

Chasing Seven

By our model, Jokić has been the best player in the league for six straight years.

One more would tie Michael Jordan's record.

A Gravity Report Deep Dive

October 17, 2026

v1 — methodology and figures verified against public sources as of October 17, 2026.

This article will be revised.

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Abstract

We ran every NBA season since 1977–78 through GRAVITY Historical to find who was the best player in the league each year. Statistically, 16 different players have had that title across 49 seasons. Michael Jordan held it for seven years in a row, from the 1986–87 season all the way until 1992–93, the longest run on record. By our metrics, Nikola Jokić has now held it for six seasons, and these six were played at a higher level than Jordan's seven or LeBron's six. This is definitely not the consensus view. The MVP voters have only agreed with 24 of our 49 number ones, and Jokić has lost three of his six, partly to plain voter fatigue. A seventh straight year of greatness from Jokić would tie Jordan's record in our data, and we give it about a **55%** chance of happening.

The 49 number ones

The 644 can only cover one season at a time, because of the advanced analytics it uses. In order to see where Jokić sits in history, we need every season, so we rebuilt our model from Basketball Reference alone for every season from 1977–78 to the present (all the seasons with complete box-score data).^[1] We call that version GRAVITY Historical, and it's the same historical model you see in our other articles whenever we need to compare the present to the past. A season's number one is simply the player with the highest impact per minute among players who played at least 1,500 minutes. All of the number ones are derived from the GRAVITY model, and not by any vote or league consensus.

To give you an idea of what the impact numbers mean: an impact of 0 is an average NBA minute, +1.3 is usually a top-ten player, and +2.0 is a top-six player. Every number one on the list had an impact of at least +2.2. Table 1 is the whole list. The last column shows where each number one ranked the following year. Looking at that list, the league kind of sorts itself into eras. There have been 16 number ones, and five of them account for 30 of the 49 seasons: nine times for Jordan, seven for LeBron, six for Jokić, and Bird and Shaq with four each.^[2]

The runs

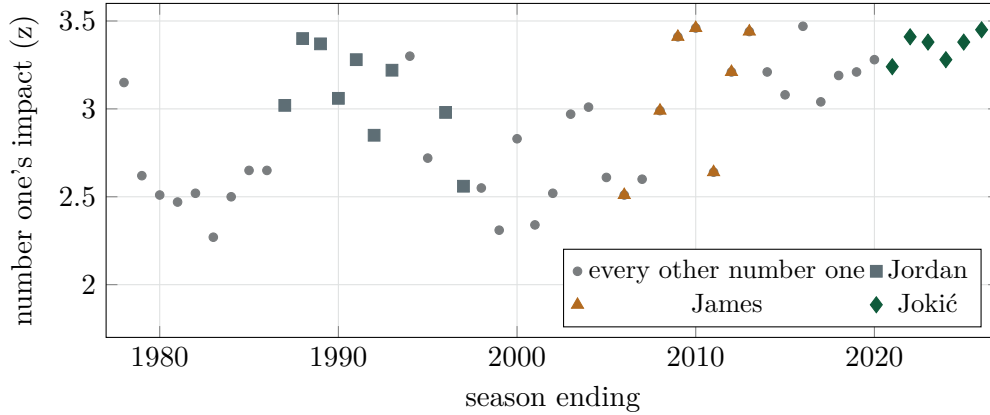
One season at the top could be luck, but a long run of them can't be. We have six players who have held the top spot for 3+ years in a row.

Table 1: Every season’s number one by GRAVITY Historical (1,500+ minutes), 1977–78 to 2025–26. Margin is how far ahead he was of the second-best player. MVP rank is where that year’s MVP winner ranked in our data; * marks the seasons where the MVP award went to someone besides our number one. Next is where each number one ranked the following year.

