

# NBA Finals: Knicks vs. Spurs

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**Paul Westhead**

**J.B. Bickerstaff**

NBCA President

**David Fogel**

NBCA Executive Director

Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award



grow the Coaches Association and putting us in position to be where we are now.

I want to echo David's sentiment, thank the NBA for giving us this opportunity because where I come from, as my dad is a coach, coaching matters. The respect that we pay to coaches and understanding the sacrifices and hard work that coaches put in, the legacy that they have, how they impact our game moving forward, is something that we should show a ton of respect to. I'm happy to be here in this position to be able to do that.

I want to thank our Selection Committee, Bernie Bickerstaff, Rick Carlisle, Billy Cunningham, Joe Dumars, Phil Jackson, Gregg Popovich, Pat Riley and Donnie Walsh, for all the time you take to have conversations about who we should honor and understanding again the value of coaches and how important that is.

Also want to acknowledge our prior winners:

Don Nelson, Rudy Tomjanovich, Rick Adelman, Mike Fratello, Larry Brown, Del Harris, Frank Layden, Doug Moe, Al Attles, Hubie Brown, K.C. Jones, Jerry Sloan, Dick Motta, Bernie Bickerstaff, Bill Fitch, Pat Riley, Lenny Wilkens, Jack Ramsay, Tex Winter and Tommy Heinsohn as well.

It's an honor for me to be sitting here next to Coach Westhead. He's one of my earliest memories of the game of basketball. My dad was hired as a general manager of the Denver Nuggets. The first hire that he made was Paul Westhead. The reason that he hired him is because of his style of play and the style that we continue to see in the NBA today. The ability to play at pace, to play at tempo. The idea was we were going to use the altitude in Denver to wear our opponents down and play that style of basketball, that it was going to make it extremely difficult for people to keep up with.

Again, my fondness for you started, I was in the seventh grade at the time, Coach, hope you're okay with me saying that.

PAUL WESTHEAD: I'm okay [smiling].

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for joining us this evening. This is the Chuck Daly Award winner announcement. I will turn it over to David Fogel, executive director of the Coaches Association.

DAVID FOGEL: Thank you. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We are excited to be here in San Antonio for Game 2 of the NBA Finals and to present the 2026 Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award.

Before we begin, on behalf of Coach J.B. Bickerstaff and all our coaches, I want to give a sincere thank you to the NBA and specifically Commissioner Silver, Mark Tatum, so many others at the league office for providing us with this tremendous platform to honor our great coaches and all the work throughout the year to support our coaches and the Coaches Association.

We are especially proud of the Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award, which honors the memory of Hall of Famer Chuck Daly, who over an outstanding career set the standard for integrity, competitive excellence and tireless promotion of NBA basketball.

Chuck was an incredible mentor to so many coaches and players in our league, including Coach Bickerstaff and our winner this year, Coach Westhead.

I'd like to turn it over to Coaches Association president, J.B. Bickerstaff.

J.B. BICKERSTAFF: Thank you.

Before we get started, this is my first opportunity to present this award. I couldn't be happier to be here with you, Coach, David. I want to say thank you to Rick Carlisle for all the work that Rick put in over the years in helping to



J.B. BICKERSTAFF: Again, I want to talk about Coach's legacy, the imprint he's had on the game. You think about his time at Loyola Marymount where he's in the Hall of Fame, as well. The West Coast Conference Hall of Fame, as well. It was interesting, I was listening to him talk, his thought process, we were all amazed by Coach D'Antoni's seven seconds or less. I was listening to him talk, he wanted to score in four or five seconds or less.

Imagine the tempo you have to play with. But you see our guys playing at the pace they're playing at. For him it's not fast enough. There's more pace to be had out there.

You talk about the tree, the innovation, the impact he has had on the game from the collegiate level to the NBA level, the only head coach to win a championship with the Lakers in the NBA, then the Mercury in the WNBA, just shows his versatility and his ability to impact people as well as the game of basketball.

