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After franchise cornerstone Dwight Howard requested for a trade, the Orlando Magic have since been the center of attention heading into the start of 2011-12 season. Trade talk has swirled around Dwight Howard as different trade scenarios seemed to change daily. But trade talk has since died down and we may see Howard in a Magic jersey until probably half the season, and then he would likely be traded to the Nets, Lakers or Mavericks. If the Magic come out of the gates and play strong to preserve their identity as contenders, then they may be able to convince Howard to stay. As it stands though, it's hard to imagine them regaining their momentum after being upset by the Atlanta Hawks in the first round of the playoffs last year.

Stan Van Gundy has his work cut out for him this year, because the team don't have a lot of talent on their roster to make a deep run in the playoffs again. But Orlando still has a shot as long as they have Howard on the team. During the 2009 season, no one believed they could reach the Finals but Howard proved that he is the special kind of player capable of making his team a contender. It's going to be very hard to duplicate that level of success this time around though, as the trade of Howard looms in the landscape of Orlando's future.

Howard averaged 22.9 points and 15.1 rebounds per game last year, but the rest of the team struggled and failed to reach their potential. The Magic traded away Brandon Bass for Glen Davis and Von Wafer, they waived Gilbert Arenas and his atrocious contract and were able to re-sign Jason Richardson and Earl Clark. But the overall team make-up may just not be enough to convince Howard to stay after this season.

Orlando Magic point guard Jameer Nelson is the anchor that can bring Orlando back to the top tier. He has the skill to be an all-star but he needs to stay on the court. He hasn't stayed injury free for a full year in seven seasons that he wore a Magic uniform. Last season he put up just 13.1 points/game. For the Magic to be a serious threat he has to be putting up at least 16-18 points a night.

The rest of the starting five leaves a lot to be desired as they contain high-priced, over the hill guy in Jason Richardson and Hedo Turkoglu. Although Turkoglu has done well in Van Gundy's offense, an upgrade would only have helped at the three spot. Glen Davis is not a better player than Bass but looks to be a better compliment next to Howard, overall the team should have tried to find a better starting lineup if they really wished Howard to stay.

Orlando does have some nice guys off the pine. They have J.J. Redick and Ryan Anderson who are able on offense. Backup point guard Chris Duhon is a nice player that can start if Nelson gets hurt, and they also have Quentin Richardson who can still shoot the rock despite not doing so well last season.

Prediction: 2nd Eastern Conference Southeast Division - Our [top NBA handicapper](#) says this prediction is based off the assumption that Howard remains with the Magic this season. Although he could very likely be traded by the deadline, it's not a foregone conclusion. With Howard, this team can still win a lot of games and fight for the fourth seed against the Knicks in the East. If they do trade Howard, they will obviously be worse off, but they can still sneak in to the playoffs depending on what they get in return.

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