JUST STAY BALANCED. "

"I think it's the frustration of some of his peers - the liberties that they have, the way they play," Bryant said. "It gets a little frustrating, at the same time, I think he's in a great situation. Byron's making him earn everything. D'Angelo may not see it now, but years from now, he'll appreciate it."

"I had to earn it. I think it does something [to you] when you start to make your mark in the league and you know you've actually had to earn it."

He may be a rookie, but Russell speaks in a manner that belies his youth and is more reminiscent of a seasoned media veteran. He expands on answers without giving too much away. A skill he may have learned from being around Bryant, but one that will certainly come in handy dealing with life in the fishbowl that is Los Angeles, where everything a player says or does is magnified.

So while you may be able to sense his frustration, he'll never outwardly admit it. When he has a good game, he won't let that get to his head.

"I just don't deal with it," Russell stated. "You can't get too high or too low. After a big game you just stay balanced. That's what I try to focus on. It's not a problem to me."

Coach Scott agrees that playing in a big city won't hinder Russell: "He's still 19-years old. We've got to give him time to find out what he can and cannot handle in Los Angeles which is a big city, so, my guess with him is that he'll be able to handle it all fine, to be honest with you. I think at the end of the day, he's going to thrive in that situation. The spotlight is big in L.A. and that kid doesn't shy away from it."

Bryant is retiring after this season and eventually the franchise will be handed over to Russell and Randle. Maybe Bryant was right. Perhaps the bumps in the road incurred this season will only serve to harden Russell's resolve, his motivation. Just know that Russell's confidence is growing by the day - no matter what.

"It goes up every game," Russell states. "Even though we're struggling we know what we gotta do. You still gotta be the same player."

It's a scary proposition for the rest of the league when a player with a balanced temperament and a high basketball IQ such as Russell is committed to doing whatever it takes to succeed.

"He's smart, he's very smart," stated Metta World Peace about Russell. "He's years beyond his age as far as NBA level, but if he continues to stay hungry, he's going to be a serious problem. A championship-type point guard."

L.A. L.A. BIG CITY OF DREAMS

- NICK METALLINOS

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ART BY TEDDY ARTS

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NOTHING ACHES QUITE LIKE THE LOSS OF YOUTH

POSTERIZES



P L A Y



V I D E O

FUTURE TEARS

AND

LOST YEARS

W O R D S B Y Z A C D A Y

Dawn is forever long ago, lost somewhere in the effervescence of the millennium's infancy. Lost in our memories. Lost in our youth.

In its place, Darkness lurks – Father Time's lackey. He's been threatening for some time now and, as it goes, many have fallen by the wayside, left to reside only in archival footage and box scores of years past. As indistinct as an era is, the final curtain is drawing on one of the NBA's most unique. In all honesty, it won't go down as one of the League's preeminent, despite the myriad of stars that shone in its peak. In fact, in many ways it has already been discarded for its slow pace and paltry scores. None of that matters, though. Nor should it. Basketball, like young love, is transcendent. And damn this was special.

As it stands, only a few torchbearers remain; wilted wheat in the last field. KG and Kobe are on their last legs, Vince has succumbed to sanity, and Pierce is finally accepting the bitter truth. Indeed the fallen hero is a tough pill to swallow. In reality, we've been gasping for air (heirs?) for some time; T-Mac, Iverson, Yao, and Franchise, among others, all were taken too soon. Now we are left, paralyzed, our hearts beating thanks only to German engineering and fundamental machines, though even their days are numbered. Of course, there are glimpses here and there – Mamba closing out the Wizards, Ticket posterizing Blake – but mostly we are left to ponder yesteryear in the shadows of an increasingly cold world. And with every game, every bricked shot, Darkness looms closer, ready to shove its ghastly hands in our chests and rip out our hearts once and for all.

When should an athlete concede to the night? The romantic in us all says they should retire at the summit, victorious and vibrant, but given the choice we wouldn't take that option, anyway. How could we? To farewell an athlete is to farewell more than just an individual, it is to farewell a part of us too. And that option never rests comfortably. Instead, we are caught at a crossroads; not ready to say goodbye to the party, but well aware of the impending hangover.

Of course, hoop-heads are witness to retirement all the time, so what makes this feel so different? For one, it's generational. Millennials, Generation Y, call us what you will, but the current crop of falling stars were our idols. We fell in love with basketball because of them, copied their moves in the playground, and grew up with them – at least from afar. Undoubtedly, we became who we are in large part because of them. As such, we feel a connection that runs deeper than any advanced stat can; roots entrenched in soil. Logos tends to yield to pathos at the best of times and this is no different. In fact, we defend their flaws to a fault because they are our guys, our family, and no one fucks with family. In truth, it's the same reason OGS tend to spit hyperbole about their own era at the expense of others. Hence, when Reggie recently boasted, 'I'd take down Curry at my peak' or, in 2013, when Horace Grant said, 'Today, Michael Jordan would average 45 points' – they did so more to validate their own worth than to discredit their modern contemporaries. Make no mistake, though, this game will continue from player to fan alike because it provides an opportunity to return to past glories, even if it is just for a fleeting moment. Besides, early 2000s ball was the best anyway. See?

