



While it lacked all the hype and pageantry of the BCS National Championship Game, tonight's Cavs vs. Bulls matchup delivered a pretty comparable viewing experience—which is to say, a dull, relentless, one-sided steamrolling: Bulls 118, Cavaliers 92.

With any halfway respectable NBA ballclub, a night like this would lead to angry calls for coach Byron Scott's job and declarations that the proverbial "wheels have come off." But in a city far more interested in the *offseason* activities of its other two pro teams than the *midseason* performance of its basketball squad, the Cavaliers' ship of horrors sails onward into the fog essentially unnoticed—like the echo of a whisper of a rumor.

Playing without Anderson Varejao yet again, Cleveland (8-28) stood little hope on the road against the division leading Bulls (19-13), who've already handled the Cavs easily in two prior meetings at the Q this season. Still, Chicago is far from a juggernaut in their current Derrick Rose-less limbo, so it seemed worthwhile for Kyrie and company to at least show up at the United Center and give it a go.

As it turned out, a forfeit would have done more for team pride. Despite jumping out to a 30-22 first quarter lead behind the outside shooting of Kyrie Irving and his now everyday starting backcourt mate C.J. Miles, Cleveland watched Chicago erase that deficit in less than two minutes early in quarter #2, as a Luol Deng three-pointer was followed-up by back-to-back Marco Bellinelli triples, giving the Bulls a 33-32 edge. Bellinelli would wind up scoring 13 points in the second quarter alone, as Chicago maintained a narrow 53-50 edge at halftime. An hour later, that rocky second period would look comparatively like the salad days.

After hanging around for a reasonable chunk of the third quarter, the lack of Varejao's defensive presence and rebounding became all too painfully obvious, as Cleveland favorites Joakim Noah and Carlos Boozer began dictating things from inside the paint. A jumper at the buzzer from the pesky muppet Nate Robinson gave the Bulls their biggest lead of the night at 88-72, and despite the entrance of Jon Leuer, Shaun Livingston, Jeremy Pargo, Kevin Jones, and Omri Casspi into the Cavs' crunch time rotation, nothing could stem Chicago's crimson-ish tide from that point forward.

As the Bulls lead ballooned to over 30 points behind a string of uncontested dunks, one's only recourse was to turn back to the Notre Dame-Alabama game, as that massive mismatch at least offered the chance to hear about how little interest Nick Saban actually has in coming to the Browns.

In terms of "bright" spots in a 26-point loss, Dion Waiters led all Cleveland scorers with 18 points off the bench—a role he remains less than thrilled about, apparently. The rest of the bench, of course, is sub-pro talent unworthy of a second mention. As for the starters, Irving (15 points, 6 assists) and Miles (15 points, 4-of-7 from downtown) did almost all their damage in the first half, and Tristan Thompson again picked up the Varejao slack respectfully with 14 points and 8 rebounds. Unfortunately, he and Tyler Zeller (6 pts, 6 rbs) were also at the mercy of the Bulls frontcourt all night, as Noah (11 pts, 11 rbs), Deng (19 pts, 7 assts, 5 rbs) and effing Boozer (game-high 24 pts, 11 rbs) got whatever they wanted. Chicago's bench was also on fire all night, between Belinelli (15 pts), Robinson (14 pts), and especially Taj Gibson, who grabbed 7 boards and scored 18 points on 8-of-9 shooting in just 23 minutes.

All told, Chicago outshot Cleveland 54% to 42%, which isn't even an eye-opening stat at this point, considering this was the Bulls's 11th straight win over your Wine and Gold. Even for a team that wasn't expected to go anywhere this year, the 2012/13 Cavaliers have turned into quite the little irrelevant disappointment.