

# NBA Finals: Knicks vs. Spurs

Wednesday, June 3, 2026

**San Antonio Spurs**

**Coach Mitch Johnson**

Game 1: Pregame



**Q. Mitch, does anything about today feel normal or is it close to whatever you would define normal as these days?**

MITCH JOHNSON: You know, it's not too different in terms of the game-day rhythm. Yesterday was a little new, or different, I guess. Had a few instances like that -- Cup earlier this year, Paris last year -- just where it's part of the deal.

But yeah, today feels somewhat familiar, especially going through it last series. I know this is the Finals, so I know there's a little added. But a lot of that is outside of our world. So I think today feels somewhat similar to what we've been in most recently.

**Q. What drew you to coaching, and were there defining moments along the way that made you say, this is what I want to do for a living?**

MITCH JOHNSON: I wasn't good enough to play anymore. Still love the game. Didn't want to get a real job. And then I realized some of the things that I didn't have God-given, like height, athleticism and talent, I got in some of the things that help you with coaching in terms of understanding the game and some of those things.

And so I realized I loved it when I was coaching nine-year-olds for free, and I enjoy doing that and I didn't get much return on that. And it's been a long journey ever since.

**Q. When Wemby is in your practice facility and David [Robinson] stops by, Pop stops by, Tim [Duncan] stops by, which one does he lean on the most for big man advice? And also in terms of Bismack, how much is Bismack in here as well?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, I don't know which one he leans on more. I don't want to speak for him, but I hope he leans on all of them. To think about the names you just mentioned and the resources that they could be and the

different perspectives that they have, wow, right, not just for Victor but our whole team, our whole program.

To have those guys so readily present and available and participatory on this journey with us is remarkable. And I know every time that I engage with them, they follow, they almost are too compliant in terms of not trying to share wisdom and their opinions because they're such gentlemen, not always Pop but the others. It's a heck of an opportunity to have those guys as resources.

And I think -- I think Bis, obviously, again, he's someone who speaks about Boris Diaw being his vet when he was in Charlotte, and just the do's and don'ts and whys and why nots of younger players. And at times they don't always maybe understand the whole extent of the why or why not. But if you have someone you trust, especially a player and not a coach, the impact of that is invaluable, and Bis being that for many guys on our team is very impactful.

**Q. What has impressed you most about Wemby?**

MITCH JOHNSON: That's a long list. I've said this a few times, but his ability to understand the expectations and the opinions and the noise outside of his world, in addition to the expectations and the vision that he has for himself, and there's some lofty stuff that's in that. And with that being said, he's never, ever, from my point of view or experience, ever put that in front of or even next to the team.

And I don't know, really, how that's possible other than I've just seen him do it.

**Q. Much has been made about the highly emotional series in the Western Conference Finals. I wonder what you said to your team to help bring the emotions down and lock in for the Finals?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Nothing, really. It was an emotional series. It was the defending champs and it was very highly contested and competitive, and it was finally over after a long seven games. I think there's a lot of appropriate emotions and fatigue -- mentally, physically and emotionally.



And I think we've had a few days now to obviously prepare and reset and get back to neutral and get ready for the Finals. And I haven't used any extra motivation because I don't think they need any.

**Q. Going back to the last series, it seemed like this was a turning point. You guys played a bad game, and Pop comes in and addresses the guys. What did you think of that?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Honestly, I think it was just a film session that we needed after a tough game. We've had plenty throughout the playoffs and postseason, and the guys showed, once again, a great competitive response and togetherness to be able to just learn from what they just walked out of.

And we've done a good job of that this year at times of learning from some success and adversity. And that was a pivotal point, obviously, in that series, and they did a great job.

**Q. Jeremy [Sochan] obviously hasn't gotten a lot of playing time with the Knicks, but are you confident that eventually he'll find a home in the NBA and be able to do what you guys saw, the promise with him early?**

MITCH JOHNSON: I hope so. Yeah. I hope so. The NBA is a grueling league, and so sometimes it's timing. Sometimes it's fit. Sometimes it's circumstance. And hopefully he gets an opportunity and can take advantage of it.

**Q. How important is it to have a guy like a Keldon Johnson who is always full of energy, especially playing for this big game, no matter you guys are up 20 or down 20, fully understand the standard of the Spurs and the culture of the Spurs?**

MITCH JOHNSON: Yeah, Keldon's energy has been at the forefront and centerpiece of our season all year. And we need that from him because that's the constant. You know, he makes shots a lot and scores points, but when he's bringing the energy, a lot of times that will influence transition offense, offensive rebounding, defensive rebounding and just those extra-effort plays, and that's something we're looking for from him every night.

**Q. Did you speak as a team that this is a rematch from 1999; that it might be hard pressure, the Knicks, it took them such a long time; that you guys are aware of it, the Knicks have so much pressure to actually win it all?**

MITCH JOHNSON: No. I think that's a very relevant topic for the media and I understand the fans, and especially the fans that probably were following the teams back in 1999.

But I'm worried about Brunson and Towns and Anunoby and so on and so forth, and I think they are probably more worried about Victor and Steph and Devin and so on and so forth.

I get the narrative. So I'm not trying to play down the question. I total understand it. It makes for great entertainment. I understand this is the entertainment business, but we are out there competing.

**Q. You mentioned some of the offensive threats they have. With the quick turnaround, what are challenges that Brunson brings?**

MITCH JOHNSON: They exhaust every possession in terms of looking for advantages and taking advantage of undisciplined defense. They are as advanced as anybody in the league in terms of manipulating, dictating and taking up angles. They have an array of fakes at the start and end of possessions. They go both ways.

Their tendencies aren't as extreme as a lot of players in the league, even some of the higher-level scorers and volume guys. They are very skilled. They are not going to force things.

So at some point, if they see the same picture over and over, they are going to take what the defense gives them and they are not going to fight the game.

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