

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Wednesday, January 17 2007 7:00 PM -

So you went to bed early last night and came over here to get the recap of the game, did ya? You know what? You are a fucking genius. Only an insomniac masochist could have stayed up to watch all of last night's game, a 94-76 pounding at the hands of the Portland Trail Blazers. (Yes, that would be the Blazers team that was 15-24 heading into the game.) That loss came on the heels of Tuesday's loss to Seattle, a team that was 14-25 heading into that game. In other words, it hasn't exactly been wine and roses for the Wine and Gold this week.



THE SUMMARY:

So you went to bed early last night and came over here to get the recap of the game, did ya? You know what? You are a fucking genius. Only an insomniac masochist could have stayed up to watch all of last night's game, a 94-76 pounding at the hands of the Portland Trail Blazers. (Yes, that would be the Blazers team that was 15-24 heading into the game.) That loss came on the heels of Tuesday's loss to Seattle, a team that was 14-25 heading into *that* game. In other words, it hasn't exactly been wine and roses for the Wine and Gold this week.

The Cavs came out exceptionally flat, not hitting a field goal for more than eight minutes, and scoring a grand total of nine points in the first quarter (a season low for the team). Fortunately, Portland was not playing much better, so the Cavs were down by only nine points (trust me, "only" is warranted there) at the end of the quarter. Hughes and Gibson each scored 10 points in the second quarter to trim the deficit to four points (41-37) at the half.

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The second half ... the less said, the better. I suspect that both teams actually went home at that point, and the second half was a tape of last week's Cavs-Phoenix game, with the Suns' jerseys carefully edited to look like the Blazers' instead. A three-point play by Ilgauskas cut the Portland lead to two at 44-42 early in the third quarter, but Cleveland would get no closer. Portland went on a 10-0 run, held a 19 point lead at the end of the third, and led by as many as 25 points in the fourth before turning the game over to the Guys At The End Of The Bench.

LeBron James led the Cavs (where "led" is used in the sense of "as a purely statistical matter, *somebody* had to lead the team in scoring") with 23 points. Amazingly, his 8-for-21 shooting (which represents a 38% field goal percentage) was one of the better rates on the team, which shot 35% from the field. Larry Hughes clanged all but three of his 12 attempts; Drew Gooden and Zydrunas Ilguaksas each made exactly one shot; and the team shot a combined 2-of-12 from three point range. Hughes did score 17 points, and Daniel Gibson added 10. Zach Randolph had 26 points for the Blazers, and rookies Brandon Roy and LaMarcus Aldridge added 19 and 14 points, respectively.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

He'll Always Be "Daniel" Here: At least Gibson showed up to play. Given extended minutes in the second quarter, Gibson responded with ten points, some tough defense, and a couple of offensive rebounds. Am I the only one who would be interested to see Gibson get a crack at running the offense like a true point guard? Right now, Gibson is being used as a shooting guard – he passes to LeBron shortly after crossing halfcourt, then sets up camp a couple of parsecs away from the hoop on the opposite side of the court. On those rare occasions when he does get to handle the ball, he makes things happen. He is quick enough to drive into the lane and suck in the defense, and that can lead to easy shots for the other guys.

Putting It On The Line: The Cavs earned 45 trips to the free throw line. They were driving to the hoop quite often and drawing fouls, and that is usually a Good Thing. (Notice that I have said nothing about how they did at the line. Yet.)

Not Exactly A Photo Finish: The three-man "race" between Ira Newble, Scot Pollard, and Dwayne Jones to see who would be the last to score this season is now officially over. Actually,

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this item should go under the "What I Didn't Like" section, in the sense of "a goal realized is a dream destroyed". I have now lost one of my pet storylines for the season. It's like I've lost a friend. But it was all worth it to see Pollard score his first point (yes, the singular is called for here) of the season.

With a little over a minute remaining, Pollard was fouled and strode to the line for a pair of free throws. He eyed the rim, fired the first shot ... and clanged it off the back of the rim. The tension in the arena mounted. (*As much as it can mount in another team's arena in which the game was long ago decided and half of the fans had already left to beat whatever "traffic" there is in a relatively small major city.*) Would Pollard get into the score book? Or would he follow the lead of Dwayne Jones, who politely bricked a pair of free throws earlier this season in the interests of keeping this regular column feature alive?

Why am I asking these semi-rhetorical questions? You already know the outcome. He made the second free throw, giving him one point for the game and for the season.