Season	Number one	Age	Impact	Margin	MVP	MVP rank	Next
1977–78	K. Abdul-Jabbar	30	+3.15	0.50	B. Walton*	2	1
1978–79	K. Abdul-Jabbar	31	+2.62	0.68	M. Malone*	14	2
1979–80	J. Erving	29	+2.51	0.12	K. Abdul-Jabbar*	2	1
1980–81	J. Erving	30	+2.47	0.35	J. Erving	1	1
1981–82	J. Erving	31	+2.52	0.33	M. Malone*	6	3
1982–83	L. Bird	26	+2.27	0.11	M. Malone*	8	1
1983–84	L. Bird	27	+2.50	0.24	L. Bird	1	1
1984–85	L. Bird	28	+2.65	0.32	L. Bird	1	1
1985–86	L. Bird	29	+2.65	0.46	L. Bird	1	3
1986–87	M. Jordan	23	+3.02	0.40	M. Johnson*	2	1
1987–88	M. Jordan	24	+3.40	0.91	M. Jordan	1	1
1988–89	M. Jordan	25	+3.37	0.67	M. Johnson*	2	1
1989–90	M. Jordan	26	+3.06	0.35	M. Johnson*	2	1
1990–91	M. Jordan	27	+3.28	0.75	M. Jordan	1	1
1991–92	M. Jordan	28	+2.85	0.26	M. Jordan	1	1
1992–93	M. Jordan	29	+3.22	0.92	C. Barkley*	2	
1993–94	D. Robinson	28	+3.30	1.02	H. Olajuwon*	5	1
1994–95	D. Robinson	29	+2.72	0.19	D. Robinson	1	2
1995–96	M. Jordan	32	+2.98	0.43	M. Jordan	1	1
1996–97	M. Jordan	33	+2.56	0.04	K. Malone*	2	3
1997–98	D. Robinson	32	+2.55	0.13	M. Jordan*	3	3
1998–99	S. O’Neal	26	+2.31	0.15	K. Malone*	2	1
1999–00	S. O’Neal	27	+2.83	0.46	S. O’Neal	1	1
2000–01	S. O’Neal	28	+2.34	0.28	A. Iverson*	6	1
2001–02	S. O’Neal	29	+2.52	0.22	T. Duncan*	2	4
2002–03	T. McGrady	23	+2.97	0.74	T. Duncan*	3	4
2003–04	K. Garnett	27	+3.01	0.49	K. Garnett	1	1
2004–05	K. Garnett	28	+2.61	0.25	S. Nash*	12	5
2005–06	L. James	21	+2.51	0.23	S. Nash*	10	4
2006–07	D. Wade	25	+2.60	0.11	D. Nowitzki*	2	21
2007–08	L. James	23	+2.99	0.06	K. Bryant*	7	1
2008–09	L. James	24	+3.41	0.15	L. James	1	1
2009–10	L. James	25	+3.46	0.59	L. James	1	1
2010–11	L. James	26	+2.64	0.43	D. Rose*	4	1
2011–12	L. James	27	+3.21	0.53	L. James	1	1
2012–13	L. James	28	+3.44	0.50	L. James	1	2
2013–14	K. Durant	25	+3.21	0.36	K. Durant	1	
2014–15	S. Curry	26	+3.08	0.29	S. Curry	1	1
2015–16	S. Curry	27	+3.47	0.57	S. Curry	1	9
2016–17	R. Westbrook	28	+3.04	0.41	R. Westbrook	1	11
2017–18	J. Harden	28	+3.19	0.53	J. Harden	1	1
2018–19	J. Harden	29	+3.21	0.15	G. Antetokounmpo*	2	2
2019–20	G. Antetokounmpo	25	+3.28	0.43	G. Antetokounmpo	1	2
2020–21	N. Jokić	25	+3.24	0.73	N. Jokić	1	1
2021–22	N. Jokić	26	+3.41	0.15	N. Jokić	1	1
2022–23	N. Jokić	27	+3.38	0.60	J. Embiid*	2	1
2023–24	N. Jokić	28	+3.28	0.58	N. Jokić	1	1
2024–25	N. Jokić	29	+3.38	0.10	S. Gilgeous-Alexander*	2	1
2025–26	N. Jokić	30	+3.45	0.15	S. Gilgeous-Alexander*	2	

Table 2: Every run of three or more straight seasons as our number one.