So I'm honored to be here sitting next to you and happy to give you the Chuck Daly Lifetime Achievement Award.

PAUL WESTHEAD: Thank you.

Well, I didn't know I did all that. Let me just say when I got into the NBA, I was hired by Jack McKinney, who is a dear friend of mine, who had an accident, then I wound up being the coach because it was either me or the trainer. There was only one assistant coach back in the NBA then. So it was an easy decision for Dr. Buss.

We won the championship in my first year. I thought this was easy, like why not do this all the time. Twenty-seven years later with the women in Phoenix, the Phoenix Mercury, with Diana Taurasi, we won another championship. The gap was much longer than I ever expected.

To have that honor in my first year in the NBA with the likes of Kareem and Magic, then in Phoenix with Diana Taurasi, it just reminded me when you receive an award like this, clearly it all depends on your players and your fellow coaches.

Speaking of fellow coaches, I just want to say in that list that J.B. talked about, my college coach, Jack Ramsay, was my man. He was my mentor. I looked up to Jack. There isn't a finer person that you could look up to.

He taught me how to coach. He taught me how to deal with people, how to be honest with them. He taught me if you weren't a very good player, sit on the bench, which I did with him for four years.

I understood how to be a sub. I was a good sub, too. I was very kind with him. But with Jack Ramsay as my mentor, I was able to go to different teams, I had the Lakers, I had the Bulls, I had the Nuggets, I was an assistant coach with Orlando.

When I mention Orlando, I want to acknowledge when you're a coach in the NBA and you're not working, you need a friend to get you back. Fortunately, I had Johnny Davis in Orlando who hired me. So, I'm ever grateful for Johnny Davis. Then that job went away.

I had one more friend left, and it was P.J. Carlesimo. He hired me in Golden State. Believe it or not, he hired me again in Seattle, which we then went to Oklahoma City.

I'm fortunate for a career of great people, but especially to people who give you a chance, a second chance and a third chance.

I do want to say about J.B. and his father Bernie, Bernie was smart enough to make me his first hire as a general manager. I was also his first fire [laughter]. That says something about Bernie. He knew what he was doing.

Just in passing, Bernie and P.J. and I, even Phil Jackson, we interacted in coaching in Puerto Rico. To Bernie's credit, he won a championship down there. Anyone who can win a championship in Puerto Rico deserves an honor.

My credit to your dad.

I'm happy for this opportunity. During the way of playing different teams and coaching different teams, I want to thank my family, my wife Cassie who is here, my four children who traveled the country with me. I think we had 20 jobs, so my daughter Monica, Patrice, Juliet and my son Paul, who is also here with me today. Thank you, family.

At the end of the line, it's your family that counts. Thank you.

**Q. I know this is an NBA-driven award. I can't think of anybody who moved across the game from amateur to pros, from men to women, domestic and foreign. As you think of basketball in all those forms and places, are there any common themes that you saw between the leagues, games, players that allowed you to be successful wherever you coached?**

PAUL WESTHEAD: Yeah, that's a very interesting question.

I can only say that upon reflection after 40-plus years in the game of basketball, if you have very good players, you

have a chance to win. If you don't have very good players, you are not going to win [smiling].

Beyond that, I often look for players who wanted to play quick and wanted to play fast. I would walk into a new job and say, all right, guys or gals, who wants to run fast this year?

If there were 12 players in the room, they'd all raise their hand.

A week later, Who wants to run fast? No hands [laughter].

The speed is the issue for me. Every once in a while one and one was three. Every once in a while I found players who wanted to play fast. Then it was a joy.

**Q. I want to ask you about the seven-second rule. And I'm curious how good you think Hank Gathers would have been if he had a chance to play at this level?**

PAUL WESTHEAD: I appreciate it when you say the seven-second rule. We really had the four or five rule, shoot in four or five seconds. Seven was a little bit slow.

