

Strat-O-Matic News

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Summer 2012

Buckle Up for Air Show in 2011 Pro Football Ratings

Strat-O-Coaches will need pilot's licenses to play offense and anti-aircraft weapons to play defense with the 2011 National Football League cards and Windows rosters on their way to gamers soon.

In most seasons, the firepower is controlled by a handful of teams. Not in 2011, when passing attacks led a devastating assault on record books.

Detroit's Matthew Stafford passed for more than 5,000 yards. New England's Tom Brady topped that – and Dan Marino's all-time record, too. New Orleans' Drew Brees topped Brady.

League MVP Aaron Rodgers led Green Bay to a 13-0 start by throwing 45 TD passes and by achieving the best single-season passer rating ever. He was shy of 5,000 yards only because he sat out the last game – when backup Matt Flynn threw for 480 yards and 6 TDs.

Finally we get to Super Bowl winner Eli Manning, whose passing – primarily to twin

1,000-yard WRs Victor Cruz and Hakeem Nicks – lifted a subpar New York Giants running game and defense to the title.

Let's not overlook the pass-run threats of Carolina rookie Cam Newton and Denver's Tim Tebow. Newton, the first rookie to throw for 4,000 yards, set records for most rush TDs by a quarterback (14) and most total TDs by a rookie (35). Denver ascended into the playoffs and beat Pittsburgh's mighty defense there with "Tebow Mania" – miraculous finishes that featured Tebow's 600 yards rushing and his clutch late-game passing.

Atlanta QB Matt Ryan and Minnesota's Christian Ponder also set team records. Matt Hasselbeck joined Warren Moon as the only Tennessee QBs to throw for 3,500 yards.

On the receiving end, Calvin Johnson's 16 TDs set the Detroit record and lifted the Lions into the playoffs for the first time since 1999. Wes Welker, who led the NFL with 122 catches, set New England's records with

1,569 receiving yards and a 99-yard TD. Patriot teammate Rob Gronkowski set the records for NFL tight ends with 17 TDs and 1,327 yards. New Orleans tight end Jimmy

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New this Summer from Strat-O-Matic

Football

Strat-O-Matic Pro Football 2012
2011 NFL season
1980 NFL season
1993 NFL season

ETA: Early August

Strat-O-Matic College Football 2012
with 2011 NCAA season

ETA: Late August
(see Page 2 for more details)

Hockey

Strat-O-Matic Hockey 2012
2011-12 NHL season
1958-59 NHL season
1980-81 NHL season

ETA: Late September
(see Page 6 for more details)

Basketball

Strat-O-Matic Basketball 2012
2011-12 NBA season
1969-70 NBA season (Windows only)
1971-72 ABA season (Windows only)

ETA: Cards-Late September
Windows-Late October
(see Page 7 for more details)
Stay up to date at www.strat-o-matic.com

Windows Upgrades Will Take You to Hockey, Hoops Arenas

Modernized game screens are on their way to Strat-O-Matic's computer hockey and basketball gamers this summer.

Replacing the simpler screen designs of the past, the new interfaces will constitute the entire upgrades for the Windows games this year due to the extensive work to create them. Gamers will find a lot to like.

The screens will offer the look and "feel" of being in real arenas, complete with authentic-looking scoreboards. And yet, the games will continue to support the customer-created ice surfaces and courts that have become so popular.

The presentation will use more screen, so pop-up card images won't overlap other content. Each element will be locked in a fixed location, but gamers also will be able to customize the look by labeling banners in the upper rafters with text to re-create championship banners or retired jerseys.

The larger presentation requires higher screen resolution. So Strat-O-Matic is making the new look optional. Gamers with older non-compatible computers can choose the original game screen instead.

Check out www.strat-o-matic.com for pre-release screen shots this summer.

BCS Controversy? Settle it Yourself with SOM

The ill-named Bowl Championship Series is finally headed to more than a one-game championship playoff, but you can beat the NCAA to it with Strat-O-Matic College Football 2012.

