

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Tuesday, April 03 2007 7:00 PM -

Now THAT is how you



THE SUMMARY:

Now THAT is how you're supposed to treat a way-below-.500 opponent: jump on them early, press the lead to double digits, then keep them from any kind of a sustained run the rest of the way. Coming off that disappointing loss at Boston Sunday night, the Cavs dispatched the Minnesota Timberwolves, 101-88, at the Corporate Sponsor Whose Name Slips My Mind Arena. The victory upped the Cavs' season record to 45-30 and now puts them a game ahead of Chicago in the ever-important race for the second-best record in the conference.

LeBron James, showing no ill effects from the knee tendonitis that sidelined him for the Celtics game, paced all scorers with 31 points. He also led the way with four "Plays Of The Night"-quality dunks (I'll vote for his fourth-quarter windmill as the most impressive). Drew Gooden backed him up with 20 points and 13 rebounds; indeed, Cleveland was just a Zydrunas Ilgauskas goofy hook shot away from having all five starters in double figures. For probably the thousandth or so time in his career, Kevin Garnett led the Timberwolves with 22 points and 12 rebounds. Super rookie Randy Foye added 18 points and six assists.

The Target Center – that's the name of the arena. I probably repressed it; thanks to my wife, approximately 62% of our disposable income is spent there. (Of course, I am exaggerating. It's not a dime over 60%. Then again, they did install a Starbucks in our local Target, creating a harmonic convergence of stores designed to vacuum money right out of her purse.)

Minnesota actually started the game rather well, hitting five of their first seven shots to take a 14-10 lead. That was the high point of the game for the Wolves; Cleveland rattled off the next 15 points in a row (during which all five Cavs starters scored) for a double-digit advantage. The closest Minnesota would get the rest of the way was four points (they cut the deficit to 44-40 in

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the second quarter). Thanks to a 25-13 third quarter, the Cavs led by 20 going into the final frame, and pushed their lead to as many as 24 points. A 15-4 run cut the lead to 13 points and gave Minnesota some hope, but they would not get any closer.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

See That Little Kid? Let's Punch Him In The Stomach And Take His Lunch Money: A recurring theme this Cavs season has been their tendency to play down to the level of weaker opponents. They've lost to Charlotte (twice!), New York (twice!), Atlanta, and Portland among others; more recently, there was

that game

against Boston the other night. (Not to mention several other close-call games, such as the come-from-way-behind win against Boston back in November.)

Last night, the Cavs stepped on Minnesota from the beginning, and never let up. As described in the summary, they held a double-digit lead for most of the game, and more or less put it away with their run at the end of the third quarter. The playoffs will provide many opportunities for nail-biting drama; no need to add to it with unnecessarily close games against teams that have a chance to land Greg Oden.

Rebound Ball. Win Games.: One of the main reasons we are talking about a Cavalier victory this morning is their rebounding. It was terrific. Cleveland outrebounded the Wolves 48-36, and held Minnesota to only six offensive boards for the entire game. Fewer offensive rebounds for the other team means fewer opportunities for them to score (

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), and prevents them from sustaining any kind of a run unless they are shooting the lights out. (Be assured that no lights in the upper Midwest were threatened by Minnesota's shooting last night.)

Pencil In His Next Strong Game For Late April: Drew Gooden averages about one very good outing every three weeks. Last night was the one. Drew was a beast – 20 points, 13 rebounds (six of those on the offensive glass), two resounding rebound-dunks, even a blocked shot. He did all this while defending Garnett, which is no easy assignment.

Drew's signature play for the evening came about halfway through the third quarter, when he rebounded a LeBron miss on the right side of the basket, then lasered in the return shot. If the rim is exactly 10 feet off the ground, then the shot reached a maximum height of 10 feet and one inch. It had the trajectory you see when somebody in the bar plays the Pop-A-Shot game. After the sixth beer. Afterwards, the camera panned to Eric Snow and Donyell Marshall on the bench, laughing it up; it's safe to say that Snow had not just told a Knock-Knock joke.

This is probably the tenth or so time this season (and maybe the 30th time overall) that Gooden has teased with his talent, making Cavs fans wonder, "what if he brought this kind of game every night?". Rather than asking that question, I'd prefer to just enjoy those efforts when he has them.

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The Return Of Boobie!: That's right; I am actually going to use Daniel Gibson's preferred nickname this morning. (But probably *only* this morning; it's still not a nickname fit for a grown man.) In 17 minutes of run, Gibby (doesn't that nickname make more sense?) made five of eight shots, all of them spot-up jumpers, for 11 points. (Note to those readers who are [Steve](#)

[Buffum](#)

: yes, I know

[that name has already been taken](#)

in the alt/punk rock arena.) When Gibson is on the court, the Cavs have one of their few legitimate outside threats; it was great to see him cashing in his shots.

Keeping The Streak Alive: But only in a weak, Ozzie Newsome-one-catch-for-five-yards kind of way. The Cavs made 20 of their 26 free throw attempts, or 77%. Any time they get above 75%, it's worth mentioning. That makes four or five games in a row that I have praised their work from the stripe, a streak that would have seemed positively Ripkenesque back when they were clanging half of their freebies every night.

In particular, James's free throw woes seem to be behind him. In his last nine games, he has made 59 of 72 free throws, an 82% success rate. That means that (a) he gets to the line a LOT, and (b) he's finally making opponents pay from the stripe.

Department Of It Has Nothing To Do With The Cavs: That means it must concern my favorite non-Cavalier,

[Walter](#)

[Herrmann](#)

Walter (yes, he has become a first-name player, a la LeBron or Kobe) has been on a tear lately.

Last night against the Wizards, Herr ... er, Walter dropped 21 on Washington, the fourth time in the last five games that he has scored 20 or more. (That also represents the fourth time in *his career*

that he has scored 20 or more.) He also grabbed all of one rebound, which has to set some kind of record for Fewest Rebounds By A Starting Forward Playing 38 Minutes. But when you shoot 8 of 11 from the field, there just aren't that many rebounds to get. I started following Walter almost as a joke, but here he is turning into a player.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Lost, Not Yet Found: If you happen to stumble across Marshall's outside shot, please return it to him; he has pretty clearly lost it. After missing all four of his shots last night, he is 5 for 22 in his last six games (including 3 of 14 from three-point range). (Yes, I did cherry-pick that number, as the game before those six was a solid performance against the Knicks.)

If that's the worst thing I can say about last night's game – that the ninth/tenth man in the rotation has been struggling – then we're in good shape.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

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The Cavs return home for the first time in six games, taking on Miami at Quicken Loans Arena tomorrow evening. It'll then be back to the road for games against Washington (who will be without Official Cav Killer Caron Butler) and Detroit. The regular season ends two weeks from tonight, so we're definitely in the home stretch.