

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Thursday, February 01 2007 7:00 PM -

That's right boys and girls ... it's Groundhog Day! And appropriately, the Cavs found a way to blow another game late last night, this time in front of swarms of celebrities down in South Beach for the Super Bowl. LeBron James couldn't hit a free throw late to save his life. Dwayne Wade could, and had 24 of his 41 in the final stanza, severely outplaying King James on this night. John Hnat is here with all the grisly details.



THE SUMMARY:

Then put your little hand in mine

There ain't no hill or mountain we can't climb

Babe

I got you babe

I got you babe...

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Okay, campers, rise and shine, and don't forget your booties 'cause it's cooold out there today!

It's cooold out there every day. What is this, Miami Beach?

That's right, boys and girls, it's Groundhog Day. We're gonna stumble out of bed into the shower with only cold water. We'll head to the restaurant with the not-the-brightest-star-in-the-sky waitress asking us if we want a cup of coffee. We'll tell annoying Ned Ryerson for the umpteenth time that no, we don't need any life insurance. We'll step off the curb into the puddle filled with icy cold water, soaking us to the knee.. And we'll make our way to Gobbler's Knob, where we'll wonder, in a jaded way, whether a furry little rodent (which appears to have crawled out of the back of Drew Gooden's head) has seen its shadow. (Not that we can really know this for sure, because GROUNDHOGS CAN'T FRICKING TALK.)

How else is it Groundhog Day, you ask? Because the Cavs, for what I estimate is the 500th time this season, pissed away a near-sure victory ... this time, on the road against the defending NBA champions.

The Cavs fell to the Miami Heat, 92-89, in a game that was played in front of enough celebrities to make a paparazzo all warm and tingly. (Not too surprising in retrospect; it is South Beach, and it is Super Bowl week.) It wasn't so much the loss itself; it was the way that the Cavs lost.

With eight minutes left in the game, Eric Snow hit a jumper off a nice dish from Sasha Pavlovic. That basket gave the Cavs a 12 point lead, at 76-64. That's not yet time for the Human Victory Cigars to start peeling off their warm-ups, but it does mean that you should have things pretty well in hand. At this point, Miami uber-star Dwyane Wade had 19 points, and the announcers were wondering whether he would break the all-time NBA record for most turnovers

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in a game (14, by Jason Kidd and John Drew; Wade had 12 at that point).

Not the Cavs, however. Knowing that they had to make the game exciting for a nationally televised audience, they let Miami back into the game. Wade hit a jumper, then two sets of free throws, then another jumper. In the time it takes the average fan to grab a cold one from the basement fridge, the Cavs' lead was down to four. Miami's James Posey then laced a three-pointer, temporarily quelling the rumors that Wade was playing the Cavs one-on-five down the stretch. Moments later, Shaquille O'Neal scored a three-point play to knot the contest at 78 points apiece.

From there, it was all Wade. He scored Miami's final 14 points, playing the role of Michael to his teammates' Rest Of The Jacksons (Not Counting Janet). Miami was basically running the Coach Mike Brown offense – pass it to your star player, and let him score while the other four players try to stay out of the way. And the announcing team was left to wonder whether Wade would break a different all-time NBA record; this time, for most free throws made in a game without a miss (24, by Dominique Wilkins; a late miss by Wade put him at 23 of 24).

Wade finished with 41 points, 24 of those coming in the final quarter. The Cavs were paced by Daniel Gibson's 19 points. LeBron James added 17 points and 9 assists.

And so closed another chapter in the never-ending book that is The Cleveland Experience. *It's gonna be cold, it's gonna be gray, and it's gonna last you for the rest of your life.*

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Two Nights, Two Career Highs: Tuesday night, it was Sasha Pavlovic establishing a new career high in points, scoring 24 against the Don't Call Us Oakland Warriors. Last night, it was

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Gibson's turn, as his 19 points bested anything he has done earlier this season. Gibson is proving to have a deadly accurate shot from three-point range; he hit four of six shots from beyond the arc, and was fouled two other times while in the act of shooting three-balls.

