

Looking at Arsenal's Chances of Winning the Premier League After an Impressive Win in the North London Derby

ALEX LEE

Following a decisive 2-0 win over Tottenham Hotspur, Arsenal seems to be in nearly unstoppable form. They have not lost in the league for over four months and have won seven out of their last eight Premier League matches. However, they are approaching a testing run of fixtures and have yet to play the current champions, Manchester City, who are currently in second place. So, just how good are Arsenal's chances of winning the Premier League?

Prior to the season, Arsenal were given just a 0.13 percent chance of winning the Premier League. Many fans would have been content with a top four finish, but now, the team finds themselves eight points above Manchester City.

This 0.13 percent chance stemmed from the seemingly large gap in quality between them and the favorites — Manchester City and Liverpool — however it turned out that this gap may not be as big as many had anticipated.

The young squad, starting Martin Ødegaard, Bukayo Saka, and several others, have found a new identity playing together under Mikel Arteta. While they seem confident playing together, their starting XI remains relatively unchanged from week to week, which may be a potential cause for weakness as they enter the second half of the season. A look at Arsenal's bench shows the steep drop-off in talent from their main XI. Many supporters are worried about this drop-off as they enter back into European competition and as the match schedule be-

gins to intensify. They have already seen Gabriel Jesus be subject to a long-term injury, and they cannot afford to lose any more talent. Squad depth is the main difference when you compare Arsenal and Manchester City. Manchester City is not as heavily impacted by injuries as they have a constant rotation between the starting XI and their deep bench filled with quality players, allowing them to be so successful over the course of a 38-game season.

The first Premier League meeting of the season between the teams will be on February 15 and if Arsenal can avoid defeat, they will be in a spectacular position to go on and win. The concern for Arsenal fans will be if Manchester City manages to win and proceed to go on a long win streak — one that they have experienced in a few



Martin Odegaard celebrates Arsenal's win against Tottenham.

of their previous seasons. Once Manchester City gets into a streak like this, there is a certain inevitability that allows them to get results and run away with the Premier League title.

To hold onto their Premier League winning

chances, Arsenal will need to stop Manchester City's potential win streak and maintain their own form. In recent years, we have seen several teams holding first place in January that were then unable to keep their momentum going. Of course, we have also seen

Can Brock Purdy Lead the Niners Through the Playoffs?

JOHN MORAN

The title of 'Mr. Irrelevant,' given to the last pick of the NFL draft, is one of the funniest yet humiliating names in football. This title has been handed out since Paul Salata, a wide receiver for the Indianapolis Colts during the 1950s, came up with the idea for a publicity and charity event for football's least important player in 1976. 'Irrelevant Week' has also been a tradition since then, with the Mr. Irrelevant of that year's draft being the center of a week of ceremonies and parties, including a trip to Disney, a golf tournament, and the Lowman Banquet. During this Banquet, Mr. Irrelevant receives the Lowman Trophy. This cheeky award mimics the Heisman Trophy, but instead

of showcasing a player powerfully stiff-arming an opponent, it showcases a wide-eyed player as he fumbles the football. Truth be told, Irrelevant Week is usually the most attention the last pick of the draft is ever given. But this isn't the case with Brock Purdy, 2022's Mr. Irrelevant, and the San Francisco 49ers starting quarterback.

After the 49ers' first and second-string quarterbacks, Trey Lance and Jimmy Garoppolo went down with injuries in Week Two and Week 13, the only man left in the quarterback room was the last guy anyone would have chosen for the job: Brock Purdy. In the first start of his career in Week 14, Purdy became the first Mr. Irrelevant to ever throw a forward pass in the NFL, and he hasn't looked back. Since December, he has been slicing and dic-

ing throughout the league, maintaining an undefeated record six games into his career, with five regular season wins, securing the NFC West title and his most recent victory against the Seattle Seahawks in the Wild Card round taking the 49ers further in the playoffs.

While he has performed well, questions will always arise when a seventh-round draftee is at the center of a franchise. Is Brock Purdy the real deal? Can he continue his streak and take the 49ers past the second round of the playoffs? Can he pull his weight for the team?