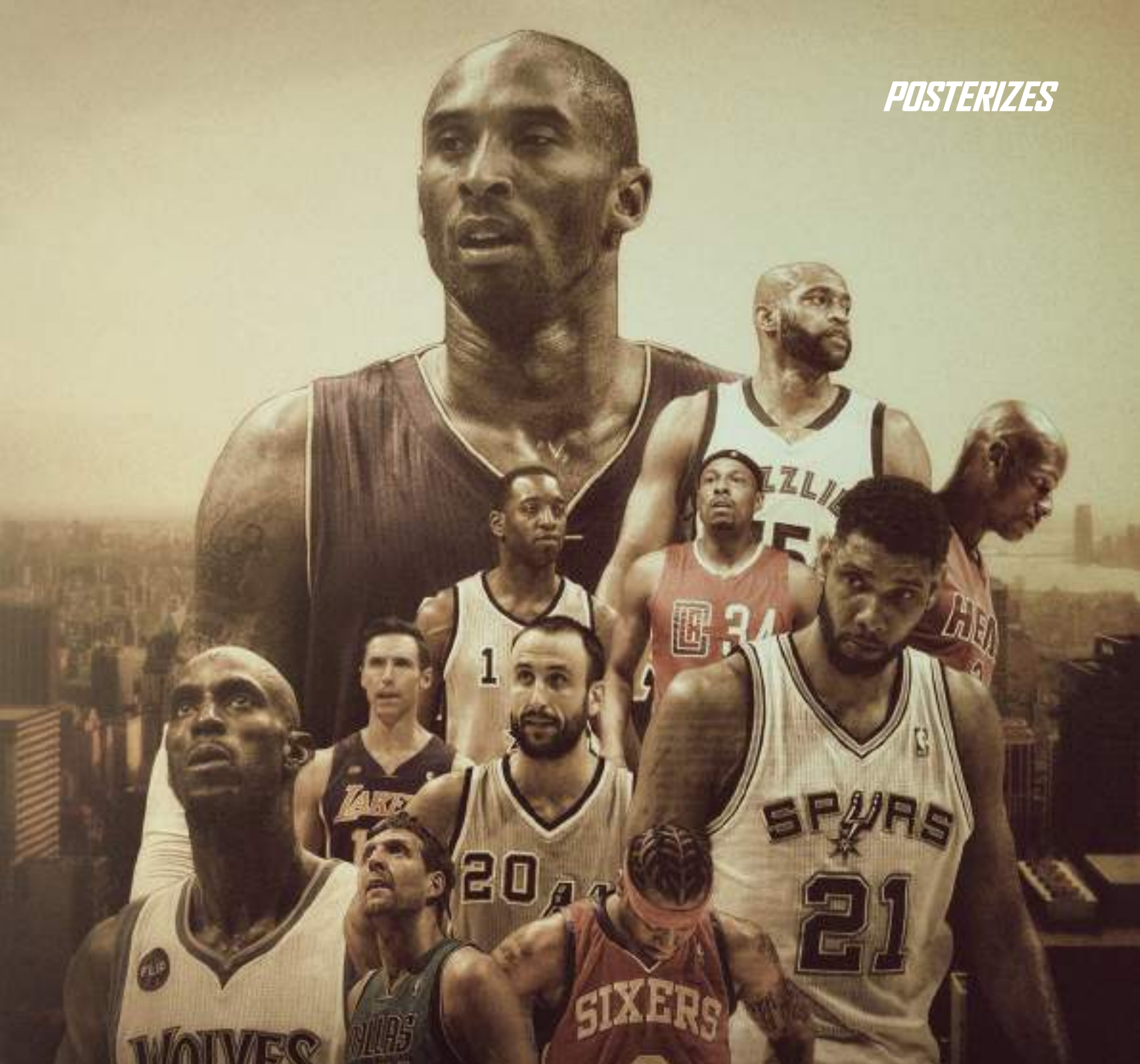
Environmental psychology asserts that we are a product of our environment and Millennials are living proof of that notion. We long for the days where teams 'only had one star' and rosters were crafted around them to create distinct styles because that's what we grew accustomed to. Al's Sixers, Ray's Bucks (then Sonics), Baron's Hornets . . . the list goes on. Somehow, you had the feeling that anyone could win and while that might've been the bliss of youth's ignorance, damn it felt good. Nowadays, we know our team's reality all too well. Only a handful of franchises have a legitimate chance of winning each year and what was once excitement to scrape into the eighth seed of the playoffs has been replaced by the understanding that it invariably means you won't have a shot at a stud in the draft. Consequently, many of us are forced to suffer the paradox of rooting for lottery balls and 'enjoying' player development.

So, how do we cope in the interim? We hold on to everything we can from our time, just as those before us do and those to come after us will. We cherish every moment Professor Miller gets the chance to school young guards on the block, every Manu Euro-step, and every JET Terry three (wings spread on celebration, of course). We cherish the wins and we cherish the losses, regardless of what player it is and what team they're playing for, because, really, when that switch goes from 'on' to 'off' it will forever stay that way. As they say, you're a long time dead.

Perhaps one day we will find solace in a new generation. Perhaps we already have. More than likely we won't, not to the same extent – nostalgia has that type of effect. No, Darkness is an unforgiving motherfucker and when he inevitably comes for the remaining few he'll take more than just light. He'll take souls too. And it will be the worst L we'll ever feel.

- ZAC DAY

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RELIVE THEIR GREATEST MOMENTS

