

Brayden's Breakdown:

PREVIEWING THE NBA COACH OF THE YEAR RACE

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Awards season is upon us for the NBA, and the Coach of the Year finalists have been announced. The three finalists are Mitch Johnson of the San Antonio Spurs, J.B. Bickerstaff from the Detroit Pistons and Joe Mazzulla of the Boston Celtics.

Here is what you need to know about all three coaches.

Mazzulla took a Celtics team that was projected to win between 41 and 43 games and coached Boston to 56 wins and the two seed in the Eastern Conference. The 37-year-old coach took a team that did not expect Jayson Tatum to play at all after his Achilles injury and turned them into a title favorite out of the East. Mazzulla was an assistant from 2019-2022 with Boston before being named interim at the start of the 2022-2023 season. In just his fourth year as a coach, Mazzulla has one of the best winning percentages in NBA history and an NBA championship already, but he is yet to win a Coach of the Year award. The youngest coach in the NBA has a high chance to take home the award this season.

Bickerstaff has manufactured one of the quickest comebacks in NBA history in just two years after the Pistons fired Monty Williams in 2024. After going on the longest losing streak in NBA history and winning only 14 games in 2024, Detroit went 44-38 in 2025 and took the number one seed in the East this year. The Pistons won 60 games for the first time since 2006 and Bickerstaff has developed the young core of Cade Cunningham, Jalen Duren and Ausar Thompson. Those three have elevated the play of the team since being drafted and have especially played well since Bickerstaff joined the team two years ago. He finished second in Coach of the Year voting last season and could win or finish second once again.

Johnson was named full-time head coach last May after being the interim head coach for the legendary Gregg Popovich. Despite the massive shoes to fill, Johnson has led the Spurs to the playoffs for the first time since 2019. The Spurs won 34 games in Johnson's first season behind young star Victor Wembanyama and 2025 Rookie of the Year Stephon Castle. With a fully healthy season from De'Aaron Fox and the addition of some veteran talent, the Spurs won 62 games this season and finished just 2 games behind the Oklahoma City Thunder for the number one seed in the Western Conference. Wembanyama was just named Defensive Player of the Year and is a finalist for the MVP. The Spurs can compete with any team on any given night, and Johnson is a big reason for that. Johnson started with the Spurs G-League team in Austin in 2016 and worked his way through the ranks to become head coach. At just 39-years-old, Johnson's name will be on this list for years to come.

For all three of the teams, it has been a while since any head coach has won the prestigious award. Popovich won the award three times, most recently in 2014 for San Antonio. Mazzulla would be the first Celtics coach to win the award since Bill Fitch in 1980. Only three Celtics coaches have won the award. Rick Carlisle was the last coach of the Pistons to win. He is one of only two coaches to win as head coach in the Motor City.

The award results should be announced soon as the Defensive Player of the Year award has already been announced.



Joe Mazzulla, the head coach of the Boston Celtics. Mazzulla is the youngest coach in the NBA and is a finalist for Coach of the Year.

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Mitch Johnson, head coach of the San Antonio Spurs. Johnson is one of three finalists for the NBA's Coach of the Year.

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