



2023-24 BKT EuroCup Coach of the year: Tuomas Iisalo, Paris Basketball

The architect of the top offense in competition history, Tuomas Iisalo of finals-bound Paris Basketball has been voted by his peers as the Coach of the Year for the 2023-24 BKT EuroCup season.

Iisalo has guided his team to a remarkable 20-1 record as Paris gets ready to host Mincidelice JL Bourg en Bresse in Game 1 of the best-of-three championship series starting on Tuesday. Before those finals start, Paris owns the best winning rate ever seen in the EuroCup at 95.2% and is tied for the best victory total with 20. Iisalo's accomplishment is all the more impressive considering it's his first EuroCup season and his club's second.

The Coach of the Year award is among several trophies handed out to recognize the outstanding work achieved by some EuroCup participants during the 2023-24 BKT EuroCup season. The Rising Star Trophy, also voted by the head coaches, was won by Zaccharie Risacher of Bourg. The All-EuroCup Teams and the 2023-24 MVP – for whom coaches, team captains, fans and media all vote – will be announced before the EuroCup Finals begin.

Paris's season has been divided into a pair of winning streaks most clubs would envy: 7-0 to open the season and put its grip on Group A, and then after a single misstep at home against eventual semifinalist Besiktas Emlakjet Istanbul, 13 more victories in a row, including a perfect three of three in the playoffs so far.

Paris's current streak matches the EuroCup's fourth-longest ever in-season, but how Iisalo's squad has dominated is unprecedented. Its average winning margin of 19.1 points is a new EuroCup record, as is the team's 42.8% rate of wins by at least 20 points. Winning 13 of its 21 games, or 61.9%, by 15 points or more is another high-water mark in the competition.

As if that were not enough, Iisalo has his team playing some of the most exciting basketball on the planet. His team's average of

98.4 points is not only the highest in EuroCup history, but in either Euroleague Basketball competition this century. The same can be said of Paris's 62.8% two-point shooting rate, unprecedented in the EuroCup or the Turkish Airlines EuroLeague. Paris also leads the EuroCup this season with 26.7 two-pointers made per game and a league-low 10.8 turnovers. It all adds up to a team performance index rating of 116.0 per game, once again a first in either Euroleague Basketball competition since 2000.

Iisalo, 41, hails from Finland, where he played his entire 14-season professional career as a shooting guard with one trophy to show for it, the 2009 Finnish Cup. He started coaching right after hanging up his playing shoes, with Tapiolan Honka, but one year later found himself in Germany with Crailsheim, where he stayed for five seasons, taking the club from the second division to the first and as high as fifth place in his last season, 2020-21. At his next stop, Iisalo guided Telekom Baskets Bonn to third place in the German League, earning a trip to the FIBA Champions League, which they won in 2023 while finishing as runners-up in Germany. He was the German League Coach of the Year in both 2022 and 2023, and won the same award in the FIBA Champions League last season.

Iisalo is said to make his practices very intense so that games will seem easier for his players, but that did not prevent six of them following him from Bonn to Paris over the summer, making the transition to the EuroCup somewhat smoother. What is sure is that Iisalo and Paris were ready to hit the ground running. They are two wins away from the EuroCup title with home-court advantage in the finals, and Tuomas Iisalo has everything to do with that soaring success to date.

Iisalo is the first Finnish coach to be voted EuroCup Coach of the Year. Aito Garcia Reneses is the only coach to have won the award twice, having done so with Gran Canaria in 2015 and ALBA Berlin in 2019.

The other previous winners were: Oktay Mahmuti of Benetton Treviso in 2009, Ilias Zouros of Panellinios in 2010, Aleksandar Petrovic of Cedevita Zagreb in 2011, Jure Zdovc of Spartak St. Petersburg in 2012, Fotis Katsikaris of Uxue Bilbao Basket in 2013, Andrea Trinchieri of UNICS Kazan in 2014, Maurizio Buscaglia of Dolomiti Energia Trento in 2016, Pedro Martinez of Valencia Basket in 2017, Sasa Obradovic of Lokomotiv Kuban in 2018, Zvezdan Mitrovic of AS Monaco in 2021, Dusan Alimpijevic of Frutti Extra Bursaspor in 2022, and Erdem Can of Turk Telekom Ankara in 2023.

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