

NBA Finals: Knicks vs. Spurs

Wednesday, June 3, 2026

Commissioner Adam Silver Media Conference



ADAM SILVER: Thank you all very much for being here. Just a little bit of history to start with.

So it's almost 80 years to the day that this league was formed in 1946. Of course, the Knicks were not only one of the original teams in the NBA but played in the very first game that this league held.

The Spurs were established, roughly, two decades later, but, of course, they were part of the American Basketball Association, and then in 1976 joined the NBA.

The reason I'm saying that is there's so much history around these Finals in addition to it being the 80th anniversary of this league. I think both these teams are steeped in history. I just ran into Manu Ginobili as I was walking in. It reminded me just here, we have David Robinson, Tim Duncan, Sean Elliott, in addition to Manu.

The Knicks have so much history around them. It's great to see so many of their great alums who are not only here today for the game but are actively involved with the franchise. People like Patrick Ewing, Allan Houston, John Starks, the great Walt Frazier I know is here. I think that's one of the things that makes this league so special is this family environment that we have.

For those who can't hear, there's a team screaming behind there. That's also part of what makes this league special.

I also had an opportunity when I was here in the Conference Finals to see Coach Popovich, the winningest coach in NBA history. Got a chance to be up in the suite and talk to him for a bit. You can still feel the connection that he has to this current team. I was moved, I'm sure as many of you were, when Victor Wembanyama said the first thing he wanted to do was sit with Pop when he got back to San Antonio. You can feel his influence throughout this franchise.

Lastly, where we see the league today in terms of the great level of competition, this will be our eighth different champion in the last eight years. I've talked about parity of

opportunity over the years. It doesn't mean that we necessarily are looking to have a different champion every year, but we want to ensure that for the 30 teams in this league, regardless of the size of their market, they all have an opportunity to compete.

I think that's what we're seeing with these two teams. Obviously you have one of our largest markets and one of our smallest markets, but what they have in common is strong management, a winning culture, and of course great team basketball. You know, I'm thrilled just about the anticipation around this competition tonight.

And very lastly, I'll just add, in terms of how global this league is becoming, roughly a third of the players on these two teams' rosters were born outside the United States. The fan base for our league is increasingly global, with hundreds of millions of fans we anticipate will be following and watching these games worldwide.

With that, happy to answer any questions.

Q. To piggyback on what you just said about the international reach, the league always touts 214 countries and more than 50 languages. We know for obvious reasons there's going to be a lot of French said about these Finals. Can you update us with the backdrop of Victor here, the interest in Europe, how that's gone and where things stand as far as the league and where the process is.

ADAM SILVER: Sure. So you know, one, I'll just begin with the level of interest in the NBA. I mean, it's unfortunate time zone-wise. Obviously we are on the middle of the night in France, which somewhat limits our audience. But in terms of social media, as you might imagine, the interest in Victor and this team is off the charts.

But we also now have, roughly, probably 15 percent of our league is comprised of European players, of course, some of the very best players in this league, and as a result we have been pursuing an independent league in Europe. We are very much on schedule. It is our hope and anticipation that that league will launch in the '27-28 season in Europe. We are on track. Final bids from franchises are due at the

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end of this month, at the end of the month in June.

As has been reported, we have seen record interest. We are very excited about the ongoing opportunity and working closely with FIBA, our federation.

Q. I want to take you back to the end of the regular season and the regular-season awards and the player participation policy. Would you support any reform to the link between the player participation policy and regular-season awards, such as either reducing the number of games needed, disconnecting All-NBA from the player participation policy, or also just on a separate issue, releasing the regular-season award winners at the end of the regular season so that fans can make maybe more of a connection between regular season and performance and why voters are voting the way they are for the awards.

ADAM SILVER: Your last point is an interesting one in terms of the timing of the release, and that's something we should look at. We've gone up and down. Remember at one point we had an award show and maybe waited too long to announce, and now we've timed them throughout the playoffs. But that's an interesting thought. So we should look at that.

In terms of supporting a change, I'm frankly not ready to support a change. I just take a step back to the situation we were dealing with when we went into the last collective bargaining negotiation and put in place the 65-game rule.

