

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

Sunday, February 11 2007 7:00 PM -

It's three impressive wins in a row for the Cavs, as they bested the Los Angeles Lakers, 99-90. Sasha Pavlovic led the way with 21 points, LeBron James had 18, and Zydrunas Ilgauskas chipped in with 17. The Cavs DOMINATED the fourth quarter, finishing off a great weekend that saw them take the Heat and the Lakers back behind the woodshed in nationally televised games. The Anti-Branson, John Hnat, reviews yesterdays thrilling win.



THE SUMMARY:

It's three impressive wins in a row for the Cavs, as they bested the Los Angeles Lakers, 99-90. Sasha Pavlovic led the way with 21 points, LeBron James had 18, and Zydrunas Ilgauskas chipped in with 17. Kobe Bryant scored a game-high 36 points for the Lakers, with Vladimir Radmanovic and Lamar Odom both notching double-doubles (Radmanovic with 12 points and 10 rebounds, Odom with 11 points and 11 boards).

The Lakers sprinted out of the gate, taking a seven-point lead minutes into the game. The Cavs erased that lead by the end of the first quarter, taking a 24-23 lead to end the frame on a Pavlovic breakaway dunk off a nice pass from Donyell Marshall. They pulled away from the Lakers in the second quarter; then the Lakers stormed right back into the game in the third, grabbing a 67-64 advantage with one quarter to go.

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That leaves us with the fourth quarter. And we can segue right into the “What I Liked” portion of the article at this point...

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

The Fourth Quarter: The Cavs had kicked away an 11-point halftime lead, and trailed the Lakers by three with less than five minutes remaining. Kobe (yes, he's one of the few who are referenced by their first name in this space) was going nuts, having scored all 12 of the Lakers' points in the quarter (some of those on his patented you-gotta-be-kidding-me shots, such as the reverse layup between two defenders that gave the Lakers a 75-74 lead).

Several times before, the Cavs have folded at that point. Not yesterday. Anderson Varejao (he of the 61% free throw shooting on the season) hit both free-throw attempts and Pavlovic drained a three-pointer to put the Cavs back in the lead. After a pair of free throws by Kobe, Varejao (still with the 61% free throw percentage) swished two more free throws, then LeBron (he of the well-documented struggles at the line) drained a pair of his own.

The play of the game came moments later, with the Cavs clinging to a three-point advantage. Larry Hughes stole the ball from Kobe, and Pavlovic drove to the other end for a layup. The Lakers' Smush Parker was kind enough to swat a mosquito on Sasha's wrist as Sasha drove by, leading to a foul and a three-point play. That gave the Cavs a six-point lead, and the game was all but over.

At Point Guard For The Cavaliers, It's Lurch: Z had a good game – 17 points, seven rebounds – but he makes it into this space for a couple of plays that are less typical of 7'3” centers and more typical of the shorter guys who play out front. First, he drove down the left side of the lane and rolled in a layup to give the Cavs a 72-69 lead early in the fourth quarter. Moments later, he caught the ball in the left post, then threw a bulls-eye behind-the-back pass to a cutting Eric Snow for a layup attempt (alas, Snow's shot was blocked). When Z is really on top of his game, he displays a confidence and elan that comes through in plays like those two.

Ladies And Gentlemen, The Most Improved Player For The 2006-07 Season: We've pointed out many times recently how Pavlovic has taken his game to a new level. He may have reached a new plateau yesterday, as his 21 points (which he earned on only 13 shots) attest. Sasha is driving past defenders almost at will; and if they drop back, he buries jumpers in their faces. Just as impressively, he is not letting his offense be his defense any more, as he infamously told Coach Mike Brown last season. It's kind of funny to say that Sasha played good defense yesterday, seeing as though Kobe (whom he often guarded) put up 38 points, but a lot of that was Kobe being Kobe. Pavlovic was often playing defense as well as it could be played; sometimes, the other guy does his job too.

