

Cavs/Raptors - The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

Wednesday, November 22 2006 7:00 PM -

The Cavs once again looked past a cellar-dwelling opponent last night, losing to the Toronto Raptors, 95-87, in front of 19,000 fans (which converts to 15,000 American fans) at the Air Canada Center. John Hnat checks in this holiday morning with the lowdown on what went down north of the border. HAPPY THANKSGIVING EVERYONE!



THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs once again looked past a cellar-dwelling opponent, losing to the Toronto Raptors, 95-87, in front of 19,000 fans (which converts to 15,000 American fans) at the Air Canada Center. LeBron James came close to his first triple-double of the season, finishing with 30 points, 10 rebounds, and 8 assists. Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Damon Jones, and Anderson Varejao all scored in double digits as well. Chris Bosh, who may be the best fourth-best player from a draft ever once all is said and done, had 25 points and 14 rebounds for the Raptors.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Yeah, Let's Start With The Obvious One: One of the difficulties of writing this style of column is avoiding repetition. It would be very easy to just put LeBron down as one of the highlights of every game, because he is that good. (Makes the columns easier to write, too. Copy and paste is a wonderful thing.) But he deserves it tonight. It wasn't his greatest effort

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ever, but when a guy scores 30 points on 11 of 24 shooting, and comes close to a triple-double, we should be somewhat impressed, no?

He Makes Our Hearts Sing: Varejao was one of the other reasons the Cavs were able to keep the game close. One of these days, he is going to get a triple-double: points, rebounds, and charges taken. (With 10 points, 10 boards, and 3 charges taken, he wasn't that far away tonight.) Even those numbers do not describe just how much of an impact he had on the game – flustering Bosh, competing for every rebound, and generally being his disruptive self. (Here is one more statistic: the Cavs were plus-11 when Varejao was in the game tonight, and -19 when he was on the bench.)

Welcome To The NBA, Rookie: Daniel Gibson received his first dose of substantial playing time tonight (21 minutes, just a few seconds more than starter Eric Snow), and he did rather well. He certainly wasn't perfect – he missed two wide open three pointers down the stretch – but he handled the ball well, drilled some outside shots (including a three ball), and had only one “you *#\$%\$#*^% rookie!” moment. (One of those in 21 minutes is not a bad ratio.) Perhaps more impressively, he was able to play some defense against Toronto's quick point guards, T.J. Ford and Jose Calderon. His outside stroke looks solid, and once he gets more acclimated to the pro game, I expect him to be hitting those shots consistently. (Speaking of the plus/minus statistic: the Cavs were plus-10 with Gibson in the game, minus-18 with him on the bench.)

Going With The Hot ... Well, The Slightly Above Room Temperature Hand: Give Coach Mike Brown credit for sticking with Gibson, even inserting him with a little over four minutes left for the stretch run. Brown has taken a fair amount of criticism from Cleveland's unpaid coaching advisors for being too loyal to his veterans. Tonight, he stuck with Gibson in the second quarter as the Cavs erased a 19 point deficit; then later, when he could see that Snow just did not have it, he went back to Gibson. While that move did not pay off tonight, it shows a coaching flexibility that has been somewhat lacking.

It Was The Best Of The Bench... Gibson, Varejao, and Damon Jones combined for 29 points off the bench. They were instrumental in bringing the Cavs back into the game in the second quarter. Jones is looking more comfortable; he's not just hiding behind the arc and bombing away. While he is certainly still shooting the threes, he is also driving the ball and

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moving in for intermediate jumpers. The result is that his 6 and 8 point games from last year are becoming double-digit games this season.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

...It Was The Worst Of The Bench: Donyell Marshall and Sasha Pavlovic, normally two solid contributors on the second unit, combined for two points on 1 of 9 shooting. This sequence from the first quarter pretty much says it all:

Pavlovic Jump Shot: Missed 1:24

Marshall Rebound (Off:1 Def:) 1:22

Marshall Tip-In: Missed 1:20

Marshall Rebound (Off:2 Def:) 1:19

Marshall Tip-In: Missed

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And The Starting Five Wasn't All That, Either: Other than LeBron, and to some extent Ilgauskas, the rest of the starters took the night off. Ilgauskas did have 12 points and 7 boards; as usual though, most of those boards came off his own misses. When the rebounds count – for example, when you don't want Bosh or Joey Graham (*Joey Graham?*) or Jorge Garbajosa (*Jorge Garbajosa???*) to crash the offensive boards – then Z is typically absent. As for the others ... well, they deserve their own sections...

This Is Why I Don't Bet: A little over a week ago, I wrote that [Drew Gooden could be a dark horse All Star candidate](#)

. That particular horse has pulled a major league [Barbaro](#)

since I wrote those words. Gooden's cumulative numbers in the seven games since then (including tonight's Raptors game): 22-57 shooting (38.6%), 55 points, 56 rebounds. Remove his stellar game last night against the Grizzlies, and those numbers drop to 13-45, 33 points, and 21 rebounds. Tonight's game was another tough one for Gooden: he finished with 8 points, 5 rebounds, and the image of Bosh beating him (you complete the cliché; I will guess that red-headed stepchildren and/or drums will be involved).

Department Of "The More They Stay The Same": Snow and David Wesley's combined line: 2-10 from the field, 6 points total, just under 37 combined minutes played. Snow was especially brickilicious tonight; after he missed two wide open jumpers in the fourth quarter, Coach Brown said "to hell with this" and put Gibson back in the game (see above). Wesley had one nice drive and foul for a three point play; alas, that was it.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

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Plenty of turkey and stuffing, followed by pretending to fall into a tryptophan coma on the couch as a dodge for getting out of post-meal cleanup.

Oh, you meant what lies ahead for the Cavs. They'll travel to Indiana to take on the Pacers this Friday night, followed by Allen Iverson and the Sixers at home on Saturday. (Early betting hint: Take the Sixers. The Cavs are 1-2 in Saturday night games this season, with the one win being the improbable come-from-way-down game against the Celtics two weeks ago; and after tonight's loss, they are 0-3 in the second game of back-to-backs.)