

best coaches in the nba history

best coaches in the nba history have shaped the landscape of professional basketball through their leadership, strategic innovation, and ability to develop talent. This article explores the most influential and successful coaches who have left an indelible mark on the NBA. From championship victories to revolutionary coaching philosophies, these individuals set the standard for excellence in the league. Understanding their careers and achievements provides valuable insight into what it takes to excel at the highest level of basketball coaching. This comprehensive overview delves into their coaching styles, career milestones, and lasting legacies. The discussion also highlights key attributes that distinguish the best coaches in the NBA history, providing a rich context for appreciating their contributions to the sport.

- Criteria for Evaluating NBA Coaches
- Legendary Coaches and Their Achievements
- Innovations and Coaching Philosophies
- Coaches with Most Championships
- Impact on Players and the Game
- Modern Era Coaching Giants

Criteria for Evaluating NBA Coaches

Determining the best coaches in the NBA history involves analyzing multiple factors beyond just win-loss records. Coaching effectiveness is measured through a combination of team success, adaptability, player development, and influence on the game. Key criteria include championship titles, regular season performance, playoff success, and the ability to innovate strategically. Longevity and consistency in coaching also play pivotal roles, as sustaining high performance over many seasons is indicative of true coaching excellence. Additionally, leadership qualities and the capacity to inspire and maximize player potential are essential components when evaluating the greatest NBA coaches.

Legendary Coaches and Their Achievements

The NBA has witnessed several legendary coaches whose accomplishments have become benchmarks in basketball history. These coaches not only amassed impressive win totals but also transformed teams into dynasties through their tactical acumen and motivational skills. Their records and accolades serve as testaments to their mastery of the sport and enduring influence.

Red Auerbach

Red Auerbach is widely regarded as one of the foundational figures in NBA coaching history. Leading the Boston Celtics to nine NBA championships in the 1950s and 1960s, Auerbach pioneered fast-break basketball and emphasized team play. His ability to assemble and manage talent, including legends like Bill Russell, established a winning culture that dominated the league for a decade.

Phil Jackson

Phil Jackson's coaching career is highlighted by his record 11 NBA championships, achieved with the Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers. Known as the "Zen Master," Jackson employed the triangle offense and focused on psychological and philosophical approaches to motivate his players. His success in managing superstar egos and fostering team cohesion remains unparalleled.

Pat Riley

Pat Riley is synonymous with tough defense and disciplined teams. He won five NBA championships as a head coach, primarily with the Los Angeles Lakers and Miami Heat. Riley's charismatic leadership and ability to adapt his coaching style to different rosters contributed to his sustained success across multiple decades.

Innovations and Coaching Philosophies

Innovative coaching strategies have often distinguished the best coaches in the NBA history. These leaders introduced new offensive systems, defensive schemes, and motivational techniques that influenced how basketball is played and coached today. Their philosophies created frameworks that other coaches have built upon, shaping the evolution of the game.

Triangle Offense

The triangle offense, perfected by Phil Jackson and his assistant Tex Winter, is a hallmark of NBA coaching innovation. This system emphasizes spacing, ball movement, and player versatility, allowing teams to operate efficiently in both half-court and transition situations. The triangle offense was instrumental in the championship success of the Bulls and Lakers under Jackson.

Defensive Intensity and Conditioning

Coaches like Pat Riley and Gregg Popovich have elevated the importance of defense and physical conditioning. Their teams are known for relentless defensive pressure, strategic rotations, and endurance, which wear down opponents over the course of a game or series.

This philosophy has become a cornerstone for championship contenders.

Player Empowerment and Psychological Tactics

Modern coaching approaches often incorporate psychological insights to enhance player performance. Phil Jackson's use of mindfulness and team-building exercises exemplifies this trend. Similarly, coaches emphasize communication, trust, and player empowerment to foster a positive environment and maximize potential.

Coaches with Most Championships

Winning multiple NBA championships is a defining characteristic of the best coaches in the NBA history. Championship titles reflect a coach's ability to prepare teams for the highest level of competition and manage the pressures of postseason play. Below is a ranked list of coaches with the most NBA championships:

1. Phil Jackson – 11 Championships
2. Red Auerbach – 9 Championships
3. Gregg Popovich – 5 Championships
4. Pat Riley – 5 Championships
5. John Kundla – 5 Championships

These coaches not only accumulated titles but also cemented their legacies through sustained excellence and adaptability across different eras of NBA basketball.

