

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Saturday, April 14 2007 7:00 PM -

It was an absolute ROUT last night at The Q, as the Cavs took the overmatched Hawks apart at the seams by a count of 110-76, good enough for the Cavs biggest rout in over nine years. In today's hysterical (as always) game recap, John Hnat uses the blowout to branch out and talk about Walter Herrmann, Esteban the late night infomercial guitarist, and Dual Action Cleanse.



THE SUMMARY:

It was a tense contest, a nail-biter that came down to the final shot ... will be the lead-in for some other game. It sure doesn't apply to the Cavs' 110-76 pasting of a depleted Atlanta Hawks team last night.

I would like to provide this complete list of the game highlights for the Hawks:

- They won the opening tip.

That's it. The rest of the game belonged to the Cavs, who sprinted to a 9-0 lead, held a 28-17 advantage after the first quarter, and led 56-28 at halftime. By the fourth quarter, the Cavs' lead was in the thirties (they led by as many as 38), and Coach Mike Brown felt comfortable enough to put in the Human Victory Cigars.

To be fair, the Hawks were without several key players: Joe Johnson (injured right calf), Speedy Claxton (sore left knee), Zaza Pachulia (injured right leg), Josh Childress (stress

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fracture in right foot), and Dominique Wilkins (retired in 1999). The rest of the team knew that they were merely days away from ending the nightmare that has been their 2006-07 season, and played like a team that already had their bags packed and tee times set for Thursday morning.

The Cavs had seven players in double digits, led by LeBron James' 23 (not bad considering that he sat the entire fourth quarter). Zydrunas Ilgauskas posted a double-double (14 points, 11 rebounds) in only 21 minutes. When he wasn't busy clubbing LeBron with his elbows, Josh Smith scored 23 points for the Hawks, with Shelden Williams ([do it to me … Shelden; you're an animal … Shelden; ride me big … Shelden](#)) posting 13 points and 11 rebounds.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

No Letdown Here: A game against the lowly Hawks seemed like exactly the kind of trap that has snared Cleveland far too often this season. Earlier this season, the Cavs fell to the Hawks at home; and their struggles against other possible destinations for Greg Oden (Charlotte, Boston, New York, Philadelphia) have been well-documented.

Not last night. Cleveland jumped on Atlanta from the opening tip (well, just *after* the opening tip) and never let up. They never took the Hawks lightly (Daniel Gibson and Donyell Marshall were still launching three-pointers late in the game) and never provided even a small opportunity for Atlanta to get back into the game. In other words, they played exactly the way that a top team should play against a lesser opponent. The playoffs start within the week; there will be plenty of time for drama then. Last night was all about keeping pace in the standings and continuing to get the team ready for the playoffs, and the Cavs did precisely that.

The Byline Said "Cleveland", But It Was Really Pamplona: Usually, when you see as much running as last night, there are bulls (no, not Bulls) sprinkled throughout. After virtually

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every Hawks miss, Cleveland was pushing the ball the other way, and it led to a lot of easy points. They had five or six fast breaks in the first quarter alone; that's more than they have had in entire *games* recently. Even big Z broke away from the pack for an easy dunk on one run-out.

To appease Coach Brown (*we'll pretend he reads this column*), the fast breaks were the product of some suffocating defense and strong rebounding. The Cavs controlled the boards, 44-32; and their swarming defense held the Hawks to 44% shooting for the night, a number that is probably skewed to the high side because of the fourth quarter garbage time. (In the first half, the Hawks shot only 11 for 35, or 31%.) They held Atlanta scoreless for a seven minute stretch of the second quarter, during which time they pushed their lead from commanding (37-23) to "would it be rude if we left at halftime?" (49-23).

See That Paint? Let's Shoot From There: Continuing their trend from the second half of the New Jersey game, the Cavs consistently shot the ball when close to the rim. These shots are Good, as they tend to go in more often than shots taken from farther away. Part of the reason was the number of Cavs' fast breaks; however, they also did well at working the ball inside to the big men and letting the offense flow from there. In particular, Anderson Varejao had a very good game in the pivot, showing some moves that he normally does not get to display (including one turnaround jumper that I never would have guessed was in his arsenal). LeBron had only one post-up opportunity, but that was more because the rest of the offense was clicking so well, rather than because of any shortcomings in the offensive plan.

To See A Higher Number, You'll Need To Find A Box Score That Includes A Line For "Nash, S": Another result from so many fast break opportunities: the Cavs had 33 assists last night, nearly equaling the team high for the season. Proving that it was truly a team effort, no individual Cavalier had more than six assists (LeBron and Sasha Pavlovic tied for this total). Perhaps the most impressive statistic of the night was Damon Jones' five assists in just under nine minutes of playing time. At that pace, he'd average 27 assists a game! (We like our false projections.)

I'm Afraid This May Encourage Him, But...: ...in the interest of Being Fair, Larry Hughes shot the ball very well last night, making six of the nine shots he attempted. Many of those were the "what are you doing ... nice shot!" variety. If he's going to have a hot streak, April is

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as good a time as any.

