

Computer NBA: 1983-84

Editor's Note: Last month, Dick Hunt told a tale behind the new Strat-O-Matic roster disk for the 1980-81 season — what gamers might be missing if they never bought the cards SOM produced back then. This month, he does the same for another new roster disk, 1983-84.

By Dick Hunt

One thing lacking in the 1980-81 season was a decent "pennant race" within any of the divisions. The 1983-84 season (and roster disk) will make up for that with two very good two-team divisional races and a great race in the Midwest Division. Utah, Dallas, Denver, Kansas City, and San Antonio all finished within 8 games of each other. Indiana had a league-worst record of 26-56, about 10 games better than the league "worsts" that we're used to seeing these days. That makes for a competitive league from top to bottom, which makes the 1983-84 season the best stock team replay set ever for Strat-O-Matic basketball. It's always been my favorite card set.

Laird Leathers and I are planning a "tandem replay," in which one guy plays a couple of weeks' worth of the schedule, and then sends the whole league to the other guy on disk so he can play a couple of weeks' worth. This project could take us years, but we won't mind, because the 1983-84 season is easily Strat-O-Matic's most timeless, in our opinion.

The Celtics won the NBA championship in 1983-84 in the first of their many great "Bird vs. Magic" series against the Lakers. The Strat-O-Matic Celtics feature a marvelous team which always amazed my friends and me in the board game. Dennis Johnson was their point guard, and he seemed to us to be a dismal excuse of a point guard because of his fastbreak passing column, which consisted of 7 turnovers and "8-20 FB Shot." We all thought Boston would stink without the standard dazzler-happy point man. But after their 9-0 start in our replay, we were singing a much more respectful tune.

Both Bernard King (57.2) and Bill Cartwright (56.1) shot over 55 percent for **the Knicks**, but only King would make the league's top 10 in field goal percentage. And he was 10th! Gilmore led the league for San Antonio with 63.1 percent.

Washington had the famous Bruise Brothers, Jeff Ruland and Rick Mahorn. Unfortunately, they had little else but a last-place 35-47 record. **Philadelphia** had a great four-

man core backed by an absolutely pathetic eight-man bench. Moses Malone, Julius Erving, Andrew Toney, and Maurice Cheeks carried that team to a 52-30 record, but that still left them 10 games behind Boston.

New Jersey had a regular hatchet squad, led by Darryl Dawkins with his league leading (by far!) 386 fouls and 22 foul disqualifications. Only Otis Birdsong wasn't 34-40 (or worse) for fouls in his defense column. The Nets guards are generally great stealers, but they all seem to foul whenever they're not stealing. Still, they're a fun team to run and have a great fastbreak.

Detroit lost the Central Division to Milwaukee by only a game. Looking at their cards, it makes me wonder how they did it. The Bucks just aren't very impressive. Detroit, however, got great seasons (and cards) from Isiah Thomas, Kelly Tripucka and Bill Laimbeer. John Long and Vinnie Johnson make an interesting tandem at shooting guard because both are more effective when you play them inside.

Atlanta had Tree Rollins and Dan Roundfield to provide defense, and Dominique Wilkins for scoring. Unfortunately, all three wanted to play inside at the same time, as 'Nique had not yet developed a decent outside shot.

The 1983-84 **Chicago Bulls** are the worst Strat-O-Matic fastbreak team of all-time. They simply cannot run it. Their best point guard, Ennis Whatley, turns the ball over on splits 1-14. If you can stick to a plodding offense, the Bulls are okay, despite a 27-55 real-life record.

Indiana has a wild offense featuring six 1+ shooters. Clark Kellogg has a great card, but is a 1 shooter like all the others, so a doubleteaming defense shuts him down in a hurry. The good news? Who does your opponent dare leave unguarded on a team that can play four or five 1+'s at a time?

Cleveland wasn't exciting, as even World B. Free came down to earth from his 1980-81 monster card. Roy Hinson and Jeff Cook made an entertaining two-headed center. Never have I seen two guys on one team who were better carbon copies of each other. Hinson was a better shot blocker, but it's tough to tell them apart otherwise.

Denver is a riot to watch and to play. David Thompson is gone, but Kiki Vandeweghe replaces him pretty well. The gunners are Vandeweghe (28.1 shots per 48), Alex English (28.7) and Dan Issel (26.7). All are 3 shooters, and power forward English is

a passer, too, with 4-19 dazzlers in his Normal passing column.