Impact on Players and the Game

The best coaches in NBA history have significantly influenced both the players they coached and the broader game of basketball. Their mentorship helped shape the careers of legendary athletes, while their strategic contributions advanced the sport's development. Through skill development, motivation, and tactical guidance, these coaches elevated the quality of play and inspired generations of players and coaches alike.

Player Development

Top NBA coaches are renowned for their ability to develop raw talent into elite performers. By tailoring coaching methods to individual strengths and weaknesses, they maximize player potential. Coaches like Gregg Popovich and Red Auerbach are credited with

nurturing Hall of Famers and turning role players into critical contributors.

Evolution of the Game

Innovations introduced by the best coaches have led to changes in playing style and basketball strategy. From Auerbach's fast-break emphasis to Popovich's adaptive defensive schemes, these leaders have influenced how teams approach offense, defense, and in-game adjustments. Their legacies include the modernization of basketball tactics and the integration of analytics and sports science.

Modern Era Coaching Giants

In the contemporary NBA landscape, several coaches have emerged as dominant figures, continuing the tradition of excellence established by their predecessors. These coaches combine traditional principles with modern innovations to succeed in today's fast-paced and analytics-driven environment.

Gregg Popovich

Gregg Popovich stands as a paragon of coaching longevity and success. With five NBA championships and numerous Coach of the Year awards, Popovich's leadership of the San Antonio Spurs exemplifies consistency, adaptability, and a focus on team-oriented basketball. His ability to integrate young talent with veteran leadership has been key to his sustained success.

Steve Kerr

Steve Kerr has quickly established himself among the best coaches in NBA history by leading the Golden State Warriors to multiple championships. Known for his emphasis on ball movement, three-point shooting, and player freedom, Kerr's coaching style has revolutionized modern offensive play and contributed to the Warriors' dynasty.

Erik Spoelstra

Erik Spoelstra's rise with the Miami Heat highlights the importance of adaptability and innovation in coaching. Winning multiple titles with a team that featured evolving rosters and playing styles, Spoelstra has demonstrated strategic flexibility and strong player relationships, securing his place among elite NBA coaches.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is considered the greatest NBA coach of all time?

Phil Jackson is widely regarded as the greatest NBA coach of all time due to his 11 NBA championships as a head coach with the Chicago Bulls and Los Angeles Lakers.

Which NBA coach has won the most championships?

Phil Jackson holds the record for the most NBA championships won by a head coach, with a total of 11 titles.

What coaching style is Gregg Popovich known for?

Gregg Popovich is known for his emphasis on team defense, ball movement, and player development, as well as his ability to adapt his coaching style to his roster.

How did Red Auerbach impact NBA coaching history?

Red Auerbach revolutionized NBA coaching with his fast-break offense and focus on team play, winning 9 championships with the Boston Celtics and setting a standard for coaching excellence.

Which coaches are known for their contributions to modern NBA offenses?

Coaches like Steve Kerr and Mike D'Antoni are credited with shaping modern NBA offenses through strategies like the three-point shot emphasis and pace-and-space systems.

Has any coach won NBA Coach of the Year multiple times?

Yes, several coaches including Gregg Popovich, Pat Riley, and Mike Kryzewski have won the NBA Coach of the Year award multiple times, recognizing their excellence in coaching.

What makes Pat Riley one of the best coaches in NBA history?

Pat Riley is known for his intense coaching style, defensive focus, and leadership, leading the Lakers to four championships in the 1980s and later winning titles with the Miami Heat.

Who are some of the best NBA coaches without a championship ring?

Coaches like Jerry Sloan and Doug Collins are highly respected for their coaching acumen despite not winning an NBA championship as head coaches.

How has Steve Kerr influenced coaching in the NBA?

Steve Kerr has influenced NBA coaching by implementing a fast-paced, three-point heavy offense with the Golden State Warriors, winning multiple championships and changing how teams approach offense.