Using the Tournament Mode, you can set up an ideal four-team tourney that includes championship-game foes Alabama and LSU without excluding Big 12 champ Oklahoma State. Big Ten winner Wisconsin, which missed being undefeated in the regular season by the margin of two Hail Mary passes, would be an ideal fourth entry.

Double your fun by adding 12-1 Stanford, with No. 1 draft pick Andrew Luck, and the flashy, big-win offenses of Cotton Bowl winner Oregon, Orange Bowl winner West

Virginia (which hung 70 in that game on Clemson) and 11-2 Arkansas, which lost only to Alabama and LSU.

Since Tournament Mode permits up to 64 teams, you don't have to stop there. Heisman Trophy winner Robert Griffin III and his 47 TDs may make Baylor irresistible.

All the top draft picks are in the game. Will Alabama's Trent Richardson be your top runner? Will LSU's Morris Claiborne your top DB? Which team really had the best defense?

Replays, What-Ifs, Solitaire, NetPlay, matching wits with the computer – any way you want to play, Strat-O-Matic's Windows game can handle it. Every major football school is there. So are many smaller ones.

1980 NFL

The Oakland Raiders became the first Wild Card team to win the Super Bowl and the Philadelphia Eagles reached the championship game for the first time in a generation. But 1980 also was memorable for Cleveland's Kardiak Kids, San Diego's "Air Coryell" offense, Houston's Earl Campbell and New Orleans' "Aints."

Oakland (11-5) leads the six carded teams. QB Jim Plunkett and the offense were at their best in the playoffs. The defense did more to get Oakland there.

Philadelphia (12-4) had the NFL's best defense. Ron Jaworski threw 27 TD passes, a third of them to WR Harold Carmichael.

San Diego (12-4) boasts Dan Fouts, who led all passers with 4,715 yards, spreading the ball to 1,000-yard receivers John Jefferson, Kellen Winslow and Charlie Joiner.

Dallas (12-4) had the NFL's most explosive offense (454 points, twice topping 50) with Danny White (28 TD passes) and Tony Dorsett (1,185 yards, 11 TDs rushing).

Atlanta (12-4) enjoyed its best season so far thanks to Steve Bartkowski's NFL-best 31 TD passes and a stalwart defense.

Cleveland (11-5) was 9-3 in games decided by seven or fewer points. Brian Sipe's heart-stopping highlights included 30 TD passes, 4,132 yards and 61 percent completions.

Computer-only teams include division winners Buffalo and Minnesota, and Houston's Earl Campbell, who ran for 1,934 yards, 13 TDs and a 5.2 average.

1993 NFL

Dallas repeated as Super Bowl winners and Buffalo lost in the Super Bowl for the fourth straight year. In a year of unprecedented free agency, Joe Montana and Marcus Allen took Kansas City deep into the playoffs. Miami's Don Shula passed coaching legend George Halas for all-time wins.

Dallas (12-4) thrives on QB Troy Aikman (69% complete, NFL-best 1.5% INTs), RB Emmitt Smith (NFL-best 1,486 yards rushing) and WR Michael Irvin (88 catches, 1,330 yards).

Buffalo (12-4) boast Thurman Thomas, who led the AFC with 1,315 yards rushing and DE Bruce Smith, who was Defensive Player of the Year with 13.5 sacks.

Houston (12-4): Warren Moon passed for 3,485 yards, Gary Brown ran for 1,002 at an NFL-best 5.1 per carry, and the defense kept 12 foes below 20 points.

Montana and Allen (15 rush TDs) led **Kansas City (11-5)** to their finest season since its 1969 Super Bowl champ team.

With new coach Dan Reeves, the **New York Giants (11-5)** were only a final-game overtime loss to Dallas from winning the NFC East.

San Francisco (10-6) had the NFL's top offense by far (473 points). Steve Young threw 29 TD passes and WR Jerry Rice had 98 catches for NFL bests of 1,550 yards and 15 TDs.