END OF AN ERA

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ART BY ISHAAN MISHRA



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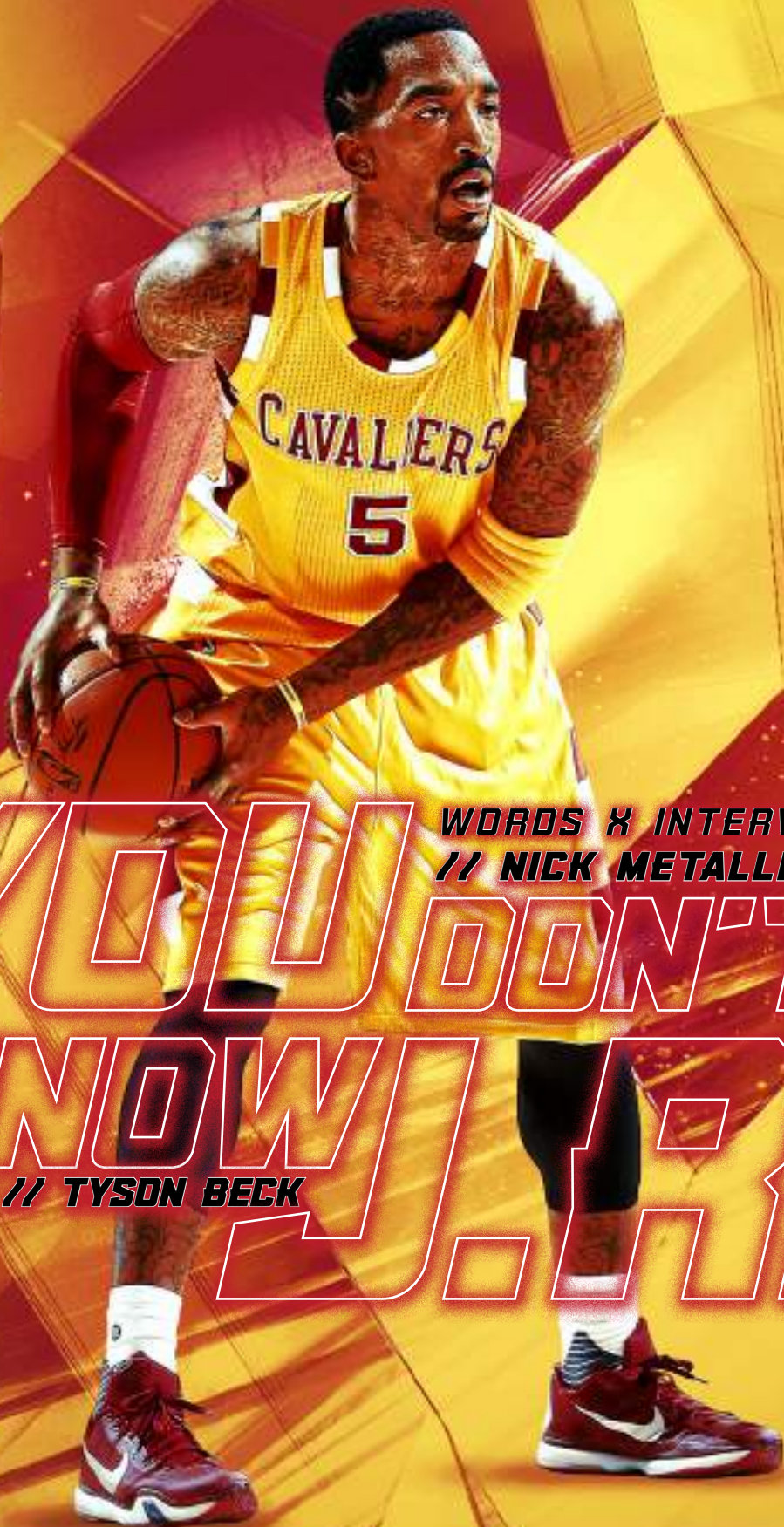


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**YOU DON'T
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L.B.**

**WORDS & INTERVIEW
// NICK METALLINDS**

ART BY // TYSON BECK

YOU DON'T KNOW JUST DE SMITH.

You've seen his antics,
heard about his nocturnal tendencies.

And in a world where perception is reality,
you've already made a judgment on who J.R. Smith is.

But there's more to Smith than just negative headlines.

Incidents like posting images of semi-undressed girls on his social media, untying players shoelaces during a game, or Rihanna alleging that Smith played a playoff game against the Indiana Pacers hungover in 2013, speak to a level of immaturity that Smith himself has acknowledged has not been beneficial to him, and that is mainly of his own doing.

It is not, however, a true representation of who J.R. Smith embodies as a man.

He's a complicated person who at times defies expectations and
other times fits them perfectly.

It's this dichotomy that makes J.R. such an enigma to many outside his inner circle,
but those that know the mercurial guard best insist that, in this case at least, the
perception does not match the reality.

It's an unusually warm mid-November morning in New York City, and J.R. Smith is still a little sleepy for the Cavaliers 9:30am shootaround at Madison Square Garden. It's just days before another story would hit the media involving Smith - one alleging that he choked a young man early one morning after the alleged victim taunted him about his trade to the Cavaliers - so, with hindsight, Smith's words seem eerily prescient.

"People look at me a certain way, perceive me a certain way, and they don't even know me," states Smith. "I think that's the biggest difference. I think if you took the time out to know somebody then obviously you would know more of the good things they do. But if you just read the newspaper or what somebody else says ..." *trails off*

