

## Kyrie Goes Down; So Do Cavs

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}  
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Looks as if the Cavaliers might have to shut down Kyrie Irving after all. The Cavaliers lost Irving with his latest injury Sunday evening in Toronto, and proceeded to



lose the game to the Raptors, 100-96. Cleveland falls to 21-42 with its second consecutive loss, a virtual three-way tie with the Kings (22-43) and Bullets (20-41) for the third-worst record in the NBA.

The Cavaliers- who were up by 17 at one point in the first half- were clinging to a 72-69 lead late in the third period when Jonas Valanciunas hip-checked Irving along the baseline and the kid hit the floor, writhing in pain and clutching his left shoulder. After splitting a pair of free throws without the use of his left arm, Irving exited the game and didn't return. Toronto promptly ripped off an 11-2 run to take a 80-74 lead going into the fourth quarter.

Once again two prevailing themes of the season- wasted double-digit leads and third-quarter meltdowns- were evident, even north of the border. After rolling to a 50-33 lead with 3:46 left in the first half, the Cavaliers blew it all and then some, getting outscored 47-24 in the next 15:46 of game-time. The Raptors outscored Cleveland 33-19 in the third period, with the Cavaliers operating incoherently on both ends of the court.

After losing that big lead and falling behind by as many as eight in the fourth, Cleveland almost stole the game back thanks in large part to Dion Waiters. With the Cavaliers down 87-80 midway through the period Waiters- who missed six straight shots at one point- took over. Over the next few minutes the rookie personally outscored the Raptors 12-7, and his free throw with 1:20 left put the Cavaliers back in front, 95-94.

But Waiters was unable to close it out when he had the chance. He couldn't stick a tough jumper that would have made it a three-point lead in the final minute and went just 5-of-9 from the line, including two critical misses in the last minute-and-a-half. Still, he finished with 21

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points, some dazzling forays to the basket and more evidence that he's a player in the making.

Cleveland's number-one youngster, meanwhile, might have played his last game of the season Sunday. Or at least, that's hopefully the case. Obviously I don't want Kyrie to be seriously injured, but a "million-dollar wound," one that shelves him for the season and won't leave any lasting affects, wouldn't be the worst thing that ever happened.

At this point the season's major goal- the positive development of Irving, Waiters and Tristan Thompson- has already been reached. Kyrie is blossoming into a franchise player- his fragility notwithstanding- while Waiters and Thompson have shown visible improvement over the course of the year. I generally want to barf when I hear that "progress trumps victories" for a Cleveland team, but in this case it's true.

The young Cavaliers have made their point. Most important now are ping-pong balls in the hopper. The Lottery race to the bottom:

Charlotte (13-50: --)

Orlando (18-46: 4.5)

*Washington (20-41: 8)*

*Cleveland (21-42: 8)*

*Sacramento (22-43: 8)*

Phoenix (22-41: 9)

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Minnesota (21-39: 9.5)

Detroit (23-41: 9.5)

Philadelphia (23-39: 10.5)

Things get awfully tight after Charlotte and Orlando- seven teams within two-and-a-half games of one another. There isn't much reason to play to win now. Shut Kyrie down, give him an extended off-season to improve his shaky constitution, and head into June armed with the premium pick this franchise needs to put this re-build over the top.

**Next:** Tuesday night at 7:00 when the Washington Bullets come into the Q for a showdown with Lottery implications out the wazoo.