The first thing to note is that this team may have the most complete roster in the league, aside from their quarterback. The 49ers are absolutely stacked defensively. Within the box, they are simply unrivaled. Edge rusher Nick Bosa has been

a Pro-Bowler in each of his three seasons in the NFL, and this season has been his best yet, such as his 18.5 sacks on the season. Linebacker Fred Warner combines strong run-stopping ability with excellent pass coverage, making him the second-best linebacker in the league for yards allowed per coverage snap. Fellow linebacker Dre Greenlaw isn't too far behind in eleventh, making for an absolutely lights-out coverage duo in the middle of the field. Safety Talanoa Hufanga and cornerback Charvarius Ward maintain control over the secondary with a powerful grasp, with Ward having an extremely low missed tackle rating of just 5 percent. Altogether, the 49ers' defense is the best in the league, allowing the least points out of all thirty-two teams.

So Purdy has defensive backing in spades, but what about his own realm? What about his offense? Well, they aren't lacking either. The offense has its own cast of powerhouses, including running back Christian McCaffrey, tight end George Kittle, wide receivers Deebo Samuel and Brandon Aiyuk, and offensive tackle Trent Williams. Williams holds the league's highest grade for run blocking, Kittle has second-best receiving grade of all tight ends, and Aiyuk is eighteenth out of one hundred twenty-three in the league as a receiver, while McCaffrey has proven himself as one of the most skilled and most versatile players in football. Purdy's side of the field has plen-

ty of weapons, but he still needs to pull the trigger. And pull the trigger he has.

Across his six regular season games (five starts and one partial game after Garoppolo was hurt), he maintained an average quarterback rating of 107.3, currently one of the bests in the NFL. His 3.25 regular season touchdown to interception ratio is the fifth-best in the league. He also had the highest touchdown percentage in the league. So his regular season was clearly high quality, and he was even better in the playoffs. This past Saturday against the Seahawks, Purdy had one of the best games of his life. He threw for three hundred thirty two yards and three touchdowns without an interception, with a rushing touchdown as well. This playoff performance puts him up there with the stat lines of Tom Brady in the '01 AFC Playoffs, one of the most notable playoff efforts of all time.

However, even in a game where he put up a monster stat line like that, he did show some flashes of weakness. In his first throw of the game, he loaded up to throw to a wide-open Deebo Samuel on a crossing route, but he overthrew the route by almost 10 yards, nearly leading to an interception. It should have been an easy throw to make, but he had just overdone it. Another throw to Jauan Jennings on a crossing route to the middle of the field was nearly picked off by a linebacker who Purdy must've not seen as he read the field. While it's understandable for Purdy





Three Realistic Trades for the MLB Off-Season

BRANDON HORNE

With the World Series in the rearview mirror, it is time to look ahead and think about moving major pieces around to try and win a championship. With all of the top free agents locked up for long-term deals, each team is in a completely different situation this off-season. Teams like the San Francisco Giants and Oakland Athletics have had extremely disappointing off-seasons, with the Giants missing out on both Aaron Judge and Carlos Correa, and the Athletics simply refusing to spend any money on a big-name player. Other teams, like the New York Mets and New York Yankees, have had extremely positive off-seasons, committing just under one billion dollars to multiple big-name players, such as Judge and Justin Verlander. The Mets actually had a deal in place with Correa, which, similar to the Giants' deal, fell through due to physical concerns, resulting in a third contract for Correa with the Verlander twins. The off-season has been tentative thus far, and many teams would like to spice things up by bringing in a new player to galvanize

their group and lead them to a World Series. Here are three realistic trades that would benefit MLB teams heading into the 2023 season.

The Los Angeles Angels trade Shohei Ohtani to the San Francisco Giants for Joey Bart, alongside top prospects, Marco Luciano, Kyle Harrison, and Casey Schmitt.

Okay, I know this trade sounds ridiculous. I know Shohei Ohtani is currently one of the best players in the entire league, but look at his contract. He only has one more year left with the Angels, who, for his entire career, have been mired in the depths of the AL Central, having not made the playoffs since 2014. Ohtani is becoming impatient, and with only one year left on his contract, he is becoming somewhat expendable. The Angels' formula is clearly not working, and it is time for them to accept that their roster is not championship material, which means trading away the stars for prospects. Joey Bart is a blooming (former top prospect) catcher, who perhaps needs a change of scenery to help unlock the vast reserves of potential he seems to be wasting in San Francisco. Luciano, Harrison, and Schmitt are current pros-

pects number one, number two, and number six respectively in the Giants organization according to the MLB's website. Since all of them are under the age of 23, they are considered to have high ceilings. This trade would benefit the Angels by getting the most out of Ohtani, who will likely not re-sign with them in the coming year, and benefit the Giants by giving them one year of Ohtani's service. This, when coupled with the mastermind Gabe Kapler, could boost them into championship contention.

