

No Lead is Safe: Cavs Blow it, lose to Knicks

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Monday night's 102-97 loss to the New York Knicks at the Q showed, once again, that the Cavaliers haven't yet found a lead they can't let slip away. Cleveland



blew a 22-point first-half lead in near-spectacular fashion against a New York team that came in still stunned from its own second-half meltdown against the Heat on Sunday. The stunner broke a ten-game losing streak in the Q for New York.

Kyrie Irving was back in the lineup after missing two games with a tweaked knee, but although he got right back in the swing of things with 10 points and 4 assists in the first quarter, it was a pair of nominal reserves that fueled Cleveland's early charge. Getting the start in place of the under-the-weather Tyler Zeller, Marreese Speights hit his first ten attempts from the field on the way to 21 first-half points. Luke Walton initiated beautifully off the bench, handing out six first-quarter assists on the way to a career-high 12.

The Knicks were cooperative in the early going. Normally judicious with the basketball, they committed eight turnovers in the first quarter-and-a-half, and their defensive effort consisted mainly of standing around while Cleveland did whatever it wanted. They looked hung over from their gut-wrenching loss to Miami the day before, while the Cavaliers looked fresh and eager with a couple off-days under their belts and their main man back on the floor.

With 7:39 left in the second period C.J. Miles threw in a three-pointer that gave the Cavaliers a 52-30 lead. At that point Cleveland was shooting 82 percent from the field, including buckets on 17 of its last 18 attempts. At that point, having followed this team all season, it definitely felt as if things were going a little *too* well.

They were. Over the next 11:43, New York outscored the Cavaliers 34-12 to turn their 22-point deficit into a 64-64 tie late in the third period. During that span, in a 180-degree role-reversal from the first half, Cleveland shot 6-of-22 (27.3 percent) and committed eight turnovers. While

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J.R. Smith (18 points, 7 rebounds, 6 assists) and Amare Stoudamire (22 points, 6 rebounds) heated up for New York, the Cavaliers completely lost whatever mojo they'd possessed in the first sixteen-plus minutes.

Although they tied it with 4:04 left in the third, it took another seven minutes for the Knicks to actually take the lead. They finally overhauled Cleveland completely with 9:08 left when veteran Cavalier-killer Steve Novak bombed in a three-pointer to make it 79-78 New York with 9:04 left. The Cavaliers were buried under a fusillade of three's down the stretch, with the Knicks going 7-of-11 from behind the arc in the final period. Novak was the biggest culprit with three long balls; Jason Kidd added a couple of daggers late as the Knicks hung on.

(All of this came after Carmelo Anthony left the game in the second period with an injury. Patrick Ewing may be long retired, but the [Ewing Theory](#) is alive and well in the Big Apple.)

The Cavaliers really missed Dion Waiters, who along with Zeller was out with an illness. They could have used his slashing and his aggressiveness in the fourth quarter. Kyrie Irving finished with 22 points and 6 assists, but he looked a little winded late and never really put his stamp on the game. Speights couldn't be counted on to keep up his torrid early pace, scoring just two second-half points. When the going got tough late, there was no one to get going with Kyrie.

In the end the Knicks won the statistical battle as well as the result on the scoreboard. They outrebounded the Cavaliers 40-31, went 12-of-30 from downtown and got 70 points, 26 rebounds and 11 assists from their bench. Meanwhile, Cleveland committed 14 turnovers, hit 6-of-20 from beyond the arc and amassed only five assists in the second half after 20 in the first.

Once again it was a case of the Cavaliers getting sloppy with a big lead- and a case of water finding its level, to a certain extent. It all added up to Cleveland's second consecutive loss and 40th of the season.

Next: Wednesday night at 7:00 when the Cavaliers welcome the Utah Jazz to the Q.