Additional Resources

1. *Legacy of Legends: The Greatest NBA Coaches of All Time*

This book explores the careers and coaching philosophies of the most successful and influential NBA coaches in history. From Red Auerbach's pioneering strategies to Phil Jackson's zen approach, it delves into how these legends shaped the game. Through detailed anecdotes and analysis, readers gain insight into what made these coaches stand out on and off the court.

2. *Winning Mindsets: Lessons from NBA's Coaching Elite*

Winning Mindsets provides an in-depth look at the leadership styles and motivational techniques of the NBA's best coaches. Featuring interviews and case studies, the book reveals how coaches like Gregg Popovich and Pat Riley built dynasties through adaptability and mental toughness. It serves as a guide for aspiring coaches and basketball enthusiasts alike.

3. *Masterminds of the Court: The Strategic Genius of NBA Coaches*

This book highlights the tactical brilliance of NBA coaches who revolutionized basketball strategy. It examines how coaches such as Chuck Daly and Steve Kerr used innovation to outthink opponents and maximize their teams' potential. Readers will appreciate the breakdown of famous plays and adjustments that changed the course of games and championships.

4. *The Coaching Tree: NBA Mentors and Their Legacies*

The Coaching Tree traces the mentorship connections among NBA coaches and how knowledge has passed down through generations. It showcases the influence of coaching legends like Red Holzman and Larry Brown, illustrating how their protégés carried forward their philosophies. The book emphasizes the importance of leadership development within the NBA coaching community.

5. *Championship DNA: Building NBA Dynasties Through Coaching Excellence*

Championship DNA explores how top NBA coaches constructed teams capable of sustained success. Focusing on figures like Pat Riley and Gregg Popovich, it discusses roster building, player development, and team culture. The book offers readers a comprehensive understanding of what it takes to create and maintain championship-winning squads.

6. *On the Sidelines: Stories from NBA's Most Iconic Coaches*

On the Sidelines shares personal stories and behind-the-scenes moments from some of the NBA's most revered coaches. Through firsthand accounts and interviews, it reveals the challenges and triumphs faced by coaches like Doc Rivers and Erik Spoelstra. This narrative-driven book humanizes coaching legends and offers inspiration to readers.

7. *Philosophies in Motion: The Coaching Styles That Changed the NBA*

This book examines the diverse coaching philosophies that have shaped the modern NBA

game. It contrasts the defensive emphasis of coaches like Tom Thibodeau with the fast-paced approach of Mike D'Antoni. By analyzing different styles, the book provides a rich perspective on how coaching influences basketball's evolution.

8. *The Art of Coaching Basketball: Insights from NBA History's Best*

The Art of Coaching Basketball is a practical yet insightful guide featuring lessons from the greatest NBA coaches. It covers topics such as game preparation, player communication, and in-game adjustments. Incorporating wisdom from legends like Phil Jackson and Red Auerbach, the book is a valuable resource for coaches and fans.

9. *Beyond the X's and O's: The Leadership of NBA Coaching Greats*

Beyond the X's and O's focuses on the leadership qualities that distinguished NBA coaching icons. It explores how coaches like Pat Riley and Gregg Popovich managed personalities, fostered team chemistry, and inspired excellence. The book highlights that successful coaching is as much about leadership as it is about strategy.

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best coaches in the nba history: Basketball's Best Coaches Matt Chandler, 2024

Sometimes a basketball game's MVP is on the sidelines, not the court. Find out the facts about basketball's best coaches at both the professional and college level. Which coach has the best record? Who has won the most championships? And who has motivated and led the most successful ball players? Turn these pages to find out!

