

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Thursday, April 12 2007 7:00 PM -

The Cavs got a big win last night, running the Nets out of the gym with an incredible 36 point third quarter in which the team shot 83%. The Cavs and Bulls now have identical records (47-32) with three games left. And as always, John Hnat gives us the good, the bad, and the summary of last night's game. Shock the world tonight Bobcats!!



THE SUMMARY:

A half of fugly basketball ... one quarter of dominance ... and one quarter of playing out the string. I cannot describe the Cavs game yesterday evening any more succinctly.

Fueled by a third quarter in which they outscored New Jersey 36-19, the Cavs downed the Nets, 94-76, at Quicken Loans Arena (which is across the street from the former site of Cleveland Indians home games). LeBron James had a dominant game, scoring 35 points in only 35 minutes of action. Larry Hughes Jekyll-and-Hyded his way to 19 points, and Sasha Pavlovic added 13. For New Jersey, Vince Carter led the way with 26 points, and Jason Kidd came reasonably close to a triple-double (8 points, 11 rebounds, 8 assists).

The first half was one of the uglier displays of basketball since the days of the center jump. I swear that I saw George Mikan lumbering down the court at one point. Never mind the 100 points that the Cavs need to score to send the fans home with free chalupas; for a while, it wasn't clear that the two teams *combined* would make it to triple digits.

The Cavs led 20-19 after one quarter. Three minutes into the second quarter, the Cavs still led, 20-19. (The two teams combined for six missed shots and five turnovers during that time.) Cleveland went on a 9-2 run (it wasn't as much of a "run" as it was a "dork walk", that exaggerated fast-walking that you still see every so often) to take a 36-32 lead at the intermission.

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And then came the third quarter. Carter started the period with a jumper to cut the Cavs' lead to two ... and that's as close as New Jersey would get the rest of the way. A LeBron three-point play ... then another LeBron three-point play ... then a LeBron jumper ... then a Pavlovic three-point play ... and the fans who left to take a leak came back to a double-digit Cavalier lead. By quarter's end, Cleveland had pushed the lead to 21 points, at 70-49. For the period, the Cavs shot 14 of 17 from the field. That is Really, Really Good. (*It's that kind of incisive analysis that you won't get anywhere else, folks.*)

The Cavs maintained their lead throughout the final quarter (New Jersey never got closer than 14 points the rest of the game). With five and a half minutes remaining, Coach Frank dropped his weapon and put his hands up, as he removed Carter and Kidd to give the bench players some activity. Cavs coach Mike Brown responded in kind, putting in Human Victory Cigars Ira Newble and Damon Jones. (That's not entirely accurate with regards to Newble; Ira received some first-half minutes after Pavlovic got into early foul trouble. It is one hundred percent accurate vis-à-vis Jones, as Damon is now strictly an end-of-the-bencher.)

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Funny, Nobody Mentioned Knee Tendonitis Last Night: Long-time readers of this column (honey, as long as you're reading this, are you supposed to pick up the kids from day care this afternoon?) know that we try not to mention LeBron in this space every game. LBJ is a transcendent player; he's good enough that even when he has a bad game, he's still better than most anybody else. But you would get bored if I wrote "What I Liked: LeBron" column after column after column, so I try to save it for the nights when he really has a terrific game.

And that brings us to last night. 35 points, 35 minutes played, 15-of-27 from the floor, eight rebounds, four assists, a couple of steals, only two turnovers. He had a very good first half with 16 points, then took the game over during the third quarter, turning a "they're not gonna blow ANOTHER one, are they?" game into a blowout.

The real key was that he kept posting up in the paint. When LeBron gets the ball close to the hoop, he is unstoppable. Opposing small forwards can't guard him. Opposing power forwards can't guard him. Bill Russell couldn't guard him. (To be fair, Bill is 73 years old and has been retired for some time.) LeBron is much, MUCH better when he plays closer to the basket; when he's dribbling out the clock and then launching bombs from Gilbert Arenas range, he kills the offense. Coach Mike Brown, we need more of LeBron in the paint. Make it so!

Perfection: Both Pavlovic and Drew Gooden had perfect nights shooting the ball. Sasha made all four of his shots from the field (including a pair of three-pointers) as well as all three attempts from the line; Gooden also made all four of the shots that he took. Drew was even nice enough to give me more material, as he talked to his hand every time he ran upcourt after a shot. If this trend sticks, and if he continues his year-long streak of inexplicably growing a patch of hair on the back of his head, Gooden will be well on his way to being the NBA's next great character. I'd prefer he spend his time trying to be the NBA's next great power forward, but I guess you take what you can get.

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DISCUSSION QUESTION: Do you talk to your hands? If so, how does the conversation go? Wouldn't it be rather one-sided, like Tom Hanks talking to that volleyball in [Cast Away](#)?

Play Of The Night, Part I: With 1.3 seconds remaining in the first quarter, Eric Snow fouled New Jersey's Antoine Wright. In between free throws, Nets head coach Lawrence Frank (who still looks young enough to be the only NBA head coach with a curfew) substituted Hassan Adams for Carter.

