

Donavan Meeters

Professor Williams

RH104

30 November 2023

Who Is The Greatest NBA Player Of All-Time?

Who is the Greatest Of All-Time? I guarantee that any sports fan has had someone come up to them and ask “Who do you think the greatest player of all time is in said sport.” Whether it be in the NFL, NHL, MLB, or any other sports league, everyone has had this question come up at least once in their lives and along with that question, everyone has an opinion on who they think it is. But throughout all of the different sports leagues, the NBA always seems to be the most notorious for having the “GOAT” debate. Whether you are a fan of basketball or not, everyone knows someone who has an opinion that they will fight their lives for who they think the GOAT is in the NBA. I would say about 95% of people believe it’s either LeBron or Jordan and then the other 5% would be the people who say Kareem or Bill Russel.

Now with every GOAT debate, people need to have support to back up their claim and that’s where the argument gets so heated. You go on ESPN and you will see grown men getting paid millions of dollars just to fight and argue about who is better, LeBron or Jordan. Most of the time, people’s arguments go like this. If they think Jordan is better, they say something along the lines of “6-0 in the finals.” If someone thinks LeBron is better, their argument tends to go something like this, “Jordan’s competition was nowhere near LeBron’s and LeBron has been one of the best players in the league for almost 20 years straight.” Most people never tend to actually

give good context and relativity to their points. They use basic points and arguments to a topic that goes way further than being 6-0 in the finals.

With this in mind, I decided to do a deep dive on who truly is the greatest player of all-time, LeBron or Jordan. For my comparison, I searched and searched for the best ways I could determine which player is the greatest of all-time. What I came up with is what I believed to be the best possible way to rank them. I looked into many different statistics and all the accolades these players have accomplished throughout their career. MVPs. Championships, Finals MVPs, and their career stats like PPG, APG, RPG and others as well. I also looked into a bunch of other advanced statistics like PER, Box +/-, Win Shares and a whole bunch of others as well. I made sure to include both their regular season stats and averages, and their postseason stats and averages as well. Lastly, I looked into their impact on the NBA and basketball as a whole.

To start off, we have the leaders for the standard statistics. When I looked into each player's statistics and averages, I looked both at their career high and single season high for their stats and averages. "Overall, Jordan has been the far better with him holding the second highest single season PPG average at 37.1, highest regular season career PPG average of 30.1, the highest single postseason PPG average with 43.7, and lastly the highest postseason career PPG average with 33.5. In comparison LeBron only holds the 5th spot for regular and postseason career PPG average and the 8th highest single postseason," (USA Today). "MJ also has put up better defensive numbers compared to LeBron with MJ having the highest SPG average for all his single regular season and postseason career high and regular and postseason overall career. He also has the higher BPG average for his regular season career, single regular season and single postseason. For LeBron, he holds the higher RPG and APG averages throughout his regular and postseason career and single season highs. He also holds the higher BPG average for

his postseason career,” (Basketball Reference). When comparing the two’s basic statistics, it is very close on which one is better. Jordan edged over LeBron with his insane scoring and defensive ability, but LeBron was the better overall offensive player with way higher APG averages and RPG averages. However, with Jordan being the overall better defender for his career and having higher BPG averages with him being a shooting guard and LeBron being a power forward, Jordan gets the edge on LeBron when it comes to who has the better standard statistics.

