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**CHICAGO STAR
DERRICK ROSE
HOLDS THE KEY
TO THE BULLS'
TITLE HOPES**



NBA 3-AT-3

MONDAY, FEB. 27

**SPECIAL SECOND-
HALF-OF-SEASON
EDITION: ODDS TO
WIN NBA TITLE**



WEST COAST DARK HORSE
Do Kobe Bryant's Lakers
have the firepower to win
another NBA championship?

ODDS TO WIN 2012 NBA CHAMPIONSHIP

TEAM	ODDS	TEAM	ODDS	TEAM	ODDS
MIAMI HEAT	6-to-5	DENVER NUGGETS	30-to-1	UTAH JAZZ	300-to-1
OKLA CITY THUNDER	4-to-1	PORTLAND BLAZERS	40-to-1	PHOENIX SUNS	500-to-1
CHICAGO BULLS	5-to-1	ORLANDO MAGIC	40-to-1	N ORLEANS HORNETS	1,000-to-1
LOS ANGELES CLIPPERS	8-to-1	PHILADELPHIA 76ERS	50-to-1	TORONTO RAPTORS	1,000-to-1
LOS ANGELES LAKERS	10-to-1	MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES	60-to-1	DETROIT PISTONS	1,000-to-1
NEW YORK KNICKS	10-to-1	ATLANTA HAWKS	80-to-1	CLEVELAND CAVALIERS	1,000-to-1
DALLAS MAVERICKS	12-to-1	HOUSTON ROCKETS	80-to-1	WASHINGTON WIZARDS	1,000-to-1
SAN ANTONIO SPURS	15-to-1	MINNESOTA T'WOLVES	80-to-1	CHARLOTTE BOBCATS	1,000-to-1
BOSTON CELTICS	25-to-1	GOLDEN ST WARRIORS	200-to-1	SACRAMENTO KINGS	1,000-to-1
INDIANA PACERS	25-to-1	MILWAUKEE BUCKS	300-to-1	NEW JERSEY NETS	1,000-to-1



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FAVORITES (LESS THAN 10-TO-1)

When they're at full strength, the Bulls are the second-best team in the NBA and the one with the best chance of knocking off Miami. If PG Derrick Rose's back holds up, all the ingredients for a championship run are there: They have a superstar, they have depth, and Chicago (along with Miami) is one of the two elite defensive teams in the NBA. Miami is a heavy favorite, but the Bulls aren't as far behind as the odds would indicate.

THE REST OF THE FAVORITES: A 6-to-5 payout is a stingy one for a Heat team that didn't show any mettle in last year's finals . . . The Thunder are favored to come out of the West, but their collapse against Dallas last spring casts some doubts and they don't consistently play championship-caliber defense. . . There's really no good reason to lay money on the Los Angeles Clippers, who are feeding off hype right now. PG Chris Paul is a game-changer, but PF Blake Griffin lacks the offensive versatility and defensive value to really help CP3 carry this team. And can you really envision reading "championship-winning head coach Vinny Del Negro"?

BEST VALUE: **CHICAGO BULLS at 5-to-1**



The Miami Heat deserve to be the heavy favorite to win the 2012 NBA Championship, but Dwyane Wade's injury history makes them too much of a risk at 6-to-5.



➡ The Lakers' big three of Kobe Bryant, Pau Gasol and Andrew Bynum has been outstanding this season and makes L.A. an intriguing pick at 10-to-1.

DARK HORSES (BETWEEN 10-TO-1 & 25-TO-1)

The Lakers still have a bullet left in the form of the trade exception they acquired from Dallas for Lamar Odom. They're going to be players in the Dwight Howard derby, but even if they miss out on him they'll still have a chance to make a major upgrade to their supporting cast. If this team can add someone to park in the corner and hit threes, Kobe Bryant can lead this team to push Oklahoma City in the West.

THE REST OF THE DARK HORSES: The Knicks' Jeremy Lin was exposed in the first half finale in Miami as more of a J.J. Barea-type talent . . . The Mavericks have made strides defensively, but they're having an awful time getting some of their fading vets (Vince Carter, Lamar Odom) acclimated . . . With Manu Ginobili out and Tim Duncan no longer a go-to option, the Spurs are simply not built for the postseason . . . The Celtics are a donut team (nothing in the middle) that will likely have to go through Chicago and Miami to get to the Finals . . . The Pacers lack the take-over-a-game No. 1 option to carry them through the playoffs.

BEST VALUE: ➡ **LOS ANGELES LAKERS at 10-to-1**

LONG SHOTS (30-TO-1 & BEYOND)

The Grizzlies' 2011 postseason run was for real. They disposed of the top-seeded Spurs and went toe-to-toe with Oklahoma City in Round 2. They could be better this spring, as C Marc Gasol is now entrenched as an elite big. SF Rudy Gay is a weapon they didn't have last spring, and they should have PF Zach Randolph back from a knee injury in time for the playoffs.

THE REST OF THE REASONABLE LONG SHOTS:

The Nuggets need Danilo Gallinari to be a No. 1 scorer, and he's simply not yet ready . . . The Blazers' road struggles and lack of a point guard will be their downfall . . . The Magic might just be stubborn enough to hang on to free-agent-to-be Dwight Howard. If they do, they have the shot-makers to be a great value at these odds . . . The 76ers don't have the talent base to make a run at Chicago or Miami . . . Although they're decimated by injuries, the Hawks could scare Miami and Chicago if at full strength . . . The Rockets don't have that difference-maker for the postseason . . . The Timberwolves will not make noise in the playoffs, if they get there at all.

BEST VALUE: **MEMPHIS GRIZZLIES at 60-to-1**



Grizzlies small forward Rudy Gay, who was sidelined for the team's 2011 playoff run, leads the team in scoring this season with 18.9 points per game.