The next time Frank will do that will be ... never, I am guessing. After Wright made the second free throw, Eric Snow inbounded the ball to a streaking James, who had burst behind Adams. (If you are a Browns fan, just use the mental image of any given opposing receiver bursting past the Browns' secondary, and you'll have an excellent idea of how this play looked.) Snow's pass perfectly led LeBron towards the hoop, and LBJ dunked the ball with 0.1 second remaining.

(Postscript: Mr. Adams was removed from the game and did not re-enter until he played the role of Human White Flag in the fourth quarter.)

Play Of The Night, Part II: Cavs leading, 53-41, midway through the third. LeBron rebounded a miss from New Jersey's Carter and began a fast break going the other way. Forgetting for a moment that his feet contain enough metal to piss off anybody behind him in line at the airport security checkpoint, Zydrunas Ilgauskas streaked down the middle of the court, ahead of LeBron. LBJ passed the ball to big Z ... who then passed the ball back to LeBron with a behind-the-back, no-look feed for the dunk. Forget Hughes; I want to see what the Cavs can do with big Z at the point. (*Yes, that is sarcasm.*)
But I suspect that Z would be slightly less likely to jack up ill-advised jumpers with a foot on the three-point line.

Play Of The Night, Part III: It wasn't quite as memorable as either of the first two, but it was still a sight. In the waning minutes of the first quarter, James had the ball on the right wing. He threw a dart into the lane to ... *a streaking Donyell Marshall.*
That's right, Donyell was in the paint. (Thus putting a dent in my theory that he wears one of those "training" dog collars that gives him a shock whenever he crosses the three-point line.) And he slammed the ball home for an easy two points.

Best In The Business: That would be TNT's Steve Kerr, in the role of color commentator. (And yes, Marv Albert is still one of the best play-by-play men around.) He always seems to have his finger squarely on the pulse of the game (for example, chastising LeBron for taking 20-foot fadeaway jumpers) and mixes in his own blend of humor and self-deprecation (lauding LeBron for a "good shot" after LBJ made one of those 20-foot fadeaway jumpers). Don't get me wrong; I like my A.C. as much as the next guy. I enjoy his epic battles with the English language. I'll be back to the local telecast for the next game. But Kerr is as good as it gets.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

The Game Starts At 9:30, Right?: That's what the Cavs thought last night. The first half was

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an abomination, and the only reason Cleveland held the lead was because New Jersey somehow found a way to play even worse. The Cavs turned the ball over 11 times in the first half, which is rather amazing, considering that they were not moving very often on offense.

The Cavs' postseason fate will be determined by which team shows up. If we see the team that played the second half, it will be a very fun April and May (dare I say June?) in Cleveland. If we see the team that played in the first half, then congratulations to whoever they play in the first round.

Return To Clang: After a couple of weeks of shooting free throws like a team of Rick Barrys (Barries? Barrae?), the Cavs returned to their brickilicious ways from the line last night. 14 of 23 from the line (or 61%) is Not Very Good. (*See earlier comment re: incisive analysis.*) LeBron and Hughes were the worst offenders, each missing four free throws. (Anderson Varejao missed the other one, splitting a pair of freebies in the third quarter.) Fortunately, the misses did not affect the outcome of the game ... but pretty soon, as announcers will be quick to remind us, *every free throw will count*

NEWS ITEM THAT HAS ABSOLUTELY NO CONNECTION TO THE GAME, BUT WE'LL TALK ABOUT IT ANYWAY:

Ouch Ouch OUCH: On behalf of all men with testicles, I'd like to extend my condolences to Jason Houston, the Northeast Ohio man who was recently [awarded three-quarters of a million dollars](#)

. Mr. Houston was using a leg-extension machine when a cable snapped, causing a steel rod to swing into his groin. (At this juncture, I have two thoughts. One, every man reading this paragraph just crossed his legs. Tightly. Two, new readers who made it here via [SportsTime Ohio's Morning Coffee](#) just hurled said morning coffee. Sorry about that.)

Amazingly, this injury happened despite the crack staff of the YWCA (YWCA? Maybe we should have seen this injury coming), who alertly repaired the machine (apparently it had malfunctioned previously) with duct tape. This repair falls right in line with the two Golden Rules of Fixing Stuff:

1. If it moves, and it shouldn't, use duct tape;
2. If it doesn't move, and it should, use WD-40.

Those rules have served me well. But they probably do not suggest the optimal repair strategy for a heavy weight machine that will be used by dozens of people on any given day.

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WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Atlanta on Saturday night, at Philadelphia next Tuesday, and then home against Milwaukee the following night ... and that'll be another regular season in the books for the Cavs. The drama is in whether Cleveland can sneak past Chicago for that second spot in the conference standings (actually, it's possible that Toronto could sneak by both of them, leaving Chicago and the Cavs to fight for the third spot; on the Likely To Happen-O-Meter, that one falls just below "Don Imus Opens Cultural Diversity Center").