



When the final buzzer rang on Monday night, the Cleveland Cavaliers found themselves facing a 100-92 loss to the Minnesota Timberwolves. On the surface, this was not one of the worst losses that Cleveland has suffered. After all, there are 36 available to choose from and far fewer wins. The Cavs have lost to the Chicago Bulls by 29 points. They gave up a 26 point lead to the Phoenix Suns. Both of those losses happened within the first six games of the season.

Something about this loss stung more than any other.

At shoot-around, veteran guard C.J. Miles had some thoughts on not taking the Timberwolves lightly. "The biggest thing we talked about was that we don't want another Golden State-type of thing happening," said Miles. He was referring to when the Cavs lost to the Golden State Warriors on January 29th. The Warriors were missing five different rotation players due to injury, were on the second night of a back-to-back and were at the end of four games in five nights road trip. Despite all of this, the Warriors beat the Cavs by a score of 108-95.

Minnesota was missing Kevin Love, Chase Budinger, Andrei Kirilenko and Brandon Roy. As we

are accustomed to, it didn't matter and the Timberwolves were able to leave Cleveland with a victory. I do not know if it is a problem with the team culture, but it is mind-boggling that a 16 win team can allow themselves to be arrogant. The Cavs have been playing better as of late, but they still have a long way to go if they want to reach the postseason in the Kyrie Irving era.

The Cavs started the game looking fairly good. Tristan Thompson was very active early en route to a 10 point and 5 rebound quarter. Perhaps he wanted to show skeptics that he was better than Derrick Williams, who played 2 minutes in the quarter and who did nothing but commit 2 fouls in that time. In the first two possessions of the game, Thompson secured 2 rebounds and drew a foul. Thompson set the tone early, but his teammates did not follow.

The Cavs only found themselves up by a score of 27-25 after the first twelve minutes. This was despite shooting a better percentage from the field, taking and making more free throws, pulling down more rebounds, committing less personal fouls, and blocking 5 shots. The difference for the Timberwolves was that they were able to hang around by making all four of their three point attempts in the first. This is a team that is in the midst of a historically bad three point shooting season. Zach Harper of A Wolf Among Wolves wrote an article that took a deeper [look](#) into how bad the Timberwolves are from beyond the arc that is quite eye-opening when taking into consideration that they made 63.6% of their three point attempts against the Cavs.

Clearly, Cleveland is doing something wrong defensively. In the Byron Scott era, they have been abysmal at defending the three ball. The Cavs have been ranked 30th, 23rd and 25th on opponent three point percentage in Scott's three seasons as the head coach. The Cavs were especially slow on rotations against Minnesota and it cost them. By my estimation, they ran the same exact play on three different possessions late in the game and it got them open looks each and every time. The ball handler would stand at the top of the key, get a screen and pass to an open man in the corner. One possible adjustment worth considering is going under the screen when the primary ball-handler is not a good shooter. By going over the screen when guarding Ricky Rubio, it allows him to get around the screen and find the open man with his superior court vision. I understand that head coaches have a system that they like, but it seems like it should be adjusted based on personnel of the opposition. Ricky Rubio can't shoot and they should be daring him to do so instead of allowing him to play to his strengths.

There was a scare in the second quarter. The Timberwolves had a 14-0 run. Kyrie Irving

responded with a three pointer that capped off a 5 point run for Cleveland. He landed awkwardly and he came up limping. Luckily, he did not appear to suffer a bad injury and he was able to play in the second half. Irving drove the lane and converted on a layup early in the second half, but he appeared to play below his standards after that moment.

The San Antonio Spurs come to Cleveland on Wednesday. This is not welcome news because the Spurs are a well-coached team that can make a young team like Cleveland look like they do not even belong in the NBA. That is the last game before the all-star break.