Find Barry Sanders, John Elway and more on the computer-only teams.

Bombs Away in 2011 NFL

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Graham also topped the NFL record for yards, and he topped Gronkowski in catches, 99-90. Franchise receiving records were set by Buffalo's Stevie Johnson (consecutive 1,000-yard seasons), Cincinnati's A.J. Green (rookie yards), Miami's Brandon Marshall (consecutive 80-catch seasons) and San Diego's Antonio Gates (career receptions).

The action revs up with running backs, too. There's New Orleans' Darren Sproles, who broke the NFL record for all-purpose yards with 2,969. And Baltimore's Ray Rice, whose 2,068 yards from scrimmage included a 204-yard rushing game.

Jacksonville's Maurice Jones-Drew led the league with 1,606 yards rushing, the most in franchise history. Miami's Reggie Bush topped 1,000 yards rushing for the first time in his career.

LeSean McCoy's 20 TDs (17 rushing) broke a Philadelphia record that stood since the 1940s. Marshawn Lynch scored a TD in 11 straight games, a Seattle record. Donald Brown's 80-yard TD run tied the Indianapolis record. Other record-topping backs were Arizona's Beanie Wells, San Francisco's Steve Gore, St. Louis' Steven Jackson and Washington rookie Roy Helu.

Special teams were special, too. Despite new rules that made touchbacks common, Green Bay rookie Randall Cobb and the New York Jets' Joe McKnight had NFL-record 108-yard kickoff-return TDs. Arizona rookie Patrick Peterson's four punt-return TDs tied an NFL and broke another for most returns of 80-plus yards (all four). Minnesota's Percy Harvin had a 103-yard kickoff return that was a TD and a 104-yard return that was not.

Punters and field-goal specialists got a kick out of 2011 as well. SF's David Akers set a record with 43 field goals. Jacksonville's Josh Scobee and Oakland's Sebastian Janikowski each had games with three field goals of 50-plus yards. Denver's Matt Prater beat Chicago by kicking a 59-yard field goal to end the fourth-quarter and a 51-yarder in overtime.

Punters Andy Lee of SF and Shane Lechler of Oakland averaged more than 50 yards per boot.

The poor defenders were nonetheless rich in pass rushers, especially Minnesota's Jared Allen, whose 22 sacks were .5 short of the record, and rookie outside linebackers Aldon Smith (14 sacks for SF) and Von Miller (11.5 for Denver). The 49ers set a mark by allowing zero rush TDs for the first 14 games.

QBs are Safer, Fumbles are Not, as SOM Upgrades its Windows Game

Fumbles on sacks and completed passes will be more treacherous in Strat-O-Matic Pro Football 2012. Returns will be longer if the defense recovers in those situations, conforming to statistical analysis.

The offense catches a break elsewhere this year: An optional rule prevents injuries to quarterbacks. This covers leagues that already have usage restrictions and it works well with the existing option to use actual NFL starting QBs.

Since more than one-third of NFL teams did not lose their starting quarterbacks to injury in 2011, the QB-injury rule also adds realism to replays.

Since Strat-O-Matic's football rule book has expanded to add play variety in recent years, the new computer version is making it easier to find the rules: A PDF document is included and a computer-screen shortcut is available from the Start Program Group.

Other improvements in the new upgrade will include easier look-ups for each team's special teams – if you purchase the Card Image option. Like the cards in the board game, the Windows game will put all the kicking and return specialists in one location of the Team Notebook.

And now you can resize the Manage League Rosters dialog. Lengthen it to see many more free agents. Widen it to see more stats categories.

Coaches will be able to dwell more on their exhilarating wins and exasperating losses with a variety of new post-game features. Game stories that mention key plays and players will accompany every game and a new report will combine the stories with line scores. Box scores are improved to note the time at the end of plays. And the Takeaway/Giveaway Report now has a Plus/Minus column.

