



The problem with the Cavaliers lies not with their collective athletic ability. It lies not with their approach to the games or their teamwork.

Their biggest problem — at least of late — is the defensive play of the guards, who seem more "Lost in Space" than Will Robinson and Robby the Robot ever were.

When the Brooklyn Nets torched them the other night, starting guards Marshon Brooks and Deron Williams combined for 51 points. The previous game, Atlanta guards Devin Harris and Jeff Teague combined for 44 points. And the game before that, the lowly Hornets' guards combined for "only" 39 points, but the diminutive Brian Roberts came off the bench to add 15 in limited playing time.

Unless my eyes deceive me, many of those points have come on veritable waltzes to the basket; and unless my memory has gone south, a layup is historically the easiest shot in the basketball world to make.

From a fan standpoint, it's difficult to tell whether the problem lies with Cleveland's guards themselves — who repeatedly let their opponents dribble around and through them — or with the Cavs' big men, who are not doing a whole lot to guard the rim. Although the front-liners have got to be at least in the top half of the league in taking charges, they rank a dismal 29th of 30 NBA teams in blocked shots.

Which leads us to another pressing problem: the Cavaliers are stick figures, usually playing against a bunch of heavier, stronger opponents — which is to say your usual NBA team. The Cavs have the length, they just don't have a lot of weight to sling around, so they end up getting pushed around in the paint. You've got to admit that, outside of Marreese Speights and Dion Waiters, there's not a lot of bulk or muscle running up and down the deck of the Q on a regular basis.

Take the Brooklyn Nets, who torched our boys the other night. The average weight of their rostered players is 222.6 pounds. By contrast, the weight of the average Cavalier is 207.3. Two-hundred and seven pounds? Two-hundred and seven? That means, on average, the Cavs were giving away 15 pounds of muscle per man.

The Cavs' starting front line goes 219 (Alonzo Gee), 250 (Tyler Zeller) and 227 (Tristan Thompson). The Nets' starting front line went 215 (Keith Bogans), 265 (Brook Lopez) and 245 (Reggie Evans).



Now, say what you will about those meager little 15 pounds that Zeller was giving away, but Lopez made the 7-foot Zeller look like Olive Oyl. (And if you're not old enough to know who Olive Oyl was...well, she was as skinny as Twiggy. And if you're not old enough to know who Twiggy was, well...just take my word for it.)

Meanwhile, Tristan, for all his athletic ability, could not hold a candle to Evans, who had 18 rebounds. Yes, that's correct: 18 friggin' rebounds!

The fact that Byron Scott's guys are getting out-muscled is not lost in the statistics. Besides being 29th in blocked shots, they are 27th in rebounding, and thanks to all those unobstructed drives through the defense to the hoop, their opponents are shooting 44.7 percent from the field, making the Cavs the sixth-worst scoring defense in the league.

The team's final problem — if you discount all the injuries, which you can do because they weren't winning much even when they were healthy — may or may not be the head coach. Mainly because it's difficult for the average schlub, like me and you who don't get to visit the practice facility, to tell whether Byron Scott is teaching these guys how to play defense in the NBA — which is entirely different than playing defense in high school or college, or in Europe or South Kumquat.

The Answers

These three intrinsic problems are not insurmountable, and they can be solved in less than one year. Here, for what they are worth, are my suggestions:

1) Consider the fact that this is an extremely young team. Historically, it takes young players longer to learn defense than offense. So there's that.

But it wouldn't hurt to hire an assistant coach who specializes in defense. A guy who is hard as nails with a philosophy that doesn't bend. Some might say Rutgers University reject Mike Rice would be a good guy. I don't know about that, but someone like him but with NBA coaching experience would at least have the gonies to start throwing basketballs at players who piss him off. And at this level, it's not about being P.C., so maybe Rice would be the guy. (I jest. Rice is just too good a target to pass up.)

2) Go after the widest, nastiest, ugliest, hulking quirks-of-nature that are available in the college draft and free agency. We've had enough with drafting the guards and the skinny front-liners. Get me a couple or three Dwayne "The Rock" Johnsons who might not be able to score much but who can keep the other team from scoring. Big brutes who wouldn't be afraid of cold-cocking any opposing guard that gets within five feet of the rim. Guys who play as wide as

they are tall. Guys who don't have necks. Guys with Mike Tyson-like attitudes. Guys who would make Austin Carr do cartwheels.

3) If Scott doesn't get his team's act together by the end of the calendar year, banish him to wherever Manny Acta and Pat Shurmur are currently holed up. By Christmas, it will be way past due time for Dan Gilbert to finally find somebody, anybody, who can craft a playoff team.

Now, see, that wasn't difficult, was it?