

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Wednesday, February 14 2007 7:00 PM -

This game was one of those that made you want to run to the drug store and buy some razor blades. For your wrists. While Hughes had arguably his best game of the season, and Varejao showed he just may be a starter, Hnat believes last night's game should have shown us (if we didn't already know it) that a point guard makes all the difference in the world. We need one, and the trade deadline is fast approaching. John Hnat reviews yesterday's tough loss.



THE SUMMARY:

This game was one of those that made you want to run to the drug store and buy some razor blades.

For your wrists.

Despite leading the game all the way into the fourth quarter, the Cavs lost a tough one, 99-98, to the Utah Jazz at EnergySolutions Arena. (*EnergySolutions Arena?* *What happened to the Delta Center, or the Salt Palace?*) The Cavs led by 10 points (29-19) after the first quarter, and led by as many as 11 points late in the first half.

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Utah whittled the lead to two by the last minute of the third quarter (although an impressive, in-traffic jumper by LeBron James at the buzzer pushed Cleveland's lead back to four points after three quarters).

The fourth quarter was a duel between Larry Hughes and Utah's Deron Williams. Hughes scored 14 points in the quarter, including 12 straight, to keep the Cavs tied at 89 apiece. Meanwhile, Williams scored 13 points of his own, and also dished out three assists during the quarter.

The game was ultimately decided when Utah's Mehmet Okur drilled a three-pointer, followed by an Andrei Kirilenko dunk, to give Utah an eight point lead (95-87) with less than two minutes to play. The Cavs valiantly mounted one last comeback. Anderson Varejao hitting a layup on what may have been the ugliest possession since James Naismith and his buddies were tossing balls at peach baskets to cut the lead to two; then after a Williams jumper, Sasha Pavlovic buried a three-pointer to make it a 99-98 game with 28 seconds remaining.

On the ensuing Utah possession, Williams was forced into a wild, off-balanced shot with the shot clock expiring. The rebound came to Utah's Paul Millsap, who promptly dropped the ball as though it had cooties. (When you have two children under five, *cooties* rejoins your vocabulary.) Pavlovic scooped up the loose ball and heaved a half-court shot as the clock ran out; alas, it fell short.

Hughes scored a season-high 33 points to lead the Cavs. Varejao, who started for the unavailable Zydrunas Ilgauskas, hauled in 17 rebounds. LeBron and Drew Gooden both had double-doubles; James with 23 points and 10 rebounds, Gooden with 15 and 10.) The Jazz were paced by Williams' 33 points (a career high) and 12 assists, and Okur added 22 points.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Electriclarryland: Hughes had his best game of the year. 10-of-19 shooting from the floor, three bombs from long distance ... oh yeah, he also hit all ten of his free throws, all of them swishers (not a single hit-the-rim-then-the-backboard-then-the-rim-again-and-finally-drop-in job

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among them). In the fourth quarter, he was the guy who put the team on his back and carried them, not LeBron (as is usually the case). Hughes also played some pesky defense, and seemed to gamble a couple more times than had been the norm for him. He'll almost certainly never be a favorite as long as they keep publishing the size of the players' paychecks, but he played a terrific game last night. Without him, the Cavs get blown out, and the Human White Flags enter the game with five minutes to go.

Hey, Maybe He Is A Starter!: Varejao played a terrific game filling in for Ilgauskas, who remained in Cleveland to deal with personal issues. He set the tone in the first minute, grabbing three rebounds (two at the offensive end) and hitting a layup. One of the knocks against Andy has been his inability to stay out of foul trouble; it's been one of the reasons he has often had to accept limited minutes. Last night, he was tagged for only three fouls in 38 minutes, so he appears to be doing better at avoiding the whistles. (Or perhaps he has enough cred with the refs now that he doesn't get called for fouls as often as he used to. Either way, it's improvement.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Sorry, Z Haters, Last Night's Game Doesn't Help Your Case: The Cavs got killed in the paint last night. Other than an early-third-quarter streak in which Gooden got hot, they had almost no inside scoring punch for the entire game. (Even in Gooden's case, his points were coming on outside jumpers.) It's not like Utah has a stable of tough big men, either. At the defensive end, Z does block some shots; with him gone, the Cavs have virtually no shot-blocking threat. The Cavs missed the big guy last night; hopefully his personal issues are not too severe, and he'll be back soon.

