

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Thursday, April 05 2007 7:00 PM -

Now that one hurt. The Cavs dropped from the 2nd seed to the 5th seed thanks to a 94-90 OT loss to the Heat at The Q last night. The Cavs played awful for 44 minutes, maniacally rallied late, blew a chance to win it in regulation, then sucked in overtime. As it stands, these two teams would meet in the 1st round of the playoffs. John recaps the contest for us, in a way that only he can.



THE SUMMARY:

It was a game that the Cavs had no business winning ... and they didn't, falling to the Miami Heat in overtime by a final count of 94-90. Wonder not how they dropped this game; wonder instead why they weren't blown the hell out of Quicken Loans Arena.

The Cavs shot 37% from the field, suffered a 1-of-17 shooting stretch that extended from the third quarter into the first five minutes of the fourth, had only 14 assists on the evening (Miami had 29, in comparison), and were completely outgunned from three point range (Miami scored 33 from beyond the arc; Cleveland, 12). They trailed by as many as 15 points early in the fourth quarter.

Indeed, Cleveland had the chance to win the game in regulation. (*With that, I will conveniently skip over the first 47 minutes and 50 seconds of the game.*

) The game was tied at 83 apiece, and the Cavs had the ball after a timeout. Alas, the best shot they could manage was a contested James three pointer (yes, we will be talking more about that play later; no, it will not be in the "What I Liked" section) that clanged harmlessly off the rim as time expired.

The Cavs did hold a two point lead in overtime, after a Drew Gooden jumper pushed the score to 87-85. (This lead, incidentally, was the largest lead the Cavs held the entire game. They also briefly held a one-point advantage midway through the second quarter, at 30-29.) They then decided to leave the league's top three point shooter, Jason Kaponov, wide open beyond the arc. Kaponov drilled a three-pointer to give Miami the lead for good. Cleveland did have the

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chance to tie the game, down 90-87 with 30 seconds to go. Alas, Miami's Jason Williams stole an ill-advised LeBron James pass, effectively ending the game.

LeBron led everybody with 35 points; he also added nine rebounds and five assists. Three other Cavs – Larry Hughes, Sasha Pavlovic, and Gooden – each had 14 points, and Gooden also tallied 14 rebounds. Shaquille O'Neal and Antoine Walker each scored 20 for Miami, and Udonis Haslem (you have to go pretty far through the book of baby names to come up with that one, no?) added 15.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

You May Have To Look Closely, But There Is A Silver Lining: I don't have a pair of wine-and-gold-colored glasses to compete with those of Joe Gabriele, the official Cavs site's indefatigable [Optimist](#), but I do see a positive message to take away from last night's loss. It can be summed up in two sentences:

1. The Cavs played about as poorly as they could last night.
2. Despite that, they were tied in the final minute, and had a chance to win the game, on the last shot of regulation, against the defending NBA champions.

I realize that Miami did not play a perfect game either, and that they were without [Charles Barkley's "son"](#). That said, they did have a pretty good game overall. Shaq looked about as good as the thirtysomething Shaq can look; Walker hit six three-pointers, or about five more than he has any business making; and Haslem had his usual workmanlike 15 point effort.

The Cavs had LeBron's typical MVP-level game, stellar free throw shooting, a good inside game from Gooden ... and not much else. If Cleveland can play that bad a game and still be competitive against one of their conference rivals, they must be capable of making some noise when the second season begins. (*Mmmmm, this Kool-Aid tastes good.*)

Six And Counting: For the sixth game in a row, we get to praise the Cavs' free throw shooting. (*Hey, we had to find SOMETHING we liked about the game.*) In the fourth quarter, they were a perfect 17-of-17 from the stripe; for the game, they were 24-of-29, for 83%. They erased Miami's 83-75 with eight consecutive free throws. Cleveland has now passed Miami in the ratings -- they can puff out their chests and claim that they are the league's SECOND-worst free throw shooting team. (Miami did not help its cause one bit, shooting 13-of-26 from the line.) The free throws were the reason the Cavs got back into the game (that, and tightening up their defense quite a bit). Had Cleveland been shooting like they were earlier in the season (or like Miami still is shooting), this would have been a double-digit loss. Isn't the game a lot easier when you make your shots?

When He Said Do Drugs, He Meant Xanax: Late in the first quarter, Scot Pollard and

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Miami's Alonzo Mourning got tied up fighting for a rebound. Pollard grabbed Mourning's arm, a move that was less apropos against "Alonzo Mourning" and more apropos against "

[The Undertaker](#)

." After Pollard was whistled for the foul, Mourning glared at him in his own faux-badass way. Pollard responded with a smile that was park mocking, part demonic. Only a seasoned observer could appreciate the combination of "glare at somebody else, you jerkoff" and "here's a rooftop, now where did I put my AK-47?," all wrapped into one show of teeth. The refs got the message; they nailed Pollard for a technical foul based on that smile alone. (I assume that's the case. We didn't have the audio, so I cannot say if Pollard suggested that either Mourning or the ref attempt one or more biologically difficult actions.)

A Great 12 Minutes...: Pavlovic was the main reason the Cavs were tied with the Heat, 24-24, after the first quarter. He scored half of Cleveland's points, using a variety of jumpers (including a three pointer) and drives to the hoop (which yielded a dunk and a pretty finger-roll layup). He also grabbed an offensive rebound and had an assist before the quarter was done. Flashes like these show that Sasha could be developing into one of the key complementary pieces to LeBron...