Maybe He Is A Keeper: Back in a reserve role with LeBron returning to the starting lineup, Pavlovic responded with a nice game off the bench: 10 points in 15 minutes, some scrappy defense, and even a couple of assists. He has always had the outside shot, but now he is showing more confidence taking the ball to the hoop (including an impressive dunk along the baseline and a drive over O'Neal that led to a three point play). That confidence will only help him get more open looks from outside. I don't know that he has yet put the inconsistency doubts to rest, but he is stringing together enough strong games for us to say that he's turning the corner. Sasha's emergence will allow LeBron to get some rest during games, moving him down to a more manageable 35-40 minutes per night. That will not come a moment too soon, as The Chosen One is looking very tired these days. Which brings us to ...

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

A King In Name, Not Quite In Deed: LeBron hurt the Cavs last night. It wasn't so much his 6-of-18 shooting from the field, including several ill-advised long shots. It wasn't the way that he dribbles, dribbles, dribbles away most of the shot clock. Those things did not help, but what really hurt the team was his performance down the stretch. The waning minutes of a close game are when the stars need to step up and make things happen. With that in mind, here's what LeBron did in the last two minutes of the game:

- Missed an off-balance three pointer;
- Grabbed the rebound from said missed three pointer (hey, I didn't say that he didn't do *anything* right down the stretch);
- Charged into Posey for what should have been an offensive foul, but which the refs somehow saw as a block on Posey;
- Bricked both of the resulting free throws, which kept the game tied at 84 instead of giving the Cavs a two-point lead;
- Missed a third consecutive free throw on the next Cavs' possession (he did hit the second

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one, and a separate free throw by Ilgauskas, the result of a technical foul on Miami coach Ron Rothstein, meant the Cavs were down by only one);

- Tried to steal a pass meant for Wade, but ended up grabbing Wade's head instead. It was clearly not intentional, but when you grab an opposing player by the head, you're gonna get the flagrant foul. Wade hit both free throws, then split another pair of free throws after Miami got the ball back. 90-86 Heat, 18 seconds remaining, game basically over.

LeBron (*I will pretend that he actually reads this column*), I can appreciate wanting to turn it on in Miami and in front of a national television audience. But it looks like that foot's hurting you just a bit more than you want to let on. Take a few days, or however long it takes, and get yourself where you need to be. The LeBron James we saw last night is not the LeBron James that we know. If it takes a few missed games now to get him back, it's worth it.

Bear, Forested Terrain, Laxative: We already kind of covered this one, but it deserves its own space. The Cavs' free throw shooting always seems to find its way to the "Didn't Like" side of the ledger, and it sure belongs there again this morning. 15 of 24 (or 62.5%) from the line is not going to get the job done. LeBron "led" the way with 3-of-8 from the line (including those three crucial misses in the final minute).

"Babe Ruth's Dead. Throw Strikes.": "Shaquille O'Neal is a dominating presence in the paint. He moves extremely well for a big man, and opposing offenses tremble with fear that he'll block any shot they put up from close range."

That's the scouting report the Cavs must have been using. And the description is accurate. If you set your calendar back to 1999, that is. The 2007 Shaq (who was just returning from an injury, by the way) is not nearly as fearsome. However, the Cavs rarely challenged the Big Diesel or Aristotle or Whatever He's Calling Himself This Week. Almost every time that Zydrunas Ilgauskas received the ball in the pivot, he passed it back out, almost terrified of trying to take it against Shaq. The only time that the Cavs really challenged Shaq was (as mentioned previously) when Pavlovic drove down the left side of the lane for a layup, and Shaq got hit with a foul, giving Sasha a three-point play.

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“Pssst. I Think They're Gonna Give It To #3.”: The last dozen or so Miami possessions were carbon copies of the same play: Wade gets the ball at the top of the three point circle, then drives to the hoop. Don't get me wrong; stopping one of the league's best players is not an easy task. Larry Hughes (who guarded Wade for most of this time) was doing the best that he could. It's up to the coaching staff, filled with Defensive Sooper Geniuses, to take away what Wade likes to do, and force the Heat to beat them a different way. They did not react, and that's why you're reading about a disappointing Cleveland loss instead of a hard-fought Cavaliers victory.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs return home tonight to face the Charlotte Bobcats, the start of a five game home stand for the Wine, Gold, and Sometimes Navy. Charlotte is in the basement of the Southeast Division with a 17-28 record. In other words, the Cavs will probably have an unusually tough time this evening.