

Cavs/Hornets: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Monday, December 11 2006 7:00 PM -

The good news is that the Cavs played about 45 minutes of decent basketball last night. The bad news is that NBA games are 48 minutes long. After rallying to tie the game at 89-89 with a little under three minutes remaining, the Cavs decided to call it a night, and the New Orleans/Oklahoma City/Formerly Of Charlotte Hornets pulled away for a 95-89 win. The anti-Branson, John Hnat, breaks it down for us.



THE SUMMARY:

The good news is that the Cavs played about 45 minutes of decent basketball last night. The bad news is that NBA games are 48 minutes long. After rallying to tie the game at 89-89 with a little under three minutes remaining, the Cavs decided to call it a night, and the New Orleans/Oklahoma City/Formerly Of Charlotte Hornets pulled away for a 95-89 win. For the first time in a while, LeBron James did not lead the team in scoring; his 15 points trailed Anderson Varejao's 17. Chris Paul led the Hornets with 30 points, often turning the game into his own personal layup drill.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Wham! With The Right Hand: In a sense, I hate that catch-phrase of Joe Tait's. The implied exclamation point makes me think of [festive '80s pop bands](#). But it's appropriate here. On two of the first three baskets for the Cavs, LeBron had two highlight-worthy, definitely in the top 10 on next morning's SportsCenter kind of dunks. On the first possession of the game, Zydrunas Ilgauskas caught the ball in the post, then fed LeBron as he drove along the baseline (Z also picked LeBron's defender, for good measure). LeBron wound up his right arm, and WHAM! A tomahawk dunk. A couple of minutes later, LeBron stole the ball, passed it to Eric Snow, who then tossed the ball into alley-oop range. WHAM!, again. If there had been a three point contest (hey, maybe there was; more on that later), it

Cavs/Hornets: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Monday, December 11 2006 7:00 PM -

would have been All-Star Skills weekend.

Hey, We Have A Center!: The Cavs' coaching staff seemed to remember that they do have a center, as they ran several plays for Ilgauskas and generally focused on getting him the ball in the pivot. Not too surprisingly, Ilgauskas responded with 15 points (he also added 12 rebounds, for his third double-double of the season).

Z is like an old classic car. You've got to shelter him, keep him out of the elements, rub him with a diaper, and generally accept that he is high maintenance. Not "high maintenance" in a prima donna, T.O. Sense; rather, "high maintenance" in the sense that he needs a supporting cast and a system that gets him the ball. At least for one night, the Cavs did get him the ball, and Z showed that he can still put up some points when that happens.

Ice Water Runs Through All 5-11" (6-2" In Your Program) Of His Veins: Rookie Dan ("Don't Call Me Daniel") Gibson continues to impress. With the Cavs down by 5, at 88-83, Gibson hit a pair of three pointers to tie the game at 89 (in between those shots, Paul split a pair of free throws for the Hornets). It's notable that Coach Mike Brown substituted Gibson for Larry Hughes with four and a half minutes to go; it's even more notable that Gibson responded in such a clutch manner. Gibson has definitely become a valuable member of the rotation, and he's only going to earn himself more playing time with performances like last night's.

(Actually, Gibson's most impressive play of the night came much earlier, in the third quarter. With the Cavs clinging to a 71-68 lead, Donyell Marshall missed a shot from the paint. Gibson charged to the hoop, grabbed the rebound before the big kids could get to it, and laid the ball back in. He also drew a foul in the process; alas, he clanged the freebie, so no three point play.)