In the few prior seasons before we put in place that rule, roughly one-third of all our All-NBA players did not participate in 65 games, or roughly 85 or 80 percent of the season. So we came together with the Players Association – and really on behalf of the fans, what this is ultimately about – and said, We've got to find a way to incentivize our stars to be on the floor, and we have to find a way to incentivize our teams to have our stars on the floor.

From that standpoint, I think the rule is working. Now, we built into the rule the opportunity to make exceptions in extraordinary circumstances if a player is missing by a game or two, and obviously we had two exceptions this year. But I'm not ready to support a change yet. Of course when we sit down to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement with the players, we are happy to talk about it.

But I think what gets left out, anywhere we draw the line, there's always going to be players on the other side of that line. Even getting to the rules we just changed around tanking, I think what you're seeing, in not just the NBA but modern sports, analytics are predominant in that teams are following clear incentives. Players are following clear

incentives.

I think just in the same way we change rules to incentivize teams to be focused on winning in the regular season, we change rules to incentivize players to participate in the regular season, and I think they have largely worked.

Q. As part of the discussions last week about the tanking rules, I know you guys are going to give updates to the Board on expansion and on Europe. Curious where the status of expansion is at the moment in terms of where you guys are in the process. And as far as Europe goes, have you guys settled on some sort of framework of what it's going to look like with the discussions with the EuroLeague and what the overall picture is going to look like, or is that still unclear outside of the bids?

ADAM SILVER: The structure is in place. So what we are planning to launch is, essentially, a 16-team league, 12 permanent franchises, and then the ability for, frankly, any club in Europe to play in in those remaining slots. So a modified open league or modified closed league, depending on how you want to look at it.

That's the structure that we're talking to these potential franchises about. Some are existing franchises that play in Europe, and then there's groups that are coming together and want to launch teams in cities that don't have top-level basketball right now.

In terms of the Euroleague, discussions are ongoing with them. It's our hope that we can find a way to integrate these operations with the Euroleague, but we will move forward either way.

On the expansion front, discussions are ongoing. As I think everyone knows at this point, we are focused on Las Vegas and Seattle. There's multiple groups interested in both cities. We are in discussions with them. The timeline is, as I've said before, it's not a foregone conclusion that we will expand either in one city or both cities. But what we have told all interested parties, our anticipation is our Board will make a decision by the end of this calendar year.

Q. I wanted to ask you about Aspiration and the investigation there, but I wanted to point out a couple things and have you react. The questions are: Is the investigation done? When might you release whatever decision you're going to make? But in this process, there's been a Pulitzer awarded for the reporting on it, and then also yesterday, the CEO was sentenced to like 14 years in prison, do either of those things from a perception standpoint affect the decision that you

ultimately have to make?

ADAM SILVER: So, number one, as you know, the investigation is being conducted by a law firm independent of the NBA. I mean, yes, ultimately we are paying their bills, but they are doing the work independent of the league office. My instruction to them is, you know, we can't be investigating forever and at some point we have to wrap it up, but at the same time, I think the most important thing is we get it right.

I think that relates to the second part of your question in terms of perception. I certainly hear and read things all the time about the perception of what really happened or didn't happen here, and I think my only reaction is I wouldn't be doing my job if ultimately I issued a determination based on perception. My job is to follow the facts.

What essentially happens here is that the factual report, together with findings, will be made by this independent firm. That's presented to me. It's then, ultimately, my role to determine what the appropriate discipline, if any, should be meted out based on their findings. So sort of two independent processes there, and that's what's happening right now.

I don't have a specific timeline on when they will be completed. I think it's clear they are far along. I think those reports are – reading all the time from people who are being interviewed by them, and I think they understand that you could keep going on and on, but I think we are close to the point now where I think we need to wrap this up, because you also need finality. The team has to understand what situation they are going to be operating under, and so do the other 29 teams. So that's where things currently stand.

Q. You opened by talking about how wonderful it is to see all these alumni here. You once tried to broker peace between James Dolan and Charles Oakley. Is it kind of a shame that he can't be part of this?

ADAM SILVER: It is a shame in that I tried, Michael Jordan tried, too, as you said, to broker peace between Charles and Jim Dolan. Our efforts were unsuccessful. I think it's unfortunate for the NBA that this is an ongoing situation.

But as you know, it's currently wrapped up in litigation. I tried my best. So I don't really see anything else I can do at the moment.

