

THE 2026 NBA CHAMPIONSHIP

The Knicks' 53-Year Wait — The Road to the Title and the Celebration That Followed

Name:

Date:

Class:



The New York Knicks celebrate on the court after clinching the 2026 NBA Championship — their first title in 53 years.

PART 1 — Key Vocabulary

Study these terms carefully. They appear throughout the reading passages and exercises below.

Term	Definition
<i>drought</i>	an extended period without a particular achievement or success, especially in sports — used to describe a team's long wait between championships
<i>underdog</i>	a competitor or team given little chance of winning against a stronger, more favored opponent
<i>dynasty</i>	a team or organization that dominates its sport over a sustained period, typically by winning multiple championships
<i>clutch</i>	able to perform at an exceptionally high level under pressure, especially in the final, most decisive moments of a contest
<i>comeback</i>	a return to a winning or competitive position after having fallen significantly behind
<i>deficit</i>	the amount or margin by which a team trails in score — a gap that must be closed to win
<i>momentum</i>	the sense of forward motion, confidence, and energy a team builds during a game or series, often shifting the outcome
<i>franchise</i>	a professional sports organization, particularly one considered in terms of its long-term history, identity, and ownership
<i>Most Valuable Player (MVP)</i>	

	the formal award given to the single best-performing player in a given game, series, or season
<i>ticker-tape parade</i>	a celebratory procession through city streets during which crowds throw shredded paper from windows above — a tradition reserved for major civic or sporting achievements
<i>euphoria</i>	an intense, often overwhelming feeling of happiness and excitement, typically shared collectively by a crowd
<i>jubilation</i>	a public, loudly expressed feeling of great joy and triumph

PART 2 — Vocabulary Practice

Match each term on the left to its correct definition on the right.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. drought 2. underdog 3. clutch 4. deficit 5. franchise 6. jubilation 7. momentum | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. amount by which a team trails in score B. a loudly expressed, public feeling of joy C. a long period without a particular success D. able to perform well under pressure E. a professional sports organization considered over time F. forward energy and confidence built during a contest G. a competitor given little chance of winning |
|--|---|

Fill in the blank with the correct vocabulary word.

1. After 53 years without a title, the New York Knicks finally ended their championship _____ in June 2026, a wait that had spanned generations of fans.
2. Trailing by 29 points in Game 4, the Knicks staged what would become the largest _____ in NBA Finals history.
3. Jalen Brunson's 45-point performance in the decisive Game 5 made him an obvious choice for Finals _____.
4. Trailing by 27 points at halftime of Game 4, New York faced an almost unprecedented _____ before completing their rally.
5. Brunson's ability to score reliably under pressure throughout the postseason made him one of the most _____ performers in the league.
6. Once the Knicks' comeback began in the third quarter, they carried all the _____ into the fourth, overwhelming San Antonio down the stretch.

PART 3 — Reading Passage 1: The Road to the Finals



Players and court-side celebrities celebrate at Madison Square Garden after New York's Game 4 comeback victory.

The New York Knicks entered the 2026 playoffs as a good team, not an obvious champion. Their regular season had been solid but unspectacular, and few analysts picked them to reach the NBA Finals, let alone win one. Then the postseason began, and everything changed. New York put together an eleven-game winning streak across the first three rounds — the longest active playoff run in franchise history — and set a record for the largest halftime lead in playoff history in a lopsided rout of the Atlanta Hawks. By the time the Eastern Conference Finals arrived, the Knicks were no longer an underdog story; they looked unbeatable, sweeping the Cleveland Cavaliers in four games behind Jalen Brunson's franchise-defining leadership. Brunson, who had transformed the Knicks' fortunes since arriving in New York, was named Eastern Conference Finals MVP, outscoring Cavaliers star Donovan Mitchell across the series and setting the tone for what was to come.

