

Cavs/Bucks - The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Friday, January 05 2007 7:00 PM -

The Cavs bested the Bucks last night by a 95-86 count, moving to 20-12 on the season, winning their third straight game on the process. The Cavs trailed by eight points in the fourth quarter before completely taking the game over late, scoring 21 of the final 25 points thanks to great defense down the stretch. Drew Gooden had a monster game with 31 and 16, and LeBron was held to single digits. John Hnat delivers his game recap, which are becoming more popular by the day.



THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs bested the Milwaukee Bucks, 95-86, to win their third game in a row and second in a row on the road. Despite trailing by as many as eight points in the fourth quarter, the Cavs were not to be denied. They scored 21 of the final 25 points of the game to walk out with the win.

The Cavs were led by Drew Gooden with 31 points and 16 rebounds, both of them season highs (the 16 rebounds tied his performance on November 4 at Charlotte). Larry Hughes backed him up with 22 points. LeBron James was held to single digits for the first time in two years, scoring only eight points; however, he also dished out nine assists. Michael Redd topped the Bucks with 26 points, and last year's top overall pick, Andrew Bogut, had 16 rebounds and 10 points.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Is That A Butterfly I See?: It has taken a third of the season, but we are finally seeing the Cavs as Coach Mike Brown wanted us to see them. In the past few games, the Cavs have ratcheted up the defensive intensity in the second half, and (except for last Saturday's Chicago game) have gotten wins as a result.

Last night's game continued this positive trend. Throughout most of the game, Milwaukee held a lead from between two and eight points. They never got hot enough to run away with the game, but they also held fast whenever it looked like the Cavs were about to take the lead. Cleveland was losing, 82-74, with a little over six and a half minutes to go.

The Cavs then took complete control of the game. They forced three Milwaukee turnovers (including a killing-what-little-momentum-we've-got dribble off the foot by Charlie Bell with 1:20 to go. They prevented the Bucks from scoring any field goals in the final seven minutes of the game (aside from a "go ahead and score, we've got a flight to catch" dunk by Redd with seconds remaining). For the quarter, they held the Bucks to 11 points (mind you, the Bucks are normally one of the Association's highest-scoring teams). They moved the ball around nicely, getting four assists on the five field goals they made during this period. They looked like a veteran team that knows how to pull out a win on the road, even against a decent opponent.

The butterfly may just be emerging from its cocoon.

When It Counts The Most: Following up on the previous point: During crunch time, the Cavs hit 11 of the 12 free throws they attempted. (The lone miss was a meaningless one by Gooden with 25 seconds to go and the Cavs up by 11.)

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Starting At Power Forward, Dr. Jekyll: Gooden has had a very up-and-down season. He started out of the blocks with several 20-plus point efforts, then had a terrible stretch in the middle of November (including a 0-point, 15-minute performance against the Celtics), then picked it up again around Thanksgiving, and followed up with an inconsistent December.

Last night, he showed those signs of being the power forward that everybody would like him to be. His 31 points (on 13-of-20 shooting from the field) and 16 rebounds speak loudly enough; you can see from the box score that he had a great game. What impressed me even more was how he responded like a seasoned veteran down the stretch. Here's what he did in the final few minutes of the game:

- Sank a pair of free throws with 6:31 remaining to cut the Bucks' lead to 82-76;
- Hit a jumper a minute later to further trim the deficit to 82-78;
- Grabbed two offensive rebounds and then made a nifty pass to Ilgauskas for a dunk that tied the game at 82;
- Caught the ball in the post, then turned and hit a hook shot to extend the Cavs' lead to 88-83 with 2:25 remaining;
- On the next possession, caught the ball in the same place, and faked the same hook shot ... and Milwaukee's Brian Skinner bought what Gooden was selling. Gooden then bumped into Skinner to draw the foul, went to the line, and sunk both free throws;
- Grabbed a tough rebound in traffic with 50 seconds remaining. And the game was as good as over;
- Did all of the above without a hint of the wasteful emotion that we often see from him. His attitude was "I have a job to do, so let's get it done."

I am not going to repeat my ["Drew Gooden, All-Star"](#) jinx here; he's been too inconsistent and does not have the numbers to warrant a trip to Vegas; besides, I don't want to doom him to two weeks of six point games. I'll just say that Gooden showed a taste of why he is a key part of this team.

You Don't Have To Score To Win: For the second game in a row, the Cavs made their move with little to no scoring help provided by LeBron. This development is positive – they are showing that they are not reliant on The Chosen One to win. (Something that they have

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certainly been guilty of in the past.)

It did seem like LeBron wanted to take the scoring reins – he took two ill-advised jumpers towards the end of the third quarter and an even more ill-advised three pointer from [Arenas Junction](#). LeBron took all three shots early in the shot clock, and he missed all of them badly.

To LeBron's credit (we're still in the section of What I Liked, remember), he shifted gears. He stopped jacking up the long shots, continued to move the ball around on offense, and tightened his defense (even drawing a charge from Ruben Patterson at one point). He continued to draw double teams whenever he touched the ball, kept passing his way out of them, and the Cavs kept finding the eventual open man for a shot.

Can A Coach Be Listed As “Probable”?: During one time out late in the game, Coach Brown reportedly slammed his clipboard to emphasize a point. That's what the Fox Sports Ohio announcers told us ... and as play was about to resume, we saw a shot of Coach Brown being treated for a cut on his hand, presumably the fallout from said clipboard slamming. (We can only wonder if a “CAUTION: Breaking this clipboard may cause injury” [warning label would have prevented this tragedy](#).)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Larry Lofton: Remember Kenny Lofton? At least a couple of times a season, he would crank a long home run. (“Long” being a relative term; we're talking about “long” in the sense of “the right fielder has no chance to leap over the wall and bring it back”, not in the Hafnerian sense of “another souvenir for the mezzanine deck”.) After such a home run, Lofton would then fancy himself a slugger, and swing for the fences for the next week or so. Inevitably, he'd slump, and would continue slumping until he got back to what he did best.

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Hughes was Kenny Lofton last night. He did score 22 points, and he looked very good from the outside in the first half (he scored 16 points, including four three-pointers and one other long jumper). He then forgot about slashing to the basket for layups and free throws, settling for long jumpers ... and in the third quarter, he missed all four that he took. For the game, he was 7-of-17 from the field, which is not terrible, but also not something to highlight on the resume. Hughes is at his best when he is slashing to the hoop; he cannot live by his outside shot alone.

They Count During Other Parts Of The Game, Too: While I gave the Cavs kudos for their free throw shooting down the stretch, that spurt merely raised the team's overall performance from the stripe from ["Dudleyea n”](#) to "below average". For the game, the Cavs were only 16 of 24 from the line, for a 67% average. (For those of you who don't need to rely on "The Diff" for math, that means the Cavs were 5 of 12 from the line until their streak in the fourth quarter.) Hughes and Eric Snow each missed a pair of free throws; if you're going to do that, you may as well fumble the ball out of bounds and get on with the game.

A mild crack on a guy who scored 22 points, and continued observation of one of the team's Achilles heels. That's all I have on the negative side.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The New Jersey Nets meet the Cavs tonight in what will be the final game at the Q for a couple of weeks. After tonight's game, Cleveland will start its two-week, seven-game tour of the West. The Nets are coming off a 91-86 victory over Chicago last night, so it may be a sluggish first quarter. Can the Cavs beat another division leader (albeit one with a Maris-sized asterisk)? Starting at 7:30 tonight, we'll find out.