The Philadelphia Phillies trade JT Realmuto to the New York Yankees for Kyle Higashioka, Luis Severino, and number six Yankees prospect Trey Sweeney.

With the Yankees looking for a catcher, they should trade for the best one: JT Realmuto. The Yankees have incredible depth at shortstop, holding two of the highest touted prospects in ages, leaving their third-best shortstop prospect somewhat expendable for trade. While the Phillies just signed Trea Turner to a mega-deal, they lack a consistent second baseman. If Sweeney were to learn from Turner, switching Sweeney to second base would make a lot of sense. Kyle Higashioka fills the hole at catcher



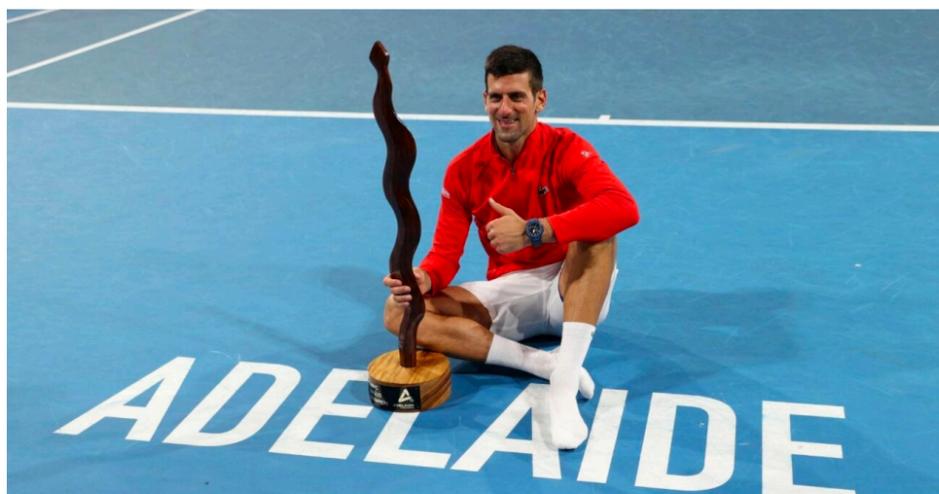
for the short term, allowing the Phillies to look for other options. They add great pitching depth with former Yankee ace Luis Severino, who throws in the high 90 range and has shown great signs coming off major injuries. For the Yankees, they add another major piece in their quest for championship number 28. Owner Hal Steinbrenner is known to be aggressive in off-seasons and the Yankees could cash in all their chips to truly push for the championship.

The Atlanta Braves trade Max Fried and Ronald Acua Jr. to the Los Angeles Dodgers for Mookie Betts and Brusdar Graterol.

In this trade, two contenders swap top players.

The Dodgers add pitching depth and a face of the franchise with Ronald Acua Jr., who will replace Cody Bellinger to fill the Dodgers' last major flaw in their starting nine. Max Fried bolsters their roster and gives them a reliable number-one lefthander in front of the aging Clayton Kershaw. The Braves get Mookie Betts, who is still playing some of the best baseball of his career, as well as flamethrower Brusdar Graterol, who should help their subpar bullpen immensely. The Dodgers add younger star players to extend their championship window, while the Braves add older, veteran stars to ideally push for their second title in three years.

Djokovic's Triumph at Adelaide International



Djokovic lifts the Adelaide International trophy after his win in the final against Sebastian Korda.

BEN SHIN

As a warm-up to the 2023 Australian Open, Novak Djokovic won the Adelaide International tournament. Last year, Djokovic was not able to play at the Australian Open due to visa issues. From his success in Adelaide, however, he looks ready to dominate the competition this year. In his first two rounds in Adelaide, he defeated the French Constant Lestienne and French Quentin Halys in straight sets. In his next round, he faced the young Canadian play-

er Denis Shapavolov, and beat him again in straight sets, 6-3 6-4. Next, he faced world number eight Daniil Medvedev in the semi-finals. Djokovic also beat him in straight sets, winning 6-3 6-4. In the finals, he played the young American Sebastian Korda and beat him in a close three-set match, 6-7 (8) 7-6(3) 6-4. The first set was won by Korda in an extremely close tiebreaker, 10-8. Despite this, Djokovic dug deep and played with effective groundstrokes, ultimately winning the next two sets. His win at Adelaide is

his 92nd career win and demonstrates just how dominant Djokovic is. Overall, the Adelaide International Tournament has given Djokovic both a great start to the 2023 season and a warm-up for the first grand slam of the year. In Melbourne, Djokovic will first face Roberto Carballs Baena and if he wins, he could possibly play the Spaniard Pablo Carreo Busta in the fourth round. Many fans and reporters are saying that Djokovic has a real chance of winning the Australian Open this year.