Also noteworthy:

- The program will adjust to the NFL's new kickoff rule that moved the tee from the 30-yard line to the 35. This also adjusts squib kickoffs slightly.

- Tumblr support has been added to the existing Twitter and Facebook support in Strat-O-Matic's social-media world.

- Thanks to gamer Fred Bobberts, Strat-O-Matic is including extra players for the 1966 (nine players), 1991 (one) and 1993 (six) seasons.

- More amazingly, Bobberts has corrected data for hundreds of players in 38 seasons. These range from minor typos in names and stat lines to inconsistencies (in such things as blocking ratings for multi-position players), to misplaced card results, to incorrect calculations in both the Elementary and Advanced versions of the game.

Patriot Games

Starting on July 4, SOM will Discount Founder's Edition for Limited Time

The final few complete games of the collectible Founder's Edition Baseball Game sell for \$99.99, but Strat-O-Matic is offering a special discount from July 4-15.

In honor of 1776, the replica edition of the original Strat-O-Matic game sold in 1961 will be on sale for \$76. Order online with the code: JULY4

This is the game that debuted at Stat-O-Matic's 50th Anniversary celebration last year. And fewer than 100 copies are left.

It comes with all the game parts, including a game box with SOM's original artwork.

The 80 player cards are the same players -- five each from the 16 Major League teams of 1960 -- in the same card design as the originals. The stars all-time greats such as Mickey Mantle, Whitey Ford, Ernie Banks, Willie Mays, Frank Robinson, Hank Aaron, Don Drysdale, Ted Williams, Harmon Killebrew and many more.

Each numbered edition of this unique collectible is signed by creator Hal Richman.



**Strat-O-Matic's 2012
T-Shirt, Only \$17.99**

**In pre-shrunk cotton,
adult sizes, small-XXX**

How to Make Money in the Strat-O-Matic Sales Club

Not everyone can make money by talking up his/her favorite hobby, but everyone who plays Strat-O-Matic can.

The Strat-O-Matic game company is encouraging its loyal customers to pitch its games to friends, associates and other acquaintances. When any become new customers, the seller gets paid.

You can sell the baseball, football, hockey and basketball board games for discounts (shipping discounts, too), or sell the Baseball Lite and Football Lite Windows games.

Collect a percent of each sale in money or a larger percentage in Strat-O-Matic merchandise of your choice. Keeping collecting when those new customers update their purchases the next year.

There are incentives for sales leaders. The top seller even wins a dinner with Strat-O-Matic creator Hal Richman.

For those who want more information or would like to join, email salesclub@strat-o-matic.com.

World Record: Another SOM Milestone

Carow and Hennemann play 61 hours, 116 games

This is too perfect: 61, the number long associated with baseball records and New York City, is now the world's record for consecutive hours playing Strat-O-Matic Baseball, or any other board game for that matter.

Gamer Brett Carow, crowned a year ago as the Ultimate Strat-O-Matic Fanatic, and Strat-playing friend Sam Hennemann, shattered the previous Guinness World Record for board-game play by rolling the dice for 61 hours and 2 minutes June 7-9 at Foley's NY Pub and Restaurant in Manhattan.

Of course, it was 1961 when New York Yankee Roger Maris hit his 61st home run to break former Yankee Babe Ruth's long-standing season record. The movie *61** memorializes that achievement.

And it was 1961 when Hal Richman's creation called Strat-O-Matic Baseball debuted. Better yet, Carow and Henneman traveled from their Minnesota homes to set the record. In 1961, Minnesota got its first Major League Baseball team.

For those of us who like numbers – what Strat-O-Matic player doesn't – this is amazing: To achieve the record, Carow and Hennemann had to play 54 hours. Until a late-1961 injury to Mickey Mantle, he challenged Maris to top Ruth's home-run mark. Mantle was the runner-up, with 54 home runs.