Is It Too Soon To Call Drew Gooden "Wally Pipp"?: Starting his second consecutive game in the wake of Drew Gooden's groin injury, Varejao had a stellar game. His 17 points, a season high, came on an assortment of layups, drives to the hoop, and jumpers. On one memorable play, he faked a jumper, drawing his defender into the air, then stepped back and hit the open

Cavs/Hornets: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

Monday, December 11 2006 7:00 PM -

shot. Andy is showing true offensive skills. The early line on Tough Decision of Next Offseason will be "how do we keep Varejao without exploding our salary cap?". It's a decision that will have to be made, because he is showing more and more just how valuable he is.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

The Magic Number: As I've suggested before, 20 seems to be the magic number for telling how the game went. If the Cavs have 20 or more three point attempts, then they're in trouble – it means that they settled for way too many long distance bombs. The Cavs had 21 three point attempts last night. When they weren't settling for 25 footers outside the arc, they were settling for 20 footers just inside the arc.

Making Role Players Into Stars: We have to talk about the Cavs' defense (or lack of it) for a minute. As mentioned, Chris Paul scored 30 points last night. That's not the disturbing part. Chris Paul can score 30 points on anybody. What is disturbing is when Mark Jackson (season scoring average of 7.0 points per game) scores 14. Or when Hilton Armstrong (season scoring average of 3.7 points per game) scores a dozen. Or when Jannero Pargo (season scoring average of 7.9 points) scores 15. (It should have been at least 17. He missed a wide-open, nobody-within-ten-feet-of-him layup in the second quarter. Just clanged it right off the rim.) By making these role players into stars, at least for one night, the Cavs lost the game.

He Should Have Worn A Red And White Striped Shirt: Where's LeBron? That's the question of the game, particularly the second half. LeBron's 15 points were way below his season average of 27 points. The really concerning aspect is that time and again, LeBron settled for long range jumpers ... and time and again, he missed them. The contrast between this game and his effort last Saturday against Indiana, when almost all of his shots were within close range, was startling. He did start last night's game with the two mammoth dunks (described earlier in this column), but then it was all outside, outside, outside. Often times, he was not touching the ball on Cleveland's possessions. LeBron rarely disappears like that during a game, but it should never happen. He's too good of a player to not grab the reins and make things happen.

Cavs/Hornets: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Monday, December 11 2006 7:00 PM -

(To be fair to LeBron, he got jobbed, in the pro wrestling sense of the word, on a non-call with the game tied and with two minutes remaining. LeBron drove the ball hard to the hole. The Hornets' Tyson Chandler blocked the shot ... and also body blocked LeBron in the process. The refs swallowed their whistles, the Hornets scored on the ensuing possession ... and the game was basically over, as the Cavs allowed the wind to completely leave their sails.)

Do They Use Soup Cans And String?: It's not technically a shortcoming of the Cavs, but I have to mention the terrible broadcasting. Maybe it is just me, but at least on my system, the Cavs' broadcasts come in with all the clarity and sharpness of the old WUAB-43 broadcasts. (The ones from 25 years ago, back in the days of rabbit ears and a grand total of six channels.) The picture is washed out and bright; you can literally go blind from the reflection off Z's forehead whenever they show him. (Understand, this is not a slam on Z – male pattern baldness is no laughing matter, for “I could be next” reasons if nothing else – but rather on the FSO signal.) And while I don't want to whine about the lack of an HD broadcast ... hey, it's 2006. Almost 2007, in fact.

The technical snafus extend to the pre-game show as well; last night, most of the pre-game had technical difficulties. For a while, they were letting the broadcast run with the glitches; if you didn't see it, think of the TV reception in “Independence Day”, as the aliens were coordinating their attack of Planet Earth. (Of course, cable repairman Jeff Goldblum was the only person on earth who could figure out that an attack was imminent.) They finally pulled the plug and just ran the sound while they re-connected the wires.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Uh-oh, it's another sub-.500 team waiting to make the Cavs' life miserable! The Charlotte Bobcats invade The Q. (I'm not sure why it is accepted in sports writing to say that a visiting team is going to “invade” the town. It makes them sound like a band of Vikings – the rapers and pillagers, not the football players from Minnesota. Although if a cruise ship is involved, there may be less of a difference than you'd think.) Anyway, Porn Stache Morrison and his crew will be in Cleveland this Wednesday. The Cavs' little homestand will then continue with a game against Seattle on Friday evening.