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ROOM ENOUGH FOR THE NBA

Want to host NBA players at your hotel? Big beds, practice courts and supersized weights might help.

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At seven-foot-six, Houston Rockets center Yao Ming might find that his toes dangle a little off the end of the biggest beds available at Miami's new JW Marriott Marquis.

But for the average six-foot-seven NBA player, the 84-inch-long California King beds in the exclusive Hotel Beaux Arts, opening this month inside the Marriott, should be just right.

Not to mention the 120-pound hand weights in the gym, extra-long massage tables in the spa or regulation basketball court in the entertainment center.

The Miami Heat starts a string of five home games Tuesday against the Utah Jazz, Boston Celtics, Toronto Raptors, Phoenix Suns and Charlotte Bobcats — and all those visiting teams have to stay *somewhere*.

Traveling NBA teams are big business for downtown Miami hotels. A team on the road might need more than 40 rooms, which could add up to more than \$15,000 a night depending on the place.



Short Nap? Not exactly. The NBA-friendly, 96-inch bed at the Epic Hotel makes five-foot-eight marketing director Eric Jellson look tiny.



Addition of a shot clock is planned for the JW Marriott Marquis' basketball court.

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Hotels try to be NBA friendly

Some of the area's newest hotels have consulted with the Heat to find out how to make their rooms as attractive as possible for professional athletes, who might bang their heads in the shower or knees on the vanity in a room made for regular folks.

With taller-than-average guests in mind, Miami's riverfront Epic Hotel at 270 Biscayne Boulevard Way, across from the Marriott, was built with high rain-style shower heads, roomy ceilings and raised vanities.

A dozen rooms there cater to the very tall with 96-inch beds — available in some other hotels in the boutique Kimpton chain.

Sales and marketing director Eric Jellson said players want food to be available around the clock, so staff coordinates with teams to make sure they can fulfill any special late-night room service requests.

The hotel, which opened in late 2008, also makes a ballroom available as an actual ball room so visiting teams can practice as needed before games — despite some initial fear of damage.

"We have these beautiful hand-blown glass globes in our ballroom," Jellson said. "I just had visions of basketballs flying through these globes."

He needn't have feared. The hotel has hosted visiting teams since 2009, and no globes have suffered the consequences.

According to the Heat, teams also have spent time at the InterContinental Miami, Ritz-Carlton on Key Biscayne and Four Seasons Hotel Miami on Brickell Avenue over the past several years.

Four Seasons marketing director Tony Rodriguez said Heat competitors from the Atlanta Hawks to the Washington Wizards have stayed at his property.

Teams can be superstitious, he said, sticking with a hotel if they've had success and switching if stays have coincided with losses. He recalled the 2006 playoffs, when the Dallas Mavericks stayed at the Four Seasons — until the Heat kept winning.

"During their stay, they kept their rooms but took their team to another location," Rodriguez said. "They moved them up north to be removed from any distractions. . . . They're all about winning."

The move didn't work. The Heat won the championship.

Rodriguez acknowledged the field has become a little more crowded lately as more hotels have come online downtown.

"Teams have gone and tried other hotels," he said. "But we've also seen teams come back."

Officials at the JW Marriott Marquis are spending this season showing off their basketball extras to visiting teams with an eye toward team business during the playoffs and next season.

The hotel has plans to install a shot clock in the basketball court and put NBA-approved lines on the floor. It also has a media screening room that can be used for watching tape of games and a decked-out gym with weights just made for giant biceps.

Mark Boulris, a real estate attorney in Palmetto Bay who played for the New England Patriots, checked out the gym Monday and deemed it fit for a pro athlete's pregame needs.

"This is certainly the nicest hotel facility I've ever seen," said Boulris, president of the South Florida Chapter of the NFL Alumni Association.

Paul Pebley, director of sales and marketing at the hotel, hopes visiting teams will feel the same way. The JW Marriott Marquis is offering up the basketball court for use whenever a team can't use one of the practice courts at the AmericanAirlines Arena.

Last week the Minnesota Timberwolves took them up on the offer — and got a look at the property. Pebley said they liked what they saw.

"Having them practice here is part of the strategy," he said.

Hotels near the AmericanAirlines Arena have also found new strategies for marketing to potential guests as the Miami Heat got hotter with the addition of LeBron James and Chris Bosh to the roster. They advertise packages and deals with names such as "Live Like LeBron" at the Mandarin Oriental, Miami or "Turn up the Heat" at the Viceroy Miami on Brickell.

Miami's Downtown Development Authority recently launched a campaign called "Game On DWNTWN" promoting Heat-themed hotel and restaurant specials in the downtown area, especially to locals who might not think of the area as a place they want to spend the night, said Robert Geitner, the DDA's senior manager for marketing and communications.

"These things are very much targeted at making sure people know they can come downtown and not just see the game, they can stay downtown," Geitner said.