

A super battle among the 'superteams'

This is a National Basketball Association (NBA) era of superstars teaming up, with franchise players capable of single-handedly leading their sides to wins but not titles. Following an intriguing "arms race" during the offseason, The Straits Times looks at the five biggest superteams who will contend for the Larry O'Brien trophy this term.



Golden State Warriors

Where they finished last season: Champions

2016-17 regular season: 67-15

Key new faces: Omri Casspi (Minnesota Timberwolves), Nick Young (Los Angeles Lakers).

Key departures: Ian Clark (New Orleans Pelicans).

Why they are still the team to beat: They have almost the same roster as last season and have even managed to add more depth. In Young, they have instant offence off the bench and in Casspi, they have another weapon from three-point range. With the "Big Four" of Klay Thompson, Draymond Green, Kevin Durant and Stephen Curry, it is hard to see how any other team can generate more offence than the Warriors.

From left: Klay Thompson, forward Draymond Green, forward Kevin Durant and guard Stephen Curry



Dwyane Wade, LeBron James



Cleveland Cavaliers

Where they finished last season: NBA Finals

2016-17 regular season: 51-31 (second in East)

Key new faces: Jose Calderon (Atlanta Hawks), Jae Crowder (Boston Celtics), Jeff Green (Orlando Magic), Derrick Rose (New York Knicks), Isaiah Thomas (Boston), Dwyane Wade (Chicago Bulls).

Key departures: Kyrie Irving (Boston).

Why they can win: Because they have LeBron James and a deeper roster. Kevin Love's move from forward to centre will see him receive the ball more following Irving's exit and will open up more space for his team-mates. However, they will need to manage their ageing (average age 29.5 years) and injury-prone squad well.



Kyrie Irving



Boston Celtics

Where they finished last season: Eastern Conference Finals

2016-17 regular season: 53-29, best in East

Key new faces: Gordon Hayward (Utah Jazz), Kyrie Irving (Cleveland), Marcus Morris (Detroit Pistons), Jayson Tatum (3rd pick in this year's NBA Draft).

Key departures: Avery Bradley (Detroit Pistons), Jae Crowder (Cleveland), Gerald Green (Milwaukee Bucks), Amir Johnson (Philadelphia 76ers), Kelly Olynyk (Miami Heat), Isaiah Thomas (Cleveland).

Why they can win: Irving – who is keen to prove himself after stepping out of James' shadow – and Hayward can score and facilitate. Their bench is deep and versatile. However, the Celtics – the fourth-worst rebounding team last season – must address their problem of getting beaten on boards and must learn to cope without their two best defenders – Crowder and Bradley.



Oklahoma City Thunder

Where they finished last season: Western Conference first round

2016-17 regular season: 47-35, sixth in West

Key new faces: Carmelo Anthony (New York), Isaiah Canaan (Chicago), Paul George (Indiana Pacers).

Key departures: Taj Gibson (Minnesota), Enes Kanter (New York), Victor Oladipo (Indiana).

Why they can win: They have gone from a one-man show to a triple threat. MVP Russell Westbrook should get plenty of support from 10-time All-Star Anthony and four-time All-Star George, and it is almost certain the Thunder will not remain the league's worst three-point shooting team. However, all three stars love isolation plays and there could be a lack of ball movement, especially as there are not many visionary passers in the rest of the roster. The trio will also need to work on chemistry.

OKC's Carmelo Anthony, Paul George and Russell Westbrook



Houston Rockets

Where they finished last season: Western Conference semi-finals

2016-17 regular season: 55-27, third in West

Key new faces: Chris Paul (Los Angeles Clippers), Zhou Qi (43rd pick in last year's NBA Draft), Luc Mbah a Moute (Clippers), P.J. Tucker (Toronto Raptors).

Key departures: Patrick Beverley, Lou Williams (Clippers).

Why they can win: Paul's vision, passing, shooting, and ability to lift those around him make him one of the best floor generals to play the game. With last season's Most Valuable Player (MVP) runner-up James Harden alongside, Houston arguably have the best backcourt in the league, and they will not be short of firepower. But peaking during the postseason could be a challenge. Mike D'Antoni's high-octane style is demanding and the coach does not favour a deep rotation.



Chris Paul