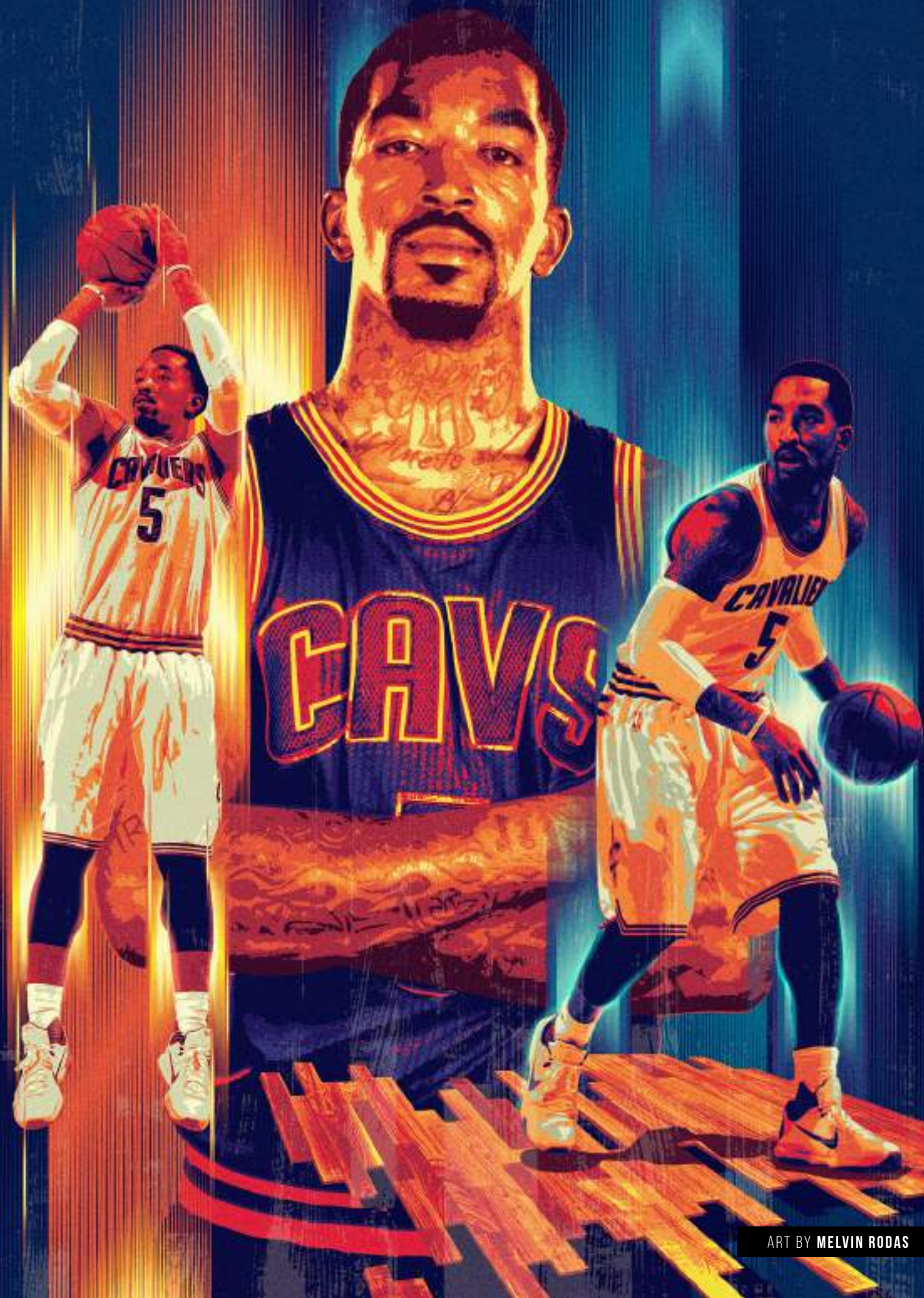
Does the negative publicity make him feel misunderstood in a way?

"Yeah, absolutely," he says matter-of-factly. "A lot of the things people say is not true about me. It's easy when you have a voice that [reaches] all of New York - you write for the newspapers and say 'such and such' and people still read it. It's not like I can just come out and make a statement, well, this isn't true, that isn't true."

Carmelo Anthony has served as Smith's teammate on both the Denver Nuggets and the New York Knicks, and probably knows Smith better than anyone in the NBA. He says a lot of the positive things Smith does are overlooked by the media.

"The negative things you go through in life will always overshadow a lot of the positive things," says Anthony. "People tend to forget, or overlook, the things that you do that's right. People don't see the good things that he do. I've been with him a long time. I know what kind of person he is. Has he made mistakes? Yeah, he made a lot of mistakes, but I still know the type of person that he is."

POSTERIZES



ART BY MELVIN RODAS



00

PEOPLE LOOK AT ME A
CERTAIN WAY,
PERCEIVE ME A CERTAIN WAY,

ART BY DANIEL GOLDFARB



AND **THEY KNOW**
DON'T EVEN
ME *OO*

For every magnified headline admonishing Smith for something negative, there could just as well be another one highlighting the good that he does, not only within his community, but for various people in each city he's played in.

A few years ago he launched the J.R Smith Foundation, aimed at introducing golf to youth who may not have had the opportunity to learn the sport otherwise. The foundation began a new campaign in December with Smith pledging to plant a tree across Cleveland for every three-pointer he hits during the 2015-16 NBA season.

His involvement with the recently launched Reach application for iPhone is high on the list of his most fulfilling achievements thus far. The app allows users to anonymously share their problems with the world, Smith explains: "Reach is an app that we - my brother (Chris), one of our guys, Mike - came up with just from the standpoint of ... you know, a lot of bullying and stuff has been coming out. Kids committing suicide; kids just feeling unsure within themselves; unsure about their sexuality and being bullied [about it]. Whatever the case may be.

"A lot of kids nowadays don't know how to take it, because, even though [some of the] kids are grown people, they don't know how to go through these real life situations. To be able to ask for help anonymously, you don't have to put your name or anything when you sign up, you can get feedback [from people] who can be in the same situation that you think nobody else is in, and somebody is literally two blocks away. To be able to help somebody without putting your name on it I think it's a great decision."

To watch Smith play on-court is to see a man not lacking in confidence - after all, he's never seen a shot he didn't like. When he speaks it's usually in a hushed, calm but confident manner. His passion for the Reach app and it's success is evident. That's why when Smith explains why the project is so important

to him, the admission comes as a shock for somebody who carries themselves with such confidence.

"I mean, when I was a kid, I was bullied," reveals Smith. "I wasn't able to sit there and fight back. I got discouraged a lot, so I figured that for someone who is a professional athlete to be bullied, and still be able to persevere through everything --there's so many kids who can't do that. Mentally or physically, they can't do it, and it's important to me to help those kids.

"Life is already too short--I have two daughters [and] to see them take their life because somebody else is bullying them, or picking on them, it's one of the worst things that could happen to you because you really can't help them at that point."



