

Cavs/Blazers: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

Wednesday, November 15 2006 7:00 PM -

That LeBron James guy ... uhh ... he's pretty good. The Cavs shot outta the gates quick last night, controlling the game wire to wire against a young Blazers team, and moving to 6-2 in the process. LeBron James played his best game of the year, and hell is likely chilly this morning as Eric Snow went 6-6 from the field. Hnat is here with the recap.



THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs rolled to a 100-87 win over the Portland Trail Blazers. The win, their fourth in a row, improved their record to 6-2, still best in the Eastern Conference. LeBron James (idea: have him wear that water-can't-penetrate-it 'fro during a game) led the way with 32 points, 7 rebounds, and 7 assists. Drew Gooden bounced back from a couple of low-scoring games to chip in 17. Zach Randolph led Portland with 26 points (on what seemed like a thousand free throw attempts) and 11 boards.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

And They're Out Of The Gate ... And For a Change, They Haven't Slipped: After the previous two games against the Celtics and Knicks, in which they started very slowly, the Cavs really needed to have a game in which they had a strong effort right from the start. They

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succeeded, jumping out to a six point lead almost immediately. They did eventually give that lead back ... but it was nice for them to not have to dig out of a double-digit hole, as opposed to their previous two games.

Let It Snow: I've been a frequent critic of Eric Snow, so it's only fair that I give him props when he does well. Tonight, he did very well – a perfect 6-of-6 from the floor for 13 points. He hit a nice assortment of jumpers and layups (including one where he beat his man off the dribble and drove through the lane). If he can sustain that kind of performance – no, I'm not being a smartass here, I don't mean he is going to shoot 100% every night – then he'll be one of the complementary pieces the Cavs need. Contrary to what plenty of fans think, the Cavs don't need an All-Star at point guard. Instead, they need a Paxsonesque point guard – one who can play without the ball, spot up and hit jumpers, and generally not hurt you with his play. Tonight, Snow was that guy.

The LeBron Atlas Watch: Looks like this is going to become at least a semi-regular feature. Once again, LeBron had a streak of plays that essentially decided the game. With Cleveland up 60-53 in the third quarter, LeBron drove the ball and pulled up for a bank shot. A few seconds later, he grabbed the rebound from a missed Blazers shot, leading to one of Snow's baskets. The Blazers missed their next shot too, and again LeBron grabbed the rebound, drove coast to coast, and scored on a layup (which became a three point play, as he was fouled). Portland missed yet another shot, and then James drilled a three pointer. Just like *that*, the Cavs had a 17 point lead. A minute later, James tomahawked a dunk. And that was the game, even though 15 minutes remained.

But They Did OK Without Him Too: LeBron picked up his second foul with six and a half minutes remaining in the first quarter. That put him on the bench for the rest of the period. At the time, the Cavs were leading by six points. At the end of the quarter ... the Cavs were still leading by six points. Larry Hughes in particular seemed to turn up the energy a notch in LeBron's absence, getting a couple of assists and being one heck of a pest on defense.

Passing Fancy: Although the box score doesn't show it (the Cavs logged but 18 assists), Cleveland did an excellent job of moving the ball around on offense. Everybody was zipping the ball around the court as though the Ebola virus were strapped to it. Many of the passes

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would have led to assists, but the Cavs did not have a particularly good night shooting the ball, at least from outside.

Of course LeBron had his usual visionary passes (he set the tone early with a nice back-handed dish to Hughes for a dunk), but other players are getting into the act too. Watching the Cavs' offense is like watching a child grow up – you can see what they are becoming, and while they are not there yet (and still have a ways to go), they consistently are taking additional steps on the road there. The most impressive development of the season thus far has been the strides taken by the offense. It is becoming rarer and rarer to have LeBron dribbling out the clock while the other four guys stand like guards at Buckingham Palace. That is not a bad thing.

Youth is Served: Daniel Gibson made his NBA debut, playing the final minute of what had become garbage time. He made the most of it – the one time he touched the ball, he drove the ball hard to the hoop, then kicked it out to Pavlovic, who drained a three pointer. (That gave the Cavs 100 points, which meant free Taco Bell chalupas for all!) You can't extrapolate too much from one play, but boy did he look like a real point guard. Certainly more so than anybody else we have seen in a while.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Who Had "Game 8" In The Pool?: It took Hughes all of eight games to leave a game with an injury. To be fair:

1. It happened as a result of a hustle play by Hughes;
2. It was an "it could've happened to anyone" type of injury.

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Midway through the second quarter, after Sasha Pavlovic missed a jumper, Hughes swatted the rebound away from Portland's Martell Webster. Webster dove for the ball, and rolled onto Hughes' right foot. That ended Hughes' evening. Fortunately, the injury did not appear to be too serious, as Hughes returned to the bench in the second half.