Yes, You Can Make It Here With Only One Play: Utah leading, 84-83, with five minutes remaining. Every possession takes on critical importance; you can't be careless with the ball, and you do not want to be forced into any ill-advised shots.

Having established the scenario, I will simply state the facts: *Andrew Melvin Gooden, who had taken a total of three three-point shots in the season to date, launched a three-pointer from the corner. With plenty of time remaining on the shot clock.*

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I cannot imagine a situation in which Drew Gooden taking a three-pointer is a good thing. That is true even if the shot clock is at one. That is true even if the shot clock is at one and no defender is within five feet. That is true even if the shot clock is at one, no defender is within five feet, and a madman has pointed a gun to my head and claims he will pull the trigger unless Gooden launches the shot. Gooden has terrific range to about 18 feet. Any further than that, and he has the accuracy of the average half-drunk teenager at the "Shoot The Ball Into This Absurdly Narrow Rim And Win A Tiny Stuffed Animal" carnival booth.

Explain This One To Me: How does Okur get picked for the All-Star Game over Williams? Granted, I do not see many Utah games, so my views are probably skewed by last night's contest. But in Okur, I see a jump shooter with unusual range for a big man, nothing more. He's almost seven feet tall, yet is averaging barely seven rebounds a game, so it's not like he is a force inside. He's kind of a better version of Donyell Marshall, on the nights when Marshall hangs out at the three-point line. Williams, meanwhile, runs that team. If he keeps playing like he has been, he'll be in an All-Star Game or ten before his career is over; but it seems to me that he deserved the nod this year.

One Step Removed From A Cowbell: After every Utah basket, the brain cells in charge of in-game entertainment at (drumroll) *EnergySolutions Arena* played some kind of sound. I can best describe the tone as the bastard child of the "where the hell are you, front desk person?" bell at a cheap motel and the sound of nickels hitting the payout bin for a blue-hair at the Tropicana. Of course, because it was so annoying, my brain put it on continuous play, so I've now been hearing it in my head ever since. I solemnly swear that I will never, ever, ever say anything bad about the Cavs' Scream Team ever again. (*Until the next time.*)

WHAT I HOPE COMES OUT OF THIS GAME:

I'm not sure whether this belongs in the "Like" or "Don't Like" section. Because of that indecision, and because it's an important issue, I'll give it a separate heading.

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The difference in last night's game was Deron Williams. Especially with Carlos Boozer on the shelf, Utah does not have a lot of talent. Sure, Okur does have the ability to hit spot-up jumpers, and AK-47 is still a talent (if an oft-injured one), but that's about it. Yet the Jazz currently sport a 35-17 record.

What last night's game should have shown us (if we didn't already know it) is that *a point guard makes all the difference in the world*

. If you have a point guard who can create shots for his teammates, you're in good shape. If you have a point guard who can create shots for his teammates AND can create his own offense ... you have a real weapon.

It has been so long since we have had a good point guard in Cleveland, we've completely forgotten what one looks like. Daniel Gibson has shown promise; indeed, he dished out five assists in his limited action last night. But after he left the game (he sprained a toe and is doubtful for tonight's game against the Lakers), that left the game in Eric Snow's hands. Almost immediately, Utah began running two guys at LeBron, knowing that Snow cannot hit open shots and is not much of a threat to drive the ball. Not coincidentally, that's when Utah took the lead.

The trade deadline is a week away. At least two very good point guards (New Jersey's Jason Kidd and Sacramento's Mike Bibby) are reportedly on the block. I'm not advocating any particular trade, nor am I saying that Danny Ferry is a lazy SOB because he hasn't made any deals. To the contrary, I'm sure that Ferry is working the phones diligently. I'm not "John from Parma", so I am not going to argue that Kidd or Bibby could be had for Snow, Ira Newble, and Scot Pollard. If you want value, you have to give up value. It'll probably mean trading a player whom you would rather not trade.

All I am saying is that I want to see what this team can do with a legitimate point guard. And I'd really want to see what this particular team can do with a real general running the show.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs will be in L.A. for a rematch against the Lakers tonight, then it's time for a few days

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of rest and relaxation.