best coaches in the nba history: Coach: The Greatest Teachers in Sports and Their Lessons for Us All Justin Spizman, 2022-02-08 Every great sports coach is a life coach. This book identifies 168 outstanding coaches who have much to teach us about optimizing our performance, our character, and our lives. Coaches build winning teams and enable each athlete they mentor, guide, cajole, and nurture to achieve top performance. More than this, every great sports coach is first and last a life coach. Sportswriter Justin Spizman identifies and profiles 168 of the greatest coaches and managers of all time. They have much to teach us about optimizing our performance, our character, and our lives. Coach: The Greatest Teachers in Sports and Their Lessons for Us All profiles coaches in every significant sport, from football, basketball, baseball, and hockey to gymnastics, skating, rowing, rugby, soccer, and more. From field to court, diamond, rink, and pitch, the big leagues to the Olympics, college, and high school, Coach delivers the most teachable moments and methods—for play, for competition, and for life. Rich in quotations, each profile ends with lessons for top performance on and off the field, in and beyond the arena. Justin Spizman tracks all the relevant stats—for every sport keeps score—but he seeks first and last to disclose the mind, the heart, and the force of character that drive each of the indispensable men and women behind the world's most envied and admired athletes. His profiles range from the likes of Cardinals manager Tony La Russa (already an MLB legend), to Aimee Boorman and Cecile Canqueteau-Landi (who both coached gymnastics phenom Simone Biles), Bill Belichick (the take-no-prisoners field general of the New England Patriots), Pat Summitt (who racked up 1,098 wins as coach of the University of Tennessee

Lady Vols basketball team from 1974 to 2012), Marián Vajda (the coach behind tennis titan Novak Djokovic), and David Leadbetter (golf guru to champions Kathy Baker, Nick Faldo, and Michelle Wie).

best coaches in the nba history: *40 Greatest Players in Boston Celtics Basketball History* Robert W. Cohen, 2017-08 Biographical profiles and stats of forty prominent Boston Celtics players.

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best coaches in the nba history: *Focus On: 100 Most Popular Centers (Basketball)* Wikipedia contributors,

best coaches in the nba history: *Better than the Best* John C. Walter, Malina Iida, 2011-05-01 In these engaging and forthright interviews, thirteen African American athletes talk about how they endured through pain, loneliness, and rejection to become champions. In sports as diverse as football and fencing, wrestling and track and field, these men and women triumphed over the odds to become better than the best. Their legacy is in their accomplishments and in their determination to continue contributing to the societal transformation their efforts helped make possible. A V Ethel Willis White Book

best coaches in the nba history: *The 50 Greatest Players in Boston Celtics History* Robert W. Cohen, 2023-10 This book ranks, from 1 to 50, the top 50 players in Boston Celtics team history, using as measuring sticks the degree to which they impacted the fortunes of the team, the extent to which they added to the Celtics legacy, and the levels of statistical compilation and overall dominance they attained while wearing a Celtics uniform.

best coaches in the nba history: *Encyclopaedia Britannica Almanac 2010* Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 2010-01-01 The Encyclopaedia Britannica 2010 Almanac, is the complete source for fast facts. Published in association with Time Magazine, the Encyclopaedia Britannica Almanac 2010 includes more coverage of key subjects such as the arts, business, people, science, and the world than other leading almanacs. Read about the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Darfur, the rise of global food prices and the accompanying political and financial effects, the growing military operation in Afghanistan, the lives of influential political leaders, athletes, authors, heroes and much more !

best coaches in the nba history: *The Sports Hall of Fame Encyclopedia* David Blevins, 2012 Provides a comprehensive listing, including biographical information and statistics, of each athlete inducted into one of the major sports halls of fame.

best coaches in the nba history: *ESPN College Basketball Encyclopedia* Espn, 2009 A comprehensive reference provides historical overviews of all 335 Division 1 teams, season-by-season summaries, ESPN/Sagarin rankings of top-selected college basketball programs, and more.

best coaches in the nba history: *The History of Lika, Croatia: Land of War and Warriors* John R. Oreskovich, 2019 This is a history of Lika, a region of Croatia known for its soldiers and poverty. It is the only known history of Lika in English. What follows is a history of Lika which the author has divided into four epochs, the first, ancient Lika, when Lika was part of the Roman Empire. The second is Slav-Croatian Lika that existed prior to the arrival of the Ottomans, when Lika was integrated into the European feudal system. The third section is the Turkish wars, when the Habsburgs and their army controlled Lika. The fourth and last section is from the 19th century to the present, when the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the country that became Yugoslavia, replaced Austrian rule in Lika. The author's family is from the Lika region of western Croatia--