The Second Unit: The Blazers' bench outscored the Cavs' bench, 47-26. That's not to say the Cavs' reserves played poorly – Pavlovic had 8 points and another solid defensive effort, Damon Jones had 7 points (all of them from inside the three point line), Donyell Marshall had 8 points and led the team with 8 rebounds – but Portland's bench had more energy. Travis Outlaw had 16 points; Juan Dixon and LaMarcus Aldridge added 14 and 13 points respectively; and Sergio Rodriguez dished out a game-high 8 assists. (Imagine that, the Cavs having problems guarding a smaller, quicker point guard.)

Lucious Wesley: David Wesley played. Alas, that in itself is bad news these days. After the Cavs had built a 20 point lead late in the third quarter, Coach Mike Brown inserted Wesley. Two minutes, one personal foul, a missed shot, and a dribble-off-his-foot turnover later, the lead was down to 13 points, and Wesley was back on the bench. With the emergence of Sasha Pavlovic, Wesley's slow start has not been as harmful to the team. But Wesley is in real danger of ending his career on a sour note. I wrote before the season started that [Wesley could be another Lucious Harris](#) – a long-time shooting guard who comes to Cleveland and watches his career fall off a cliff – and while I didn't want to be right, so far I am.

You're Seven Feet Tall For A Reason: If I see one more Cavs frontcourt player try to lay the ball in instead of dunking it, I will ... well, I'm not sure what I'll do. I've never been one to throw things at the TV (only exception to that rule: Marquis Grissom's deer-in-the-headlights muff of an easy fly ball during the 1997 ALCS). But I'll figure out some appropriate action to take. Donyell Marshall and Zydrunas Ilgauskas both had easy dunks ... both decided to lay the ball in instead ... and both missed their shots. You know how teams will have drills in practice the day after a game in which they miss a lot of free throws? Maybe that's what Coach Brown needs to do: have a dunking drill for the big men the day after they miss (or, more accurately, pass up the opportunity) more than one dunk.

Michael Reghi, Where Are You Now That We Need You: I've deliberately not said

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anything about new Cavs announcer Fred McLeod. I was (am) a big fan of previous Cavs' announcer Michael Reghi, and think that he got the wrong end of the Spalding (is there such a thing? But I want to keep the reference basketball related) when he was canned shortly before the season. After a few games, I can confidently say: he's much better than McLeod.

McLeod seems likeable enough, and tries to call the game, but the game he's seeing often bears at most a passing reference to the game actually being played. Here's one example: Portland's Randolph took a pass on his way to the hoop, but ran right over Snow for an offensive foul. As Randolph was charging to the hoop, Z came over to help, swatting at Randolph's shot. When the foul was called, McLeod said that Z had taken the charge. Mind you, there is no way in the physical universe that Z could have taken the charge – he was dashing (well, dashing for him at least) over to help Snow. But McLeod persisted in his call that Z had established position, and reversed it only after Snow peeled himself off the floor.

Then again, McLeod and partner Scott Williams bring a certain cluelessness that makes their banter unintentionally funny. The best exchange came as the broadcast returned from a time out, with "Hang On Sloopy" being played in the Q. Of course, this is Buckeye country (not to mention that they have a relatively big game this weekend; check the many other articles on this site), and the fans were doing the "O! H! ! O!" chant after each chorus. Williams said "why are they singing about Snoopy?". In all seriousness. McLeod then had to point out that the word is actually "Sloopy", and how it was a big song from the 60s. It wasn't quite as noteworthy as [Al Michaels explaining to Peter Jennings the falsity of a reported sighting during the O.J. Simpson Bronco chase](#), but only because the stage wasn't nearly as large.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Kevin Garnett and the Minnesota Timberwolves come to the Q on Friday night. I like it when star players get mentioned ahead of the team. It's almost rock star-ish, like "Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers" or "Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band". Anyway, the Cavs will try to extend their winning streak to five games.