



Thunder guard Russell Westbrook secured a triple-double average for the 2016-17 season during the third quarter in Phoenix on Friday. [AP PHOTO]

THUNDER JOURNAL

Watson says Westbrook is the MVP

PHOENIX — Add another coaching endorsement to the Russell Westbrook-for-MVP movement. Former Thunder teammate Earl Watson remembers when Westbrook was 6-feet tall as a freshman at UCLA but played like "a great power forward." Watson recalls Westbrook's rookie season in OKC, when the man with a seemingly endless amount of energy would come to huddle during every timeout gasping for air, barely able to breathe.



THUNDER Erik Horne ehorne@oklahoman.com

Watson, the Suns head coach, looks back fondly on the memories he shared with Westbrook. He also looks at him as the league's Most Valuable Player this season. "I just think he's the MVP," Watson said Friday. "We're talking about skill. It's not a popularity contest. If we're talking about skill and what he's doing for the game, it's not a question." Watson believes Westbrook's perception could cost him votes. "I don't think it's the skill that's up for debate, I think it's how people perceive him," Watson said. "I think the questions that are asked of him, a lot of writers like to instigate. It's fun. You ask questions to get a certain reaction. He's a very intelligent person. He likes to be respected, treated professionally, but if you give him a certain

question he's gonna give you back a certain answer. "If you talk to Russ out of that emotional space ... because he puts so much into it physically, he goes to a place mentally that a lot of players cannot understand. He has to be that way to be as impactful as he is, to do what he does. He doesn't have time to come down. If you let him come down and have a conversation with him, he's really special and he'll give you the biggest smile that exists. But unfortunately the clips that are played in interviews are not that Russ. I just think he's the MVP and if fans and the media saw the other side, I think it would be acknowledged." Watson's endorsement comes a few days after Bucks coach Jason Kidd said Westbrook would be "cheated" if he wasn't named MVP. Westbrook wrecked the Suns in every meeting this season, averaging 41.7 points, 13.7 rebounds and 13.7 assists entering Friday's game. It's why Watson — whose team came in on a 13-game losing streak — couldn't outright root

for Westbrook picking up his 42nd triple-double in Phoenix. Even if the bond between the two former UCLA Bruins goes beyond the court. "Zero part of me roots for him," Watson joked.

Roberson missed

A streak came to an end for Andre Roberson on Friday. Roberson and Westbrook had been the only two Thunder players to appear in every game this season. That was until Roberson was rested with left knee soreness against Phoenix. Roberson said he actually picked up the injury against Milwaukee on Tuesday when he hit his knee trying to work around a screen on defense. He played just 12 minutes against Memphis on Thursday. While Thunder coach Billy Donovan said Semaj Christon was up for consideration for the starting spot, Doug McDermott started his first game as a Thunder player. Alex Abrines (left knee sprain) still isn't with the Thunder on the road trip, but his injury isn't severe enough to where he'll miss a long stretch, said Donovan. Roberson was sorely missed in a first half in which the Thunder gave up 61.4 percent shooting and 71 points.

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Westbrook in rare company

Russell Westbrook's assault on all things triple double has led to some developments falling through the cracks — concerning Russell Westbrook. The triple double saga has overshadowed some remarkable feats by Westbrook this season. Starting with this. Westbrook almost surely is going to win the NBA scoring title. Westbrook leads James Harden, 31.6-29.2, in points per game. If Westbrook goes scoreless in each of OKC's final five games, Harden could catch him for the scoring title by averaging 37.8 points a game. If Westbrook averages a pedestrian 15 points a game down the stretch — he's scored under 20 points only eight times all season — Harden would have to average 46.8 points in the final five games. So the scoring title is Westbrook's. In NBA history, only 12 scoring champions have averaged a double double. And only one player, Nate Archibald in 1972-73, did so with points and assists. The other 11 were forwards or center. And no player has achieved the 30/10 threshold since Shaquille O'Neal in 2000. Even rarer, only two players — Archibald and Oscar Robertson — in NBA history have averaged at least 30 points and 10 assists per game in a single season. Westbrook can clinch that feat with 16 more assists and 24 more points. Here are the seasons in which a player has averaged at least 30 points and 10 assists:

Table with 5 columns: Player, Team, Season, Points, Assists. Lists players like Nate Archibald, Oscar Robertson, George Mikan, Paul Arizin, Neil Johnston, etc.

