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Michael Jordan Career Triple Doubles

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Michael Jordan is widely regarded as the greatest basketball player of all time. His scoring titles, Defensive Player of the Year award, and six NBA championships are the cornerstones of his legend. Yet one statistical category often sparks debate among fans and analysts: his triple-double totals. While players like Russell Westbrook and Oscar Robertson have made triple-doubles a highlight reel staple, Jordan's numbers in this area are surprisingly modest—at least when compared to his overall dominance. But a closer look at the Michael Jordan career triple doubles reveals a different story: one of efficiency, situational brilliance, and a legacy that transcends raw counting stats.

The Numbers Behind Michael Jordan Career Triple Doubles

According to official NBA records, Michael Jordan recorded **28 regular-season triple doubles** and added **2 triple doubles in the playoffs**, giving him a career total of 30. At first glance, that number seems low for a player of his caliber, especially when compared to modern stars. LeBron James has over 100 triple doubles in the regular season alone. Russell Westbrook has more than 190. But context is everything. Jordan played in an era where the pace was slower, the game was less spread out, and the triple-double was far rarer. In the 1980s and 1990s, only a handful of players—Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, and a few others—regularly approached triple-double numbers. Guards like Jordan were expected to score first, defend, and create for others only when the situation demanded it.

Jordan's triple-double seasons peaked in the late 1980s, especially during the 1988–89 campaign. That season, he recorded five triple doubles, including a remarkable stretch where he nearly averaged a triple double over an entire month. In fact, from March to April of that year, Jordan averaged 33.5 points, 9.5 rebounds, and 9.5 assists over a 10-game span. He also posted a triple double in the league's All-Star Game that same season, though All-Star stats are not counted in career totals. His ability to stuff the stat sheet was never in question; it was simply a matter of team need and game flow.

Season-by-Season Breakdown

- 1984–85 (Rookie Year): 1 triple double (first of his career)
- 1985–86: 0 triple doubles (injury-shortened season)
- 1986–87: 0 triple doubles
- 1987–88: 2 triple doubles
- 1988–89: 5 triple doubles (career high)
- 1989–90: 3 triple doubles
- 1990–91: 1 triple double
- 1991–92: 2 triple doubles
- 1992–93: 1 triple double
- 1994–95 (comeback): 1 triple double
- 1995–96: 1 triple double
- 1996–97: 4 triple doubles

- 1997–98: 0 triple doubles
- 2001–03 (Wizards): 7 triple doubles (including a streak of 5 in 10 games during 2002–03)

Interestingly, Jordan recorded the majority of his triple doubles after his first retirement. During his final season with the Washington Wizards at age 39–40, he posted 3 triple doubles, proving that his all-around instincts never faded. His two playoff triple doubles came in 1989 (vs. Cleveland Cavaliers) and 1993 (vs. New York Knicks), both in high-stakes elimination games.

Why Jordan's Triple Double Count Is Lower Than Modern Stars

To understand the Michael Jordan career triple doubles phenomenon, we must examine the era in which he played. The pace of the NBA in the late 1980s and early 1990s was roughly 90–95 possessions per game, compared to today's 100–105. Fewer possessions mean fewer opportunities for rebounds and assists. Additionally, the Bulls' defensive system under Phil Jackson emphasized team rebounding, with Scottie Pippen, Horace Grant, and later Dennis Rodman absorbing many of the boards. Jordan, as a shooting guard, was often required to leak out in transition rather than crash the glass. Likewise, Chicago's triangle offense distributed playmaking duties. While Jordan handled the ball in crunch time, he didn't run the offense on every possession like a point guard. Historically, shooting guards have lower triple-double averages than point guards or versatile forwards. For comparison, Kobe Bryant finished his career with 21 triple doubles, and Dwyane Wade had only 4. Jordan's 28 regular-season triple doubles place him second among shooting guards, behind only James Harden (who often played point guard in Houston's system).

Another factor is Jordan's pure scoring mentality. He approached games with a killer instinct that prioritized putting up points over filling a stat sheet. In many games where he neared a triple double, he would surpass 30 or 40 points before reaching double digits in assists or rebounds. For example, in the 1997 NBA Finals, Jordan averaged 32.3 points, 7.0 rebounds, and 6.0 assists—just a few rebounds and assists short of a triple-double series average. Yet he never forced the issue; his goal was winning, not statistical benchmarks. His coach Phil Jackson once remarked, "Michael could have averaged a triple double

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