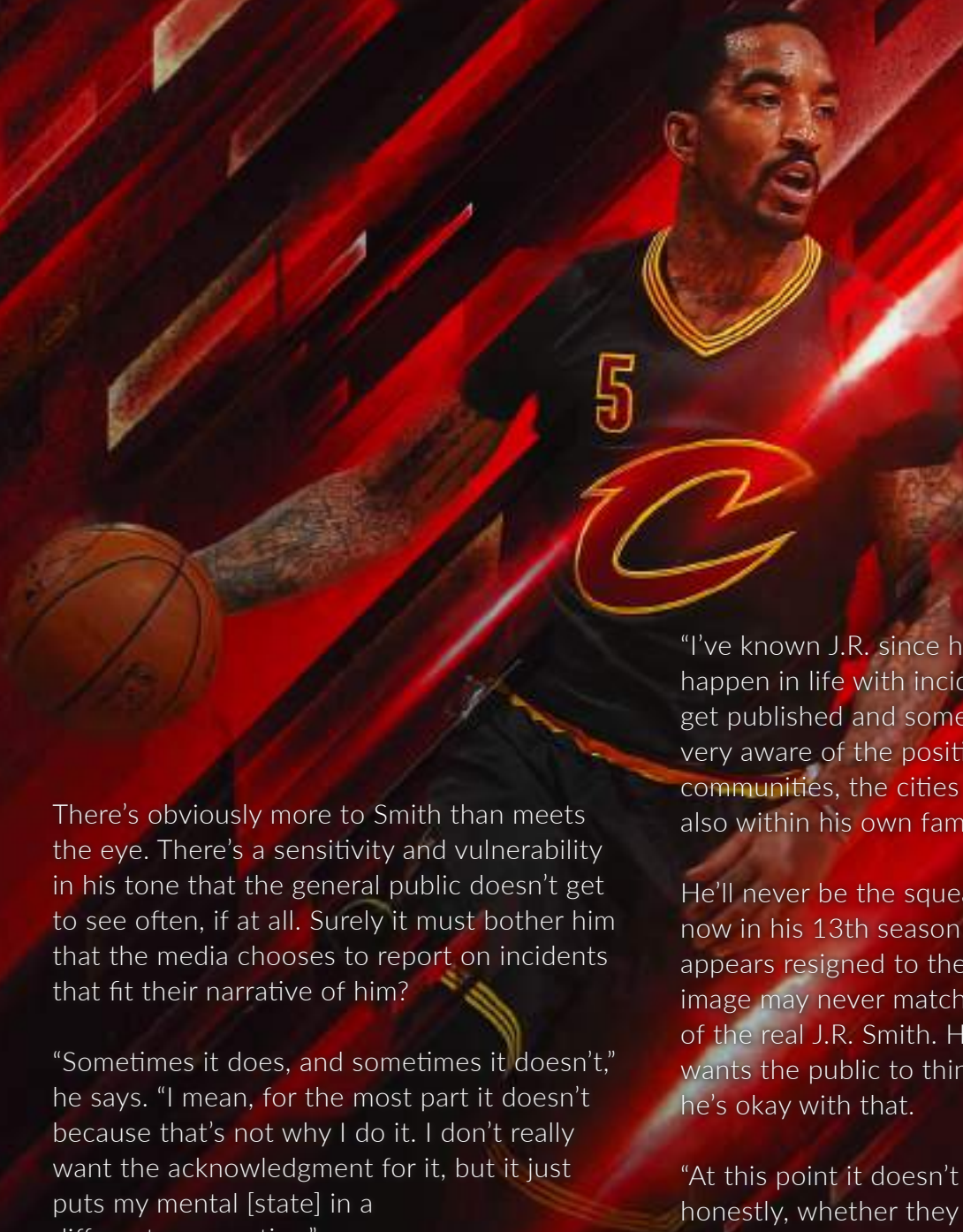
ART BY GARY CHEN

POSTERIZES



**“I’M GONNA BE
ME ANYWAY SO I
JUST TRY TO BE
THE BEST ME I
CAN BE”**

ART BY **MATT SANOIAN**



There's obviously more to Smith than meets the eye. There's a sensitivity and vulnerability in his tone that the general public doesn't get to see often, if at all. Surely it must bother him that the media chooses to report on incidents that fit their narrative of him?

"Sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn't," he says. "I mean, for the most part it doesn't because that's not why I do it. I don't really want the acknowledgment for it, but it just puts my mental [state] in a different perspective."

New York Knicks' guard Arron Afflalo has known Smith since they were both teenagers. He says that the media's failure to properly recognize Smith's good deeds is a part of being a professional NBA player.

"We're professional athletes - it comes with the job, it comes with the territory," says Afflalo. "Some people are gonna dig into your life for the positive things, some are gonna look for the negative. He's been around a while now, he gets it. It's just a part of being a professional."

"I've known J.R. since high-school [and] things happen in life with incidents; some of them get published and some of them don't, but I'm very aware of the positive things he does in his communities, the cities that he's played in and also within his own family."

He'll never be the squeaky-clean athlete, and now in his 13th season in the NBA, Smith appears resigned to the fact that his public image may never match-up with the essence of the real J.R. Smith. He's not even sure if he wants the public to think he's a good guy, and he's okay with that.

"At this point it doesn't really faze me, honestly, whether they do or they don't," he admits. "I'm gonna be me anyway so I just try to be the best me I can be."

Smith takes a long, contemplative pause when he ponders the question of what he would like fans and the general public to know about who the real J.R. Smith is: "Umm, One thing I would like them to know? I'm just a family man, honestly. My family is my whole world and I know where I came from. If it wasn't for them I don't know where I would be. I'm like that because of my family." - **NICK METALLINOS**

POSTERIZES



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PICKS



— *POSTERIZES*
BY NICK JUNGFER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PATRICK TOMASSO

EAST STARTING 5

Guard / **Kyle Lowry** / TOR

Kyle Lowry's dramatic offseason weight-loss sparked more than just the "Skinny Kyle Lowry" social media frenzy; namely the best statistical season of his career.