Player	Seasons	Length	Mean impact	Mean margin	MVPs during run
Michael Jordan	1986–87 to 1992–93	7	+3.17	0.61	3
LeBron James	2007–08 to 2012–13	6	+3.19	0.38	4
Nikola Jokić	2020–21 to 2025–26	6	+3.36	0.39	3
Larry Bird	1982–83 to 1985–86	4	+2.52	0.28	3
Shaquille O’Neal	1998–99 to 2001–02	4	+2.50	0.28	1
Julius Erving	1979–80 to 1981–82	3	+2.50	0.27	1

**Figure 1:** The number one’s impact per minute, every season since 1977–78. Of the ten highest single seasons on the chart, four are Jokić’s, three are LeBron’s, and two are Jordan’s. The highest one is Steph Curry’s 2015–16.

Each of these runs tells a different story. Jordan’s run was the longest and the most dominant: he beat the second-best player by 0.61 on average. LeBron’s run won the most MVPs, with four. Jokić’s run is statistically “the best.” His six seasons have an average impact score of +3.36, above Jordan’s +3.17 and LeBron’s +3.19. Jokić’s worst season at number one, +3.24, is higher than the best seasons Larry Bird, Shaq, or Julius Erving ever had. Jordan had one edge over Jokić: margin. Jokić led by just 0.10 and 0.15 in the last two seasons, with Shai Gilgeous-Alexander right behind him both times. Being the best in our model and being the most dominant are two different things, and Jokić can only claim one of them.

The voters

The MVP went to our number one in 24 of 49 seasons, and the typical winner ranked second in our data. In most years the winner stays within our top three, and the voters probably also weigh team success. However, some of the misses have been huge. Moses Malone won in 1978–79 while ranked 14th in our rankings, and Steve Nash won in 2004–05 while ranked 12th.

Jordan was our number one in nine seasons and only won the MVP in four of those. Magic Johnson took three of the other five, and Charles Barkley and Karl Malone also took one each. Jokić has lost three of his six: to Joel Embiid in 2022–23 and to SGA in the last two seasons.^[3] Part of that is voter fatigue. Once a player has a few MVPs on the shelf, voters start looking for a new story, and Jokić already has three. By the standards of the last 50 years, that’s completely normal. Our model’s best player loses the vote roughly half the time, so if you think Jokić has

been robbed, you're kind of wrong.

Why The 644 has it closer

Everything you read above comes from GRAVITY Historical. Our actual ranking, The 644, gives Jokić a rating of 97.8, 4.9 points ahead of SGA in second at 92.9.^[5] That's a tighter race than the historical model shows, for two reasons, and only one of them is a flaw. The flaw is ours: the model limits every input at four standard deviations above average, and Jokić's 2025–26 Box Plus/Minus sat at 4.66. The cap takes about 3 points off his rating.^[4] The other reason is fair. The model took away 3.4 points because of his playoff BPM (8.0 in a six-game series loss to Minnesota), which was well below his regular-season 14.2. Playoff performance is a real metric, and it should count. Cleaning the Glass, which filters out garbage time, shows the playoff dip clearly: his points per 100 shot attempts fell from 133.5 to 111.5 in the series, and he shot only 20% from three.^[7]

The seventh year

Does a number one usually keep his spot? History gives three different answers, depending on which number ones you look at. Looking at all of them, our number one has kept that spot the following season 30 times out of 46. Looking only at the ones whose margin was 0.15 or less, like Jokić's is right now, the rate drops to 7 out of 11. Looking only at the ones who were 30 or older, it was just 3 out of 7, and Jokić is 31 this season.

