

# The Last of His Kind

For ten seasons no player who refused to shoot threes was in the top ten,  
until Jalen Duren.

A Gravity Report Deep Dive

October 13, 2026

v1 — methodology and figures verified against public sources as of October 13, 2026.  
This article will be revised.

Not a research paper: an article, typeset in L<sup>A</sup>T<sub>E</sub>X. Independent analysis, not peer reviewed.

## Abstract

Every other player in our top ten last season took at least 22% of his shots from three. Jalen Duren took none of them, and our per-minute rating still put him as the 7th best player in the league. That hasn't happened in over a decade. From 2015 to 2025, there wasn't a single player who never shot threes that finished in the top ten. Back in the 2004–05 season there were four of them, including the best player in the league. Today we look at how that kind of player has disappeared, how Duren is a top player without having a skill that is more important than ever in the modern game, and why we rank him 14th. Duren and the Pistons were in a four-month-long contract standoff, but now that it's finally over and he's getting paid \$200 million over the next five years, we give it an **80%** chance that he finishes top 15 next July.

## The top ten, and the odd one out

**Table 1:** Our ten best players per minute in 2025–26 (GRAVITY Historical, 1,500+ minutes), with their impact rating and the share of shots they take from three.

|    | Player                  | Impact       | Three-point attempt rate |
|----|-------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1  | Nikola Jokić            | +3.45        | .261                     |
| 2  | Shai Gilgeous-Alexander | +3.30        | .226                     |
| 3  | Victor Wembanyama       | +2.82        | .324                     |
| 4  | Luka Dončić             | +2.57        | .476                     |
| 5  | Kawhi Leonard           | +2.17        | .354                     |
| 6  | Cade Cunningham         | +1.71        | .308                     |
| 7  | <b>Jalen Duren</b>      | <b>+1.61</b> | <b>.000</b>              |
| 8  | Donovan Mitchell        | +1.48        | .439                     |
| 9  | Tyrese Maxey            | +1.42        | .399                     |
| 10 | LaMelo Ball             | +1.29        | .595                     |

The list above is the modern NBA summarized. Even the two centers ranked above Duren shoot. Jokić takes a quarter of his shots from three, and Wembanyama takes a third. Duren's three-point attempt rate rounds to zero (he didn't take a single one).<sup>[1]</sup>

One note on the ranking itself. Table 1 uses GRAVITY Historical, our per-minute rating: the same formula behind Deep Dives No. 1 and No. 2, minus the on/off numbers we license from Cleaning the Glass, which only go back to 2003–04 and can’t be published. Leaving that input out lets us run the exact same rating on every season since 1977–78 and line Duren’s season up against Garnett’s or Shaq’s.<sup>[2]</sup> It’s also why this table can have Duren 7th while we rank him 14th overall: The 644 starts from this rating, adds the on/off input, blends in the season before, and charges or credits the playoffs.

## Ten years without one

When the three-point line was first introduced in 1979, nearly every regular player ignored it. In 2014–15, about 29% of players with 1,500 minutes still took less than one in ten of their shots from three. As of last season that cohort has dropped to just 6% of the league.

The best players changed faster than the rest. Figure 1 shows the pure non-shooters (taking 2% or less of their shots from three) among every season’s ten best players.

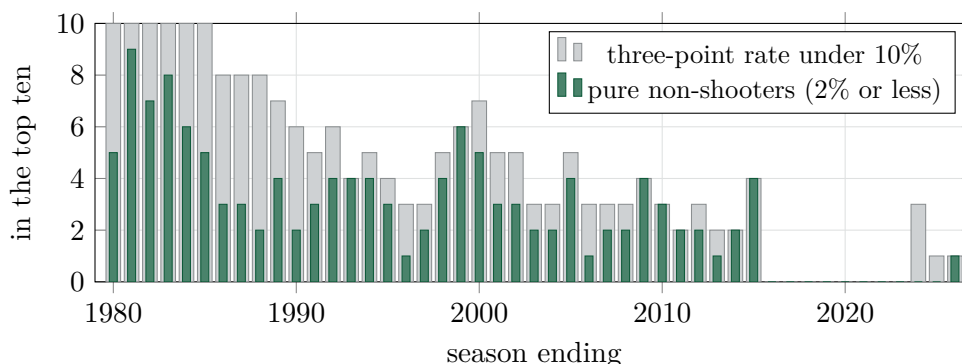


**Figure 1:** Non-shooters among each season’s ten best players per minute, 1979–80 to 2025–26. The single green bar all the way to the right is Duren.