The Best and Worst of 2022-2023 Fantasy Football

THEO SFIKAS

As we finally end a remarkable 2022 NFL season, it's time we look back at what really matters: Fantasy football. Along with consistently active veterans like Patrick Mahomes and Christian McCaffrey, we saw several new faces light up the field this year.

Veteran quarterbacks Josh Allen and Patrick Mahomes both had a phenomenal season, each averaging over 25 points per game. Somewhat surprisingly, Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts also had a fantastic season -- averaging over 25 points and achieving a career-high 101.5 rating. While quarterbacks including Joe Burrow and Justin Fields also performed well this season, Dak Prescott and Lamar Jackson were both quite disappointing, having their 2022 season riddled with injuries.

In terms of tight ends, most had a mediocre season.

George Kittle, Mark Andrews, and TJ Hockenson all averaged slightly under 15 points. However, we saw a spectacular season from a future Hall of Famer and arguably the most valuable player in the 2022 fantasy football season: Travis Kelce. Kelce averaged roughly 20 points per game -- well above the mark set by any other tight end this season. He also had 12 touchdowns in the season, making significant contributions to the team in the first 13 games. He ended up tying for second place for the most touchdowns by a tight end in a singular season.

Despite his trade to the 49ers, running back McCaffrey continued to put up amazing numbers this season along with all-stars Austin Ekeler and Josh Jacobs. Regardless of sporadic successes, the NFL backfield saw a lot of disappointment this season. Cam Akers, who experts believed was going to perform

spectacularly, had a less-than-mediocre season. Both Jonathan Taylor and Najee Harris, who were held to extremely high standards after remarkable 2021 seasons, averaged just under 14 points.

On the bright side, we saw a lot of success downfield. Wide receivers like Davante Adams, Keenan Allen, and Stefon Diggs had phenomenal seasons. The true spectacle, however, came from third-year receiver Justin Jefferson. Jefferson had his fair share of highlight reel plays as he broke several franchise records, including the most receptions and receiving yards in a single season by a Viking. Receivers like Jamar Chase, Amon-Ra St. Brown, CeeDee Lamb, and Tyreek Hill also had their share of wins while rookie receiver Garrett Wilson led the Jets to one of their most successful seasons in the last few decades.



Buffalo Bills Safety Damar Hamlin Sees Outpour of Support Following Horrific On-Field Accident

CHARLES VEST

A horror story unfolded earlier this month as millions watched Damar Hamlin, a safety for the Buffalo Bills, collapse after making a tackle midway through the first quarter of the team's Monday night game against the Bengals. According to the on-site EMTs, Hamlin, 24, had suffered a cardiac arrest on the field following the hit. Fortunately, the medical personnel was able to restore Hamlin's heartbeat due to their timely response. CPR was administered for several minutes before Hamlin received oxygen and was placed into an ambulance bound for the University of Cincinnati Medical Center some 16 minutes after he collapsed.

Following the incident, the NFL announced that the game would not resume for the rest of the week, and that the decision as to when the game

would be finished was still up in the air. "Immediately, my player hat went on," said Troy Vincent, former cornerback and current vice president of the NFL's football operations. "How do you resume playing after you've seen such a traumatic event occur in front of you in real time?" Vincent wasn't the only one who held this sentiment, however. Several NFL teams, including the Bengals, the Steelers, the Cardinals, and the Seahawks, took to social media to express their concerns about Hamlin sending their thoughts and prayers via Twitter. Even Hamlin's alma mater, the University of Pittsburgh, tweeted their support for the player; stating that Hamlin "is the best of us." Outside the professional sports setting, people far and wide have also expressed solidarity with Hamlin. Just hours after Hamlin suffered cardiac arrest, the fundraiser for children's toys he had started reg-

istered over eight and a half million dollars; blowing the 2500 dollar goal out of the water.

Amidst all this support, Hamlin himself has seemed to stay in high spirits. On Saturday, Hamlin was back at the Bill's facility just two weeks after the life-threatening incident. Hamlin expressed his gratitude to all the fans who showed their overwhelming support, taking to Twitter to deliver a message: "The love is felt, and extremely real. No matter race or religion everybody coming together in prayer. This will make me stronger on the road to recovery, keep praying for me!"

