PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Brand Keys 2015 Sports Fan Loyalty Index
Names Bulls, Clippers and Spurs NBA Fan Favorites

NEW YORK, NY April 27, 2015 – The 2015 National Basketball Association playoffs are underway and while it may be unwise to jump to conclusions as to which team will ultimately win over all others, it demonstrates that fan loyalty is much more than just a teams' win-loss ratios,

"But when it comes to making the playoffs, 'it couldn't hurt,'" said Robert Passikoff, founder and President of Brand Keys, Inc. (brandkeys.com), the New York-based brand engagement and customer loyalty research consultancy that conducted the 23rd annual Sports Fan Loyalty fan survey. In fact, making the playoffs does raise a team's fan loyalty levels by about 10%. Winning almost doubles that as this year's results bear out.

The *Brand Keys Sports Fan Loyalty Index* (SLI) was designed to help professional sports team management identify the key drivers of fan loyalty in their home and national markets and allows management to identify areas, particularly emotional aspects that need strategic brand coaching. Brand Keys assesses all the teams in the league, interviewing 250 self-classified basketball fans from *each* of the 30 NBA teams' immediate metropolitan catchment areas. The current 2015 NBA top 5 and bottom 5 team standings follow:

Top-5 2015	**2014**
1. Chicago Bulls	(#5)
2. Los Angeles Clippers	(#4)
3. San Antonio Spurs	(#1)
4. Miami Heat	(#3)
5. Dallas Mavericks	(#6)

Bottom-5 2015	**2014**
30. Sacramento Kings	(#30)
29. Minn. Timberwolves	(#29)
28. Milwaukee Bucks	(#27)
27. Orlando Magic	(#24)
26. Detroit Pistons	(#23)

"Winning may be the only thing when it comes to a playoff championship," noted Passikoff, "but when it

comes to winning fan loyalty it's not the only thing." Fan loyalty correlates very highly with broadcast viewership, merchandise purchase, and to a certain degree, ticket revenues. Teams can count on some "lift" to fan loyalty from making the playoffs (about a 10% lift) or a championship win (about 20%), both of which fall into the "**Pure Entertainment**" category loyalty driver.

"It's important to keep in mind that teams don't leap to the top of the loyalty roster just because they win a playoff or a championship. It adds to the loyalty bond, but you need the complete package," pointed out Passikoff. There are three other emotionally based factors that must be taken into account when measuring fan loyalty: Authenticity, Fan Bonding, and History and Tradition, with all the loyalty drivers functioning like this:

Authenticity:
How well they play as a team. Sometimes a new arena and, often, a new manager, can lift this driver. Which brands sponsor the team can matter as well. "As brand support has a lot to do with building concomitant fan loyalty and a larger viewer audience," noted Passikoff, "it becomes a symbol of genuine teamwork."

Fan Bonding:
Are there players who are particularly respected and admired? More is always better and it helps if that bonding extends beyond just a player's ability to sink a 3-point shot. If you have to think about who that might be on your team, or can only come up with one, your team's Fan Bonding is likely to be low. "Yes," noted Passikoff, "we know that all these players are supposed to be the best of the best, but the roster that fans really bond with on individual teams ends up being relatively small."

History and Tradition:
Has the game and the team become part of fans' and community rituals, institutions, and beliefs? "That's one of the strongest drivers when it comes to fan loyalty in any Major League Sport," said Passikoff. "For some teams it accounts for the lion's share of loyalty they possess. Think about a team like the Utah Jazz, only a reasonable level of History & Tradition keeps them out of the bottom 5."

Teams need to meet some minimum levels on all four factors to create reasonable levels of fan loyalty. If one of those drivers weakens, or disappears, so do high levels of loyalty. "Want proof?, asked Passikoff, "look at the New York Knicks."

The NBA again this year ranks third of the four Major League Sports that Brand Keys tracks. The National Football League is currently first, followed by Major League Baseball. The National Hockey League comes in last. Overall league and team rankings – no matter which league – correlate with viewership and merchandise sales, ticket sales and game attendance, and since rankings can be influenced depending upon how loyalty drivers are managed, it's critical that team marketers act as strategic as the coaches.

"That's the secret of fan loyalty in basketball," said Passikoff. "Have five great and admired players and as many fans as possible."

END