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The Best Nicknames in NBA History

JESSE DORSEY
MARCH 30, 2012



The **NBA** has always had a fascination with nicknames, which is no different than any other major sport, but it seems like when they grab a hold of a really good nickname, they don't let it go. It's one of the few sports in America where a nickname can turn into an entire persona, completely replacing the player's first name.

However, for every great nickname out there, we have today's hoard of nicknamers systematically tearing apart everything that is good when it comes to nicknames. They're becoming less clever and more formulaic, with everything from D-Rose to D12 passing as a nickname these days I've made it my mission to end this trend.

I can't stand by and let the people try to call Blake Griffin B-Griff or BG-3-2, I won't let it happen. Call it my last crusade, call it me being a whiny prick, call it whatever you want but I've made it my life's mission.

So, in honor of all the great nicknames out there, I've decided that we need to really take a look at what a good NBA nickname looks like.



NBA's Worst Videobomb Ever 🤪

20. The Ukraine Train

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Back when he was tearing up the hardwood, Potapenko, seemingly to the aid of Marv Albert, who could never say his name the same way twice, was known as the Ukraine Train.

You don't want to be there when 200 tons of steel from behind the Iron Curtain comes barreling down on you.

19. AK-47

2 OF 20

If there is one thing I hate more than simply taking the first initial of a player's first name and slapping it together with their last name to form a nickname (think D-Wade), it's taking the initials of the guy and adding his jersey number onto the end (like CP3).

However, when it works out as well as it did with the likes of Andrei Kirilenko, who am I to complain?

The big Russian has had the nickname for years, giving him the fierce-sounding nickname making everyone think that he's as dangerous as the Russian machine gun.

18. White Chocolate

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Whether it's the fact that he played with style or that he had "WHITEBOY" tattooed across his knuckles I'm not sure, but I do know that he was fun to watch.

The nickname White Chocolate came along when he was back in Sacramento and a [reporter honored him with it for his flashy playing style](#).

17. The Custodian

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It's a rare event in nickname history when a player's moniker outweighs his real name and even takes on a life of its own.

Brian Cardinal, known as the Custodian since his days at Purdue, was given the nickname because he did all the dirty work, cleaning up the glass and hustling for loose balls.

From there his legend grew and we've even started to hear people use the nickname when talking about the makeup of a team with things like, "Sure, they're a good team, but they don't have a custodian to clean up the dirt."

16. Downtown Freddie Brown

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...the arena, Dennis Johnson went by the classic "DJ," Dennis Scott's made name was Jewel and they even had a guy on the end of their bench named Jackie Robinson.

However, nothing took the name cake quite like Downtown Freddie Brown.

It seems fitting that the leader in three-point percentage the first year that the three-point line was added would have the nickname "Downtown." I'm sure [Marv Albert](#) agrees.

15. Bryant "Big Country" Reeves

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Everything about Bryant Reeves was big. He had a big body, a big man's game, big expectations and a big fall from grace soon after he was drafted and everyone realized that he couldn't play ball very well. Plus there was that nickname, that glorious nickname.

Big Country Reeves got his nickname back at Oklahoma State when Byron Houston saw his reaction to traveling on an airplane for the first time to New York. Now that's a classic nickname story right there for you, folks.

14. Jazzy Cabbages

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C'mon, you know I couldn't lea... Previous Next ...re off t

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...up or down), even starting a handful of games for the post-miscellaneous (misc), but his nickname, grown out of the confusing nature of his last name, is timeless.

13. Thunder Dan Majerle

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This is one of the many nicknames of the 90s that just oozed cool, almost to the point where Dan Majerle was completely referred to as "Thunder Dan" for the better part of his time in Cleveland (I can't speak for Phoenix).

He went from throwing down thunderous dunks as a young'un to looming like a storm from the perimeter as a grizzled veteran, always seeming like a storm throughout his career.

12. The Round Mound of Rebound

9 OF 20

I know the big man has slimmed down, but Charles Barkley will he's just a fat man in a skinny man's body these days.

My favorite part about the nickname many used when talking at Chuck or Sir Charles) is that it's a slight to Barkley while being a same time. That's a rare double-edged nickname.

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11. Hondo

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John Havlicek, forever endeared to Celtics fans simply as "Hondo," was the reason for the continued success of the Celtics franchise going from the 1960s into the '70s.

Whether it was his John Wayne-like stoicism or the fact that he sort of looks like The Duke, Havlicek got saddled (Get it?!) with the nickname from [the old Wayne flick bearing the same name](#).

10. Chocolate Thunder

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Before Thunder Dan there was Darryl "Chocolate Thunder" Dawkins, whose nicknames were many but the one that stuck out the most was Chocolate Thunder.

When he wasn't just being a weird dude in general, Dawkins was busy ripping down backboards, sending Bill Robinzine flying out of his way and living up to his nickname in every possible way.