Despite the situation seeming to have worked out in the end, the scare still raises a major question: does the violence in football go too far? The number of injuries that occur on the field every day across America is sobering. After the NFL came under fire for the devastating effects



of head trauma, the sport saw a drop in participation, with concerned parents pulling their kids out of youth programs and schools canceling their seasons due to too many injuries. Though some saw these as steps in the right direction, the NFL's apparent lack of concern for their players left many people unsatisfied and wanting to see sev-

eral changes in the organization's policies. Many people believe that Hamlin's injury will serve as a wake-up call to the NFL, that the sport can, in fact, kill. His near-death experience poses a question, not only to the NFL but to us all: at what point does a sport become too dangerous to justify?

The Rise of Dagestani Fighters Brings New Excitement to the MMA

RICHARD LAU

With there being so much depth in the UFC roster from top to bottom, across multiple weight classes, it's hard to deny that this is the most exciting MMA has ever been. The rise of Khamzat Chimaev and Shavkat Rakhmonov in welterweight, the

upcoming Jones-Gane clash in heavyweight, and the Usman-Edwards trilogy are just a few of the many events that MMA fans can look forward to. The pool of talent seems to be exponentially increasing, as prospects from all over the world work tirelessly on perfecting their craft, competing for a spot in the

organization.

However, there is no set formula for becoming a good fighter. Whether it's McGregor's striking abilities, Oliveira's Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, or George St-Pierre's versatility, fighters have found success in the sport whilst being completely different from each other. As athletes ar-

en't exactly sure what area they should focus on, it is extremely difficult to break into this level of MMA. But not for the Dagestanis; they seem to have cracked the code.

The Republic of Dagestan is buried deep in the mountains of Eastern Europe. With the sub-0 winters, low oxygen levels, steep mountains, fighting culture, and hyper-masculine traits, the area produces warriors like no other. The region was first brought to light by Khabib Nurmagomedov, a retired UFC champion with an undefeated record. According to him, "Dagestan is a different level for people living a tough life," and seeing that viral clip of him wrestling a wild bear as a kid, I don't doubt that. During MMA reporter Alzo Slades' visit to Dagestan, he noted that villages put kids through wrestling camps with 150 people, and parents would let their kids wrestle with each other during

family visits. Khabib's success has also heavily influenced the region, as kids look up to him, and train hard hoping to follow in his footsteps. With harsh training sessions in high mountains and unparalleled discipline, Dagestani fighters develop strong cardiovascular systems along with skill sets far superior to others.

Dagestan's fighting culture has certainly paid off, as fighters from that region possess a 73% winning chance in MMA. As Islam Makhachev becomes the new UFC lightweight champion after beating Charles Oliveira, it's fair to say Khabib's legacy is in good hands. Dagestan fighters now have a new hero to look up to. Today, the dominance of Dagestani fighters massively helps bring MMA to the next level, and MMA fans should be excited about what the region has to offer.





A New Jet Pilot? Evaluating Options at Quarterback For The New York Jets in 2023

MARIO CALVO

The New York Jets are a team competing in the National Football League (NFL). Unfortunately, this is not a team that has a reputation for good quarterbacks. Ever since franchise icon Joe Namath won a Super Bowl with the Jets in the 1968-69 season, the Jets have had failed draft picks, free agent busts, and journeyman backups at the quarterback position; this has resulted in over 50 years of quarterback failure, usually keeping the team from that elusive second championship.

However, the 2023-24 season offers a unique situation for an incoming quarterback. The Jets arguably have top-tier players at every position but quarterback. A top-5 defense in the NFL with names including Sauce Gardner, D.J. Reed, Quinnen and Quincy Williams, C.J. Moseley, and Lamarcus Joyner. A solid

wide receiver corps including rookie sensation Garrett Wilson, veteran Corey Davis, dynamic playmaker Elijah Moore, and tight end Tyler Conklin. Furthermore, the offensive line, when healthy, has proven to be able to not only protect quarterbacks for the pass, but also open lanes for a running game for Breece Hall, Michael Carter, and Zonovan "Bam" Night.

But alas, Zach Wilson, Mike White, Joe Flacco, and Chris St-reveler have been, to say the least, unproductive. A combined 56.9% completion rate, 15 touchdowns to 14 interceptions, and a combined 75.0 QBR are not elite by any means. Thus, it pays to take a look outside of this QB room and into the wider NFL... and perhaps beyond.