Last year, the previous record-holders spent 53 hours, 59 minutes playing a game with, appropriately enough, a zombie theme. Carow and Henneman averted zombie status and dehydration by consuming Gatorade, blueberries, bananas and peanut butter.

Carow's wife Carisa contributed a back massage. By



After their record-setting marathon, Hennemann (left) and Carow paused to celebrate with Hal Richman, then returned to the table, cards and dice for seven more hours.

pooling break minutes (they were allowed five minutes per hour), the gamers managed a single 90-minute nap. Ultimately, the banter that head-to-head Strat players everywhere thrive on carried the guys through.

While a large electronic counter ticked off the seconds, minutes and hours in red lights, Carow and Hennemann rolled through a 32-team tournament of great teams from the past 100 years. They had such highlights as Carow's five-home-run inning with the 1964 Yankees and a near no-hitter by Vinegar Bend Mizell of the 1960 Pirates.

When the gamers reached the 54-hour record at 3 p.m. on Saturday, June 9, they took only a legal break for celebratory photos and handshakes, then, true to the fanatics they are, decided they had to complete the job. That done (won by the 2007 Red Sox, who beat the 2004

Cardinals four games to one in a best-of-seven finals), the friends topped off the 111 tourney games with five exhibition games to hit the 61-hour milestone.

Spirit was high throughout. Foley's owner Shaun Clancy let SOM take over street-front space for signage and also to set up menu-like cards on each table to promote the event. Clancy joined the SOM staff in wearing promotional T-shirts.

Former big-league pitcher Jeff Nelson stopped by for a chat. Former big-league pitcher Ron Darling posed for a photo with the dice-rollers. So did Bill Welke from the crew that took in some of the SOM action after umpiring the Yankees-Mets Subway Series.

The 17 official witnesses, who each had four-hour shifts and kept the world-record quest honest by keeping time during breaks, included Ultimate Strat-

O-Matic Fanatic finalist Larry Salay and his wife Sonia.

Salay "made me tag him into the witness chair" at the start of his last shift, like we were tag-team partners in a wrestling match," reported Fanatic finalist Marty Bender, writing as Helton on the Stratfan Forum.

"A special shout out should go to all of our Minnesota witnesses (Ashley McPherson, John McGough, Alex Anderson and Nita Sivongxay), who combined to fill out the overnight shifts on *both* nights," said Strat-O-Matic Marketing Director Adam Rosen, who organized the Guinness event and shunned sleep for most of the marathon.

Other witnesses from the New York area included Ross Burns, Nick Klopsis, Jared Casden, Amy Mann, Frank Ullman, Karen Youdelman, Don Applegate, Nelly Olshan, Tom Harvey and Daniel Duran.



The atmosphere at Foley's Pub was festive throughout the record-breaking event. Clockwise from upper left: passersby had no trouble figuring out what was happening at Foley's; Major League umpire Bill Welke took his position to call a Strat-O pitch after a day calling the Yankees-Mets game; gamers Sam Hennemann and Brett Carow, cheered on by witnesses and friends, looked just as fresh more than 40 hours into their 61-hour marathon.

Photos by Adam Rosen / Strat-O-Matic

Kings or 12 Others Can Win for You

There has never been an NHL season like the one Strat-O-Matic players soon will be able to re-live.

No season since the Original Six can compare to 2011-12 for parity at the top, as nine teams topped 100 points, and only 10 points separated them.

The teams were so evenly matched that, for the first time, two lower seeds faced off in the Stanley Cup final. But that was less shocking after The No. 6 seeds in each conference topped 100 points.

Los Angeles, which had not won the Cup in its first 44 seasons, claimed the prize after barely making the playoffs as the No. 8 seed in the West.

The Kings then demolished the West's No. 1, No. 2 and No. 3 seeds by winning 12 of 14 playoff games, and whipped New Jersey, No. 6 in the East, in a six-game Final.

For Strat-O-Matic hockey gamers, this means any of a dozen or more teams can win your playoff – it's more likely than ever that your favorite team is one of them and it's more likely than ever that your coaching can make the difference.