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working together. He examines historically successful NBA teams and identifies what made them so successful: individual talent, a system of putting players together, or good coaching. Oliver then uses these statistical tools and case studies to evaluate the best players in history, such as Magic Johnson, Wilt Chamberlain, Bill Russell, and Charles Barkley and how they contributed to their teams success. He does the same for some of the NBA's oddball players-Manute Bol, Muggsy Bogues, and Dennis Rodman and for the WNBA's top players. Basketball on Paper is unique in its incorporation of business and analytical concepts within the context of basketball to measure the value of players in a cooperative setting. Whether you are looking for strategies or new ideas to throw out while watching the ballgame at a sports bar, Dean Oliver's Basketball on Paper will give you amazing new insights into teamwork, coaching, and success.

best coaches in the nba history: Motor City Legends: Michigan's Sports Legacy Robert Reynolds, 2017-01-06 Motor City Legends explores the rich history of Detroit area and Michigan related competitive sports and individual athletes through the careers of old-time greats as Al Kaline, Doak Walker/Bobby Layne, Gordie Howe, Joe Louis and George Yardley. Also recent legends Barry Sanders, Isiah Thomas, Steve Yzerman, Chauncey Billups, Miquel Cabrera, the Fab Five, defunct teams Michigan Panthers and Detroit Shock, goalie fights, odd Tigers' trades in the 1959/60 seasons, Benton Harbor's House of David baseball teams, and Lions Alex Karras squaring off against pro wrestling bad man Dick the Bruiser. The messy results of Gates Browns' unusual slide into second base. There's the time a rival ball player stole home against the Tigers twice in a single game. Countless items of trivia are presented in this stroll down Michigan Sports Memory Lane. Much of the book centers on a large Who's Who section of many athletic personalities who were raised in Michigan, attended a local school, or played on an athletic team.

best coaches in the nba history: America's Greatest Coaches Mike Koehler, 1990 First ever compilation to rank coaches in 19 major men's and women's sports. Includes bios of top five coaches at each level of play--high school, college and professional.

best coaches in the nba history: NBA Coaches Playbook National Basketball Coaches Association (NBCA), 2008-09-09 At a time when more high school and college coaches and players are studying the pro game to get an edge, top coaches from the National Basketball Association have assembled their knowledge in one authoritative coaching manual. NBA Coaches Playbook provides a collection of proven methods and strategies for maximizing player and team performance. Many top current college coaches, such as Duke's Mike Krzyzewski, Louisville's Rick Pitino, and Auburn's Nell Fortner, attest to the benefits gleaned from the pro level. And now that information is available at your fingertips—be it from Phoenix Suns coach Mike D'Antoni on the fast break, Phil Jackson and Tex Winter on the triangle offense, or Pete Carril and Eddie Jordan on the Princeton Offense. In all, 28 successful coaches with more than 750 years of coaching experience all over the world share their wisdom on topics for which they are considered the experts. Coaches reading NBA Coaches Playbook are guaranteed to find the technical and tactical insights invaluable to their own teaching and game planning. Each chapter offers technical teaching points, practice drills, tactical nuances, or game management tools that can provide a coaching edge. The special plays section, featuring many of the book's 450-plus Xs and Os diagrams, will be especially popular among coaches seeking the out-of-bounds and last-second plays that work when the game is on the line. NBA Coaches Playbook gives coaches the ability to access top-level instruction and then use that knowledge in their own system to achieve greater success each season.

best coaches in the nba history: A Biographical Directory of Professional Basketball Coaches Jeff Marcus, 2003-04-28 Coaches have played a vital yet changing role throughout basketball's professional history. Biographical Directory of Professional Basketball Coaches is a comprehensive directory of all the professional coaches in the history of United States basketball. Jeff Marcus provides, in alphabetical order, the year-by-year coaching records for every pro major league coach in basketball history beginning with the American Basketball League (ABL), which formed in 1925 and was the first league to play in larger arenas on the East Coast and in the Mid West, then tracking the birth of the National Basketball League (NBL) from its onset in 1937 to its

convergence 12 years later with the BAA, forming what we know today as the NBA. Brief but detailed biographical sketches are provided for every coach in these leagues. A wonderful resource for basketball fans and sports buffs.

