For the first time since 1971, two teams that have never reached the NBA Finals before will battle it out for the title. Additionally, if the Heat win, it will be the first time since 1972 that the NCAA (Florida) and NBA champions come from the same state. In this column, Papa Cass looks back at the history of the NBA Finals as well as the teams that have yet to get there.

Visit the Papa Cass weblog at http://papacass.blogspot.com/

Savor this, because it doesn't happen very often.

Two first-time teams will face each other in the NBA Finals when the Dallas Mavericks host the Miami Heat Thursday.

I went back through my sports almanac, and found the last time the stars aligned this way for a pair of deflowered Finals virgins: it was 1971, when the Milwaukee Bucks of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar swept the Baltimore Bullets of Wes Unseld.

NBA history is largely based on dynasties, with the Lakers, Celtics, 76ers, Pistons and Bulls, and more recently the Spurs, making serial Finals appearances. To have a couple of first-time teams facing each other is rare. How rare? Prior to 1971, the previous occurrence involved the Celtics.

It was 1957, when Boston, making the first of 19 Finals appearances, defeated the St. Louis Hawks of Bob Pettit. The Celtics would appear in the Finals in 12 of the next 13 years, every year but 1967. They lost the rematch with the Hawks in 1958, and didn't lose again during the run.

In fact, the next time the Celtics lost an NBA Finals was in 1985 to the Lakers.

The Celtics have the most NBA titles with 16, but their 19 Finals appearances is a drop in the bucket compared to the Lakers, who have been to the NBA's championship series 28 times, winning 15. That includes six appearances (five wins) as the Minneapolis Lakers prior to 1960. The Lakers are the only team to play in the Finals in every decade the league has existed.

Other teams that have made at least four Finals appearances include:

- Knicks -- 8
- 76ers -- 8 (two as the Syracuse Nationals)
- Pistons -- 7 (two in Fort Wayne, five in Detroit)
- Bulls -- 6
- Warriors -- 6 (three in Philadelphia, two as the San Francisco Warriors, one as the Golden State Warriors)
- Bullets -- 4
- Rockets -- 4
- Hawks --4 (all in St. Louis)

Even with the disparity between the Finals haves and have-nots, the NBA is comparable to other professional leagues based on the percentage of teams that have played in its championship game/series.

Out of 30 NBA teams, eight have now never appeared in the NBA Finals (Grizzlies, Nuggets, Cavaliers, Raptors, Timberwolves, Clippers, Hornets and Bobcats). Compare that with the NFL, where six of 32 teams have never played in the Super Bowl, and Major League Baseball, where five of 30 teams have never played in the World Series.

One last pair of tidbits about this year's Finals. If the Heat win, both the NCAA men's basketball and NBA champions will be from the same state. The last time that happened was in 1972, when the Lakers and

UCLA both won.

If the Mavericks win, the NBA and NCAA football champions will be from the same state. The last time that happened was 1983, when Penn State was the reigning national champs and the 76ers won the NBA crown.