Waiting in the Finals were the San Antonio Spurs, led by the towering, generational talent Victor Wembanyama. San Antonio had needed seven grueling games to eliminate the top-seeded Oklahoma City Thunder in the Western Conference Finals, a series widely regarded as one of the most competitive in recent memory. The stage was set for a Finals rematch of 1999 — the last time these two franchises had met on basketball's biggest stage, a series the Spurs had won convincingly. For Knicks fans, many of whom had never seen their team win it all, the moment carried decades of accumulated hope and heartbreak. New York's championship drought stretched back to 1973, the third-longest active drought in the league at the time, behind only a handful of franchises that had never won at all. This was a chance, finally, to end it — but nobody, including the Knicks themselves, expected the road to the trophy to be easy.

Game 1 of the Finals set an ominous tone for New York, a tight defensive struggle that came down to the final possession. The Knicks steadied themselves in Game 2, holding on for a narrow 105-104 win at Madison Square Garden as fans flooded the streets outside in anticipation of what might be coming. But the Spurs answered forcefully in Game 3, evening the series behind a dominant performance from Wembanyama, who controlled the paint on both ends of the floor. Heading into Game 4, the series felt genuinely undecided — and what happened next would become one of the most talked-about games in NBA Finals history.

Comprehension Questions

1. How did the Knicks' performance change between the regular season and the playoffs?

2. What two records did the Knicks set during their playoff run before reaching the Finals?

3. Why was the 2026 Finals matchup described as a "rematch" of 1999?

4. How long had the Knicks' championship drought lasted before the 2026 Finals, and what does the passage say about its significance?

5. How did the series unfold through the first three games, according to the passage?

6. What tone does the passage use to describe the situation heading into Game 4? Why might the author have written it this way?

PART 4 — Reading Passage 2: The Comeback and the Championship

Game 4 of the 2026 Finals became the moment the series — and the Knicks' entire season — turned. Trailing by as many as 29 points, with the Spurs leading 95-78 with under ten minutes left in the third quarter, New York looked finished. NBA teams trailing by 17 or more points that late in a game had lost 96 consecutive times in league history; by any historical measure, the game was over. Then the Knicks' defense tightened, San Antonio's shooting collapsed under pressure, and New York outscored the Spurs 32-11 in the fourth quarter alone. Jalen Brunson and forward OG Anunoby, who scored a playoff-career-high 33 points, led the surge, hitting one improbable shot after another as Madison Square Garden grew louder with every possession. When the final buzzer sounded, New York had completed a stunning 107-106 victory — the largest comeback in NBA Finals history, breaking a record that had stood since 1971. The Knicks led the series 3-1, but Brunson, characteristically measured, told reporters afterward: "There's nothing to celebrate. It's not over."

Three days later, on June 13, 2026, it was over. In Game 5 at Madison Square Garden, in front of 19,812 fans who had waited their entire lives for this moment, the Knicks closed out the Spurs 94-90 to win the series 4-1. Brunson scored 45 points, including 15 in the fourth quarter, capping a Finals performance that averaged 32.6 points per game and earned him the Finals MVP award. For the first time since 1973 — a wait of 53 years — the New York Knicks were NBA champions. The Finals drew an average of 20.6 million viewers per game, the highest audience for the NBA championship since 1998, as a global audience watched a franchise, and a city, finally get the ending it had waited more than five decades for. Karl-Anthony Towns, who had joined the Knicks only two seasons earlier, described the feeling as "something I can't put into words — you dream about this as a kid, and then one day it's real."

The significance of the win extended well beyond a single trophy. For a franchise long associated with near-misses, front-office turmoil, and disappointment — the Knicks had not even reached the Finals since 1999, when they lost to these same Spurs — the 2026 championship represented a genuine

changing of the guard. Analysts pointed to years of patient roster building, the mid-career acquisition of Brunson as a true franchise cornerstone, and a coaching staff willing to adapt its system around its best players' strengths. Whether the Knicks could sustain this level of success into a true dynasty remained an open question, but for one summer, at least, none of that mattered. New York had its championship.

True or False

Write T for True or F for False.

1. ___ The Knicks were leading Game 4 for most of the game before winning comfortably.
2. ___ The Knicks' Game 4 comeback was the largest in NBA Finals history.
3. ___ Jalen Brunson scored 45 points in the series-clinching Game 5.
4. ___ The Knicks won the championship series 4-1 over the San Antonio Spurs.
5. ___ This was the Knicks' first championship since 1999.
6. ___ The 2026 Finals had the highest television viewership since 1998.
7. ___ Karl-Anthony Towns had been with the Knicks for most of his career before the championship.
8. ___ The passage states that the Knicks are now certain to become a dynasty.