LAMAR JACKSON: BALTIMORE RAVENS QB (2018-PRESENT)

An elite quarterback such as Lamar Jackson needs no introduction. The 2019 MVP can terrorize any opposing defense with his remarkable running and passing ability. He has postseason experience and is still just 25 years old. With all the pieces the Jets have, Jackson would make them immediate Super Bowl contenders. However, with a price tag likely north of 50 million dollars per season and his recent injuries, are the Jets really willing to risk it all? And would Baltimore really let Jackson walk away?

JIMMY GAROPPOLO: SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS QB (2017-PRESENT)

On the surface, this is a good match. The Jets run an offense similar to San Francisco that Garoppolo has already mastered, so the transition would be easy. Furthermore, Garoppolo is a seasoned veteran with winning playoff experience that could definitely bring the Jets to the postseason. But with his many injuries and the likelihood that the 49ers may keep him alongside Trey Lance and Brock Purdy, the Jets might have other things to consider.

DEREK CARR: LAS VEGAS RAIDERS QB (2014-PRESENT)

Derrek Carr is budget Jimmy Garoppolo, as some may say. Once again, Carr is a veteran with a steady presence that could work well given the talent the Jets have. Only, Carr has never done well in the playoffs and is not a consistent winner. This could be a potentially high-risk, low-reward situation. Not for me.

TOM BRADY: NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS QB (2001-2019) TAMPA BAY BUCCANEERS QB (2020-PRESENT)

Picture this: Tom Brady walks out of the tunnel of Metlife Stadium to warm up...in a Jets uniform. On paper, this could work. He's the undisputed greatest quarterback of all time and brings a culture of winning wherever he goes. But in reality, this could be a potential disaster. His age of 45 is a concern, making this only a short-term solution, and I am not very sure a lot of people would want to see Tom Brady in a Jets uniform, including perhaps Tom Brady himself.

2023 DRAFT

With the 13th pick in the draft, it would be unlikely a highly-rated college quarterback would fall this far. If you do consider drafting a quarterback in the first round, would you really be admitting defeat with Wilson and burning another first-round pick on a quarterback? This is the most unlikely option.

VERDICT

With all of this in mind, this is what I want the Jets to do: get Jackson if he is made available, and if not, sign Garoppolo. Keep Wilson and White on the roster for insurance, and see if Wilson can learn from Garoppolo. Please, Woody Johnson. Please, Joe Douglas. Give us Jets fans the winning team we deserve.





Top Contenders For The 2023 Australian Open



Novak Djokovic poses with his 2021 Australian Open trophy. He has won the past three Australian Opens that he has played in.

BRANDON HORNE

The 111th edition of the Australian Open began on January 16th, 2023. With world number one Carlos Alcaraz recently withdrawing due to a leg injury, the draw seems wide open for both top-ranked veterans like Nadal and Djokovic and top-ranked youngsters like Fritz, Medvedev, and Ruud. Nadal's recent performances have not been as showstopping as they were a year ago, and he does not seem to be a favorite in defending his title. On the other hand, Djokovic is coming off a very strong start to his season, having just won the Adelaide International, putting him in a prime position to win his 10th title in Australia. Despite this, the younger generation is also extremely talented—the US Open Final being between two players under 25 years of age, Casper Ruud and Carlos Alcaraz. Other strong contenders include Stefanos Tsitsipas, who is coming off a strong showing in the inaugural United Cup

against fellow youngster Matteo Berrettini. With all that said, let's jump right into the predictions.

Contenders: As it currently stands, I can only really see 4 players that have a possibility of winning the 2023 AO. These players are: Casper Ruud, Novak Djokovic, Felix Auger-Aliassime, and Daniil Medvedev. Firstly, Ruud has been playing the tennis of his life and is currently ranked 3rd in the world. Also, considering his disappointing loss at the US Open this past year, Ruud has some extra motivation to fire him up. Novak Djokovic is also playing some of the best tennis of all time. As previously mentioned, Djokovic has been unstoppable, winning 5 of his last 6 tournaments, including the ATP Finals and Wimbledon. Moving on, Canadian Felix Auger-Aliassime is also a title contender, having recently beaten Djokovic at the Laver Cup in a thrilling match. His game has only continued to improve since then, so a far run for him should be in store. Last but not least, Med-

vedev. While Medvedev is the only member of the original Next Gen to win a Grand Slam, Medvedev has endured a bit of a rough stretch recently. Despite this, I expect great things as the Russian opens up his 2023 season. To be quite frank, the draw this year is wide open, so be prepared for a wild, wild couple of weeks.

