



## The Five Most Likely Candidates to Become the Next Face of the NBA

A fun conversation for NBA fans is to discuss who will be the next face of the league after the likes of LeBron, Steph, and KD retire. A very subjective question with a wide range of responses. Yet interesting, given the trajectory of the once dominant United States now beginning to be overwhelmed by the amount of NBA superstars coming from other countries.

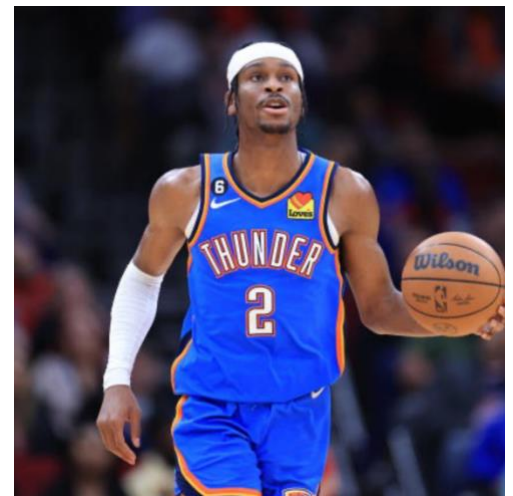
With all that in mind, I decided to share who we think will be the Top Five Faces of the NBA within the Next Five Years. These picks based off statistics, marketability, and Hall-of-Fame potential. Before getting started, we do have some honourable mentions.

Honourable mentions to Tyrese Haliburton, Joel Embiid or Jayson Tatum in the top five. But I think these five franchise-changing players have a slight edge one way or another.

### 5. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander

The slight edge SGA has is the fact the Oklahoma City Thunder are arguably the most young, exciting team in the NBA. The potential to win several titles for years to come is there, and a lot of praise goes to Gilgeous-Alexander. The OKC have third-highest offensive rating in the NBA, a main contributor to that is Gilgeous-Alexander leading the league in most 30+ ppg (points per game) and is second in average points per game. His defensive presence should also be noted, as he leads the league in steals per game.

An NBA ambassador for the Kim Kardashian-owned SKIMS, Canada Goose, and Louis Vuitton. He has a sneaker deal with Converse and is the captain of the Team



*Image via Yahoo Sports*

Canada basketball team. Every year he keeps elevating his game to be that clutch bucket-getter which is exciting to watch. If he can avoid the injury bug, I could see his future containing a few MVPs and turn the Thunder into the next NBA dynasty.

#### 4. **Giannis Antetokounmpo**

*The Greek Freak:* You cannot contain him, only hope to stop him.

The story of Antetokounmpo is inspiring and emotionally impactful. An impoverished son in Greece, he used his basketball talents to provide for his family and lead the Milwaukee Bucks to its first championship in 50 years. A story so cinematic Disney made a documentary about it. The media outlets love him for resilience and discipline even when faced with failures. Antetokounmpo was once laughed at for saying he wanted to be an MVP as a rookie to giving one of the most emotional MVP acceptance speeches.



*Image via Maven*

Outside the basketball court, Antetokounmpo shows a light-hearted side to him singing along to One Direction and making dad jokes. The man is a walking meme factory but comes off so genuine it's endearing.

On the court, he's a force to be reckoned with. Throughout his career, Antetokounmpo has averaged over 23 points and 9 rebounds shooting over 50 per cent field goal percentage. He has been a top 5 MVP candidate every year since 2018, and winning the award back-to-back. Something that has only been achieved by 12 players in the history of the NBA. He's 7x All-NBA, 2019-20 Defensive Player of the Year, 2021 Finals MVP, and made the NBA 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Team.

#### 3. **Victor Wembanyama**

The most highly-touted prospect since LeBron James. At 19 years old, the unicorn of an NBA player was selected 1<sup>st</sup> overall by the San Antonio Spurs this year. The Spurs spent four years studying Wembanyama because they knew he had the potential to be a game changer. A 7'3 big man with an 8-foot wingspan who won lead the LNB Pro A's in scoring and in blocks (taking home the 2022-23 MVP).

In over 50 NBA games with the Spurs, Wembanyama has averaged over 20 points, 10 rebounds, 3 assists, and over 3 blocks on a team that isn't providing him much support. Against the LeBron James-led LA Lakers, Wembanyama became the youngest player in league history to record a stat line of 5x5 (at least 5 pts., 5 reb., 5 asts., 5 steals, 5 blocks).



