

## Los Angeles Lakers

# LA Lakers: Does Pau Gasol Deserve the 'Soft' Label, and Does It Even Matter?

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By  
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Ever since he stepped on the court in 2001, questions about Pau Gasol's toughness have followed him.

The Lakers' starting power forward is a four-time NBA All-Star and two-time NBA champion. Yet, when the Spaniard has his struggles, many are quick to call him soft, including his fellow players.

Oklahoma City center Kendrick Perkins, for one, took a shot at the seven-footer, calling Gasol soft last March.

“I don’t like Pau Gasol or Phil Jackson,” Perkins told ESPN the Magazine. “Phil is arrogant. Pau is soft.”

Just a month later, Amar’e Stoudemire echoed Perkins’ sentiment.

“He’s still soft. But, he’s a good player, you know what I mean? But he also has help down there. He has help down there in Lamar Odom, Andrew Bynum, and those 7-footers down there. So he’s got some supporting cast.”

Even Gasol's own teammate, Kobe Bryant, agrees with Perkins and Stoudemire.

When asked if he and Gasol had feuded during the Lakers’ uncharacteristically short playoff run last year, Kobe admitted the soft label fits Pau.

“The only beef that we have is when I call him ‘soft’—he gets upset when I call him ‘soft.’ That’s it.”

Is Pau Gasol, in fact, soft? The definition of a soft player is someone who attempts to minimize contact as much as possible because it knocks them off of their game.



Ezra Shaw/Getty Images

That description fits Gasol perfectly, especially for someone as big as he is.

Gasol can hold his own against even the best big men, as he did against Dwight Howard en route to his first championship in 2009. He gives full effort on the court, is not afraid to dunk the ball and records blocks and rebounds at a high clip.

On the other hand, Gasol’s presence on the court hardly intimidates his opponents.

He does not deter smaller players from driving to the lane, as evidenced by JJ Barea’s frequent penetration in the Lakers’ season-ending sweep at the hands of the Dallas Mavericks last May.

Additionally, Gasol has some trouble dominating smaller opponents and rarely sends a statement by issuing a strong foul.

Even worse, Gasol is easily one of the NBA’s biggest complainers, especially when he feels like he was fouled. Here is a common sight: Gasol faces a physical defender and is forced into a tough shot. After it misses, Gasol immediately turns his head toward the official beckoning for a foul.

A player not afraid of contact likely would have played through it, leading to a possible three-point play opportunity.

Simply put, Gasol is not a player who thrives with contact. In fact, it is clear that he looks to avoid it more times than not.

Despite some reports claiming that Gasol has changed since his time in Memphis, make no mistake that Gasol is a soft player whose strength is finesse.



Ronald Martinez/Getty Images

Others will point to how Gasol often makes angry faces, yells out in excitement, and pumps his fists, but such claims only show that Gasol is an emotional player, not a physical one.

The truth is that Gasol is indeed a soft player, which is simply a product of his personality.

But while he is soft, the success he has brought the Lakers is a testament to his value to the team. After all, the Lakers qualified for the NBA Finals three consecutive years after acquiring Gasol.

In fact, Gasol's soft playing style may even be a reason for the Lakers' success. He rarely has to sit because of foul trouble, he never gets suspended he and puts up points because of his finesse skills.

So while Gasol is evidently a soft player, does it even really matter since it helps the team?



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