

Spurs beat Heat 104-87 in Game 5 to win NBA title

Written by Administrator
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SAN ANTONIO (AP) — Tim Duncan and Tony Parker won titles in their second seasons. Manu Ginobili was a champion as an NBA rookie.

Success came so quickly and frequently for the Big Three, but San Antonio couldn't keep it up after winning its last title in 2007. And just when the Spurs were on the verge of being back on top again last year, the Miami Heat practically snatched the rings right off their fingers.

So when they finally celebrated again Sunday, players wrapping themselves in flags from around world in a reminder that the Spurs look far beyond the border to build champions, Parker had no trouble deciding where to rank this title.

"That's why I say it's the sweetest one," Parker said, "because it's just unbelievable to win seven years ago, and to be so close last year, it was very cruel. But that's the beauty of sport. Sometimes it's tough. And sometimes it can be beautiful like today."

The Spurs finished off a dominant run to their fifth NBA championship, ending the Heat's two-year title reign with a 104-87 victory that wrapped up the series in five games.

Painfully denied 12 months ago by the Heat, this victory party was worth the wait.

"We got to this spot and we didn't let it go," Ginobili said.

San Antonio erased an early 16-point deficit and routed Miami for the fourth time in the series, denying the Heat's quest for a third straight championship. A year after the Spurs suffered their only loss in six finals appearances — a heartbreaking seven-game defeat — they turned the rematch into no match at all.

"We had a great first quarter, but from that point on they were the better team, and that's why

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they're the champions in 2014," said LeBron James, who led the Heat with 31 points and 10 rebounds.

Finals MVP Kawhi Leonard had 22 points and 10 rebounds for the Spurs, who added this title to the ones they won in 1999, 2003, '05 and '07 by shooting a finals-record 52.8 percent in the series.

"They played exquisite basketball this series and in particular these last three games and they are the better team. There's no other way to say it," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.

A decade and a half after winning their first title, the Spurs remain the NBA's model organization, a small-market team that simply wins big and hardly ever does it with a high draft pick. Instead, they found players overseas or in other organizations who would fit the Spurs' way of doing things and mesh with Duncan, Parker and Ginobili, who have teamed for 117 postseason victories, the most by one trio.

Players such as Leonard, acquired in a draft-night trade with Indiana after playing at San Diego State, and Patty Mills, an Australian national who scored 17 points off the bench.

The Spurs won four titles in nine years, but had gone so long since the last one that Foreigner's "Feels Like the First Time" was an appropriate song choice after the final buzzer.

Duncan and Popovich have been here for all of them, and it was the fourth for Parker and Ginobili, who with Duncan are once again the reigning the Big Three in the NBA.

Chris Bosh finished with 13 points and Dwyane Wade just 11 on 4-of-12 shooting for the Heat.

The painful conclusion to last year's NBA Finals served as the fuel for this one, powering the Spurs to a league-best 62-win season and a rematch with Miami — the first in the finals since Chicago beat Utah in 1997-98.

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Round 2 went to the Spurs, but both teams have challenges to navigate if there is to be a rubber match.

San Antonio will face questions — as it has for years — about the age of its core, and whether Duncan, Ginobili and Popovich want to stick around. The Heat will brace for the potential free agency of James, Wade and Bosh, and will need younger, fresher pieces around the three All-Stars if they all stay.

But this moment belongs to the Spurs.

Playing a methodical style for many years made San Antonio respected, but never beloved despite its winning ways. The Spurs were TV ratings killers, casual viewers finding them not much fun to watch.

But Popovich opened up the offense a few years ago, making the Spurs an easy-to-like, tough-to-beat group that thrives on ball movement and 3-point shooting.

"You showed the world how beautiful this game is," Commissioner Adam Silver told the Spurs during the postgame award ceremony.

NOTES: It was the Spurs' 12th win by 15 or more points, most ever in a postseason. The Spurs outscored opponents by 214 points in the postseason. ... Miami had won 11 straight series, tied for the fifth-longest streak in NBA history.

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