



The 2012-2013 Cavaliers season officially ended after a particularly tough loss to the Charlotte Bobcats on April 17th. With that loss, the Cavs finished the year with a 24-58 record. The third straight sub-30 win season was enough to cost head coach Byron Scott his job and sent him to the golf course where he will likely spend the rest of his summer. After Scott was let go of his duties, the team issued a press release that had the following statement:

"It has been our strong and stated belief that when our team once again returns to competing at the NBA's highest levels it will be because we have achieved our goals on the defensive side of the court."

It seemed fairly obvious upon reading that quote that the Cavs were going to target Mike Brown. Brown was quickly hired by the team on April 24th. His responsibility to the team is to help teach the young squad how to become a legitimate defensive-minded team. One of the best ways to measure defensive efficiency is to look at defensive field goal percentage. It is easy to understand and is not affected by pace. Under Byron Scott's tenure, the Cavs finished 30th (47.6%) in 2013, 27th (46.7%) in 2012 and 27th (47.5%) in 2011. In other words, the team was regressing defensively. We've heard all of the excuses about Byron Scott. There

is always some truth behind excuses, but the overall body of work left a lot to be desired. In addition, it is generally accepted as fact that the Cavs were not necessarily playing to win in these past few seasons. They have made their intentions clear and that is to develop young talent at the expenses of winning games and to rebuild through the draft. Considering that the Cavs have taken this approach, it is unlikely that Scott was fired because the Cavs lost a lot of games. There had to be bigger issues that the front office was not thrilled with that eventually led to Scott losing his job and Mike Brown being rehired.

Now that Byron Scott is gone, it is time for the Cavs to stop making excuses. Gone are the days when the Cavs can rank in last place defensively and have all of the blame placed on the head coach or system. With Mike Brown at the helm, they absolutely need to show significant improvement on the defensive end of the court. **The Cavs will be a better team defensively with Mike Brown, but they will not be the defensive juggernaut that they were in his previous tenure with the team.**

When Mike Brown was in Cleveland in the LeBron James era, he had the benefit of coaching a veteran team with the best player in the world. LeBron James had incredible physical tools that made designing a defensive system a lot easier for Brown. As currently constructed, the Cavs have players who are individually good defenders, but none of them are nearly as physically gifted as James. Because of the young roster and an expected learning curve, **I would (at best) expect the Cavs to rank in the middle of the pack defensively by the time the season is over.**

If the Cavs can accomplish this under Mike Brown next season, the decision to hire him should be considered a success.

One area that it is difficult to criticize Byron Scott in is how he is able to develop young players. Tristan Thompson and Dion Waiters got off to very shaky starts in their NBA careers, but they looked like legitimate lottery talent by the time the 2012-2013 season was over. Byron Scott seems to have a way of getting through to young players and bringing out the best from them individually. Where there are issues is with his ability to develop these players into a cohesive unit. One of the biggest questions that surrounds Mike Brown is not if he can coach an NBA offe

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Hickson

. Shannon Brown was given up on only after playing only 38 games for the Cavs

. His career did not really take off until he left the Cavs

and found himself in Los Angeles being coached by Phil Jackson. J.J.

Hickson

had his moments under Brown, but he did not develop into the player that he is today (which leaves a lot to be desired) until Byron Scott came into the picture.

Hickson

spent a lot of time in Byron Scott's dodhouse

, but he eventually got through to him.

Hickson

averaged 19.5 and 12.3 rebounds in 8 games in April of 2011. Mike Brown is a very good coach, but his resume is weak when it comes to one of the most important areas for the Cavs

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I would look for improvement defensively from the young players, but I would not expect a lot of success from an individual numbers standpoint in Mike Brown 2.0.

Assuming Mike Brown's system is the same and he relies heavily on big men hedging at the top of the key, Tristan Thompson, Tyler

Zeller

and Anderson

Varejao

should do extremely well playing under Brown. Having said that, it will be very interesting to see how Dion Waiters and

Kyrie

Irving do in the new system.

It is difficult to predict whether or not the Cavs will be better from a wins and losses perspective. It probably isn't what the fans want to hear, but the franchise is probably not at a place where they can judge success by how many games the team wins. Without knowing what the roster will look like on opening night, it is impossible to even make a prediction on how many games the

Cavs will win. They could get impatient and decide to overpay for a decent (but not great) free agent and be a .500 team. Odds are that the team will not do that and will focus on the draft and signing a player to two to function as a stopgap.

If the Cavs trot out a similar team with the 4th and 19th overall picks, I think 35 wins is a safe bet.

At some point, they will have to have a year where the rotations players are generally healthy. Kyrie Irving, Dion Waiters and Tristan Thompson will all be a year older and better. Anderson Varejao will be back and playing in a familiar system.

The Cavs will be better next year. I hardly expect them to be a good team, but there should be signs of overall improvement. The biggest key for success are for the players to buy into Mike Brown's system. In addition, the team needs to stay healthy and improve offensively and defensively. Mike Brown does not have a reputation for being an offensive-minded coach, but there is hope that he can bring in an assistant coach that will help cover up his shortcomings. The most important thing is for the team to improve on the defensive end of the court. If they do not do that, the rehiring of Mike Brown will be remembered as a failure. The good news is that the team can only improve defensively.

On March 27, the Boston Celtics played in Cleveland. The young Cavs played them tough throughout the game. The Celtics found themselves down by 1 point with possession and with 2.1 remaining in the game. At that point, it felt like it was inevitable that the Celtics would find a way to score and win. Jeff Green's layup at the buzzer found its way in the hoop and the Cavs were suddenly the losers of 6 straight games. The hope is that the days of knowing beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Cavs will not be able to get one single stop when they need it are over. Hopefully Mike Brown will be able to teach the team the fundamentals of team and personal defense. After all, he was able to coach the Cavs to the 8th best defense in 2007-2008 with a roster littered with poor defenders.