Enter Sentence With “Can’t Stop” And “Hope To Contain” Here: For newer readers of this column, I have a borderline-unhealthy infatuation with Charlotte rookie forward [Walter Herrmann](#)

. You can read about the origins of that infatuation (

WARNING: Gratuitous link to an earlier column

)

[here](#)

. As a result, we discuss Walter’s (*yes, he has earned first-name status*

) progress more often than you would find in the typical Cleveland basketball column.

And boy, did Walter give us something to talk about last night. A career-high 30 points on 12-of-15 shooting from the field (including 6-of-8 from long distance), plus nine rebounds, led the Bobcats to a big win over Milwaukee. He better watch it, or else he’s going to get some Rookie of the Year votes. (Although it would have been nice if he would have dropped 30 points in a more meaningful game – say, against the Bulls on Friday.)

Dusting Off The Bench: One of the fun side bonuses of a blowout -- especially a blowout late in the season – especially a blowout, late in the season, against an opponent with an injury-depleted roster – is that you get to see their towel-wavers actually play for a few minutes. And so it is that Esteban Batista, backup to the backup to the backup power forward for the Hawks, played seven minutes last night. He Lurched his way around the court for a basket and three rebounds.

More importantly, he gives me the opening to discuss late-night infomercials. When his name was announced, I (and probably you, and upwards of six other fans still watching the game) immediately flashed to Esteban, the guitar-playing, Johnny-Cash-wardrobe-channeling fixture of *après*-midnight TV. I can’t speak for anybody else ... but when I have a dose of insomnia, the only thing on my mind is, *who is going to teach me to play “Turkey In The Straw” on a custom-made acoustic guitar that I can own for four easy payments of \$39.99?* That’s the void that Esteban fills. If it’s one that you also need to fill (and who doesn’t?), his web site is

[here](#)

. (Be sure to check out how you too can stay in Esteban's [beach condo](#) !)

As good as Esteban is, the vanguard of infomercials is still Dual Action Cleanse. In this one, a man named Klee Irwin (who has taken Drew Gooden's grooming habits to the next level, combining what appears to be a chocolate milk stain on his upper lip with a Low Rent slicked-back embryonic mullet) is only too happy to discuss his poops, his daughter's poops, why their poops are better than your poops, and (just in case you're envious) how you too can poop like them. I am not making this up. Unfortunately, no viewers out there have wasted a half hour of their lives been dedicated enough to upload the entire spot to Youtube, so we'll just have to rely on [this hilarious review](#) and [this snippet](#) from the program.

DAC's working thesis seems to be that the world would be a better place if we all weren't carrying so much, well, crap inside of us. Their product (which is an "all-natural herbal supplement", all the better to evade any pesky FDA requirements) allegedly cleans and detoxifies you, and lets you poop the way you've always dreamed you could. (*Some people want money; others, power; but a large segment of the population apparently has more modest desires.*)

The DAC folks have [their own web site](#). I visited the site, and was elated to discover that they have a Live Chat option. *Finally, the opportunity to talk about my stools with a person who understands!*
, I thought. Alas, the live chat feature was unavailable. In the spirit of journalistic research, and also in the spirit of keeping Swerb from complaining about the inadequate length of my columns (*there's a common theme here, no? Maybe Swerb needs some Dual Action Cleanse*), I'll keep trying it throughout the week, and will provide updates as events warrant.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

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The Cavs just won by 34 points – their greatest margin of victory this season – and you’re expecting me to find something to nit-pick about? You got it! Here’s one petty item that I’ll mention:

Where You And I Have Brains, He Has A Monkey Playing The Drums: Even a 34-point blowout has to see one rock-headed play from our favorite power forward, Mr. Gooden. Last night, it came with the Cavs leading 17-11 in the first quarter. Gooden ended up with a rebound after a missed Hawks shot. He had opponents on either side of him, reaching for the ball.

Now, let’s put ourselves in Drew’s shoes for a moment. (*Yes, you will also have to glue part of a squirrel to the back of your head.*)

Your options would include:

- Cradling the ball in both arms, maybe swinging the elbows a bit, until the defenders give up and run downcourt;
- Finding a guard and passing him the ball;
- If all else fails, call a 20 second time out.

In Drew’s world, the fourth option, “dribble the ball between your legs”, is the right one. Sure enough, he had the ball stolen from him. Also sure enough, my wife asked why I was yelling at the TV.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

At Philadelphia on Tuesday night, then home against Milwaukee the following evening. And then they will play an as-yet-unknown opponent in the first round of the playoffs.

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You probably know the playoff picture, but here's a recap: The battle is for the second seed in the Eastern Conference, and it's between Cleveland and Chicago. (Toronto is still technically in the picture as well.) Both teams have 48-32 records entering today's action. Chicago plays at Washington this afternoon, then at New Jersey on Wednesday evening. Chicago owns the tie-breaker with Cleveland, as they had a better divisional record this season.

That means that Cleveland has to finish at least one game ahead in the standings to get the coveted #2 spot. (Why is it so coveted? Because then Chicago, Detroit, and Miami will all be left to pound the stuffing out of each other in the first two rounds of the playoffs, while the Cavs would have a relatively easier road to the conference finals.) Thanks to the NBA's deep thinkers (apparently, monkeys playing the drums are common), if the Cavs finish with the third best record in the conference, they will get only the #5 seed, as the other division winners will be slotted ahead of them. So root for the Cavs to keep winning, and for the Bulls' team bus to get lost en route to one of those road games.