While not in my top group, I also expect many players to make deep runs in the coming tournament. My contenders include: Stefanos Tsitsipas, Taylor Fritz, Holger Rune, Matteo Berrettini, Jan-nik Sinner, and Nick Kyrgios. These players all have great games and tons of potential, which makes me confident that they can make it far. Even though Tsitsipas has not reached the final of a slam since 2021 Roland Garros, his current form is promising. Taylor Fritz will use his massive serve and forehand to open up the court and his side of the draw, but lingering questions about his movement and durability remain a concern; for now, he is a solid contender. Hol-

ger Rune is an up-and-coming name in the tennis world, having just defeated Djokovic in Paris to win his first Masters 1000 title. Rune will hope to build on an explosive end to the 2022 season with a deep run in Melbourne. **Mid Round Exits:** The two Italians, Berrettini and Sinner, are also poised to do well, both playing well recently. Nick Kyrgios is a particularly interesting name, as he won the AO Doubles in 2022 which begs the question - what is his priority? Will he attempt to win his maiden singles Grand Slam or focus solely on his doubles title defense? Either way, with the often raucous Australian crowd backing him, you can be sure that he will make a great run and put on a great show.

Quarter Finalists: I consider these players to be solid, and can foresee a decent performance possibly resulting in a quarter-final. This list includes: Rafael Nadal, Andrey Rublev, Hubert Hurkacz, Frances Tiafoe, Alex de Minaur, and Lorenzo Musetti. With Nadal's current form leaving him looking older

and older by the day, I am unsure of his ability to defend his 2022 title. All the other players in this category are in the top 25, but due to individual slights, I don't see any of them advancing past the QFs.

Mid Round Exits: While these players are still top quality, I believe it is unlikely any of them will make it very far. These players are: Denis Shapovalov, Pablo Carreno Busta, Cameron Norrie, Karen Khachanov, Diego Schwartzman, Marin Cilic, Dan Evans, Tommy Paul, and Alexanderublik.

All other players in the draw are not on my radar for a title run. All in all, this year's Australian Open seems very promising, with a wide-open draw for the first time in many years.

Editor's Note: Nick Kyrgios has recently withdrawn from the 2023 AO due to a knee injury.



What Big Man Should The Golden State Warriors Trade for to Compete This Year?

HARRY MURPHY

The reigning champions, the Golden State Warriors, are clinging desperately to the end

of their dynasty, sitting at 22-22 and seventh place in the Western Conference. Their title chances are looking slimmer and slimmer as the seasons goes on. This season, the team has been plagued by injury to Steph Curry, regression from newly extended Jordan Poole, and defensive and offensive mediocrity the Warriors are not used to.

The reason for the Warriors' struggles has been pretty evident to the viewer: a lack of a dominant presence in the paint. Despite being top of the league in pace, they rank 27th in blocks and 30th in free throw attempts per game. It may finally be time for the Warriors to invest in a dominant big man because the core of the team is slowly regressing and no longer able to afford just an average center. Bob Myers, Steve Kerr, and the front office have made it abundantly clear that they want to continue contending with the core of Curry, Klay Thompson, and Dray-

mond

Green for as long as possible. Additionally, they want to keep complementary piece Poole as he is relatively untradeable due to his contract situation. Luckily, because of the D'Angelo Russell trade and the Warriors' woeful 2020 season, they have three highly drafted young pieces on the roster. Among James Wiseman, Jonathan Kuminga, and Moses Moody, none of them get even 20 minutes on the court per game. Especially in the case of 2020 second overall pick, James

Wiseman, his future with the Golden State Warriors is looking very bleak. Having all their

going forward and three very young and promising pieces to play with, in trades, the Warriors have the value and the salary matching ability to land a mega star because of Andrew Wiggins' 34 million dollars per year contract.

The San Antonio Spurs big man Jakob Poeltl would be a cheap option that would excellently fill the Warriors' defensive needs. The Spurs are 14th in the West and after selling

Dejounte Murray to the Atlanta Hawks, the

Spurs are in full rebuild mode, meaning the 27-year-old defensive star is very expendable. The package for Poeltl would likely be one of the young pieces and a first-round pick, with no need to throw in Andrew Wiggins to match the salary. The Spurs would happily accept James Wiseman back as a potential offensive star in the future.

