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NBA Playoffs

Sizzling Spurs secure finals berth

By Bob Baum
The Associated Press

PORTLAND — For the first time in the 23 years since they joined the NBA, the San Antonio Spurs are in the finals.

And they go there as one of the hottest playoff teams ever.

The Spurs won their 10th straight playoff game, one short of the league record, and swept the Portland Trail Blazers from the Western Conference finals with a 94-80 victory Sunday.

The Blazers, swept in a seven-game series for the first time in the franchise's history, challenged San Antonio with a second-half surge that briefly gave Portland the lead.

But Tim Duncan had two three-point plays, a spectacular slam dunk and a series of big defensive plays to help the Spurs pull away.

The Spurs buried the Blazers with a 71 percent shooting performance in the fourth quarter (12-for-17).

San Antonio put away their biggest victory ever with a 17-4 run. Duncan and Sean Elliott each scored five points and Avery Johnson had four in the decisive surge. The first of Jaren Jackson's three 3-pointers in the fourth quarter put the Spurs up 81-67 with 7:09 to play.

David Robinson, finally in the NBA Finals in his 10th season, had 20 points and 10 rebounds. Duncan, who had just five points in Game 3, had 18 points and

eight rebounds in Game 4. Elliott scored 16. Johnson, the point guard Damon Stoudamire said would never lead a team to a championship, had 15 points and six assists.

Stoudamire, 1-for-12 in Portland's embarrassing 85-63 loss Friday night, was 9-for-13 for 21 points. Rasheed Wallace, the Blazers' lone consistent offensive threat in the series scored 17, while Isaiah Rider had 12.

San Antonio is 11-1 in the playoffs, 6-0 on the road. After winning the first-round series with Minnesota 3-1, the Spurs swept the Los Angeles Lakers and the Blazers. Now they go back to San Antonio to await the outcome of the Eastern Conference finals. New York leads Indiana 2-1 in that series.

The Spurs beat the Blazers for the seventh straight time. Of Portland's five home losses, three were to San Antonio.

Never a flashy bunch, the Spurs celebrated only with hugs and high fives.

San Antonio is the first of the four old ABA teams to make it to the NBA Finals. Indiana could join them if the Pacers beat the Knicks.

Portland trailed nearly all of the first half but the Blazers did not roll over and die.

Trailing 48-36 on Elliott's 3-pointer with 10:24 to go in the third quarter, Portland came back with a 14-4 run.

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