The even distribution of 2011-12 talent will do the same for draft-league coaches. With save percentages climbing ever higher,

Goalie	SAVE%	GAA	W
Elliott, Stl	.940	1.56	23
Halak, Stl	.926	1.97	26
Quick, LA	.929	1.95	35
Lundqvist, NYR	.930	1.97	39
Smith, Pho	.930	2.21	38
Rinne, Nas	.923	2.39	43
Schneider, Van	.937	1.96	20

there is a taller stockpile of fine goaltenders than ever, as the chart here shows. And this list doesn't include such stalwarts as Boston's Tim Thomas, Calgary's Mikka Kiprusoff, Detroit's Jimmy Howard, Dallas' Kari Lehtonen, Vancouver's Roberto Luongo and Minnesota's Niklas Backstrom, who all had save percentages around .920.

In this crowd, Pittsburgh's Marc-Andre Fleury, second in the league with 42 wins, Stanley Cup finalist Martin Brodeur and such other netminding stars as Ryan Miller and Cam Ward look almost average.

Same story for goal-scoring. The NHL had 30 men who reached 30 goals, but only four who reached 40.

At the top, there's Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos, who became only the second

player since 1996 to reach 60 goals. Then there's MVP Evgeni Malkin of Pittsburgh, who dominated like few others in recent seasons after teammate Sidney Crosby (37 points in 29 games) was out for 53 games. Malkin's 50 goals and 59 assists made him the only 100-point man this season.

But after those two, only 11 goals separate the Rangers' Marian Gaborik (41 goals) from 27 others who scored at least 30. Another 38 players scored at least 24 goals.

Those Kings? They weren't one of the 100-point teams. Their top scorer, Anze Kopitar with 25 goals and 76 points, was No. 53 on the NHL goal-scoring list. Dustin Brown and Justin Williams, who scored 22, tied for No. 76. Jeff Carter tied for No. 85 with his 21 goals.

Perhaps you'll do better with 111-point Vancouver or the 109-point Rangers, the two top seeds. Pittsburgh had Malkin, Crosby and 40-goal man James Neal for unmatched offense. St. Louis had the stingiest defense and Boston had the NHL's top five leaders in plus-minus. New Jersey improved by 21 points over last year. Balanced Nashville and Detroit can beat anyone. Underdogs Florida and Phoenix didn't hit 100 points, but clawed to the top of their divisions.

1958-59: Canadiens Lead the Original Six

Montreal dominated the regular season and the playoffs to win its fourth straight Stanley Cup in its historic run of five straight.

Dickie Moore (41 goals, 96 points) and Jean Beliveau (45 goals, 91 points) were the league's top two in points and goals. Eight Canadiens teammates had double-figure goals, including Bernie Geoffrion (22) and Henri Richard (21).

Jacques Plante won his fourth straight Vezina Trophy and defenseman Tom Johnson won the Norris Trophy, unseating teammate Doug Harvey, who had won four straight.

Don McKenny scored 32 goals to lead **Boston** to second place, its best finish in a decade. **Chicago**, with Ed Litzenberger (33 goals) and Todd Sloan (27), plus developing young stars Bobby Hull, Glenn Hall and

Pierre Pilote, finished third, reaching the playoffs for just the second time in 13 years. Then the Blackhawks made Montreal work for it in the first round of the playoffs by winning a pair of games in Chicago.

Toronto won its final five games to edge **New York**, which lost six of its last seven, for the final playoff spot. The Leafs, with six 20-goal men led by Dick Duff (29) and three other future Hall of Famers (Frank Mahovlich, George Armstrong, Bob Pulford), then reached the Stanley Cup finals, where they managed only a Game Three overtime victory. New York's historic collapse followed a brilliant season by Andy Bathgate (40 goals, 88 points).

Detroit, a force through most of the '50s, fell to last despite Gordie Howe's 32 goals and 78 points.