Another less likely, but higher upside option, could be the Washington Wizards' Kristaps Porzingis. The Wizards are perpetually stuck in mediocrity, and Porzingis will clear-

ly not lead them to a championship in the future. He is another monster rim protector but fits the Warriors' system because he's an elite shooter, hitting two threes a game for the Wizards. He also takes seven free throws a game, fixing another one of the Warriors' problems. If the Warriors approached the Wizards with a swap deal for Andrew Wiggins, the Wizards would undoubtedly accept. The final option that could open up this summer is a blockbuster for superstar Karl-

Anthony Towns from the Minnesota Timberwolves. The Rudy Gobert experiment has fallen on

its face and Towns clearly does not mix well. The trade this summer would likely cost Wiggins,

Moody, Kuminga, Wiseman, and multiple first-round picks, which, in the current trade market, would be well worth it to capitalize on the championship window of the Warriors' aging stars.



Legend Khabib Nurmagomedov Cuts All Ties With MMA After Retiring as Coach

JOHN MORAN

For the first time since 2011, Khabib Nurmagomedov is no longer a part of mainstream mixed martial arts (MMA). The former Russian fighter and current coach announced his retirement from his MMA career on January 5, bringing an end to more than two decades of his part in the sport. Nurmagomedov stated that he will be "taking some time off for his family," and is unsure about whether or not he will return. This announcement has come as a surprise to much of the MMA community, seeing as Nurmagomedov is the coach and cornerman of Islam Makhachev, the current UFC Lightweight Champion, who will be attempting to defend his title in a month on February 12.

However, this unsuspected and jarring exit mirrors his first retire-

ment from the UFC. Nurmagomedov first announced his retirement in the interview following his title-defending fight against Justin Gaethje in October of 2020. Nurmagomedov won that fight, maintaining his position as the champion, but he still chose to retire. While he was still in control of the championship belt, this retirement caused him to vacate the title. Under most circumstances, this rapid exit from the sport would seem almost foolish, because who would wish to lose their title even as they continue to win fights at the highest level? Much of the time, a fighter will go into an early retirement because of damage sustained in fights or other health issues, but Nurmagomedov was in no worse condition than usual after his 2020 fight against Gaethje. In truth, the reason for Nurmagomedov's retirement is unrelated to his performance in MMA or his

health; it is much more significant.

In 2020, Nurmagomedov's father, Abdulmanap Nurmagomedov, became ill and passed away due to complications caused by COVID-19. This was only a few months before his third title defense fight against Gaethje, and Nurmagomedov was, understandably, distraught, even more so as he would be fighting without his father in his corner. He was quoted in a post-fight interview saying, "No way am I coming here without my father." In the same interview, Nurmagomedov expressed that his mother didn't wish for him to fight any longer either: "She didn't want me to fight without father and I said this is my last fight - and I have given her my word."

Seeing as his first retirement was caused by the loss of family, it would make sense that his retirement this month would be for a similar reason. Surely,

it is difficult to stay on a busy coaching and cornering schedule for ten different fighters while also spending time with his family. With the unfortunate passing of his father, it is perfectly understandable that Nurmagomedov would want to step away from MMA and have more time for his family.

While every MMA fan will be sad to see him go, perhaps for the final time, we must remember all the incredible and wild moments he has given to us. From his 29-0 record to his harrowing victory over Dustin Poirer, he was always a joy to watch. His controversy with Conor McGregor will go down as one of the most explosive and hateful rivalries in UFC history, both inside and outside of the octagon. His three title defenses of the UFC Lightweight belt are only matched by three other greats, and who knows how many more he could have had if he fought for

longer. While Nurmagomedov's exploits in the ring are extraordinary, he maintains a skill for work outside of it as well. He coached and cornered his fellow Russian, Islam Makhachev, into his own Lightweight title belt, as well as his cousin, Usman Nurmagomedov, into an undefeated record and a Lightweight championship in Bellator, another MMA fighting series seen as the minor leagues for the UFC.

Khabib Nurmagomedov stands with the greats inside the ring, but now he has chosen to stand with his family. Although his fans will miss the sight and impact of him in the MMA community, we wish him a long and happy retirement, as well as success in whatever he might pursue in the future. If he ever comes back, he will be welcomed with open arms, but even if that never happens, he has already left a legacy that will be matched by few.