Comprehension Questions

1. What specific statistic shows how historically unlikely the Knicks' Game 4 comeback was?

2. Why do you think Brunson said "there's nothing to celebrate" immediately after such a historic Game 4 win?

3. How many years had it been since the Knicks' last championship, and why does the passage say that matters to fans?

4. According to the passage, what specific factors do analysts credit for the Knicks' turnaround?

5. What is the difference between winning "a championship" and building "a dynasty," according to the passage?

6. How does Karl-Anthony Towns' quote help illustrate the emotional meaning of the win beyond statistics?

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

Use the word bank to complete each sentence. Use each word only once.

drought · underdog · dynasty · clutch · comeback · deficit · momentum · franchise
· MVP · ticker-tape parade · euphoria · jubilation

1. Entering the playoffs as a relative _____, few analysts expected the Knicks to make it past the second round, let alone win a title.
2. New York City had not seen this kind of _____ in the streets since the team's previous championships more than fifty years earlier.
3. The _____ down Manhattan's Canyon of Heroes was the first the Knicks franchise had ever held, since their 1970 and 1973 titles predated the tradition.
4. Sportswriters debated whether this single title was the start of a genuine _____ or simply a remarkable one-off achievement.
5. For a _____ that had endured decades of disappointment, the 2026 championship represented a complete turning point.
6. Fans described a feeling of pure _____ — disbelief mixed with overwhelming happiness — the moment the final buzzer sounded.

PART 6 — Reading Passage 3: The City Celebrates



More than a million fans lined Manhattan's Canyon of Heroes for the Knicks' first-ever ticker-tape parade, June 18, 2026.

New York City had not celebrated a Knicks championship in 53 years, and the emotion spilled into the streets the moment Game 5 ended. Crowds gathered outside Madison Square Garden and in Times Square, chanting, hugging strangers, and setting off impromptu fireworks. The Knicks organization had even arranged official watch-party locations at Radio City Music Hall and Central Park to accommodate the enormous demand. The celebration, however, was not without serious problems. Amid the joy, violence broke out in pockets of the city: a shooting injured a teenager, several stabbings were reported, and more than 60 people were arrested overnight. Knicks owner James Dolan publicly urged fans to celebrate safely as officials scrambled to restore order, even as the city began planning an official victory parade for the days ahead.

Five days later, on June 18, 2026, New York held its ticker-tape parade — the first in franchise history, since the Knicks' 1970 and 1973 titles predated the tradition being extended to basketball champions. The parade began at Battery Park and travelled north along the historic Canyon of Heroes to a ceremony at City Hall. More than a million fans lined the route, with some estimates placing the total closer to two million across the full day. Players Jalen Brunson and Karl-Anthony Towns rode through the crowd holding the Larry O'Brien Championship Trophy aloft, while Brunson's father and Knicks assistant coach, Rick Brunson, carried the trophy on a separate float. Mayor Zohran Mamdani addressed the city at the City Hall ceremony, calling the day "unity born from joy rather than tragedy," and presented the team with keys to the city. Musician Alicia Keys performed for the crowd, filmmaker Spike Lee made an appearance among the many celebrities in attendance, and Knicks legend Walt "Clyde" Frazier — a member of the franchise's 1970 and 1973 championship teams — was honored alongside the current roster.

Even the celebration itself was chaotic. With over 10,000 police officers deployed for security, every official viewing area reached capacity within hours, leaving thousands of fans locked out and chanting "Let us in!" Some climbed onto police cars and sanitation trucks in search of a better view, and overcrowded press risers made it difficult for media crews to communicate or move through the area. Despite the disorder, the parade concluded without a major incident, and for a franchise that had waited more than half a century, the celebration — messy, overwhelming, and record-breaking in scale — was, in the end, exactly the one New York had been waiting for.