1980-81: Expansion Teams Dominate

The New York Islanders won their second straight Stanley Cup in a year notable for its then-record dozen 100-point men. These are the six carded teams:

Islanders (110 points): Mike Bossy scored 50 goals in his first 50 games and finished with an NHL-best 68. Bryan Trottier added 31 goals and 103 points.

St. Louis (107 points): Bernie Federko's 31 goals and 104 points and Wayne Babych's 54 goals led the surprising Blues to the Smythe Division title with a 352-goal offense that was only three short of the No. 1 Islanders' offense.

Montreal (103 points): The NHL's most balanced team had 14 double-figure goal scorers, the league's top defense and the best goals differential (+100).

Buffalo (99 points): Danny Gare scored 46 goals, Don Edwards led the NHL with a

2.96 goals-against average and the Sabres were the class of the Adams Division.

Los Angeles (99 points): The unstoppable Triple Crown Line of Marcel Dionne (58 goals, 135 points), Charlie Simmer (56 goals, 105 points) and Dave Taylor (47 goals, 112 points) were backed by Mario Lessard's NHL-best 35 wins.

Philadelphia (97 points): The Flyers had the league's second-best defense and Bill Barber (42 goals), Rick Macleish (38) and Reggie Leach (34).

The computer teams include Stanley Cup finalist Minnesota (87 points) and six 100-point men. Edmonton's Wayne Gretzky won the MVP and the scoring title with a record 164 points and 109 assists.

Quebec's Peter Stastny set a rookie scoring record with 109 points.

Draft or Replay: LeBron or Durant?

The Thunder couldn't take the Heat in the NBA Finals, but Strat-O-Matic players will have a great choice between 46-win Miami and 47-win Oklahoma City.

Your pick for drafts, trades or replays with the 2011-12 NBA cards and computer rosters probably depends on which superstar you admire the most – MVP LeBron James or scoring champion Kevin Durant.

James, one of only eight men to win the MVP title three times, won his first of the multiple Miami championships he promised. In so doing, he avoided becoming the first three-time MVP with no rings. Durant lifted Thunder fans sky high by reaching the Finals for a city as young in NBA years as their best players.

Yes, both players have help, lots of it. James has two-thirds of the recently famous Big Three, Dwyane Wade, who averaged 22 points, 5 rebounds and 5 assists, and Chris Bosh, who averaged 18 points and 8 rebounds. Durant has dynamic point guard Russell Westbrook, the NBA's No. 5 scorer at 23.5 ppg, and fast-breaking sub James Harden, whose 16.8 ppg made him the runaway winner of the league's Sixth Man award. If you're keeping score, that's a wash in help with the hoops.

Defense? James is third in the league in steals and is 1st team on the All-Defensive Team. OKC is by far the dominant shot-blocking team because Serge Ibaka's 241 swats is, get this, *106 more than the next best guy*.

Breakin' 'em down

So it comes down to James vs. Durant. James, the MVP, has the top Efficiency Rating (29.9) and Durant is third (27.3). That measures the player's total contribution in points, rebounds, assists, steals and blocks. But so does the NBA Fantasy Rating. There, Durant is No. 1 (6.67) and James is second (6.40).

Scoring leader Durant (28.0 ppg) tops James, who is third (27.1). Durant is the better 3-point shooter and free-throw shooter. James is the better 2-point shooter and has the higher overall field-goal percentage.

Durant has the edge in rebounding, 8 rpg to 7.9, but James has more rebounds per 48 minutes. Durant is the better defensive rebounder, James is the better offensive rebounder.

James has a big edge in assists per game

(6.2 to 3.5) and more double-doubles (26 in 62 games vs. Durant's 8 in 66).

Pick 'em.

