

# Raptors on the Verge of a Playoff Berth

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With the end of the NBA regular season just weeks away, the Toronto Raptors find themselves on the verge of becoming a playoff team for the first time in their seven year history.

The Raptors sit in fourth place in the Eastern Division tied with the Philadelphia 76ers at 39 wins and 26 losses. If the Raptors can maintain their current standing they will have home court advantage in the first round of the playoffs.

It had been an incredible turnaround for the Raptors this season. In last year's strike shortened season the Raptors just missed clinching a playoff spot. In the off-season the Raptors made some key acquisition by picking up point guard Muggsy Bogues and forward Antonio Davis from the Indiana Pacers. Above all, the Raptors success this season can be attributed to the play to second-year forward Vince Carter.

Carter's talent is unquestioned but the

fact that he has become such a dominant and well rounded player, so quickly, is surprising. He won the Slam Dunk Contest at the All-star Game this year with some of the most amazing dunks ever seen. He has been compared to Michael Jordan already which may be a little pre-empted. The fact is Carter has not won a championship but when he does the comparisons will fluctuate once more. He is fourth in the league in scoring this year averaging 26 points-per-game.

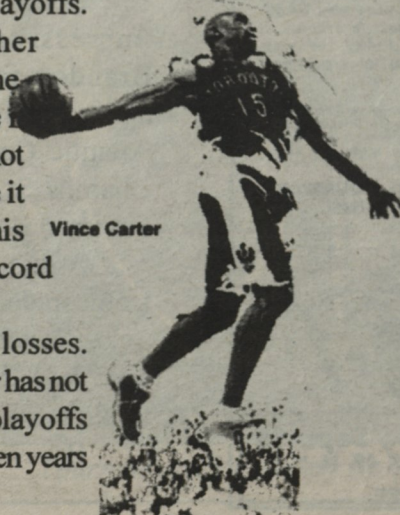
The Raptors were playing .500 basketball before the All-Star Break in February barely holding on to a playoff spot. Since then the Raptors have climbed their way through the standing and are almost guaranteed to become the first Canadian NBA team to make the playoffs. Canada's other NBA team, the Vancouver Grizzlies, are not going to make it to the dance this year with a record of 19

wins and 49 losses. Vancouver has not made the playoffs in their seven years

of existence.

If the playoffs were to begin now the Raptors would face the 76ers in the first round. This scenario would seem to go against the Raptors who have lost their last four meetings with Philadelphia. Their latest meeting was last Wednesday with the Raptors losing 106-93. The NBA's leading scorer Allen Iverson led Philadelphia with 44 points, scoring 31 in the second half alone. Vince Carter led the Raptors with 26 while Tracey McGrady scored 20 in the losing cause.

Although the record is not great against the Sixers, the Raptors are a team that is thriving with confidence which will only get stronger with the playoff berth. If the Raptors get through the first round they have a change to upset some of the high contenders and perhaps.....?



Vince Carter



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