Guard / **Jimmy Butler** / CHI

Rewiring one's brain to accept a new king often proves difficult, but any remaining doubt that Jimmy Butler is the man in Chicago has been well and truly extinguished. The same day this list was compiled, Butler dropped a franchise record 40 second half points on Toronto. Point taken, Jimmy.

Frontcourt / **LeBron James** / CLE

At 31 years of age, LeBron isn't quite at the peak of his Miami powers, but has slightly increased his offensive efficiency this season. The injury-immune Cyborg that is LeBron James remains the epitome of the no-brainer selection.

Frontcourt / **Paul George** / IND

Paul George has bounced back from his horrendous leg injury to record career-high averages of 24.6 points and 7.7 rebounds per game. George, whose defence remains elite, has thrived in Frank Vogel's refreshed system as Indiana replaces size with position-less basketball.

Frontcourt / **Andre Drummond** / DET

Andre Drummond has been a man amongst prepubescent boys this season, lifting his game to an All-Star level, his Pistons above .500 and his stats to 18 points and a league best 16 rebounds.

Guard / **Dwyane Wade** / MIA

Old Man Wade replaced kamikaze rim runs with crafty play and clever passing years ago, and yet still registers 22, 5 & 5 per 36 minutes for the highly competitive Heat.

Guard / **John Wall** / WAS

Due to Washington's horror run of injuries, few players have had to carry a bigger load than John Wall this season. Some would find themselves crushed under the weight of expectations. Yet Wall has responded with some of the best play of his career and averaged 22.6 points, 11.7 assists, 4.8 rebounds and 2.3 steals in the month of December.

Frontcourt / **Carmelo Anthony** / NYK

Pick through the isolation plays and tough turnaround jumpers, and you'll notice that Carmelo Anthony does so much more. This season Melo has added gutsy defensive rebounding, efficient passing and a sense of genuine leadership to his repertoire. His maturation process has been one of the most important factors in New York's turnaround.

Frontcourt / **Kevin Love** / CLE

Cleveland is determined to find interesting ways to use Love's versatile skill set, rather than stashing him away in the corner to be seen and not heard. As a result, Love has become a particularly valuable piece for a team that knew it needed to maximize his abilities if they were serious about winning it all.

Frontcourt / **Chris Bosh** / MIA

Chris Bosh was an All-Star Game lock for a solid decade, but when he developed blood clots on one of his lungs last season, suddenly nothing was a given. Thankfully, Bosh has made an admirable return to All-Star form this season, boosting his PER and true shooting percentage in the process.

Wildcard / **DeMar Derozan** / TOR

Often criticized for forcing the issue with the ball in his hands, and taking inadvisable pull-up jumpers, DeMar DeRozan is now playing a smarter game. DeRozan can now be spotted taking better shots, regularly finding open teammates, and operating within the general framework of the offense.

Wildcard / **Paul Millsap** / ATL

Atlanta was forced to choose between retaining either Paul Millsap or DeMarre Carroll this summer, and in keeping Millsap they made the right choice. Millsap has been the Hawks' best player. He leads the team in points, rebounds and steals (as well as registering career highs in each of those categories).

WEST STARTING 5

Guard / **Stephen Curry** / GSW

There isn't a whole lot to say about Curry that hasn't already been said. He's the greatest-ever long range assassin, an orchestrator of calculated madness, a destroyer of worlds. Few players will have more fun at this season's mid season showcase than Steph Curry.

Guard / **Russell Westbrook** / OKC

Russell Westbrook is averaging an absurd 25 points, 9 assists, 7 rebounds, 2.5 steals (leads the league) on 46% shooting with a PER of 29.7 (second best behind Curry). Fresh off his one-man show last season, Westbrook find himself reunited with KD and has played Batman far more often than Robin.

Frontcourt / **Kawhi Leonard** / SAS

More than just a terrifying defender, Kawhi Leonard now leads the league in three point percentage (50%) and is one of the game's most efficient post scorers. As recently as last season's playoffs, Leonard didn't quite fit the bill as San Antonio's number one guy. Now he's all that and more, having taken another tremendous leap and launched himself into the MVP conversation.

Frontcourt / **Blake Griffin** / LAC

Over time Blake Griffin has transformed from a one man, 'dunk-first-ask-questions-later' wrecking crew to an increasingly versatile, well rounded scorer with the ability to hit the mid-range shot. With Chris Paul's usage dropping slightly this season, Griffin is shouldering an even greater offensive load, converting his career high 18.4 FGA per game at 51%.

Frontcourt / **Kevin Durant** / OKC

With three surgeries to repair a troublesome foot injury, Oklahoma City fans had every reason to sweat over Durant's return to the court this season. Thankfully, KD has successfully reached near-peak KD, and is once again a lock for the All-Star Game.

Guard / Chris Paul / LAC

As Chris Paul enters his thirties, his shooting has dropped while his turnovers have increased. However, Paul is still one of the best floor generals in the game, has been dealing with injury, and often leaves his best for fourth quarters and playoff runs.

Guard / Klay Thompson / GSW

Klay Thompson is the second best shooter on his team, the second leading scorer on his team and the second best player on his team. Playing alongside Steph Curry makes second place hard to overcome. Yet NBA historians are primarily concerned with championships, and last June Thompson came in first.

Frontcourt / Kobe Bryant / LAL

'Best-player-right-now' vs. 'who-the-fans-want-to-see' is a long-time debate, and this writer usually sides with the former stance. However, making an exception for Kobe Bean Bryant is the right thing to do. Lifetime achievements aside, holding Kobe out of the game would be to deprive ourselves of a potential 'Magic in 1992' or 'Jordan in 2003' piece of NBA All-Star Game history.

Frontcourt / Draymond Green / GSW

Draymond Green is arguably the best defender in the league and leads the Warriors in assists (7.4 per game). He transformed himself from a horrible three-point shooter into an elite one and has the second best +/- in the league behind Steph Curry. He means everything to one of the greatest teams of all-time, and is undoubtedly worthy of the All-Star honour.