Q. With the October '27 as a start date in mind, when do you think you will announce the qualification process for the four additional teams? And also, we

saw obviously Luka Doncic. You weren't committing during All-Star Game, but can you now say a current player can invest in NBA Europe?

ADAM SILVER: Well, you know, first of all, as I said, our bidding process is continuing. The end of this month, bids will be due, and presumably we'll be in a position in the fall to award franchises. I think then we will turn to the qualification system. But we are in the process of working that through with our federation, FIBA, right now.

In terms of whether it's Luka Doncic or other players owning teams, that's not been resolved yet. That's an issue we have to work through with our Players Association.

I will just add I think part of the determination will be what the basketball relationship will be between these teams and call it NBA Europe and the NBA. That obviously could complicate things if current NBA players are owners. So those are some of the factors we'll be looking at.

Q. When you watch Draft Lottery reform happen behind the scenes, what were some of the things that stood out to you about where it started, where it ended, and ultimately what do you like about the finished product?

ADAM SILVER: I think what stood out is an issue that had been – you know, that we had been dealing with at the league for decades now, obviously before I became involved in the league. In the '60s there was a coin toss and then David Stern instituted the initial lottery. In the early '80s, I obviously just mentioned Patrick Ewing around that draft. The lottery was changed four times over the years.

Tanking is not a new issue for this league. I think maybe what surprised us all a little bit is how quickly it became acceptable behavior in this league. I think it used to be limited, frankly, to a small group of teams. I think there was -- I think I could genuinely stand up and talk about rebuilding and not say "tanking," and it was practiced in a different way. I don't know how else to say it.

I think sort of to my earlier comment about incentives, I don't think this is unique to the NBA. I think you've seen a wave of analytic experts come into all sports and looking directly at incentives and not necessarily feeling bound by some of the tradition that leagues have followed historically.

So we found ourselves in a situation this year where all of a sudden it seemed like a third of the league maybe was responding in what an economist would say is very rational

behavior but non-traditional behavior in terms of what they saw as a clear incentive to fall to the bottom of the standings.

And it may be or likely was compounded by the fact that there's a perception of a very deep draft class this year. But we ultimately concluded that we needed to take immediate action.

Again, our fans were speaking loud and clearly about this being unacceptable. Oddly you had situations where in some markets, fans were cheering on their teams and saying, of course this is the right strategy, you have to be either really good or really bad. Which also created a certain amount of unfairness because those same fans may have been saying that's a good, long-term strategy to win games but at the same time saying, don't ask me to pay for this product or watch this product in the meantime.

So what I was pleasantly surprised about is we led a process in the league office, Byron Spruell was here, Evan Wasch, who -- part of his group was sort of our analytics mastermind in helping create this 3-2-1 lottery. But I was pleasantly surprised the various stakeholders came together very quickly.

There was largely agreement among our team owners, general managers and our coaches and ultimately the Players Association, as well -- they can speak for themselves, the Players Association -- but that this was not what we wanted to see in the NBA; that we needed to make some quick changes here and deal directly with those incentives so that teams were not put in the position where they felt they had no choice or that they would be at a competitive disadvantage if they didn't engage in this type of behavior.

Now standing here in June, I'm thrilled, frankly, that we got this done this year. Looking forward to seeing how this will play out next year -- teams have an incentive to win all of their games.

Back to a question about European basketball. I think Europeans are chuckling that we are using the word relegation, but the concept is clear; that if you're one of the worst-performing teams in the league, your chances of winning the lottery actually decrease.

And at the same -- I should add, at the same time, and I think part and parcel of this issue is, how will the draft continue to operate; is there still a means to rebuild your team for the draft. And I'll just say that for the teams with the bottom 10 records, they still will have a 70 percent chance, I'm blending all their odds together, of getting a Top-10 pick.

So record is still connected to your performance on the floor, but there's no particular incentive. There's a disincentive to be one of the worst-performing teams and there's no incentive to be bad. This is something we haven't seen before in this league.

Just lastly, it's designed to grandfather out; it's a three-year term so that we can study it and make a determination whether we should be doing something differently as a result. And there's some really interesting ideas out there, marketplace-type approaches where you can trade, draft options and things like that. Some of them get very complicated.