Yes, Robertson was amazing. His five-year span of 1961-66, Robertson averaged 30.3 points, 10.4 rebounds and 10.6 assists. That's averaging a triple double over five years. Here is the list of NBA scoring champions who posted a season double double:

Table with 5 columns: Player, Team, Season, Points, Rebounds. Lists players like George Mikan, Paul Arizin, Neil Johnston, etc.

BERRY TRAMEL, STAFF WRITER

RUSSELL WESTBROOK'S TRIPLE-DOUBLE TIMELINE

Ten key dates in Russell Westbrook's triple-double chase this season: Oct. 28: In the Thunder's second game of the season, Westbrook records his first triple double of 2016-17 with 51 points, 13 rebounds and 10 assists against the Suns. Nov. 28: At Madison Square Garden, Westbrook torches the Knicks for 27 points, 17 rebounds and 14 assists, raising his season rebounding average from 9.9 to 10.3. From that point on, he never dips below a triple double average. Dec. 17: Westbrook records 26 points, 11 rebounds and a career-high 22 assists against the Suns. It's Westbrook's 13th triple double, and he ends the game with exactly 820 points for the season, clinching a double-digit scoring average. Dec. 23: Westbrook leads the Thunder to a win at Boston with 45 points, 11 rebounds and 11 assists. It's the first triple double against the Celtics in 230 games. Dec. 31: In a blowout win against the Clippers, Westbrook finishes with 17 points, 12 rebounds and 14 assists, his 16th triple-double of the



Russell Westbrook recorded his first triple double of the season against Phoenix on Oct. 28, 2016. [PHOTO BY BRYAN TERRY, THE OKLAHOMAN]

season. He hits double digits in all three categories in 18 minutes and 45 seconds of action. That's his second-fastest career triple double and the third-fastest in NBA history. Jan. 13: With 21 points, 11 rebounds and 12 assists at Minnesota, Westbrook notches his 19th triple double of the season. That establishes a career high and breaks the "modern" record of 18 he shared with Magic

Johnson. Jan. 18: In a loss at Golden State, Westbrook finishes with 27 points, 15 rebounds and 13 assists. It's his 21st triple double of the season in the Thunder's 41st game. Entering Friday night's game, James Harden had 20 triple doubles in 77 games. March 22: He takes a season-low six shots, but Westbrook makes them all and finishes 6 for 6 from the free-throw line. His triple double — 18 points, 11 rebounds, 14 assists — is the first ever by an NBA player who shoots 100 percent from the floor and the foul line. March 29: Westbrook erupts in the fourth quarter and overtime to lead the Thunder back from 21 down to beat the Magic in Orlando. He finishes with 57 points, 13 rebounds and 11 assists, the highest-scoring triple double in NBA history. April 4: Westbrook ties Oscar Robertson's single-season NBA record with his 41st triple double: 12 points, 13 rebounds and 13 assists against the Bucks. He also passes 820 rebounds for the season, securing a double-digit average.

BRETT DAWSON, STAFF WRITER

TRIPLE-DOUBLE FUN FACTS

- Some of the standout numbers in Russell Westbrook's 2016-17 season of triple-doubles. 2: Triple-doubles this season in which Westbrook has scored at least 50 points. He joins James Harden (also this season) as the only players ever with two 50-point triple-doubles. 5: Number of consecutive triple-doubles Westbrook recorded from March 26 to April 2 in which he scored 30 or more points. No player had ever recorded more than four straight 30-point triple-double games. 7: Westbrook's longest streak of consecutive triple-double games this season. He's had two seven-game streaks. No player in NBA history has had more than one such streak in a season. 8: Players in the history of the NBA with more triple-doubles in a career than Westbrook has this season. Besides Westbrook, they are Oscar Robertson, Magic Johnson, Jason Kidd, Wilt Chamberlain, Larry Bird, LeBron James and Fat Lever. 36: Combined career triple-doubles for point guards Chris Paul (13), Kyle Lowry (9), Stephen Curry (7) and John Wall (7). 44: Years since a player averaged 30 points and 10 assists per game (Tiny Archibald, 1972-73). It's been 27 years since a player averaged 30 points and 10 rebounds. Westbrook is averaging more than 30 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

BRETT DAWSON, STAFF WRITER

NBA SCOREBOARD

NBA Scoreboard table with columns for Eastern Conference, Western Conference, and Friday's Games. Includes team names, scores, and game details.