The next category I wanted to look at was their advanced statistics. With advanced stats, they show a bigger picture on how big of an impact that player made in the game he played. It further shows how bigger of an impact they had on offense and defense. The main advanced statistics I focused on were their Player Efficiency Rating or their PERs, True Shooting Percentage or TS%, their Win Shares (Offensive or OWS, Defensive or DWS, Win Shares per 48 or WSP48, and their Total Win Shares or TWS), Box +/- (Total, Offensive or OB+/- and Defensive or DB+/-), and their Value Over Replacement Player or VORP score. “Jordan has the higher PER, OWS, total WS, DB+/-, and VORP score for a single regular season. For his regular season career, Jordan has the higher PER, WSP48, B+/-, OB+/-, and DB +/- . For a single postseason, Jordan has the higher DWS total. For his postseason career, Jordan has the higher PER, WSP48, B+/-, and OB+/-,” (ESPN). “Lebron has the higher TS%,DWS, WSP48, B+/-, and OB+/- for a single regular season. For his regular season career, Lebron has the higher TS%, OWS, DWS, total WS, and VORP score. Lebron dominates Jordan for his single postseason highs as he outmatches him in all advanced stats except DWS. Lastly for his postseason career, Lebron has the higher TS%, OWS, DWS, total WS, DB+/-, and VORP score,” (ESPN). As we really look closely at their advanced stats, Lebron easily takes the win on this one. Jordan is the

better player in the regular season, but LeBron wipes him when it comes to the playoffs. For nearly all of the categories, LeBron and Jordan were putting up nearly identical numbers compared to one another. If Jordan had a higher score than LeBron in a category, most of the time LeBron was just behind him and vice versa. What really set them apart though was how LeBron has had the better performances in a single postseason than Jordan has. Jordan really wasn't close to any of LeBron's scores besides WSP48 when it came to a single postseason, so thus LeBron gets the win on Jordan for advanced statistics.

Continuing on, I went and compared the two players' overall career accolades. Both LeBron and Jordan are considered two of the most decorated players when it comes to their accomplishments. Most of the time, this category is what people use most to compare these two players on which one is greater all-time. For the comparison I looked at both players' total Rings, MVPs, Finals MVPs, All NBA and Defensive NBA selections, All Star MVPs, Defensive Player of the Year awards and some other single game and career records for points, rebounds, assists, steals, and blocks. First I will look at Jordans. "Jordan won 6 championships and never lost a Finals series. With his Finals wins, he also brought home 6 Finals MVPs which is the most all-time. Jordan also has 5 regular season MVPs, 1 Defensive Player of the Year Awards, 11 All NBA selections and 9 All Defensive selections. For his records, Jordan has more steals in his regular season career. Jordan also has more points, steals and blocks in a single regular season game. For a single postseason game, Jordan has the highest points in a single game record with 63," (Basketball Reference). "For LeBron's accolades, he has 4 Rings with 4 Finals MVPs as well as 4 regular season MVPs, 19 All NBA Team selections which is the most all-time by a big margin, and 6 Defensive NBA Team selections. For his regular season records, LeBron holds the most points all-time and continues to add onto it, he also holds a higher record for rebounds,

assists and blocks than Jordan. For a single regular season game, LeBron has a higher record for assists and rebounds than Jordan. For his postseason career, LeBron has higher totals than MJ in every stat with him also holding the most points and steals as well as the second most assists in postseason history. For a single postseason game, LeBron has a higher assist and rebound single game high than Jordan. Between the two players, they both have ties for All-Star MVPs with 3 each, and are tied for their single postseason game steals and blocks career highs,” (ESPN). A few years ago, this debate really wouldn’t have been a question. Even just 4 years ago, there was no doubt that Jordan had the better accolades. But LeBron has been doing something we’ve never seen a player do before. He is in his 21st NBA season and he is still putting up All-Star nearly All-NBA stat lines. He continues to add to his All NBA selections which is a record almost certainly impossible to break. Along with that, he recently set the record for most points all-time and continues to add to it at the age of 38 not to mention his postseason career points record which is basically untouchable at this point. Even in the other categories where he isn’t number one, he still has time to climb the ranks and he probably will claim those number one spots by the time he retires. By the time Jordan retired in his 15th season, he had accomplished a lot more than LeBron during his 15th season. But within these last 6 years, LeBron still hasn’t slowed down and continues to climb the ranks. For now, I am giving Jordan the edge over LeBron, but LeBron’s longevity is starting to become something people can’t deny anymore when it comes to excusing the records he holds.