In 2004–05, four of the top ten were pure non-shooters: Kevin Garnett, who ranked first that year, Tim Duncan, Shaquille O’Neal, and a 22-year-old Amar’e Stoudemire. In 2014–15 there were still four of them: Anthony Davis, Duncan, Marc Gasol, and DeMarcus Cousins. The following season that count dropped to zero and stayed there for ten straight seasons. The larger group (players under a 10% rate) did see a return in 2023–24 and the next season after that through Giannis Antetokounmpo, Domantas Sabonis, and Anthony Davis. However, all three of them at least shoot a little. Duren doesn’t shoot at all.

Duren’s season also belongs on an interesting historical list. Since 1979–80, only eight seasons by players aged 22 or younger have been rated higher without shooting threes: Davis (again), Shaq twice, Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Tracy McGrady, Zion Williamson, and Isiah Thomas.

## How does he do it?

A good jump shot is one way to be efficient, but Duren found others. His true shooting was .688 on a 23.6% usage rate, which comes out to 2.6 standard deviations above the league-average minute once you look at how much of the offensive burden landed on him. He grabbed 20.9% of available rebounds and drew a free-throw attempt for every two shots he took.<sup>[3]</sup> All four of those parts of his

**Table 2:** Duren’s season by component. Each value shown is a z-score against the league-average minute: zero is average and +1 is one standard deviation better.

| Box   | WinSh        | Volume | Effic.       | Creation | Load  | Stocks | Rebound      | Rim          |
|-------|--------------|--------|--------------|----------|-------|--------|--------------|--------------|
| +1.63 | <b>+2.79</b> | +1.43  | <b>+2.60</b> | −0.59    | +0.18 | +0.38  | <b>+2.57</b> | <b>+2.26</b> |

game, efficiency, win shares, rebounding, and rim pressure, sit more than two standard deviations above average. The weak spot shows up in creation, where he comes in at below average. He doesn’t run an offense, but he completes a very good one paired with Cade Cunningham, who ranks 6th on the same list.

Among the 164 players with over 1,500 minutes, Duren ranked the best in efficiency under load, third in win shares per 48 minutes, fourth in rim pressure, and fifth in rebounding. Another way to say this is that Duren’s value is concentrated in the very few square feet the three-point revolution left for centers to work in, and nobody was more efficient than him there.

Cleaning the Glass, which filters out garbage time, fills in some of the details. 72% of Duren’s shots happened at the rim, which is more than 82% of bigs, and we already know none of them came from three. He scored 137.5 points per 100 shot attempts, placing him in the 93rd percentile, and he drew a shooting foul on 22.5% of his shots, which is in the 95th percentile. He also rebounded 14.1% of his teammates’ missed shots. However, there was one job that the old center always had that we couldn’t find in the case of Duren. His block rate of 1.5% puts him in the 49th percentile for bigs.<sup>[8]</sup> He’s an offense-first center.

## Why we rank him 14th

We rank Duren 14th overall, seven places below his spot in Table 1, and the reason is almost entirely the playoffs. Duren’s playoff BPM of −1.7 in 422 minutes against Cleveland and Orlando was 6.7 points lower than his regular season, and the model’s playoff weighting hit the lowest it can go. That alone costs him 4.3 points of gravity score. Of all 229 players in The 644 who played in the postseason, he was the only one to hit that mark.<sup>[4],[5]</sup>

His playoff numbers show exactly what fell apart. 70% of his shots still left his hands at the rim, but he only drew fouls on 11.8% of them, half of his regular-season rate, and his short mid-range shot percentage dropped to 22% compared to his regular 50%, a major decrease. To top it off, his points per 100 shot attempts came down from 137.5 to 110.0, the 26th percentile for playoff bigs.<sup>[8]</sup> Excluding the playoffs, he would climb up to 8th in our rankings.

The rest of the gap is pretty small. The full model grades his regular season slightly lower, at +1.51 instead of +1.61, because it includes the on/off input and has slightly different skill weights.