Comprehension Questions

1. What two very different kinds of events happened on the night the Knicks won the championship?

2. Why was the June 18 parade historic for the Knicks specifically?

3. Name at least two notable people, other than current players, who were part of the parade celebration.

4. What problem did the parade face despite the heavy police presence?

5. How does the passage describe the overall mood of the parade, despite its problems?

PART 7 — Discussion Questions

Discuss with a partner or your class. There are no wrong answers — support your view with reasoning and examples.

1. Why do long championship droughts, like the Knicks' 53 years, make a title feel more meaningful to fans than it might for a franchise that wins more often?
2. What responsibility do cities and sports leagues have when large public celebrations turn dangerous, as they did on the night the Knicks won?
3. How do "clutch" performances, like Brunson's 45 points in Game 5, shape the way we remember an athlete's career?
4. Was the Knicks' Game 4 comeback more impressive because it was statistically unprecedented, or does the "story" of a comeback matter more to fans than the numbers themselves?
5. Why might a city choose to hold a parade even after a celebration night involved violence and dozens of arrests?
6. Do you think one championship is enough to call a team great, or does greatness require sustained success — a "dynasty" — over many years?

PART 8 — Opinion Essay

Prompt: Championship celebrations bring cities together, but as seen in New York after the Knicks' 2026 title, they can also lead to chaos, overcrowding, and even danger. Using evidence from the passages above, write an essay arguing how cities should balance the joy of public celebration with public safety. Write at least three paragraphs: an introduction with a clear thesis, at least one body paragraph drawing on specific details from the passages, and a conclusion that addresses at least one counterargument to your position.

Sources

NBA.com, "2026 NBA Finals" and "2026 NBA Playoffs" official recaps · ESPN, "NBA Finals 2026: The Knicks finally have their New York" · Wikipedia, "2026 NBA Finals" and "2026 NBA Playoffs" · CNN, "In pictures: Knicks win NBA Finals to end 53-year title drought" · NPR, "In photos: The Knicks celebrate their first NBA championship in more than 50 years" · NBC Connecticut, "Mayhem, violence during celebrations of New York Knicks victory" · New York Post, "More than a million Knicks fans line the streets" · Yahoo Sports, "Frustrations Spike During Knicks Parade"

Worksheet for educational use — Tahric Teaches · tahricteaches.com

ANSWER KEY — 2026 NBA CHAMPIONSHIP

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Part 2 — Vocabulary Matching

1. C — a long period without a particular success
2. G — a competitor given little chance of winning
3. D — able to perform well under pressure
4. A — amount by which a team trails in score
5. E — a professional sports organization considered over time
6. B — a loudly expressed, public feeling of joy
7. F — forward energy and confidence built during a contest

Part 2 — Fill in the Blank

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. drought | 4. deficit |
| 2. comeback | 5. clutch |
| 3. MVP | 6. momentum |

Part 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. They went from a solid-but-unspectacular regular season to an unbeatable playoff team, winning 11 straight games. | 4. 53 years, since 1973 — the third-longest active title drought in the league at the time. |
| 2. An 11-game playoff winning streak and the largest halftime lead in playoff history (vs. the Hawks). | 5. Close and back-and-forth: a tight Game 1 loss, a narrow Game 2 win, and a Game 3 loss that evened the series. |
| 3. Because the Spurs beat the Knicks in the Finals in 1999, the last time these two franchises met for a title. | 6. Suspenseful/uncertain tone, to build anticipation for the historic Game 4 comeback described next. |

Part 4 — True or False

- | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|
| 1. F | 2. T | 3. T | 4. T |
| 5. F | 6. T | 7. F | 8. F |

Part 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. 96 straight losses in NBA history for teams trailing 17+ points that late — broken by the Knicks. | 4. Patient roster building, acquiring Brunson as a cornerstone, and coaching adapting to its players. |
| 2. The series wasn't finished — the Knicks led 3-1 but hadn't clinched the championship. | 5. A championship is one title; a dynasty needs sustained success over years — an open question here. |
| 3. 53 years — generations of fans had never seen a title, making the win historic and emotional. | 6. Shows the human side of the win beyond stats — a childhood dream realized. |