Frontcourt / Anthony Davis / NOP

Media and fans alike expected the world of Anthony Davis during the offseason. His seemingly exponential growth in years past arguably set the bar impossibly high for 2015/16, and he hasn't quite reached it. Having said that, when 23 points, 11 rebounds and 2.6 blocks with a 24.3 PER is a mild disappointment, life could be worse.

Wildcard / James Harden / HOU

Coming into the off-season out of shape did Harden few favours, as he reverted back to his lowlight reel defense and general lapses in effort and concentration. Yet the man is still averaging 28 points, 7 assists and 6 rebounds, and is unquestionably remains one of the ten best players in the league.

Wildcard / DeMarcus Cousins / SAC

DeMarcus Cousins made his All-Star debut last year, but only as a last minute injury replacement - despite averaging 24 and 12 with a PER of 25. His reputation and circus-like team may hurt his chances, but it's time Boogie made the mid-season showcase in his own right.

VOTE BELOW

AGREE
OR
DISAGREE

ALL-STAR SELECTIONS BY NICK JUNGFER

WORDS BY MATT LEONARDO
ART BY COLLECTION BY VC

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH



**THERE IS NO DOUBT
ABOUT IT,
STEPHEN CURRY
IS A GOOD
BASKETBALL PLAYER.**

**HE'S BETTER
THAN GOOD, HE IS A
GREAT PLAYER.**

Stephen's back story is very interesting, coming out of a small school in North Carolina at the time, Davidson. In 2008, Davidson had the most tournament wins in 1 season in the history of the school, making it to the Elite 8 with 3 wins. They ended up losing to a Kansas team that won the whole tournament with Mario Chalmers. Curry was the star of the show. He put up 40, 30, 33, and 25 respectively, while only sitting 8 minutes in 4 games. He took a small 10th seeded team from the Southern conference (before they moved to the A-10) and upset some of the biggest schools in the country, like Georgetown and Wisconsin.

In 2009 he was taken 7th overall by the Golden State Warriors, behind Hasheem Thabeet and Jonny Flynn, who will not be on this list, or probably another NBA article, for a while. The Warriors have started Curry in all but 6 games that he has played in. As you can see, he is lighting it up in his 7th season, and his team is flourishing because of it. I mean, the team is 37-4, and won 28 straight in the regular season (dating back to last season).

Curry is definitely a reason for such success for the Warriors. 30 points per game leads the NBA. 186 three pointers made is a league high. 6.4 assists per game is the 2nd best on the Warriors. Steph also leads the NBA in player efficiency rating and is 5th in steals.

So there is Stephen Curry, but what about the rest of the league.

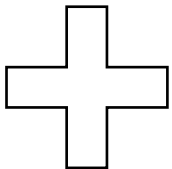
Who is actually chasing Curry?

Let's take a look at what the rest of the league has, and what they need to do to chase and pass Stephen Curry for the illustrious MVP award.

JAMES

HAARDEN

HOUSTON ROCKETS



BASIC STATS

Although Curry is putting up crazy numbers, James Harden is still playing as well or better than Curry statistically. Harden is rebounding better and has more assists than Stephen. Some might look at the basic stats and believe that Harden is the better all around player. You do have to understand that Curry plays on a team with a lot more talent and the fact that Harden plays the shooting guard position instead of point guard can explain the rebounding numbers. Nonetheless, when based off of some important stats, James Harden looks like the better overall player than Curry.

□ TEAM PERFORMANCE

Anybody could tell you the Warriors are a better team than the Rockets. But, did anyone think the Rockets would under perform this badly. People were expecting the Rockets to go to the Conference Semifinals at the least. Now, they are just above over .500 (22-20). The only team worse in the Southwest Division is the New Orleans Pelicans. A true team leader can take a team that may not be the best and turn them into a contender, sort of like LeBron's first tenure in Cleveland. If Harden has any chance at the MVP, he needs to make the rest of his team better.

