

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Thursday, February 15 2007 7:00 PM -

Alright, an honest show of hands. Who made it up till 1:52 AM last night to watch the entire thrilling Cavalier 114-108 victory over the Lakers in La-La Land last night? I didn't. But luckily for me, and the readers of this website, John Hnat did. Per usual, John delivers a fantastic game recap for us this morning. On an exciting win that gives the Cavs momentum heading into the All-Star break.



THE SUMMARY:

Time to 'fess up. All of you. Who gave the Cavs much chance to win last night's game against the Lakers? Let's have a show of hands. I see one or two of you in the back raising your hands; is that all?

Not that I blame you. Last night's game seemed like the harmonic convergence of virtually every Gonna Get Crushed factor out there:

- A game against a good opponent;
- On the road;
- On the second night of a back-to-back;
- With the first night being a heartbreaking loss against another tough opponent;
- Two starters sidelined;
- On "getaway day" before the All-Star Break;
- And with Larry Hughes having filled his One Good Game Per Month quota the night

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before.

So what do the Cavs do? They beat the Lakers, 114-108, in an exciting contest at the Staples Center. The game was close the entire way (the largest lead by either team was an eight-point advantage to the Cavaliers during the second quarter), as both teams responded every time the other looked to pull away.

As you'd expect from such a close game, the contest was decided in the final minutes. A LeBron fade-away with three minutes to go gave the Cavs a 102-101 lead. LeBron then stole a pass from the Lakers' Kobe Bryant, and fed Sasha Pavlovic for a three-pointer. A Lamar Odom dunk cut the Cavs' lead to two.

The Cavs ultimately won the game on their free throw shooting (they hit nine of ten free throw attempts in the final two minutes) and scrappiness (the one free throw they did miss was rebounded by Anderson Varejao; that particular rebound broke the Lakers' backs, as it led to two more free throws for LeBron, giving the Cavs a four point lead with 11 seconds remaining). Kobe heaved a long three-pointer with seconds to go; once it clanged off the iron, the disappointed Laker fans were left to deal with the L.A. Freeways on the ride home.

Playing his best game in recent memory, LeBron led all scorers with 38 points. Varejao, starting his second game in place of the unavailable Zydrunas Ilgauskas, added 15 points and 11 rebounds. Bryant scored 34 points and Odom added 20 for the Lakers.

Heading into the All-Star Break, the Cavs are now 31-22, which puts them two games behind division-leading Detroit in the Central Division.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Rising To The Occasion: There have been a few times – not many, but a few – over the

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past three and a half years (the "Age of LeBron") in which the criticisms of some aspect of LeBron's game rise from whispers to something resembling a chorus. Last year, it was *he can't hit the big shot*

. Seemingly in search of some chink in LeBron's armor, critics wailed that he couldn't hit shots when they counted. As if on cue, LeBron hit a couple of late-regular-season game-winners (such as the game against Charlotte), then provided his last-second heroics throughout the playoff series against Washington.

This year, the critics have been chanting, *his game has stopped progressing*. The criticisms aren't entirely baseless. LeBron has looked very tired at times this season; and I'd be willing to bet that his toe is hurting him a lot more than he has let on. Going into the Lakers game, LeBron had only (

only

) five games of 35 or more points, and none with 40 or more. His scoring average is down more than five points as compared to 2005-06.

Just as those critics get loud, LeBron has a game like last night's to shush them. 38 points (while taking only 16 shots from the floor), 18-of-22 from the free throw line (which shows both that he was relentless in driving to the hoop and able to do something with the resultant free throws), and almost no ill-advised long-range bombs. He played with an energy, a I'm-going-to-hunt-you gleam in his eye, that we just have not seen as often this season.

But He Had A Supporting Cast Too: Six other Cavs (including the entire starting lineup) scored in double digits as well. As mentioned, Varejao had 15 points. Hughes added 14, Eric Snow had 13 (not a misprint), Drew Gooden scored 12, and Pavlovic and Donyell Marshall each chipped in 11 from the bench. The Cavs have plenty of talent; they do not need to stand around and wait for LeBron to score. Indeed, they extended their lead from one point to six during the second quarter while LeBron was taking a well-deserved rest.

He Can Drive To The Hoop Too!: Snow had ten (10) free throw attempts last night. (Perspective: that is four more attempts than he had taken for the *entire month of February*

, a span of seven games.) We're risking becoming boring, but it needs to be said again and again:

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when you drive to the hoop, good things happen

. Actually, E-Snow deserves praise for his entire game – besides the 13 points (he did make nine of those ten free throws), he also had eight rebounds and five assists.

Department of Redundancy and Repetition: I've already mentioned the Cavs' free throw shooting a couple of times in this column, but since they have drawn so much fire for their brickilicious ways from the stripe this season, I have to take advantage of this rare opportunity for plaudits. First, the Cavs made it to the line 55 times.

55 times

. That's huge. It means that the Cavs were not standing around and launching deep jumpers late in the shot clock (a sure-fire recipe for a poor offensive night). Mind you, the Lakers went to the line 42 times themselves, so it does appear the refs were being paid by the whistle last night.

Just as importantly, once they got to the line, they scored. They made 41 of those 55 freebies, or approximately 75%. (Interestingly, LeBron, who made most of his free throws, changed his routine. He abandoned the kiss-his-wrists approach in favor of three exaggerated exhales before each free throw. If it produces results like last night's, he can hyperventilate for all I care.)

No, He's Not Paying Me To Write About Him: One more bit of praise for LeBron. With just over a minute remaining, the Cavs had the ball and a four point lead. Hughes drove along the left sideline. His defender followed, then *splat!* Like a bug against a windshield, he crashed into LeBron, who set a terrific pick. Hughes was freed to drive to the rim (alas, he charged into another defender and picked up an offensive foul). Not that LeBron has never set a pick before, but this one may have been his best.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Notsoelectriclarryland: The previous night against Utah, Hughes had his best game of the

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season, scoring 33 points and [earning praise](#) from this corner of the Internet. That was Good Larry. Last night, Evil Larry showed up. All told, Hughes took aim at the basket 28 times over the course of the evening, and he made only 8 of those shots. (Those numbers include a hire-Dennis-Rodman-as-your-free-throw-coach-ish 3-of-10 from the free throw line. This, one night after he went 10-for-10 from the stripe.) He also turned the ball over five times, with a couple of particularly memorable what-are-you-doing dribbles into traffic.

The challenge for Larry for the rest of the season (beyond the usual hope that he won't join the Expensive Suits At The End Of The Bench) is to find some measure of consistency. He's driving the ball to the hoop more often, which is a Good Start.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The All-Star Break. For the players, it'll be a long weekend of basketball, parties with A-list celebrities, splitting on aces at high-limit tables, watching women with impressive displays of silicone-based structural engineering while sipping Cristal, and ... well, whatever else will happen in Vegas will stay in Vegas. For everybody else – unchosen players, coaches, fans, and obscure writers of basketball-related Internet columns – it'll be a few days off. See you next week.