

The Nets acquire James Harden, shake up NBA power rankings

Adam Cohen, Sports Editor | January 29, 2021



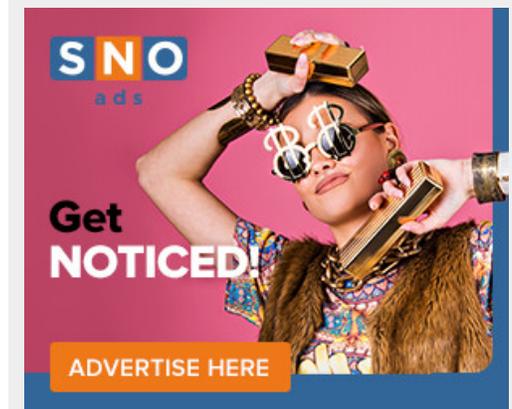
The Brooklyn Nets officially acquired eight-time All-Star James Harden from the Houston Rockets on Saturday, Jan. 16, in a four-team deal. Harden joins Kevin Durant and Kyrie Irving as the NBA's newest big three. The other two teams involved in the trade were the Cleveland Cavaliers and Indiana Pacers.

According to [espn.com](https://www.espn.com), the Rockets received Victor Oladipo (from the Pacers), Dante Exum (from the Cavs), Rodions Kurucs (from the Nets), and three unprotected first round draft picks in 2022, 2024 and 2026. The Nets traded for Caris Levert (from the Rockets via the Nets) and a 2023 second round pick from the Rockets. In addition to James Harden, the Nets also received a 2024 second round pick from Cleveland. Meanwhile, the Cavaliers received Jarrett Allen and Taurean Prince (from Brooklyn).

The trade surprised Anthony Baldeosingh, '22, Alexis Caldwell, '23, and Jacob Stotsky, '23. James Harden was a franchise icon in Houston after spending the last nine seasons with the team and leading them to eight consecutive playoff appearances. Despite making two appearances to the Western Conference finals, Harden never appeared in the NBA finals with the Rockets. Baldeosingh is convinced that Harden's lack of a finals appearance with the Rockets was one of the reasons why Harden demanded a trade away from Houston.

"I feel like Houston did everything that could (to retain Harden), but he could not win a championship there," Baldeosingh said. "He will go down as one of the greats, but Harden wanted to go somewhere that he was sure he could win."

Without their star player, the Houston Rockets are in a precarious position. As of Jan. 26, as



specified by nba.com, the Rockets are in 12th place in the Western conference with a 6-9 record. Caldwell argues that the package the Rockets received in return was not sufficient, but they could still sneak into the playoffs.

“They did obtain Victor Oladipo, which was interesting to see, but from my perspective this was not a good trade for the Rockets,” Caldwell said. “They have the potential to make the playoffs, but I don’t think they will make it as far (without Harden).”

Meanwhile, the Nets are in win-now mode. After acquiring high-profiled players such as Kyrie Irving and Kevin Durant in 2019, who combine to make over \$70 million in the 2020-21 season (as reported by spotrac.com), there was speculation among NBA fans that the Nets could not afford another elite player like Harden. As a result, Stotsky was amazed by the Harden trade.

“I was shocked at first when he went to the Nets because they already had Kyrie and KD, but I think it’s a good landing spot for him because they built a superteam there,” Stotsky said.

Baldeosingh expressed similar feelings of excitement and predicted the Nets will meet the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA finals this year. However, he believes the Nets have a lot of flaws and the Lakers are still the team to beat.

“LeBron and the Lakers still have the edge,” Baldeosingh said. “They are top five in offensive and defensive efficiency. That’s not to say that KD, Kyrie, and Harden are not doing their thing, but KCP (Kentavious Tannell Caldwell-Pope) is one of the best three-point shooters in the game right now and they have Anthony Davis.”

Since the Lakers have LeBron James, who has reached the NBA finals in nine of the last ten years, Baldeosingh is certain that the Nets made the trade to stop The King.

“KD understands what it takes (to beat LeBron),” Baldeosingh said. “Now LeBron has Anthony Davis and KD knew that he cannot come at LeBron with just Kyrie. That’s why he knew that he had to bring James Harden in.”

The Lakers are one of the more well-rounded teams, and while the Nets are talented, they have problems beyond the basketball court. Kyrie Irving has been critiqued as a team leader in the past with the Cavaliers and Boston Celtics. He was also given a \$50,000 fine by the NBA for violating the league’s COVID-19 policy. Stotsky predicts the Nets will win their first championship since joining the NBA in 1976, but understands that Irving can be a nuisance away from the court.

“Kyrie has some problems working with other teammates.” Stotsky said. “His attitude wasn’t exactly what they (the Celtics) wanted. He went to a club with his sister for his birthday and was not playing at the time because of at home issues that he does not really talk about. Then the Nets catch him (in the club) not wearing a mask. What is he focused on right now?”

Although the revamped Nets team has on the field and off the field problems, this trade is a huge turning point for the franchise. Caldwell anticipates that there will be a lot more NBA fans watching the Nets because of Durant, Irving and Harden.

“When the Nets obtained Kyrie, they got recognition,” Caldwell said. “When they obtained Durant, they had more people coming to their games. They profited through those two players (Durant and Irving) joining the Nets, and they just got Harden, so their sales will be pretty high.”

It remains to be seen whether or not the NBA will have fans this season, but having a team consisting of some of the three highest paid players in the league has put the Nets on the map. After acquiring Harden, the Brooklyn Nets are tied for fourth in the Eastern Conference with a 11-8 record, and just 1.5 games out of the #1 seed (as of Jan. 26, stated by nba.com). The Nets are well within striking distance of being the best team in the Eastern Conference. For that reason, Harden’s presence has convinced Baldeosingh, Caldwell, Stotsky and many other NBA fans that the Nets are one of the more exciting teams to watch in the NBA.

About the Writer



Adam Cohen, Sports Editor

Adam Cohen is a second-year student from New York City. He is a Communications major with a double minor in Math and Spanish. This is his first year on...

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