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

...Unfortunately, The Game Lasts 48 (And In Some Cases, 53): ...alas, the remaining 41 minutes said otherwise. After that stellar first quarter, Pavlovic was absolutely invisible for the rest of the game. He scored only two more points the entire game, those coming on a pair of free throws with a little over a minute remaining in regulation. He shot 0-for-7 from the field, after going 5-for-7 in the opening quarter. He also continued releasing his inner Derrick Chievous, having a layup attempt swatted away by Mourning. When (if?) Sasha can consistently bring the first quarter type of effort for the entire game, then he'll be the #2 option the Cavs need. Until then, he's just one of several two-line actors on the stage.

When You Shoot At A King, You Must Kill ... Wait, This Gun Is A Water Pistol!: Last night's game was unusual in that you knew –
knew

– that the home team had no chance in overtime. The one serious chance that the Cavs had to win the game was the play at the end of regulation. (They had gotten the ball after Larry Hughes won a jump ball; the ensuing chase for the ball featured a nice shove by Pollard against Shaq.) With ten seconds to go, they called a time out. Surely Coach Mike Brown had a winning play in his bag of tricks...

...but he skipped over those, turning to the "LeBron And Four Guys Waiting For A Bus" page in the playbook. James caught the inbounds pass some 35 feet from the hoop. And he dribbled. And dribbled. And dribbled. Williams joined James Posey to double-team LeBron, and Bron could not pass out of it. With time expiring, he launched a long, off-balanced three pointer. In one sense, it was a clever idea – sending up a prayer, what with this being Easter weekend. In another, more accurate sense, it was a botched play call.

We Can't Score From 17 Feet ... Let's Try From 25!: When a team is going through an

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extended scoring drought, it's probably not a terrific idea to bomb away from three point land. Yet that was exactly how the Cavs approached their offense in the second half. From 6:43 in the third quarter (when Gooden hit a bank shot) until 6:33 of the fourth quarter (when James drove to the basket for a layup), the Cavs did not make a single field goal. Not one. They missed 16 consecutive field goal attempts. Most of those were either from beyond the arc (they were 0-for-4 from three point range during this span) or just within (LBJ, Pavlovic, Larry Hughes, and Daniel Gibson all missed jumpers in the 20-foot range). As a general rule, when you are missing your shots, you want to try shooting *closer* to the hoop.

The Law Of Averages Is Not A Good Defense: Antoine Walker, shooting three pointers at a 25% clip (which is Not Very Good) entering the game, drains five of them. After a Donyell Marshall three-ball trimmed the Miami lead to 75-70, the next Miami possession found Walker holding the ball, all alone, at the three point line. No Cavalier defender was within ten feet of him. *Swish.*

I realize that based on the law of averages, Walker was not a good candidate to make another long shot. Plenty of times, I have seen him launch shots with trajectories better used for grenades. But he had already made five three-pointers earlier in the game. Maybe, just maybe, that was a sign that he had his shot working last night, and that a little closer defensive attention would be justified?

Incidentally, the Cavs did not learn from their mistakes. As mentioned earlier, they left Kaponu wide open for a three-pointer in overtime. The TNT announcers were bashing the Cavs for that lapse, pointing out (correctly) that they should have taken their chances with Shaq in the paint (if you foul him, then he has to make his free throws, which for him are no sure thing). Hey speaking of TNT...

This Is Why We Pay Cable (Or Dish, As Appropriate) Bills Every Month?: The game continued an interesting, albeit annoying, trend of subpar telecasts by a national broadcast company. (Recently, I've ripped on ESPN for showing "high definition" broadcasts that have been of circa-1985, blocked-movie-channel quality.) My main points here are twofold:

1. It's 2007. Instant replay is an accepted telecast device. It's not a cutting edge feature at this point in television broadcasting history. Some fans find that being able to see a critical play again, in slow motion, adds to their appreciation of the contest. But not at TNT, where they avoid replaying any play that is even mildly controversial. (For example, Pavlovic was called for a goaltending violation late in the third quarter. The original – and as it was, only – view of the play was from under the Miami basket. We saw Walker drive for a layup; we kind of saw Pavlovic block the shot; and that's it.)

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1. Doug Collins and his boys believe one hundred percent in results based broadcasting. Their opinion of an action is directly related to whether it succeeded.

Here's an example. Early in the game, LeBron had the chance to pull up for a long jumper. Instead, he passed to Pavlovic in the corner, who also spurned the long jumper for a drive to the basket. The play resulted in a charge on Sasha. The announcers tore apart LeBron for not taking the shot ("you're a star; you need to take those shots"), and Sasha for not launching away from three point land. But later in the game, they pounded on LeBron for taking long shots early into the shot clock – the exact same action that they criticized him for *not* doing earlier in the game. Was it a coincidence that they made their remarks after Mr. James missed those shots? If he had made them, would they have been praising him for "taking over the game the way a star should"? You decide.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

It's a quick turnaround for the Cavs, as they travel to Washington to face the Wizards tonight. The second half of a back-to-back is always tough, especially when it's coming off an overtime ... damn, I'm buying into the excuses already. The Cavs' PR machine has done its job. Guys, it's the Wizards. A good team, but they never played defense, even when they were healthy. And now two of their big guns (Arenas and Caron Butler) are done for the season (yes, I know that they could technically be back if Washington ekes its way into June; that ain't happening). Go into Washington and take this game. (Especially with a critical matchup against Detroit looming on Easter Sunday.)