*Image via AJ Photo/AJ Mast*

Superstars like Kevin Durant came out and said He's gonna create his own lane that's much different than anybody who's ever played." Atlanta Hawks point guard Trae Young stated on X, the French center "is special man." Prior to playing his first-ever NBA game, Wembanyama has over 12 endorsement deals worth over \$70 million. A stat from the website Sportcal stated "the team [Spurs] could earn up to an additional \$80 million annually over the coming years, which would be roughly the same figure as when James moved back from Miami to Cleveland." One of five times in NBA history a Summer League game was sold out was Wembanyama's debut into the NBA. Simply put: Keep Wembanyama healthy and build around him... you have the potential to witness a game changer.

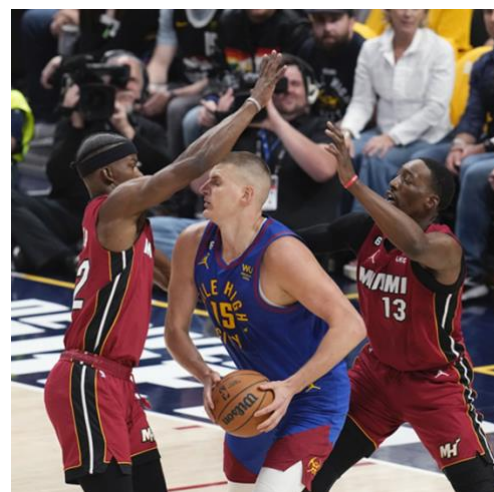
## 2. Nikola Jokic

Falling to the second round in the 2015 NBA draft, the Denver Nuggets took a chance on Serbian big man Nikola Jokic. Many criticized Jokic for being overweight and lacking athleticism. It didn't help he lacked the media attention juxtaposed to the NCAA players competing in the 2015 March Madness tournament.

Similar to Antetokounmpo, Jokic was a part of the All-Rookie team and was progressively improving the more he got comfortable with the NBA-style of play. Then like Antetokounmpo, 2018 hit and his career went from good to historic.

What elevates Jokic above Wembanyama is that Jokic has already racked up the accolades, and what elevates Jokic above Antetokounmpo are accolades. 2x MVP (possibly three with how the 2023-24 predictions are looking), 2023 NBA Finals Champion and MVP, 6x All-Star, and 5x All-NBA. The first NBA player to get at least one triple-double against every NBA team, the youngest player to record at least 13,000 points, 6,000 rebounds, and 4,000 assists, one of four players ever to post a statline of 29 points, 15 rebounds, 14 assists, 2 steals, and 1 block on 70% shooting (done in the least amount of playing minutes), and the first player in NBA history with a 20/15/15 game on 100% shooting.

It helps that the 29-year old seems to be a likable guy off-the court, constantly praising his team, fans, and organization —when he isn't attending to his true love of riding horses. His playmaking is like watching Picasso paint as he throws one-handed full-court lobs and no look passes to teammates. Nikola Jokic changed the game of basketball to allow big men to make outlandish passes, take game-winning-contested three-point shots, and not require the traditional "NBA-caliber physique" to be taken seriously. With the trajectory of the 29 year old's historical career, all he needs is another championship ring within the next five years and I think he'll be in discussion for the Top 20 greatest players of all-time.



*Image via The Associated Press*

## 1. Luka Doncic

In 2012, Doncic represented Olimpijia at the under-14 Vasas Intesa Sanpaolo Cup in Hungary and won MVP, despite finishing as runners-up in the tournament and being two years younger than his competition. In 2015, Doncic went pro as a 16-year old and by 2020, he was voted a member of the Euro-League All-Decade Team. So what separates him from Jokic? His flashy style of play.

Future generations are more likely to emulate their play style off Doncic than Jokic because they want to be the standout guard who can score at will. Doncic became the first teenager in league history to record multiple triple doubles, the youngest player to make seven three-pointers in a game, and the youngest European to start in an All-Star game.



*Image via Getty Images*

In the '23-'24 season alone, Doncic is currently leading the league in ppg (including a career-high 73 point game). This performance was the most efficient 70 point game in NBA history by over 10 per cent. He became one of two players in NBA history to reach 10,000 points, 3,000 rebounds and 3,000 assists before turning 25 years old (the other being LeBron James).

Unlike Jokic, Doncic welcomes the media attention more than Jokic. Doncic makes up to \$10 million a year in endorsement deals with NBA2K, Panini, BioSteel, Hasbro, and Jordan brand. Doncic is so talented, he could retire right now and still make a case for being in the Hall of Fame. In my opinion, the question is not can Doncic will win an MVP title or a ring. Instead, when and how many he will accomplish in the span of five years?