RUSSELL WESTBROOK

OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER

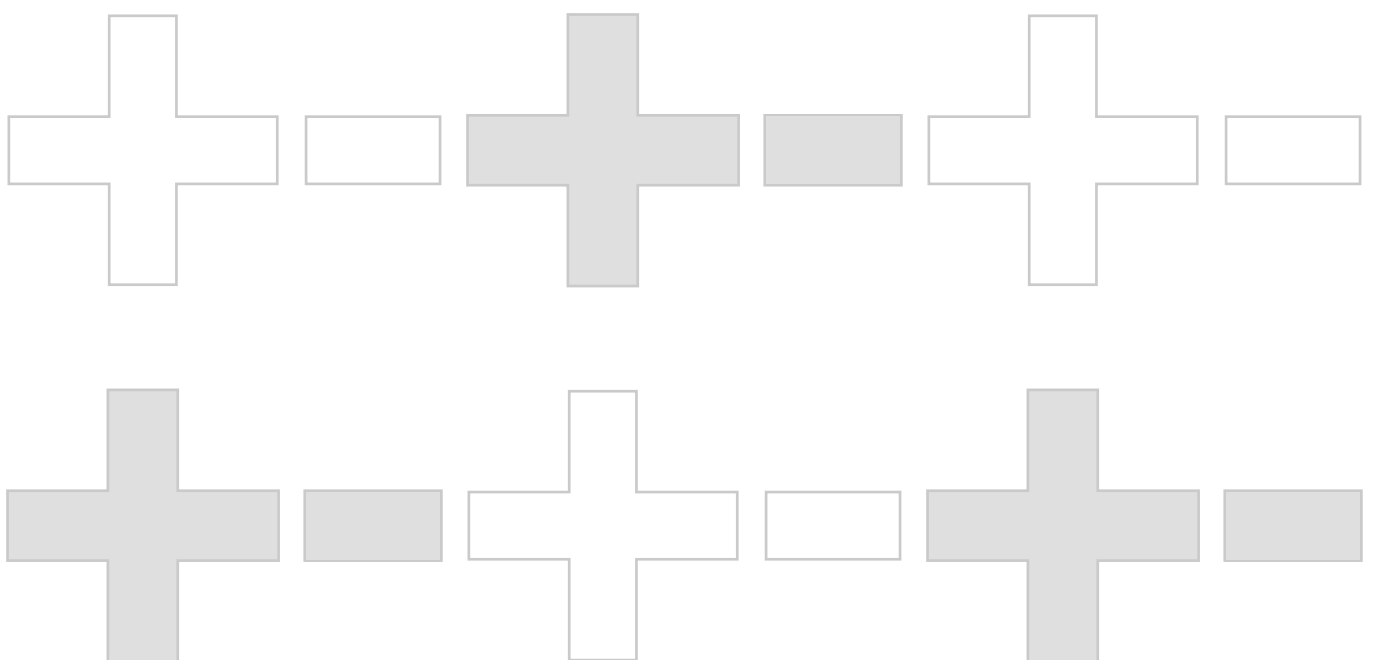
+ LEADERSHIP

When Kevin Durant went down last season, Westbrook was impossible to stop. He knew he needed to carry the team again this season. That's exactly what he did in 6 games Durant missed in November. He averaged 33 points and 8 assists per game, with 3 double-doubles in those games. There isn't a Draymond Green, Klay Thompson, or Harrison Barnes on the Thunder. With Durant out, all they have is a Serge Ibaka, who has turned into more of a defensive specialist. Russell has the ability that Curry hasn't been able to show of yet, carrying a team with very little help on the side.

□ KEY STATISTICS

There are quite a few stats that Curry has over the whole league. But, the difference on some of them between Westbrook and Curry is a huge difference maker. Among them include:

- Turnovers (Westbrook averaging 0.7 more per game)
- 3 Point FG % (Curry's is over 14% better)
- Points (Curry averaging 5.7 more per game)
- Player Efficiency Rating (Curry's is 2.3 more than Westbrook's)



LEBRON JAMES CLEVELAND CAVALIERS

+ COMPLETE TAKEOVER

LeBron is LeBron. Everybody who has any idea of professional basketball knows who LeBron James is. Before he went to Miami to win a couple titles, he took team after team in Cleveland that didn't have much help from any sort of players. They would give the ball to LeBron and then he would go and score. Now, the weapons are better than they were before, but he has done similar with Mo Williams, Iman Shumpert, Kyrie Irving, and JR Smith collectively missing a large chunk of this season. Yet, the Cavaliers are still atop their division and are high up in the Eastern Conference standings with many weaker teams. Most of their success right now is coming from LeBron, with Kevin Love as the next best option.

□ KEY STATISTICS

LeBron is LeBron. The production that LeBron is having is very good, but just can't compare with Stephen Curry. Curry is ahead of him in points, and steals on a per game basis along with FG% and FT%. Now, LeBron does actually have him in a few categories, like rebounds and turnovers, also on a per game basis. While some categories are close, others are complete blowouts. Curry's 3-point FG% is almost 15% better and the player efficiency rating of LeBron is 5 worse than Steph's.

For all of these players, their stats as a whole are not far off from Stephen Curry's. There is, of course, only one stat that any of these player's teammates care about. For some, it is not looking bad, but for others it is a difference maker.

Golden State Warriors: 37-4
Cleveland Cavaliers: 28-10
Oklahoma City Thunder: 30-12
Houston Rockets: 22-20

Pretty simple, isn't it. It is a fairly simple stat because anyone can look that up with ease. But, it is the most important stat. The most valuable player is the player who makes the biggest impact for his team. Stephen Curry is just that, and this stat shows it all. 24 straight wins to start the season, 28 dating back to last season. This team is in absolute domination mode, and Stephen is crazy good from tip off to the final buzzer.

Now, imagine if Jonny Flynn was their starting point guard...

- MATT LEONARDO

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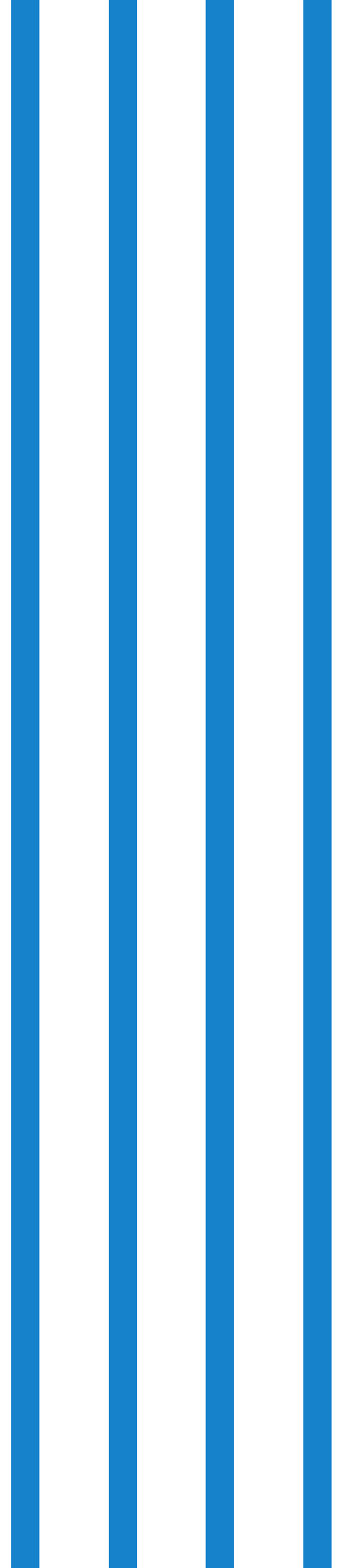
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