

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Sunday, February 04 2007 7:00 PM -

On a day when the bitter cold caused every part of you to go numb within seconds, the Detroit Pistons similarly caused the Cavs (and a sellout crowd at Quicken Loans Arena) to go numb, beating Cleveland 90-78. The high point of the game for Cleveland came with about seven minutes remaining in the first quarter, when a Larry Hughes jumper gave the Cavs a 9-5 lead. It was all more or less downhill from there. John relives the horror.



THE SUMMARY:

On a day when the bitter cold caused every part of you to go numb within seconds, the Detroit Pistons similarly caused the Cavs (and a sellout crowd at Quicken Loans Arena) to go numb, beating Cleveland 90-78.

The high point of the game for Cleveland came with about seven minutes remaining in the first quarter, when a Larry Hughes jumper gave the Cavs a 9-5 lead. It was all more or less downhill from there. Never a steep downhill, mind you; the Pistons never had that huge, 21-2 type run that can bury a team. But they just kept wearing down the Cavs, gradually extending their lead until the game was out of reach. The Pistons led by three (27-24) after the first quarter, extended that lead to seven points (50-43) at the half, and extended it into double digits (70-59) by the end of the third quarter.

Consider this fact: Cleveland never scored more than six consecutive points during the entire game. (The six-point run came at the outset of the second quarter, when Sasha Pavlovic briefly

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turned the game into his own personal layup drill.) Detroit never let Cleveland get any momentum. When Zydrunas Ilgauskas tied the game at 41 with a jumper, Rasheed Wallace was there to bury a three-pointer on the following trip down the court. When Ilgauskas later cut the Detroit lead to 58-55 halfway through the third quarter, Chris Webber and Rip Hamilton scored on Detroit's next two possessions. When Pavlovic drilled a three-pointer to pull the Cavs within ten with five minutes remaining, Chauncey Billups answered by swishing a jumper. Detroit never let the Cavs get any traction, and accordingly kept the Cleveland fans from ever becoming a factor in the game.

Six Pistons scored in double figures, led by 18 for Billups and 15 apiece for Wallace and Webber. LeBron James led all scorers with 21 points, and Larry Hughes had 14 for the Cavaliers, who fell to 27-21 and to third place in the Central Division.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Nothing that would move me to give it its own quippy heading. There were certainly good points, but even those were tempered. Larry Hughes hit several jumpers early on ... then watched his shooting percentage fade as he continued to take (and started to miss) those same shots. Pavlovic did have that series of plays in which he abused Detroit's Carlos Delfino for three straight layups ... but he also turned the ball over several times as Detroit exposed his lack of true dribbling ability. LeBron went above 20 points for the first time in a week ... but he needed 22 shots to do it. So while there were some bright spots yesterday, I can't bring myself to single anybody out. Maybe I am just not very motivated as I write this. Hey, speaking of that...

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Having Or Showing Little Or No Interest In Anything; Languid; Spiritless; Indifferent: That's how the dictionary defines "listless". The dictionary folks would do well to use pictures of

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the Cavs from yesterday's game as illustration. I'm not sure why that would happen. We're talking about a nationally televised game against a divisional rival, the team that eliminated you from the playoffs last season ... and you can't get pumped?

Even by the Cavs' walk-it-up-and-stand-around offensive standards, they played a very sedate game. Time and again, they settled into the 1-4 offensive set, with LeBron holding the ball at the top of the key and his four teammates standing in a line across the court. If it were me, I would tear that page out of the Cavs' playbook; it's not doing them any favors. Of course, that would leave us with an empty playbook. But having no offensive sets is preferable to having one set that almost never works.

Crawling Back Into His Cave At The Three-Point Line: After playing rather well for the past few games, Donyell Marshall had a real clunker yesterday. He scored five points on 2-of-7 shooting in 24 minutes of run. That performance won't get you anywhere near the Hall of Fame, but that's not why he had such a poor game. It was his lack of apparent effort, his lack of willingness to get inside the paint and mix it up with the Pistons' big men. He camped out at the three point line for most of the game (all but one of his shots came from behind the arc). That is marginally acceptable for a diminutive long-range bomber like Damon Jones, and it's completely unacceptable when you are a 6-foot-10 power forward.

Two plays, both of which came within minutes of each other in the fourth quarter, demonstrated Marshall's lack of effort. First, with just under three minutes remaining, Rasheed Wallace grabbed an offensive rebound and dunked to give Detroit a 12 point lead. Marshall, who should have been boxing out Wallace, had all but sat down with a tub of popcorn, all the better to let him watch Rasheed go to work.

Then, with just over a minute to go in the game, Cleveland had cut the lead to eight points (84-76), and had one last flicker of hope. Marshall lined up a three-pointer. The shot missed, but the ball rebounded all the way to the top of the three-point arc, where Marshall had taken the shot. Alas, Marshall had already backpedaled to half-court. Rip Hamilton collected the rebound (which would have been an easy board for Marshall had he followed his shot, or even if he had not vacated the area so quickly), and the game was unofficially over.

Bear, Forested Terrain, But This Time It's The Metro Page: If you've read this column this season, you know that the Cavs' free throw shooting always finds its way to the "Didn't Like" section. And so it is again today, although not for the usual reason. True, the Cavs shot only 67% from the line, but that's almost to be expected at this point.

The particularly worrisome aspect of the Cavs' free throw shooting was that ... they didn't do much of it. They made their way to the line only nine times throughout the entire game – four by Ilgauskas, three by LeBron, and two by Gooden. That's it. That means that no Cavaliers guard attempted a single free throw during the game. (By contrast, Detroit's Billups had ten free throw attempts, and Rip Hamilton added five.)

Much of the blame for this statistic has to be laid at the feet of the Cavs' coaching staff. They have a guy who was one of the best driving/slashing guards in the game, in Larry Hughes. (At least, that's what he was when he was with the Wizards. After two years in Cleveland, he has all but forgotten that part of his game, since he is rarely encouraged to use it.) They also have a quick young point guard in Daniel Gibson. So why is it that we rarely see either of these guys initiating offense, and instead watch them toss the ball around the perimeter until it gets to LeBron?

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

After a couple of days off, the Cavs will take on the Los Angeles Clippers on Wednesday night at The Q. The home stand continues against Miami on Friday night, and concludes against the Lakers next Sunday.