Hank Gathers, I'm almost speechless because as a young man he was a terrific person. As a competitor, there was none better. I can only say to you we're playing at LSU against Shaquille [O'Neal] and Chris Jackson and company, and in the first five minutes of the game he had his first five shots blocked. So he's 0-for-5. There's a timeout. Hank said to the team and me, get me the ball.

He wound up with 45 points and 25 rebounds.

How he would have been as a pro? He easily would have been a journeyman player. I'll get you 15 and 10 night in and night out. I won't get you 40. I won't get you five. But I'll get you 15 and 10. Just put me in the game and watch me.

**Q. The family factor you mentioned, them being here today, how important was their support for you throughout the journey and how did that help you be the coach you've been?**

PAUL WESTHEAD: Well, the family support you can't do without. Like, you have to move. Moving is a task. We did it I think it was 18 times. You have to be together, you have to be supportive.

I do know later in my career sometimes some of the older children stayed home, and my wife came with me and the youngest. It was kind of hard then. It was a split family.

Without the family backing, coaching is hard enough, but without your family backing, it's almost impossible.

**Q. Something that happened a long time ago, I just wonder what those 36 hours were like before Game 6 in 1980 when you realized Kareem is not going to be able to play in Game 6 and Magic says, I'll do it, what that was like being a part of that. Then when you see the way the game is played today, with the bombardment of threes, people running at every opportunity, playing five out, zero in, do you feel like this is sort of what you hoped the game would be or is it still not fast enough?**

PAUL WESTHEAD: In answer to your question about what happened in 1980, this arena, only it was the Spectrum then in Philadelphia. We were playing against some marvelous players, Dr. J and Mo Cheeks. I think Mo is still around. He's out on the court. Bobby Jones. What a terrific team.

I do remember walking into the tunnel, I think we walked in two hours before the game, and we heard all kinds of hammering going on. I just had a curiosity and said, what's all the hammering about?

They said, well, we just got a call from the NBA office and the Commissioner said, If you can win a championship, we need a stage.

So they were building a stage, although no one ever believed they would use it because Kareem was home and never made the trip. Without Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, everyone expected we would lose.

We played the game. As you know, Magic jumped center, and his first shot was in the post, a little sky hook, then he did everything else. He handled the ball, shot outside shots, inside shots. A little bit like Wemby.

We win. A little caveat on the win. Everyone talks about how bad the Philadelphia fans are, Philly fans who threw snowballs at Santa Claus and things like that.

My wife was one of the handful of people who came to the game from Los Angeles, because everyone stayed back in L.A. She came to the game. By herself she was surrounded by 50 avid Sixer fans. They finally figured it out when she cheered during the end of the game. They said -- dadadadada.

The 50 stood up and applauded her at the end of the game. So Philly fans aren't that bad.

**Q. You've been talking a lot about the pace, your pure belief in the pace. How did you form that philosophy? Was it a mentor or experience you had?**

PAUL WESTHEAD: Well, two things happened. I was at a coaches clinic in Wildwood, New Jersey. I ran into a coach named Sonny Allen who coached Old Dominion College to a Division II NCAA championship. He said, I do my fastbreak. Next thing I know he got a job at SMU. I called him, he said, come on down.

He said to me, Coach, before I show you my system, you have to be a little crazy to do this.

I said, I'm a little crazy. I can do that.

So I did that and I followed his system. Then I went to Puerto Rico with Bernie Bickerstaff and many other coaches went down. I tried to put in my half-court offense. The players were saying, Coach, we just come down and shoot the ball and it goes in.

I said, wow. That's a good idea.

So why pass the ball around six times and bang and screen and hit and have zebras trying to call screens and fouls on you when all you got to do is pass it and shoot it. First man down, shoot.

That's what we do. If they pass it to you, shoot it. It works. If you go fast enough.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, and congratulations.

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