The rivals matter more than the base rates do, so let's project each number one candidate from his 2025–26 season. Table 3 lays it out. If Jokić repeats his season, his gravity score rises to 100.7. If SGA repeats his, he scores 95.4. To reach a score of 100, SGA would need to improve his impact by 0.4, which is exactly the gap between him and Jokić last season. In other words, he would have to play like Jokić did. Victor Wembanyama jumped by 1.2 last season to reach +2.7. Another jump of 0.8 on top of that would get him to 98.6, still short of a repeating Jokić. The last row is the aging risk. A typical star loses 0.29 of impact between 30 and 31. If that happens to Jokić, his score next year is 97.4, which puts him ahead of an SGA who repeats and behind an SGA who improves.

Table 3: July 2027 gravity scores under each scenario. Impact here is the full model's (it includes on/off), so the levels differ slightly from Table 1.

Scenario	What it assumes	2026–27 impact	July 2027 score
Jokić repeats 2025–26	65 games, no playoff charge	+3.43	100.7
SGA repeats 2025–26	same season again	+3.03	95.4
SGA improves by 0.4	plays like Jokić did, 72 games	+3.43	100.0
Wembanyama repeats	same season again	+2.74	89.6
Wembanyama improves by 0.8	another leap, 72 games	+3.54	98.6
Jokić ages like a typical star	loses 0.29, 68 games	+3.13	97.4

We think Jokić has a 55% chance of getting his seventh year in a row as the GRAVITY number one. Our external prediction is that Jokić will have the best BPM in the league, which ironically he's also done six years in a row. The BPM leader has repeated 34 of 52 times, and 15 of 21 times once the leader had three or more titles in a row. We think this one has about a 60% chance. The betting market says his MVP chances are 17%, or +500 on DraftKings. We think it's really a 25% chance, considering we think he's more likely than not to be the best player in the league.^[6]

0% coin flip 100%

Nikola Jokić ranks #1 in The 644, July 2027 edition.



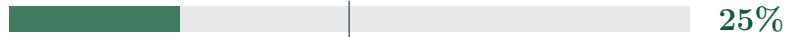
#1 = Win #2 = Near miss (graded as a miss) #3 or below = Miss. This is our own ranking; we keep one bet on it each article so the model gets graded too.

Nikola Jokić leads the NBA in 2026–27 Box Plus/Minus among players with 1,500+ regular-season minutes.



Basketball Reference, final regular-season table.

Nikola Jokić wins the 2026–27 MVP award.



NBA's official announcement.

External predictions are graded by April 30, 2027 (BPM) and June 30, 2027 (MVP). Registered October 17, 2026, before the October 18 freeze. Scored by Brier score in the Forecast Ledger.

Method and sources

GRAVITY Historical (GRAVITY-RS in the code): $0.533 z_{\text{BPM}} + 0.133 z_{\text{WS}/48} + 0.333 S'$, with the specification's small-sample shrink, minutes-weighted moments over players with 200+ minutes, clipped at ± 4 . Code: `papers/common/gravity_rs.py`, `papers/jokic/history.py`, `papers/jokic/analysis.py`.

- [1] Basketball Reference, league advanced and per-100 tables, 1977–78 to 2025–26. <https://www.basketball-reference.com/leagues/>
- [2] Basketball Reference, NBA MVP winners. <https://www.basketball-reference.com/awards/mvp.html>
- [3] Basketball Reference, 2025–26 awards voting. https://www.basketball-reference.com/awards/awards_2026.html
- [4] The Gravity Report, The GRAVITY Specification, v3. <https://thegravityreport.com/notes/spec/>
- [5] The Gravity Report, The 644, July 2026 edition (CSV). <https://thegravityreport.com/the644/the644-2026-07.csv>
- [6] VegasInsider, MVP odds (DraftKings, September 28, 2026). <https://www.vegasinsider.com/nba/odds/mvp/>
- [7] Cleaning the Glass, Nikola Jokić (garbage time filtered), accessed September 29, 2026. <https://cleaningtheglass.com/stats/player/1883>