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best coaches in the nba history: Pipeline to the Pros Ben Kaplan, Danny Parkins, 2024-04-16 Jeff Van Gundy. Brad Stevens. Frank Vogel. Mike Budenholzer. Tom Thibodeau. Sam Presti. Leon Rose. Before you knew his name, before he drafted your favorite player, before he guided your team to a championship, he had a playing career of his own at an NCAA Division III college. He didn't play for fortune &- the NBA was out of reach, and his school didn't even give athletic scholarships. He didn't play for fame &- his games weren't televised, and the stands were rarely full. Whatever the motivation, he simply couldn't give up the game of basketball. And that didn't change after graduation, when it was time to pick a career path. For the first time in league history, NBA coaches and general managers are just as likely to have played Division III basketball as they are to have played in the NBA. While the number of former D3 players working in the NBA is higher than ever, small college alums have served in leadership positions since the league's founding. They shaped the NBA into what it is today, playing integral roles in the Lakers' initial success in Los Angeles, the inception of several expansion franchises, the creation of the popular All-Star Weekend dunk contest, the globalization of the league, and more. Their improbable and inspiring journeys tell a bigger story &- the history of small college athletics, the evolution of coaching and management in the NBA, and the hiring practices in the most competitive fields. Their alma maters were small, but their impact on the game, and the implications of their success, loom large.

best coaches in the nba history: Coaching Basketball Successfully Morgan Wootten, Joe Wootten, 2012-10-11 Legendary UCLA coach John Wooden once said, "People say Morgan Wootten is the best high school basketball coach in the country. I disagree. I know of no finer coach at any level—high school, college, or pro." Morgan Wootten has retired from coaching, but his knowledge of the game remains unsurpassed and keen as ever. Coaching Basketball Successfully contains a wealth of Wootten's timeless wisdom. And, in this third edition, Wootten adds even more value—the coaching experiences, methods, and tactics of his son Joe, a successful high school coach himself. Loaded with insights, instruction, drills, and Xs and Os, Coaching Basketball Successfully is the best single resource on making the most of your program, team, and players each season.

best coaches in the nba history: The Sports Hall of Fame Encyclopedia Dave Blevins, 2011-12-23 In 1936, the Baseball Hall of Fame was established to honor the legends of the sport. The first inductees were some of the greatest names of the dugout, including Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth. Less than ten years later, in 1945, the Hockey Hall of Fame inducted its first members. The Soccer Hall of Fame was established in 1950, followed by the Basketball Hall of Fame in 1959, and the Football Hall of Fame in 1963. In all, more than 1,400 inductees-players, teams, and behind the scenes personnel-have been enshrined in these five halls of fame. The Sports Hall of Fame Encyclopedia is a comprehensive listing of each inductee elected into one or more of these major sports halls of fame. From Hank Aaron to Fred Zollner, this book contains biographical information, sport and position(s) played, and career statistics (when applicable) of each of the more than 1,400 honorees. The book also includes specific appendixes for each shrine, in which inductees are listed alphabetically and by year of induction. Also included are appendixes briefly describing the history of each hall of fame.

best coaches in the nba history: Why Indiana is the Center of the Basketball World

Michael G. Ludlow, 2014-01-23 Basketball is now the second most popular sport world-wide trailing only futbol (soccer) in the number of participants, fans, and leagues. Its popularity is due to the fact that the game of basketball requires the most number of physical skills making basketball players the most complete athletes. The speed, grace and teamwork required to play the game combined with the athleticism required makes it beautiful to watch and fun to play. The United States has always been and always will be the greatest basketball nation. Although the rest of the world has

been catching up with us (note the increasing number of international players in the NBA from all parts of the world) we invented it (thank you Dr. Naismith); we perfected it (thank you Coach Wooden, Bill Russell, Larry, Magic, Michael, Lebron, etc.); and we still have the highest concentration of excellence at all levels - high school, college and professional. Indiana has long been known to be basketball crazy. The image of a basketball goal on every garage, barn or any other place you can put one (including the governor's residence) is based, as most legends are, on a ring of truth. Indiana has always been basketball crazy. Decades before "March Madness" became a national trademark, Hoosier Hysteria rippled through the entire state at tourney time. Other states can claim they are the "best" basketball state. Certainly North Carolina does and cases can be made for Kentucky, New York and California. This study provides overwhelming statistical evidence and so much anecdotal support that it is undeniable that Indiana IS the center of the basketball world.

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