The only thing I would change about basketball in the 80s would be to give the nickname "Chocolate Lightning," thereby creating the best man-big man fast-break combination in the history of the league.

Just think of the announcer's calls, just think of the puns, for Pet

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9. Penny Hardaway

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There are few players who have a nickname become so attached to them that it becomes who they are.

If we were to take a time machine back to 1997 and go ask a handful of people on the street who Anfernee Hardaway is, odds are we would get a bunch of blank stares, but whip out the name Penny Hardaway and everybody's on board.

The nickname was endearing, having come from his grandmother, and it seemed to fit him so well, even though I'm not really sure how a penny fits into basketball. It just worked, it wasn't something to be argued with.

8. The Microwave

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Vinnie Johnson heated up so quickly that he could bake a potato in 55 seconds and score six points while he was doing it.

One of the original combo-guards, Johnson was a streaky shooter whose streaks were quick bursts, giving him openings to put the ball on the deck and

This allowed him to score even easier, leading to the nickname Ainge.

You know when a guy from the team you're competing with for 1 positive nickname that it really

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7. The Big Dipper

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One of the most iconic figures in sports history also happened to have one of the most iconic nicknames to go along with his larger-than-life status.

The nickname made Chamberlain seem other-worldly, as if he came from space as a basketball-playing alien to score points and breed with our women, but it had simple roots.

As a younger fellow, Chamberlain was still quite tall, leading to him leaning down to get under doorways. His friends started calling him [Big Dipper because of it](#).

Simple, yet effective, as all nicknames should be.

6. Clyde Frazier

15 OF 20

It's strange how different a nickname can make a player seem. With a name like Walt Frazier's memory just seems to give off that of the guy that help title.

However, with a name like Clyde, somehow the style in his game conveyed. Clyde is smoother, silkier, more Frazier-esque than Walt been.

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and the character. This portrayal is not intended to be a caricature and is not intended to be a parody.

5. Dr. J

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It's simple, memorable and it's easily punned upon; there's nothing more you could ask for in a nickname.

Julius Erving was a man so entrenched in style and flair that he became the doctor of the hardwood, putting on clinics every time he stepped onto the court, dishing out silky layups and unfathomable dunks out in daily doses to his patients who could never be cured of their basketball madness.

The best medicine to get a guy to quell his basketball madness would be another dose of the Doctor, and he doled out plenty of doses in his day.

4. Earl the Pearl

17 OF 20

The only guy that could have out-nicknamed Clyde Frazier on the court of the 70s was Earl Monroe, the king of cool nicknames.

Whether you go with "Black Magic," "Black Jesus" or the classic "Black Pearl," you've got yourself a nickname for the ages.

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...names, and now from the courts just pop around the court and play the game the way...

3. Air Jordan

18 OF 20

Yet again, we see the simple yet effective nicknames coming up over and over again.

Michael Jordan was a superstar on par with Larry Bird and Magic Johnson in the '80s, but he became bigger than basketball in the '90s. The way he played the game above the rim and below the rim was unlike anything we'd ever seen before.

Jordan was so good that only a nickname like this could capture the way that every single person in this country felt about him. He was constantly in the air, so it made sense, but it also makes it seem like he played beyond the game, which he did.

2. Magic Johnson

19 OF 20

Magic Johnson is a lot of things; he's one of the three greatest L... the embodiment of basketball in the 1980s, he's a great figurehe... HIV/AIDS, but he was never, and I mean never, Earvin.

From the minute he was drafted until long after he shuffles off th... will be Magic. There's just something about him that makes it so... like "Magic Johnson" and still r...
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1. Pistol Pete

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This is the coup de gras, folks, very few people are able to take a nickname and completely become it on the court. Magic, Jordan, Dr. J and a few others did it, but Pistol Pete was able to be the Pistol every time he was out there.

There's something about the combination of the uniqueness of the nickname and the simplicity that makes it all that much better, but at the end of the day it comes down to the fact that The Pistol was The Pistol.

He played like a loaded gun, ready to fire at any time, packing a punch into a small frame and always finding angles that seemed unimaginable and firing at the perfect time.

If you are one of those twitterers, you can follow me [@JDorsey33](#).

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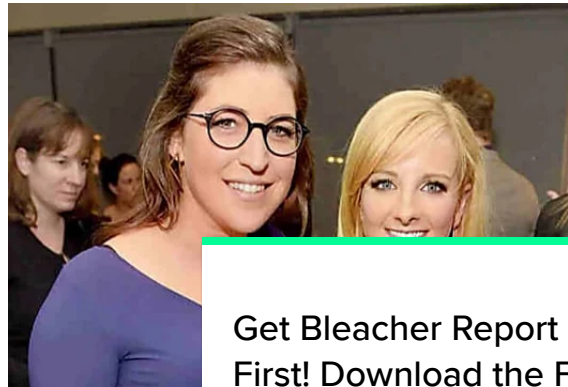
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