Denver's (and the card set's) biggest enigma is T.R. Dunn. He's a 12/26 rebounder at guard, and led the team that year with 574 rebounds. This, along with his 21-30 stealing, made it almost impossible for the board game to adhere to his paltry 6.6 shot attempts per 48 minutes. In our board game play, Dunn nearly always averaged 15 points per game (real life 5.7) and over twice his shots-per-48, even though we never deliberately threw him the ball, thanks to his lousy shooting card full of Replays. But because of the rolls we'd get on the defense cards and X-columns, it was impossible for such a great rebounder/stealer to shoot only 6.6 shots per 48 minutes. If the computer game can bring T.R. back into line statistically, I'll be terribly impressed.

Houston features a case of "out with the old and in with the new." The 1983-84 Rockets feature the last Strat card for Elvin Hayes and the first card for Ralph Sampson. Ralphie got a great rookie card (3/4 rebounder at center!), but the Big E was definitely past his prime.

For those of you who buy both disks, you won't even recognize the 1983-84 **Dallas Mavericks** after you've played the 1980-81 version. Only Brad Davis and Jim Spanarkel played on both squads (the little-used Spanarkel is cardless in the 1983-84 set). The good part is that the team finished 15-67 in its first season, but had improved to 43-39 by 1983-84, second in their division before bowing to LA in the Western Semis.

The Kings were in Kansas City in 1983-84. LaSalle Thompson was a tower of strength at center with 4/4 rebounding and 1-15 shot blocking. Unfortunately, he also fouls on 26-45, so enjoy that shot blocking while it's available.

San Antonio had a maddening team. Six of their twelve carded players could play only guard. That leaves them painfully thin up front. George Gervin (30 FGA per 48 min) and Mike Mitchell (26.9 per 48) were the scoring machines, and Gilmore got a great shooting card with rebounding (2/3 at center) and defense (1-13 blocker) to match. Johnny Moore had 7-20 fastbreak dazzlers, and John Lucas had 6-20, so these guys can really score. Their injuries, however, will drive you nuts in a realistic replay.

Utah has two amazing players. Adrian Dantley scored 30.6 ppg while canning 55.8 percent of his shots and firing the ball up 23.1

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times per 48 minutes. His 1983-84 card is probably the all-time best basketball card ever produced by Strat-O-Matic. He gets 24.9 scoring chances in his inside column, and draws fouls on 23 of them (X + F1 on a roll of seven!), rendering him absolutely indefensible. His shots-per-48 isn't so high until you consider his foul drawing skills. It's tougher to get off 23.1 shots per 48 minutes when you're already busy shooting 15.2 free throws per 48! That adds up to a 3 shooting rating and a trail of defenders' bodies.

The other amazing player on this team is John Drew, Dantley's backup. Another 3-rated shooter, Drew gets a "mere" 17 chances to draw a foul on an inside shot.

Golden State features a decent Joe Barry Carroll and Purvis Short. Short is a great outside shooter, with Xs or fouls on rolls five through nine in his outside column. That's 24 chances packed right into the heart of his card.

Phoenix's Walter Davis got a very nice shooting card, but will never be your point guard; his fastbreak passing column is all turnovers. Larry Nance gets 30.5 chances to score in his fastbreak

column, and he's a 3/13 rebounder at small forward to boot. He's everything but a 1+ shooter. No one's perfect.

Jim Paxson got an excellent card for **Portland**, as did Calvin Natt. The Trailblazers had a very good starting five, but the bench was shaky. Clyde Drexler was a rookie in 1983-84, but don't expect much. This was easily his worst season as a pro.

The **San Diego Clippers** had a great "potential" team in 1983-84. Terry Cummings, Ricky Pierce, and Derek Smith were all there, but all would see much better seasons than they had in this card set. Norm Nixon was a great point guard, and tied Isiah Thomas for the league lead with 914 assists. Bill Walton has a fun card, but missed 25 games because of foot injuries.

Point guard Gus Williams and center Jack Sikma carried the **Seattle Supersonics**. Tom Chambers was there, but had not yet blossomed.

And finally, the **Los Angeles Lakers** feature a vintage combination of Magic Johnson and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. When you run that team, you'll almost be able to see Magic out front directing traffic just before he whips the ball where he always does — right to the big guy.