But I want to get a sense from our teams and ultimately our fans how they feel about those options, as well. But I'm pleased with where we ended up.

Q. Last year I asked you a question about the media perception of the NBA Finals, and you said you had fans coming up to you asking you about ratings. This year it feels more celebratory. Do you attribute that to the Knicks, Wemby or media partners or a shift in strategy internally?

ADAM SILVER: Honestly, I think it's all of the above. I'd like to think that we listen to our fans. We listen to the media. I mean, even some of the ceremonial trappings that weren't there last year, it surprised me a bit. It seemed at the time that inserting the Larry O'Brien Trophy digitally in our telecast was a good idea because teams had complained about slipperiness of logos and other things on the floor.

But we heard loud and clearly from people that that was just one indication of a lack of pomp and circumstance around the games.

So went to our network partner at ESPN/ABC and said we need to produce openings, on-air openings, and we need to add more trappings of the sense of celebration here in the Finals. Obviously it's not a decal; we went to the trouble of painting, repainting floors, so that the Larry O'Brien trophy was on there.

I would just say, we try to listen and learn and acknowledge when we have made mistakes and try to improve. The league office, hearing from our fans that they wanted more -- and sure, I live in New York. I live in New York City, and everywhere I go, people want to talk about the Finals. That's really exciting.

I'd say same thing here in San Antonio. I was here the other day for the Conference Finals. The city is on fire.



Like I said earlier, two franchises that have different origins, teams composed and created in very different ways but enormous excitement around it, and global excitement around these Finals which are highly anticipated.

Q. I wanted to go back to the lottery reform and the tanking reform. Now that that is in place, how do you envision truly bad teams rebuilding in an era where restricted free agency has basically dried up; where teams in the second apron are in a difficult position, and most great young players simply sign extension after extension with their existing teams to remain where they are?

ADAM SILVER: Number one, as I said, the draft still only includes, largely, teams that aren't in the playoffs. So you have 14 teams who aren't even eligible to get a lottery pick. You have, as I said, for a bottom 10 teams, still have a 70 percent chance of getting a Top-10 pick.

And you know, I think the world has changed considerably, too. There used to be this notion in the draft, was this small market lure was the only way to build your franchise. I look around the league now, in the same way the country and the world have changed in dramatic ways because of digital media. It would be hard to argue that Victor Wembanyama is not getting the global attention he deserves because he's playing in a small market, San Antonio. I get questions all the time about the impact of having a successful Knicks team in the league office.

And while it's wonderful to have a great Knicks team, like I said, this will be eight different champions in eight years. And we seem to be fine, also, when we have Oklahoma City and Indianapolis in the Finals.

I think in this new system through the lottery, it's going to put more emphasis on drafting deeper. I think it's going to put more emphasis on scouting during the season where you're paying a lot of attention to maybe players 6 through 10 on roster that traditionally haven't gotten the same focus.

Remember when you and I got involved in this league, there were maybe sort of two or three players and everybody else on every team. I'm also fond of saying, when I got to the league in the early '90s, roughly five percent of the players were international in this league. Now it's roughly one-third. There's this global pool of incredible talent.

Lastly, just look at these two teams, how deep they are. James Jones was making this point the other day in our basketball operations group saying that even it's different

from when James was winning championships in this league. Look how deep these rosters are and look how deep teams have to be to be successful in this league.

So I think rebuilding will come in different ways than it did in the old days. But still, just as I look at San Antonio and New York and say, compliment them for team building, for management, for culture building, I think it's going to be the same in every market.

Q. I asked you about this several years ago, so I guess I'm looking for an update. Has there been any recent discussion or consideration about honoring the memory of David Stern by attaching his name to an award, a trophy, some other fixture in the league?

ADAM SILVER: The answer is yes. There's always ongoing discussions.

It's hard with David because the problem is, so many of the proposals at the league office, honestly, haven't felt big enough. I don't know how else to say it. We're going to come up with the right way to honor him.

There's been many smaller honors, I don't know how else to say it, scholarships, things we've done, community awards. But there's no doubt that more needs to be done.

There undoubtedly will be opportunities around this new Europe league. Again, like David's vision was the global NBA. Whether, again, that will feel big enough in the same way, I almost think there's nothing that we could do in some ways that will ultimately feel that he's getting his just due, but we have a committee of team employees, of league people, and we got waylaid a little bit by COVID and lost a little bit momentum, but we're turning back to it.