The Best Player In The Game: Pardon me for a moment for getting all warm and sticky about the opposition, but I would pay to watch Kobe Bryant before any other player in the Association. It's not just his obvious talent, or his star-player knack for hitting shots that the laws of physics say he has no business making. It's his sense of lifting his play a notch when the game is on the line, combined with his killer instinct and general game face of "if I don't win, I am going to crush your spleen". (Note also that Kobe got to the line 11 times yesterday and didn't miss once.)

Time For A New Stat: I don't believe that anybody tracks "number of shots made at the buzzer that were called off", but if not, perhaps it is time to start. With just over a second remaining in the first half, LeBron took an inbounds pass, dribbled a couple of times, then heaved a shot from the Lakers' three-point line. Backboard, rim, and through the net. Only problem was, he shot it about a half-second after the buzzer had sounded, so the basket was waved off. The Cavs have had quite a few of these lately (think of the Daniel Gibson three-pointer against the Clippers that was approximately 0.000001 second from being a valid shot). It's nothing more than a random occurrence, but it does fill a couple of column inches, so there you have it.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

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The Third Quarter: A memo to Coach Brown:

Dear Coach Brown,

The offensive set in which LeBron dribbles the ball at the top of the three-point arc for twenty seconds blows goats. Please do not run this "play" in the future. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

John A. Hnat

P.S. I know you have a sinus issue, but carrying a spit cup on the sidelines during games gives you all the class of the combined cast from "Deliverance". And you're not a "Deliverance" kind of guy.

The main reason the Cavs were in position to pull out a dramatic victory was because they scored only 12 points in the third quarter, allowing Los Angeles to get back into the game. The main reason the Cavs scored only 12 points in the third quarter was because they kept running (*running?* *Walking* is the more apropos word) the play (*play?* *Clusterfuck* is the more apropos word) in which LeBron dribbles, dribbles, dribbles away the clock, puts on his cape with four seconds remaining, and tries to save the possession with some heroic shot.

When LeBron slowly dribbles the ball up the court, I have already mentally written off the possession as a rebound for the opposition. The Cavs did a terrific job of moving around on

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offense for the other three quarters; I'm not quite sure why they lapsed the way they did in the third. (On a related note, check out [Terry Pluto's column](#) from yesterday, particularly the note from an opposing coach about the Cavs not running the pick-and-roll. Why get away from what works?)

Larry, Larry, Larry: Speaking of stats, I am going to start keeping a stat for the number of times I smack myself in the forehead after Hughes launches a jumper with 18 seconds remaining on the shot clock. I'm not sure of the exact count from yesterday's game, but my forehead is tender to the touch, so it had to be quite a few.

As alert reader Tom Oktavec recently noted, Larry often takes his shots outside of the flow of the offense; and while he will make some of them, it's not really what you want to see. And when his shot isn't on (like yesterday), then you get a line of 5 points on 2-of-8 shooting.

I don't think it is Larry's "fault" as much as he may have been the wrong guy for the Cavs. Larry is at his best when he drives to the hoop, and that's hard for him to do when Z has set up camp on his side of the lane. One of the Cavs' themes over the past year and a half has been about how they have been trying to force the square peg named Larry Hughes into a very round hole.

Hey, A Dead Horse! Let's Beat It! It's February. In Cleveland, that means it is cold. It is a fact of life. So it wasn't really necessary for the ABC broadcasting crew to point it out at every possible opportunity, or for the game producer to choose every possible frozen lake overhead shot when returning from a commercial. Sack up, put on a coat and some gloves, and deal with it. You're flying back to warm weather in a few hours anyway. (But I did like the reference to the players paying attention to the scoreboard during timeouts, and generally thought that the game was well-announced.)

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WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Two road games – at Utah on Wednesday night, then a rematch against the Lakers on Thursday evening – and then it's the All-Star Break.