

A Dose of Their Own Medicine: Cavs Stop C's

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Tough. Hard-nosed. Defensive-minded. It's been the blueprint for victory for the Boston Celtics since time



immemorial. Tuesday night at the Q, the Cavaliers turned that blueprint against the Celtics in a gritty 95-90 victory. The upset lifted Cleveland to 11-32 on the season; Boston dropped its fourth straight to fall under .500 at 20-21.

Cleveland's blueprint for victory generally involves a heavy dose of Kyrie Irving. The youngster had perhaps his finest performance of the season on Tuesday: 40 points on 16-of-24 from the field, 1-of-3 from three-point range and 7-of-7 from the line to go with 5 assists, 3 rebounds and 2 steals. Torching defensive specialist Avery Bradley from the tip, Kyrie dropped in 19 points in the first quarter and bracketed it with 15 in the fourth, including 11 in the final two-and-a-half minutes as Cleveland turned a one-point deficit into an insurmountable eight-point lead.

Kyrie also got the better of his positional matchup with Boston point guard Rajon Rondo, who had 17 points, 13 rebounds and 8 assists but shot just 7-of-17 and committed some crucial mistakes down the stretch, including a save of the basketball under his own basket that Kyrie neatly picked off and laid in for an 86-83 Cavalier lead with 2:05 left.

Cleveland's draft class of 2011 was well-represented on Tuesday night. Tristan Thompson

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tallied a season-high 21 points on 9-of-18 shooting to go with 9 rebounds and 5 assists. And an unexpected victory also produced an unexpected hero in the form of Luke Walton. Playing crafty, cerebral basketball, Bill's kid came off the bench and produced 7 points on 3-of-3 shooting along with 7 assists, several of them no-look delicacies.

Individual heroes aside, this night was about defense and toughness- qualities that haven't exactly flowed in abundance from this team. The Cavaliers had every reason to lose this game. They were on their first game back home from a long road trip, generally a let-down game in the NBA. They scored a middling 41 second-half points, including just 16 in the third period, and trailed by as many as seven to a veteran Boston team that really needed a victory.

But they didn't lose, in large part to a defensive effort that was altogether out of place for his usually ragged defensive team. After shooting 59.7 percent in the last meeting with the Cavaliers back on December 19th, Boston shot just 38.1 percent on Tuesday night. Paul Pierce, who ripped Cleveland for 40 in December, tallied just 12 on 3-of-15 shooting; Kevin Garnett shot 5-of-13. Only rookie Jared Sullinger, who celebrated his first trip back to Ohio as a Celtic, stood out in defeat- he came off the bench to log a double-double 12-point, 10-rebound line.

Cleveland kept coming up with stops to stay in the game in the fourth quarter. Carrying a 73-70 lead after three, the Celtics missed seven of their first eight shots in the final stanza. They stayed cold, hitting on just 5-of-23 and committing 6 turnovers in the final twelve minutes. Boston still led 81-78 after Sullinger's put-back with 5:23 left, but watched it slip away thanks to missed shots and mistakes. To be sure, the Celtics were their own worst enemy on Tuesday night- but the pressure applied by the Cavaliers didn't help, either.

Cleveland hasn't had many good nights this season, but this was definitely one of them. No, the Celtics aren't what they used to be. But to beat them- and at their own game, moreover- made this one of the best victories the Cavaliers have garnered in 2012-13. Not that there's an abundance of victories to choose from, of course.

Next: Friday night at 7:30 when the Cavaliers host the Milwaukee Bucks.