We're going to come up with the right way to honor him.

Q. Can you talk briefly about Victor Wembanyama, third Finals in his NBA career. Did you expect him to become so quickly a global superstar in the NBA, and how big of an asset is he to keep growing the game around the world for the NBA?

ADAM SILVER: What was the last part of the question?

Q. How big of an asset to keep growing the game around the world.

ADAM SILVER: I would say he's just a huge personality, putting aside his size. I've enjoyed getting to know him.

I'd say having been with the league for a long time now, players come along every once in a while that, in addition

to having this incredible skill, love the promotional side of it and want to play that role for the league.

We saw the role he played at All-Star, even leading the other young players, saying, let's take this seriously, this really matters.

In terms of my expectation for him, again I try not to have an expectation like that. That goes back to the question of the draft and tanking and lotteries. I mean, there's so much pressure on these young players, and there's been lots of young players who have come into this league as top draft picks that haven't panned out. And then you have Jalen Brunson who is a second-round pick and was picked up as a free agent who has dramatically exceeded all people's expectations, maybe not his own, but based on the place he was drafted at.

You know, I don't want to put any more pressure on Victor. I will say, he obviously is the No. 1 pick in the draft. He came in highly touted. He was somebody who even before he came into the NBA was blowing up the Internet in terms of his highlights.

Did I have a specific expectation in terms of numbers of years it would take him to get to the Finals? No. But I would say just for, just trying to be an objective observer, he's ahead of any timeline that people had many mind.

Q. Being in New York, what do you think when you see the old Ewings and those guys cheering for the team like uncles and everything? And when you have a place that is as big as New York City and has not had a Finals in so long, how painstaking has it been for the NBA to prepare for the crowds, the people partying outside watching the game, the crazed fans, maybe unique people deciding to attend the game? Like how much preparation have you guys done in that regard, and is it still a work-in-progress?

ADAM SILVER: I'd just say, I don't view that part of the job as painstaking. I think it's a really enjoyable part of job.

I happen to live, as I said, in New York City, and so I'm seeing it every day. And yes, viewing parties, the things the Knicks are putting together and things the league is helping with but the great news, games are on broadcast television.

Obviously there's only so many tickets to these games. It's frustrating that more people can't get into buildings, and more people can't get into buildings at lower prices, but markets are markets when it comes to -- especially with a secondary market, the value of tickets.

So I think from that standpoint, I think it's -- as I said, because I'm witnessing it every day, I'm just seeing it all around me and everywhere I go, people all feeling part of that Knicks franchise and maybe just say a little bit more about my opening comments.

I think what's really so special about sports in our society -- and it's a little bit of a cliché, but our increasingly divided society, and that goes to people who will be attending the first home game at Madison Square Garden -- it truly brings people together. It creates a sense of connectivity among people. It creates a sense of belonging, and I feel that every day. And whether it's because somebody is just wearing a Jalen Brunson jersey or has a Knicks cap on or just wants to yell "Go Knicks" as I'm walking down the street, you feel it. They all feel part of that community.

And the other part of your question, I love seeing all these legends at games, and it's not unique to San Antonio or the Knicks, either. It's become part of the fabric of this league. I think San Antonio led the way, I think, in terms of building culture around its former players.

But the Knicks have done an incredible job, Lakers. I could go team by team, the Sacramento Kings, everywhere I go, you see legends, whether they are directly involved in basketball operations or some other business aspect, or as broadcasting, but increasingly, there's very long benches these days of assistance and people who are involved in the team.

I think the young players in the league love it. They learn from these veterans. There's things that they can learn from former players, players who played in those cities that maybe can't be taught by others.

You know, back to that question about David Stern. He always coined that expression "NBA family." I feel part of that family, and I think the more alumni -- it's remarkable to me. The number, I think it still may be below 5,000 people, men, have ever played in this league, ever, in the history of this 80-year league. It's quite remarkable.

And to the extent that those players who want to continue to have roles with the league or with the team or with new ventures in Europe or with the WNBA or G League or our NBA Africa, all are welcome. I think it's something really special and in some ways unique to the NBA.

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