Part 5 — Fill in the Blank

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| 1. underdog | 4. dynasty |
| 2. jubilation | 5. franchise |
| 3. ticker-tape parade | 6. euphoria |

Part 6 — Comprehension: Passage 3

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Joyful celebration (crowds, fireworks) alongside serious violence (a shooting, stabbings, 60+ arrests). | 4. Viewing areas hit capacity within hours, leaving thousands locked out despite 10,000+ officers. |
|--|--|

2. The franchise's first-ever ticker-tape parade — the 1970/1973 titles predated the tradition.
3. Any two: Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Rick Brunson, Alicia Keys, Spike Lee, Walt "Clyde" Frazier.
5. Despite the disorder, described as joyful, historic — the celebration the city had waited for.

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STUDENT ANSWER SHEET

The 2026 NBA Championship — The Knicks' 53-Year Wait

Name:

Date:

Class:

Record all answers below. For Parts 7 and 8, use the space on your main worksheet.

PART 2A — Vocabulary Matching (write the letter)

1.		2.		3.		4.		5.		6.		7.	
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PART 2B — Fill in the Blank

1.		4.	
2.		5.	
3.		6.	

PART 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1

1.		4.	
2.		5.	
3.		6.	

PART 4 — True or False

1.	T / F	2.	T / F	3.	T / F	4.	T / F
5.	T / F	6.	T / F	7.	T / F	8.	T / F

PART 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2

1.		4.	
2.		5.	
3.		6.	

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank

1.		4.	
2.		5.	
3.		6.	

PART 6 — Comprehension: Passage 3

1.		4.	
2.		5.	
3.			

Parts 7 and 8 — use the space provided in the main worksheet · Tahric Teaches · tahricteaches.com

ANSWER SHEET — ANSWER KEY

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PART 2A — Matching													
1.	C	2.	G	3.	D	4.	A	5.	E	6.	B	7.	F

PART 2B — Fill in the Blank			
1.	drought	4.	deficit
2.	comeback	5.	clutch
3.	MVP	6.	momentum

PART 3 — Comprehension: Passage 1			
1.	Went from unspectacular in the regular season to unbeatable in the playoffs, winning 11 straight.	4.	53 years, since 1973 — the third-longest active drought in the league at the time.
2.	An 11-game playoff win streak and the largest halftime lead in playoff history (vs. Hawks).	5.	Close and back-and-forth — tight Game 1 loss, narrow Game 2 win, Game 3 loss evened the series.
3.	The Spurs beat the Knicks in the Finals in 1999, the last time these two teams met for a title.	6.	Suspenseful/uncertain tone to build anticipation before the Game 4 comeback.

PART 4 — True or False															
1.	F	2.	T	3.	T	4.	T	5.	F	6.	T	7.	F	8.	F

PART 4 — Comprehension: Passage 2			
1.	Teams trailing by 17+ points that late had lost 96 straight times in NBA history before the Knicks broke the streak.	4.	Patient roster building, acquiring Brunson as a cornerstone, and coaching staff adapting to its players.
2.	Because the series wasn't finished — the Knicks led 3-1 but hadn't clinched the title yet.	5.	A championship is one title; a dynasty requires sustained success over years — still an open question here.
3.	53 years — it matters because generations of fans had never seen a title, making the win historic and emotional.	6.	Shows the human, emotional side of the win beyond stats — a childhood dream realized.

PART 5 — Fill in the Blank			
1.	underdog	4.	dynasty
2.	jubilation	5.	franchise
3.	ticker-tape parade	6.	euphoria

PART 6 — Comprehension: Passage 3			
1.	Joyful celebration (crowds, fireworks, watch parties) alongside serious violence (a shooting, stabbings, 60+ arrests).	3.	Any two: Mayor Zohran Mamdani, Rick Brunson, Alicia Keys, Spike Lee, Walt "Clyde" Frazier.
2.	It was the franchise's first-ever ticker-tape parade — their 1970/1973 titles predated the tradition.	4./5.	Viewing areas hit capacity within hours despite 10,000+ officers, yet the mood is described as joyful and historic overall.