

NBA: Heat burn Celtics to reach Finals

Sunday, 10 June 2012

LeBron James finally got a Game 7 victory, on his third try.

Next up, the NBA finals - and his third try at that elusive first championship. A year after watching someone else celebrate on their home floor, the Miami Heat were the ones dancing at midcourt.

James had 31 points and 12 rebounds, Chris Bosh hit a career-best three 3-pointers - the last sparking the run that put it away - and the Heat won their second straight Eastern Conference title by beating the Boston Celtics 101-88 in Game 7 on Saturday night.

Miami opens the title series in Oklahoma City on Tuesday night. The Heat got there by outscoring Boston 28-15 in the fourth quarter, with the "Big Three" of Dwyane Wade, Bosh and James scoring every Miami point.

"We decided to come together and play together for a reason," Wade said.

Wade scored 23 points, Bosh finished with 19 and Shane Battier added 12 for the Heat, who won a Game 7 for the first time since 2004 - Wade's rookie season. Now it's back to the finals, where Miami fell in six games to Dallas a year ago.

Rajon Rondo finished with 22 points, 14 assists and 10 rebounds for Boston, which got 19 points from Paul Pierce in what might be the last game of the "Big Four" era for the Celtics.

Boston took out its starters with 28.3 seconds left. By then, workers already had a rope around the perimeter of the court, preparing for the East trophy presentation.

"Give them credit," Rondo said. "They spread the points out as a team tonight. Give them credit. They played great tonight as a team and we just came up short."

When Heat President Pat Riley was shown on the giant overhead video screen in the moments just after the final buzzer, the crowd screamed. Riley finally acknowledged them with some claps, before the 2012 Eastern Conference champions logo was shown as players below the scoreboard high-fived and hugged, all wearing the new T-shirts and caps that marked the accomplishment.

The screams kept coming, first when Alonzo Mourning took the microphone - "We still got a lot of work to do," Mourning said - and then again when he handed the trophy to Heat owner Micky Arison.

"A roller-coaster ride," Arison said.

A roller-coaster game, too. In a roller-coaster season.

All worth it - for now, anyway. The next step awaits, another shot at the finals. In a championship-or-bust season, the Heat board a plane for Oklahoma City on Sunday.

"We have been through a lot," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.