



**BOSTON CELTICS**  
**VS.**  
**LOS ANGELES LAKERS**

## **RIVALRY RENEWED:**

These two storied franchises have combined for 30 of the 61 NBA Championships (16 for the Boston Celtics; 14 for the Los Angeles Lakers). Boston's dominance began in the late 1950's and on into the 1960's when a center by the name of Bill Russell led them to 11 titles in 13 years. Some of the league's greatest battles came between Russell and Wilt Chamberlain, the only player to ever score 100 points in a game. Plenty of other marquee names and Hall-of-Famers, such as Jerry West and Elgin Baylor for the Lakers, and Bob Cousy and John Havlicek for the Celtics, played key roles as well. The rivalry intensified when the Celtics drafted Larry Bird and the Lakers drafted Magic Johnson. Those two met three times in the Finals during the 1980's ('84, 85 and 87), and while Boston beat L.A. the first eight times they met in the NBA Championship, the Lakers have won the last two meetings. Teaming with Shaquille O'Neal, Kobe Bryant helped the Lakers to three consecutive titles from 2000-02. L.A. most recently lost in the Finals in 2004 to the Detroit Pistons. Boston, however, has not won a Championship since 1986.

## **BREAKDOWN:**

Both teams got here in large part because of moves made either in the off-season or during the season. The Lakers were able to land a legit second scoring option and All-Star caliber player to play alongside Kobe Bryant when they pulled the trigger on a deal with the Memphis Grizzlies that brought Pau Gasol to Hollywood. Thanks to that donation by Memphis, it enabled Lamar Odom to go from their second best offensive player to a matchup problem that not only provides rebounding, but has more comfortable and effective as the #3 option. As for Boston, their monster moves came when they traded for Kevin Garnett, a former league MVP, from Minnesota and lured sharp shooter Ray Allen, who holds the record for most three-point makes in a season, from Seattle. Those additions alleviated a lot of pressure that was on the shoulders of Paul Pierce, who had previously only gone as far as the 2002 Eastern Conference Finals. Garnett, Pierce, Allen and Celtics Head Coach Doc Rivers went a combined 4380 games before reaching the NBA Finals.



**Kobe Bryant won his first regular season Most Valuable Player award in 2007-08. Now, Kobe goes for his first NBA Finals MVP award as well as a fourth ring.** (Garrett W. Ellwood of Getty Images)

Winning Gm. 1 is imperative for the Celtics for a number of different reasons. Phil Jackson is 41-0 in playoffs series' when winning Gm. 1. Boston is 10-1 at home in the playoffs this year, and the Celtics have not lost a Gm. 1, nor have they trailed in any series yet despite their road troubles (2-7 away from home in the postseason). However, both teams are capable of winning on the other's home floor as Boston had the best regular season road record, while L.A. won a pivotal Gm. 6 in Utah in the second round, followed by Gm. 4 at San Antonio in the Western Conference Finals. The home team owns a .738 winning percentage (45-16) in Gm. 1 of the Finals.

**Storyline I'm Watching: One of the many interesting storylines centers around Lakers Head Coach Phil Jackson, who goes for his tenth NBA title to pass legendary Celtics Head Coach Red Auerbach for the most all-time.**

Two of the keys in this series in my opinion are bench play and rebounding, especially for the C's. Contributions from point guard Rajon Rondo and center Kendrick Perkins are extremely for Boston as well. Rondo must continue to run the point without

turning the ball over, which he's done nicely in the playoffs, and Perkins needs to stay out of foul trouble. In the Lakers' case, their three-point shooting could be something that gives them an edge and off-sets some of Boston's strengths, and definitely so if Vlad Radmanovic heats up.

Much has been made of LA's bench, which features Luke Walton, Ronny Turaif, Sasha Vujacic and Jordan Farmar. To me it is not significantly better than the Celtics' group of reserves. Although Sam Cassell has struggled with his jumper in this year's playoffs, he has some big shots throughout his career and won two titles as a member of the Houston Rockets in 1994 and 1995. James Posey is my x-factor for the series. Posey played for the Miami Heat two years ago when they defeated the Dallas Mavericks to win the NBA Championship. Not only can Posey bury a clutch shot like Derek Fisher can for the Lakers, but he does all the little things, hustles for loose balls, gets rebounds and plays solid defense. P.J. Brown has plenty of playoff experience, going to back the rivalry between the Knicks and the Heat in the latter part of the 1990's when he was in Miami, and also when he was on the Hornets. Known for his defense and rebounding, Brown came through with a couple of key baskets at the end of Gm. 7 in the Eastern Conference semifinals vs. the Cavaliers.



**Acquiring power forward Kevin Garnett, the NBA's Defensive Player of the Year, from the Minnesota Timberwolves was a major reason why the Celtics enjoyed the biggest turnaround in league history.** (Associated Press Photo – Charles Krupa)

**Why the Celtics will win?** Because Red is looking down on them from above, he wants to prevent the Zen Master from passing him for the most titles in league history and they have those leprechauns in the Garden. Seriously though, Allen getting his confidence and shot back in the Eastern Conference Finals vs. the Pistons should pay dividends for this series since they are going to need him to help shoulder the scoring load with Garnett and Pierce. Whereas the Lakers are averaging 105.9 points per game and shooting 47.8% from the field in the playoffs, Boston is holding foes to 87.3PPG in the playoffs. Their defense has been able to clamp down when it needs to most, and when they are having trouble to produce points. Home-court advantage helps quite a bit

too, particularly if there is a Game 7. A road team hasn't won a Gm. 7 of the NBA Finals since 1978 when Washington beat Seattle.

**Why the Lakers will win?** Because Kobe is a difference maker. The larger the moment, the closer the game, the greater he plays. That includes a 39-point performance in the close out game of the Western Conference Finals against the defending NBA Champion Spurs. He's got the ability to pull up and hit the jumper over any defender, drive to the basket or get to the foul line. Kobe attempted 86 free-throws in the Jazz series compared to 11 in the San Antonio series. However, he did average 29.2PPG, shot 53.3% from the field and connected on 90.9% of his free-throws vs. the Spurs. In this year's postseason, Bryant is averaging 31.9PPG and 11PPG in the fourth quarter. His shot-making at the end of games certainly can decide the series outcome in LA's favor.

**My Pick: Boston in 7**

**Finals MVP: Kevin Garnett – Boston Celtics**



**Boston Coach Doc Rivers looks to bring the Celtics' franchise its 17<sup>th</sup> NBA Championship, and in the process win his first. (Photo Courtesy of the Associated Press)**