“99% of statistics only tell 49% of the story,” (Ron DeLegge II). This is an amazing quote from DeLegge II that is so prevalent when it comes to this debate. You can look at all the stats in the world and make a case why you are right or wrong, but stats aren’t the whole story. When it comes to Jordan and LeBron, they have all the stats and accolades you could possibly

have in the NBA, but the biggest thing that these players are known for is their impact and influence on the game of basketball as a whole. Both of these two aren't just considered two of the greatest players of all-time just because of their stats, it's from how they changed they have impacted the sport and influenced it throughout their careers and lifetime. Before even coming into the league, Lebron was being viewed as the most highly anticipated prospect to come into the NBA as a high schooler." His senior year, his averages were 30.4 PPG, 9.7 RPG, 4.9 APG, 2.9 SPG, and 1.9 BPG," (Interbasketball). These were unheard of averages and they were coming from a poor kid in Akron Ohio looking to make a dream become reality. When he entered the league, was put to the test and was littered with pressure all throughout his life to perform once he got into the league. People have doubted him and discredited him throughout his entire career, and he has shut them all up. He continues to prove the haters wrong and will continue to do that until he retires. But when it comes to who is the most influential and impactful, MJ takes the cake. MJ is the reason basketball is as popular as it is today. From his high flying dunks giving him the name Air Jordan, to his obsession of being the best and destroying everyone that stood in his way, MJ has changed everyone's look of what basketball is. Coming into the league, MJ once stated, "From the first day of practice, my mentality was - 'Whoever is the team leader of the team, I'm going after him. And I'm not going to do it with my voice.' because I had no voice. I had no status. I had to do it with the way I played," (Khatri). On the court, his unreal athletics jumping out of the stadiums for dunks, and hitting clutch shots like it was nothing his entire career have been cemented into many basketball fan's minds for their lives. His insane athletic gifts are what brought out the Air Jordan's which are the number 1 selling sneaker in the world for one reason, because everyone wanted to be like Mike.

Both these two players are extraordinary. When you think of basketball at all, these two guys are the first thing that comes to mind. Their amazing performance on the court with their stats and accolades they collected over the years, to their impact and view on what basketball should look like, have given us so many special moments and memories to cherish. The debate between the two players may never end, but for the time being, MJ still sits at the top as the GOAT of the NBA.

\

Works Cited

- Khatri, Akhil. "Michael Jordan had a tremendous work ethic - NBA." *Sportskeeda*, 8 November 2022,
<https://www.sportskeeda.com/basketball/news-michael-jordan-tremendous-work-ethic>.
Accessed 1 December 2023.
- "LeBron James Career Stats - NBA." *ESPN*,
https://www.espn.com/nba/player/stats/_/id/1966/lebron-james. Accessed 1 December
2023.
- "LeBron James' high school stats while at St. Vincent-St. Mary High School." *Interbasket*, 27
June 2020,
<https://www.interbasket.net/news/lebron-james-high-school-stats-stvincent-stmary-accomplishments/31140/>. Accessed 1 December 2023.
- "LeBron James Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft Status and more."
Basketball-Reference.com,
[https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/j/jamesle01.html#all_advanced-playoffs_a
dvanced](https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/j/jamesle01.html#all_advanced-playoffs_advanced). Accessed 1 December 2023.
- "LeBron vs. Jordan: Who is the GOAT? Here's how the stats stack up." *USA Today*, 16 February
2023,
[https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/graphics/2023/02/16/nbas-best-player-lebron-jordan-
statistics/11222031002/](https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/graphics/2023/02/16/nbas-best-player-lebron-jordan-statistics/11222031002/). Accessed 1 December 2023.
- "Michael Jordan Career Stats - NBA." *ESPN*,
https://www.espn.com/nba/player/stats/_/id/1035/type/nba/seasontype/3. Accessed 1
December 2023.

“Michael Jordan Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft Status and more.”

Basketball-Reference.com,

<https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/j/jordami01.html>. Accessed 1 December 2023.