We hear a lot of talk about how fans don’t want to pay so much for a player who can’t perform on the biggest stage. The poor end to last season has left a bad taste in the mouths of Pistons fans going into this offseason, and it has blinded them from seeing what a great player he really was all year long. It may also raise some concerns for the next playoff run, but that’s a conversation for later. Duren will definitely help Detroit run a successful campaign in a competitive East.

## The contract

When we first started writing this article, Duren was still unsigned, and we were a little unsure of his future. He had turned down a five-year, \$200 million deal and skipped media day, and his

qualifying offer of \$9.6 million was set to expire on October 1st.<sup>[6]</sup> He decided to take the long-term deal that same day, before the 11:59 p.m. deadline. ESPN reported that he had objected to weight clauses in Detroit’s earlier offers.<sup>[7]</sup> Even though he did miss media day and the first few practices of camp, Detroit fans can sleep at night knowing that their star center won’t be sitting out games over a contract.

## The forecast

Throughout history, young centers tend to stay good. Of the 22 seasons since 1977–78 from centers aged 21 to 23 with a comparable rating to Duren’s, 18 of them were followed by a year that would keep Duren in the top 15. If he has an exact repeat of last season, his gravity score would rise to 71.1, which would rank him 7th.

Now that his contract issues have been resolved, we give it an 80% chance that he stays in the top 15. Injury would be the main risk that threatens this.

Our external prediction revolves around that traditional-center title. Since 1999–00, the best BPM among centers with a three-point attempt rate under 10% has gone to the same player in back-to-back seasons 11 out of 26 times. Duren led that group last year, and we give him a 60% chance to repeat, because Alperen Şengün took under 10% of his shots from three as recently as 2024–25 and could easily qualify for this again.

0%                      coin flip                      100%

**Jalen Duren ranks top 15 in The 644, July 2027 edition.**



#1–15 = Win    #16–20 = Near miss (graded as a miss)    #21 or below = Miss. This is our own ranking; we keep one bet on it each article so the model gets graded too.

**Jalen Duren posts the highest 2026–27 BPM among players listed at center with a three-point attempt rate below 10% and 1,500+ regular-season minutes.**



Basketball Reference, final regular-season table.

External predictions are graded on Basketball Reference’s final regular-season tables by April 30, 2027. Registered October 17, 2026, before the October 18 freeze. Scored by Brier score in the Forecast Ledger.

## Method and sources

GRAVITY Historical (GRAVITY-RS in the code) per the specification’s retrospective equation, 1977–78 to 2025–26; three-point attempt rate from Basketball Reference advanced tables. “Pure non-shooter”: three-point attempt rate of 2% or less. Code: `papers/duren/` (`extinct.py`, `analysis.py`) and `papers/common/` (`gravity_rs.py`, `pipeline.py`).

- [1] Basketball Reference, 2025–26 advanced table. [https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA\\_2026\\_advanced.html](https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/NBA_2026_advanced.html)
- [2] Basketball Reference, league advanced and per-100 tables, 1977–78 to 2025–26. <https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/>
- [3] Basketball Reference, Jalen Duren. <https://www.basketball-reference.com/players/d/durenja01.html>
- [4] The Gravity Report, The GRAVITY Specification, v3. <https://thegravityreport.com/notes/spec/>
- [5] The Gravity Report, The 644, July 2026 edition (CSV). <https://thegravityreport.com/the644/the644-2026-07.csv>
- [6] ESPN, Duren not at media day amid contract standoff, September 28, 2026. [https://www.espn.com/nba/story/\\_/id/50051681/sources-pistons-duren-not-media-day-amid-contract-standoff](https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/50051681/sources-pistons-duren-not-media-day-amid-contract-standoff)
- [7] ESPN, Duren accepts five-year, \$200 million deal, October 1, 2026. [https://www.espn.com/nba/story/\\_/id/50081576/jalen-duren-accepts-5-year-200m-deal-pistons-agent-says](https://www.espn.com/nba/story/_/id/50081576/jalen-duren-accepts-5-year-200m-deal-pistons-agent-says)
- [8] Cleaning the Glass, Jalen Duren (garbage time filtered; percentiles by position), accessed September 29, 2026. <https://cleaningtheglass.com/stats/player/5102>