

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

Tuesday, January 09 2007 7:00 PM -

The Cavs got their West Coast trip off to a strong start last night, beating the Sacramento Kings 108-98. The Cavs were down by as many as 17 points in the third quarter, before going on an incredible 46-14 run to end the game and seal the win. The Cavs second half defense was superb, LeBron caught fire late, and Gooden and Z stayed hot. And John's here to tell us all about it.



THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs got their West Coast trip off to a strong start last night, beating the Sacramento Kings 108-98. The Cavs were down by 15 points at the half (53-38), and were losing by as many as 17 points in the third quarter. Cleveland then went on an incredible 46-14 run over 15 minutes, taking a 90-75 lead with seven and a half minutes remaining. The Kings clawed their way back to within four points, cutting the lead to 98-94 with just over one minute remaining. But a dunk by Zydrunas Ilgauskas and a three-point play by Drew Gooden kept the Kings from getting any closer, and Larry Hughes eventually sealed the win with a steal and a resulting three-point play.

LeBron James, who had one of those unbelievable hot streaks in the second half (we'll be talking about that one later), led all scorers with 34 points. Drew Gooden notched another double-double with 21 points and 11 rebounds, and Ilgauskas just missed one himself with 17 points and 9 boards. Mike Bibby had 26, Brad Miller had a season-high 24, and Kevin Martin had 23 for the Kings, who dropped their third consecutive game.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Deee-Fense: It sounds kind of silly to laud the Cavs' defense in this game. They gave up six more points than they typically surrender in a game, and they were being toasted by outside shot after outside shot for the entire first half and the first few minutes of the second. (Bibby and Miller were particularly hot for the Kings, hitting jump shots almost as often as Paris Hilton gives crotch shots to the paparazzi.)

After a Martin jumper gave the Kings their largest lead of the game, Coach Mike Brown called a short time out, and spent the entire 20 seconds telling the team to pull their heads out of ... well, let's just say that what the Cavs had been doing to that point was biologically impressive. The team's defensive intensity went up several notches, almost as though Coach Brown had flipped a switch. Gooden, who spent most of the first half in a different area code from Miller despite being assigned to guard him, started covering Miller like a second skin. Eric Snow and Hughes stepped out more on Bibby. The entire team became much more active, challenging every shot and pass. The result? Sacramento scored only 15 points in about 15 minutes, including a nearly ten minute stretch in which they did not score a single field goal. Make no mistake: defense won this game for the Cavs, just as it has throughout their winning streak.

The LeBron Watch: It's been a while since LeBron took over a game, but he certainly did last night. Let's pick it up with the Cavs trailing 63-54 midway through the third quarter:

- LeBron drove to the hoop for a layup, was fouled, and hit the free throw;
- On the next possession, LeBron was fouled again while shooting, and sank both free throws;
- A couple of minutes later, LeBron hit a jumper to cut the Sacramento lead to three points;
- On the next possession, LeBron hit another jumper, cutting the lead to one;
- The following time down the court, LeBron faked a shot, hit Anderson Varejao with a pass under the hoop, and Varejao put the ball in the hoop to give Cleveland its first lead since the first quarter;
- In the waning seconds of the third quarter, LeBron dished the ball to Damon Jones for a three-pointer;

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- LeBron found Drew Gooden for yet another assist;
- And then LeBron started raining three-pointers, each one further than the last. Bang! Bang! Bang! Three long-balls later, the Cavs were up 86-72, and the Kings were looking for the license plate of the truck that ran them into the pavement.

It's been a few games since we have seen LeBron completely take over a game like that, and it was a very welcome sight.

Department Of The Interior: Gooden had yet another 20-plus point game and another double-double. He did most of his damage in the second half, as he had only four points and one rebound at the intermission. He was particularly active on the offensive glass, as seven of his rebounds came off of his teammates' misses.

As much as that performance spoke about Gooden's talent, it also says something about Coach Brown's development. In the past, a poor first half by Gooden often resulted in Drew riding the bench for most of the second half. Brown stuck with Gooden in the second half, and Gooden responded with some very high energy minutes. He has had his ups and downs, but he is developing into one of the team's critical players.

Ilgaukas, meanwhile, continued his solid play. His 17 points came on very efficient 7-of-11 shooting from the field, and he was also a force on the offensive boards with four rebounds. (And no, they did not all come on the same possession, although that would be a fair question to ask.)

We also need to mention Varejao here. Andy did not stuff the stat sheet (although seven points and seven rebounds in 21 minutes is not bad at all), but he was part of the swarming defense that changed the course of the game. He drew two charges (one against Miller, one against Ron Artest) in the opening minutes of the fourth quarter. Later in the fourth, he had a memorable sequence in which he blocked a shot by Miller, then knocked the ball out of Miller's hands a few seconds later.

Hey, It's Not So Hard After All!: With all of the times I have put the Cavs' free throw shooting performance in the thumbs down side, I have to give them props for hitting 80 percent (16-of-20) from the line last night.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Deee-Fense-Less: Of course, for the Cavs to come back from 17 points down, they had to trail by 17 points in the first place. It's admittedly difficult to sustain defensive intensity for all 48 minutes of the game, but did it really take more than a half to realize that by stepping out on the Kings' jump shooters, they might miss some of their shots?

Keep Shooting, You Never Know When You Might Hit Something: Larry Hughes' line: 3-of-16 from the floor (for a field goal percentage of "ouch"), 11 points total. He still gets props for his defense (he caused a clear-path foul on a steal and hit both free throws, and then iced the game with his steal from Bibby in the final minute). Funny, we didn't hear the announcers say anything last night about how much better his ankle is feeling.

Hate It When I'm Wrong: A couple of games ago, I suggested that it would be nice to see a bit more of the Cavs' bench, as Coach Brown seems to be riding his main horses pretty hard these days. Coach Brown, who obviously reads this column, responded with seven minutes of David Wesley. OK, Coach, point taken. (You have to feel for Wesley. The poor guy keeps hearing his name in the same sentence as "water" and "boat".)

The Fox Sports Ohio Gripe: The producer of last night's broadcast picked some shots that were, uh, interesting. With the clock winding down in the first quarter and the Kings setting up for their last shot, Fox Sports wisely decided that viewers would rather see LeBron chewing his nails on the bench. A few minutes later, during a pair of free throws, FSO displayed some advertising graphic that covered most of the screen. I understand that they have bills to pay, but do they have to sacrifice the live action in order to do it?

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WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs' road trip continues in Phoenix tomorrow night. The Suns have the NBA's second-best record at 26-8, including a 15-3 record at home, so the Cavs will not have an easy time trying to extend their winning streak to six games.