After the top two guys and the top two teams, there's a lot to love about the 2011-12 NBA. Minnesota's Kevin Love, for instance. He was fourth in scoring and second in rebounding with more help from flashy rookie PG Ricky Rubio. Another newbie guard, Kyrie Irving, was the easy choice for rookie of the year after leading Cleveland with 18.5 ppg. New York offers Lin-Sanity (from-nowhere sensation Jeremy Lin).

The better teams were deeper in stars. From Tony Parker at his best to the bottom of the NBA's deepest roster of solid players, San Antonio amazed with a 50-16 season and a record 20 straight wins overlapping the regular season and the playoffs.

Derrick Rose led a potent foursome for 50-win Chicago. The Lakers had the NBA's No. 2 scorer in Kobe Bryant, Andrew Bynum and Pau Gasol. The Clippers rode new guard Chris Paul and monster-jammer Blake Griffin to 40 wins. Indiana, Memphis and Atlanta all reached 40, while Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett and Rajon Rondo got Boston to within one game of the NBA Finals.

1969-70: New York's Favorite Knicks Team

With MVP Willis Reed, Walt Frazier and a deep squad that emphasized team play, the Knicks ascended in the year when the Celtics bowed after the retirements of Bill Russell and Sam Jones.

It took 60 wins, best in the NBA, for **New York** to prevail in the highly competitive Eastern Division, and seven games to whip **Los Angeles** in the playoff finals.

Rookies Lew Alcindor and Bobby Dandridge took **Milwaukee** from last to second in the East, with 56 wins, second best in the NBA. Alcindor's 28.8 points per game trailed only West's 31.2 and Alcindor's 14.5 rebounds per game trailed only Elvin Hayes of **San Diego** (16.9) and Wes Unseld of Baltimore (16.7). Hayes also scored 27.5 ppg, third in the league.

Another rookie with unusual skill and unusual circumstances electrified the league. **Phoenix**' Connie Hawkins scored 24.6 ppg, sixth best in the NBA—eight years after he had been barred from the league for not reporting a bribe offer while in college at Iowa. While suing the NBA for admission, Hawkins starred in the American Basketball Association.

Milwaukee won the rights to draft Alcindor in a coin flip with Phoenix. What if Phoenix had Alcindor and Hawkins?

Baltimore, with Unseld, Gus Johnson (13.9 rpg) and Earl Monroe (23.4 ppg) was the league's other 50-win team. Atlanta, with 48 wins, 25.4 ppg from Lou Hudson and 14.4 rpg from Bill Bridges, won the West, two games better than LA.

1971-72: LA and West are Finally the Best

The Jerry West-Wilt Chamberlain **Lakers** had lost seven-game finals in both 1968-69 and 1969-70. This time, they left nothing to chance, with an NBA-record 69 wins, a record-shattering 33 straight wins in mid-season and a 12-3 run in the playoffs, including four straight after losing Game 1 of the Finals to New York.

As with 1966-67 Philadelphia, Chamberlain won a championship by sacrificing his scoring and by dominating in other ways – this time, with a league-leading 19.2 rebounds per game. The Lakers' Gail Goodrich notched 25.9 ppg and West had 25.8 to finish in the NBA's top six.

Milwaukee's dominant center changed his name from Lew Alcindor to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, won the scoring title easily with 34.8 ppg, was third in

rebounding (16.6 rpg) and won the MVP award. The defending-champion Bucks had set the NBA record the previous year with a 20-game win streak and they were the ones to halt LA's 33-game streak in January. A 63-19 record would have dominated most seasons, but not this year.

Boston returned to the top of the Eastern Conference with 56 wins as John Havlicek was third in scoring (27.5 ppg) and fifth in assists (7.5 apg), and Dave Cowens was fifth in rebounding (15.2 rpg).

Chicago won 57 games to pressure Milwaukee in the Midwest Division as Bob Love averaged 25.8 ppg. Other stars included **Portland** Rookie of the Year Sidney Wicks, and all-stars Spencer Haywood of **Seattle** (26.2 ppg) and Walt Frazier of **New York** (23.2 ppg, 5.8 apg)