The Hidden Game: Throughout this season, I have regularly criticized the Fox Sports Ohio broadcasts. Many of those criticisms are justified. They always miss at least one live-action play per game while showing some sponsored replay. Their non-HD broadcast signal makes one wonder if they are using soup cans and yarn to transmit the signal. Several times a game, they plaster sponsors' logos over the screen during free throws, forcing us to squint around that damn Aflac duck to see the result (not that we always want to).

But I am realizing that this announcing team brings a certain endearing cluelessness to the table, one that is actually very enjoyable. Scott Williams provided a priceless gem immediately before the tip-off when he said that the Cavs looked upbeat, and that they would get off to a quick start. (They missed their first eight shots, turned the ball over several times, and had a grand total of two points with four minutes to go in the first quarter.) Later, in the third quarter, the announcers were discussing Eric Snow's off night (which it was; he had no points, no assists, and two turnovers in fifteen minutes of run). In all apparent seriousness, Williams said, "he normally has two or three points by this point of the game". I can't make this stuff up, folks.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

“Eight And Sixteen ... How Did We Ever Win Eight?”: It is a smart-ass cliché to describe a blowout of a game as being “not as close as the final score indicated” ... but it really is true. I am really not sure how Cleveland managed 76 points. Virtually every outside shot drew serious rim (and that's when they were lucky; they mixed in a few air balls as well). These shots were not the kind that looked good and somehow rimmed out; we are talking about shots that caused fans along the baseline to yell “Incoming!”.

Department of Bears Defecating In The Forested Section Of The Terrain: Yes, the Cavs did make it to the free throw line 45 times last night. Care to guess how many of those free throws they made? (Go on, take a peek at the box score. It's not like I am there to keep you from cheating.) That's right, they made only 28 of those free throws. LeBron made 6 of 13. Several of the bench bunch (Anderson Varejao, Sasha Pavlovic, the aforementioned Pollard) split their two free throw attempts. (That has become my standard reaction when a Cav heads to the line for a pair of freebies. I mentally chalk it up as one point, and hope that they will miss the second throw and somehow scrounge the offensive rebound.) And David Wesley missed all three of his attempts badly.

While I'm here, I would like to say that Wesley has already retired. His career statistics will show that he played the 2006-07 season in Cleveland, but that is a formality. His entire demeanor screams of a sullen teenager being forced to tag along with his parents. Unless Shannon Brown broke into Coach Mike Brown's home and took a dump on his bed, I do not see how he can be inactive while Wesley still suits up. I do not want to hear about “veteran leadership”, which is a sports media euphemism for “older player who has lost whatever game he had, and whose value to the younger players is in knowing the locations of the best stripper clubs in 29 other NBA cities”.

Anyway, had the Cavs made a few more of those attempts, they would have been in position to make a game of it in the fourth quarter, even after Portland's run. Not saying that they would have won the game; but at least they would have been in the position to possibly catch a lucky spurt and sneak out the W.

Department of Bears Yadda Yadda Yadda, Part II: We saw a serious regression to the “all LeBron, all the time” offense last night. The Cavs had a total of seven assists for the game. Seven. The ball movement was pathetic. The few times that they did try to pass to players

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cutting to the hoop, they threw the ball away. For the most part, they were content to swing the ball around the perimeter, then let LeBron try to create something as the shot clock would down.

This strategy does not work terribly well even when LeBron is hot; and on a night like last night, when LeBron is off, the results are disastrous.

It's Your Move, Coach: When an opposing guard has the ball on the perimeter, the Cavs will routinely send a big man to double team him, in the hopes of pushing said guard even further away from the rim and forcing the opposition into a desperation heave with the shot clock running out. The strategy has generally worked well (and has had the side benefit of allowing us to watch Ilgauskas attempt to scurry back to cover his man). The problem is that when the Cavs' big man steps out, he leaves his guy wide open. Teams have figured this out. Time and again, when the Cavs sent a big ugly to the three point line, Portland's guards would simply dish the ball to the open big man. That led to several easy baskets, as the Cavs were slow to rotate to the ball. It appears that teams have figured out this tendency of the Cavs ... so it is now up to the coaching staff to come up with a counter move.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Having dropped to 2-3 on their West Coast swing, the Cavs will attempt to salvage their trip with games at Denver (who will still be without the services of the suspended Carmelo Anthony) on Friday night and at Oakland ... er, Golden State on Saturday. (In case you missed it, [the Warriors are now the Pacers](#)

.) The Cavs will then return home on Monday night to face Orlando