

Celtics beat Lakers for 17th championship

BOSTON (AP) — With Russell and Havlicek sitting courtside, and Red surely lighting up a victory cigar somewhere, these Boston Celtics returned to glory like the great teams before them. Dominant in every way.

On a new parquet floor below aging championship banners hung in the rafters two decades back, the Celtics won their 17th NBA title and a first one — at last — for Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett and Ray Allen — their Big Three for a new generation.

After 22 long years, the NBA has gone green.

Lifted by ear-splitting chants of "Beat L.A." early and cries of "Seven-teen" in the closing seconds by their adoring crowd, the Celtics concluded a shocking rebound of a season with a stunning 131-92 blowout over the Los Angeles Lakers in Game 6 on Tuesday night.

"It means so much more because these are the guys, the Havliceks, the Bill Russells, the Cousys," Pierce said.

"These guys started what's going on with those banners. They don't hang up

any other banners but championship ones.

"And now I'm a part of it."

Garnett scored 26 points with 14 rebounds, Allen scored 26 and Pierce, the Finals MVP who shook off a sprained right knee sustained in Game 1, added 17 as the Celtics, a 24-win team a year ago, wrapped up their first title since 1986.

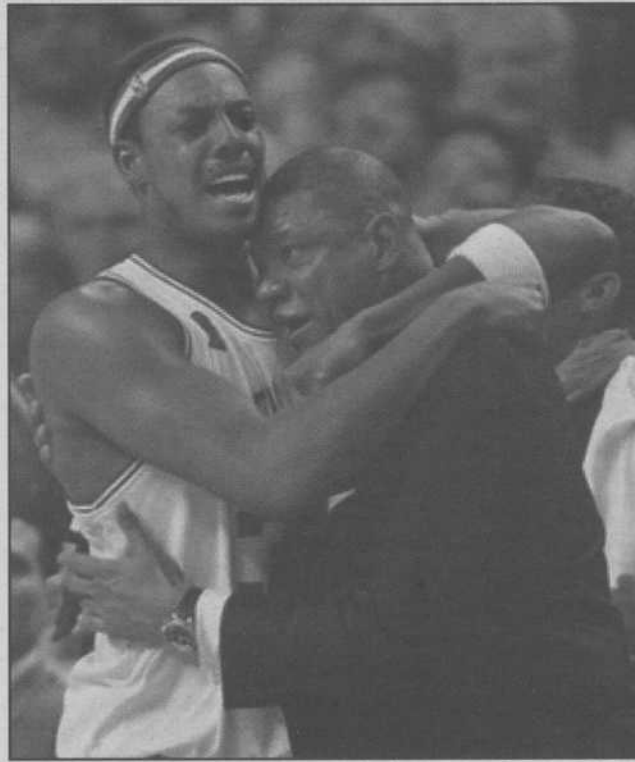
Rajon Rondo had 21 points, eight assists, seven rebounds and six steals as the Celtics built a 23-point half-time lead and obliterated the Lakers, who were trying to become the first team to overcome a 3-1 deficit in the Finals.

They didn't stand a chance.

Boston's 39-point win surpassed the NBA record for the biggest margin of victory in a championship clincher; the Celtics beat the Lakers 129-96 in Game 5 of the 1965 NBA Finals.

By the time Rivers was handed the Larry O'Brien Trophy, it was June 18 — his late father's birthday.

When the game clock reached zeros, Rivers re-



Boston Celtics' Paul Pierce, left, hugs coach Doc Rivers near the end of Game 6 of the NBA Finals against the Los Angeles Lakers on Tuesday in Boston. The Celtics won.

flected on his dad.

"My first thought was what would my dad say," Rivers said, "and, honestly, I started laughing, because I thought he would probably say, if you knew my dad, 'It's about time. What have you been waiting for?'"

It's was Boston's first title

since the passing of Auerbach, whose presence was the only thing missing on this night. Even Auerbach, who died in 2006, got some satisfaction. Led by Rivers, Auerbach's beloved team denied Lakers coach Phil Jackson from overtaking him with a 10th championship.

The Boston-Los Angeles rivalry, nothing more than black-and-white footage from the '60s and TV highlights of players wearing short shorts in the '80s to young hoops fans, remains tilted toward the Atlantic Ocean. The Celtics are 9-2 against the Lakers in the Finals.

Boston missed its first crack at closing out the series in Game 5, but the Celtics didn't miss on their second swing, running the Lakers out of the gym.

Bryant, the regular-season MVP, finished with 22 points on 7-of-22 shooting.

"They were definitely the best defense I've seen the entire playoffs," Bryant said. "I've seen some pretty stiff ones and this was right up there with them. The goal was to win a championship, it wasn't to win MVP or anything like that, it was to win a championship."

Garnett and Allen were All-Stars in other cities, stuck in Minnesota and Seattle, respectively, on teams going nowhere. But brought together in trades last summer by Celtics general manager

Danny Ainge, a member of the 1984 and '86 Celtics champions, they joined Pierce and formed an unbreakable bond, a trio as tight as the club's lucky shamrock logo.

They resisted being called The Big Three, a nickname given to Larry Bird, Kevin McHale and Robert Parish two decades ago.

"This is the reason we came here," Garnett said. "This is the reason we got together, and Danny made it go down. This is it right now."

No team had to work harder for a championship than these Celtics, who were playing in their record 26th postseason game after being pushed to seven games by Atlanta and Cleveland before taking care of Detroit in six to win the Eastern Conference title.

They entered Game 6 slowed by injuries as Pierce, Kendrick Perkins (shoulder) and Rondo (ankle) were less than 100 percent. There was also uncertainty surrounding Allen, who stayed behind in Los Angeles following Game

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