Why LeBron James is Better Than Michael Jordan

The Numbers Are Not the Whole Story

By Owen Kovacs
kovacso@etsu.edu

Who is the greatest basketball player of all time? Is it LeBron James or Michael Jordan? This has been a question in the basketball world for about 10 years now. Some basketball fans and analysts claim you can't compare them because they played in different eras. For the sake of this paper though, we are going to compare the two players and I'm going to explain why I think LeBron is the better one.

Player	Points per game	Assists per game	Rebounds per game	Steals per game	Blocks per game	Field Goal Percentage	Field Goal Attempts per game
LeBron James (As of June 2019)	27.2	7.2	7.4	1.6	0.8	50.4%	19.6
Michael Jordan	30.1	5.3	6.2	2.3	0.8	49.7%	22.9

Source: landofbasketball.com

The first reason why I think LeBron is the greatest of all time is that he is better at more aspects of the game than Michael Jordan. When it comes to scoring, rebounding, and passing I think LeBron has the upper hand. As you can see on the chart above, it says Michael averaged 3 more points than LeBron over the course of his career. This might get you thinking why I think LeBron is better at scoring. The reason that I do is because LeBron took 3 less shots than Michael per game. So if you assume LeBron takes 3 more shots a game, he would be either tied or beating Michael in career points per game. When it comes to passing LeBron has the firm

upper hand. LeBron averages just about two more assists per game than Michael. Not to mention LeBron for the first half of his career played with horrible teammates, but I'll touch on that more later. LeBron is also a better rebounder. He averages a little over one rebound more than Michael. This might be because LeBron is 2 inches taller and weighs 40 more pounds, but hey that's also a big reason I think LeBron is better.

Let's now talk defense. I do think Michael is the better defender. He averaged more steals and had the same amount of blocks per game. However, I think a big reason why Michael is better defender is because LeBron plays in an era where there are better scorers. What I mean by better scorers is players in today's NBA can shoot 3-pointers a lot better than in Jordan's era. So when it comes to the overall better player, LeBron wins.

Player	Full Seasons Played	MVPs	Finals Record	Finals MVPs	All-Star Appearances	All-NBA First Team Selections
LeBron James	16	4	3-6	3	15	12
Michael Jordan	15	5	6-0	6	14	10

Source: landofbasketball.com

Next is comparing the career accolades between the two. To start Michael Jordan has one more MVP award than LeBron, but this could also change because LeBron's career is not over yet and he is still playing insanely good basketball. LeBron has one more All-Star appearance than Michael Jordan. This number will most likely go up for LeBron considering he will make the All-Star game as long as he is in the league. LeBron also has 2 more All-NBA First Team

selections. An excuse for Michael having less in both of these categories could be that LeBron has played more seasons. Well it isn't LeBron's fault that Michael quit basketball for baseball.

I wanted to save the comparison of each other's NBA finals appearance for its own paragraph because this one is going to take a lot of explaining. If you take a look at the chart above you see that Michael Jordan's NBA Finals record is 6-0 and LeBron's record is 3-6. Obviously Michael's record is way better than LeBron's, but I don't think this makes Michael the better player. First off, Michael never ever had to carry the team on his own. In all of his finals appearances he had one of the best defenders in NBA history by his side, Scottie Pippen. Not to mention Pippen also averages around 20 points every year. Jordan also had a top 3 rebounder of all time, Dennis Rodman. So Jordan got to play with an all-star on his side for all 6 NBA Finals appearances. I'm not saying LeBron hasn't played with some insanely good players, because he has. Examples of these players are Dwyane Wade, Chris Bosh, and Kyrie Irving. LeBron has also had to play in the Finals with zero all stars 3 times. Being the only all star on the team and having to take on multiple all stars is nearly impossible, especially when you don't even have reliable role players.

Michael Jordan also had one of the best head coaches of all-time, Phil Jackson. Phil Jackson in his coaching career has won 11 NBA championships. Michael did not win a finals without him. LeBron however has had one coach that has been somewhat successful. The most successful coach that LeBron had is probably Erik Spoelstra, and he only won a championship when LeBron was on his team.

Another point is that LeBron has played way tougher competition in the NBA Finals. LeBron has faced superteams the Warriors (2015-2018) and the Spurs (2007,2013-2014). The

Spurs had 2 all stars during this time and the Warriors either had 3 or 4. LeBron also faced the Thunder in 2012 who consisted of Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook, one of the best duos of all time. So in total, LeBron faced teams with at least two all stars 8 of the 9 times in the NBA Finals. Michael only faced teams with two all stars 4 out of the 6 times.

The biggest problem I have with this topic is people not willing to see the other sides point of view. People born in 1980s-1990s will most likely think Michael is the best to ever play because that is who they grew up watching. People born in the 2000s will most likely think LeBron is the greatest of all time because that is who they are watching right now. People that grew up in the 1980s-1990s just can't realize that LeBron plays in a tougher league right now and his championship losses don't determine his whole legacy.