

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
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The Cavs stayed alive in the race for the #2 seed last night, going on the road to Philly and knocking off the Sixers by a 98-92 count. In today's column, John recaps the win, examines five losses that killed the Cavs this year, and unloads on the schmuck ahead of him in line at Target that caused him to miss the first quarter. LETS GO NETS!



THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs outlasted Philadelphia, 98-92, in a game that they needed in order to keep alive their hopes of obtaining the second seed in the Eastern Conference. Frankly, the game was tougher than it probably should have been. Cleveland (which has been remarkably healthy this season) had all of its players rested and available, while the Sixers dressed only eight players. The missing Sixers included their big gun, Andre Iguodala, as well as Kyle Korver (certified Cavalier killer) and Shavlik Randolph (mentioned mainly because I wanted to type the word "Shavlik").

Larry Hughes led the Cavs (who had six players score in double digits) with 22 points. LeBron James, playing "only" 36 minutes, added 18. Philadelphia's Willie Green led all scorers with 24 points, and Joe Smith and Samuel Dalembert both posted double-doubles (17 points and 13 rebounds for Smith; 11 and 10 for Dalembert).

The game was close most of the way, with the teams trading the lead back and forth

throughout the first half. Cleveland pushed to a 58-50 advantage at halftime; the Sixers erased this lead almost immediately after the two teams returned from their locker rooms. The thin roster and talent differential eventually cost the Sixers, as Cleveland surged to a 14 point lead (88-74) midway through the fourth quarter. Philly was able to keep the game from becoming a blowout, but really did not threaten the Cavs the rest of the way.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

I Still Don't Want To Encourage Him, But...: Hughes had another decent night shooting the basketball. 9-for-19 from the floor is not stop-the-presses stuff ... actually, for Larry, it might be. The point is that he is showing the ability to hit jumpers, particularly in transition. I wouldn't want to redesign the offense to center on his outside shooting abilities, but he deserves props for shooting the ball well.

I Do Want To Encourage Him: Also getting into playoff shape at just the right time is Zydrunas Ilgauskas. The big guy scored 14 points (6 of 10 shooting from the field), pulled down eight rebounds, and even had five assists. (One of those assists was a sweet alley-oop to LeBron for a dunk.) His outside shot is money in the bank right now – exactly what the Cavs will need to draw opposing big men (Shaq?) out from under the basket.

I'm Not Sure I Want To Encourage Him, But I Like What I See: Anderson Varejao (who scored 11 points and pulled down eight rebounds) had a solid game off the bench. More and more, he is demonstrating an array of post moves and ability to drive to the basket. I still twitch involuntarily whenever I see him dribbling the ball – although he is competent for a big man, he doesn't *quite* have complete control of the ball, and is susceptible to losing it – but it worked last night. (The other reason for twitching: for every one of those drives he makes in the playoffs, he'll earn about another million dollars in his contract offer this offseason. But that's Dan Gilbert's problem, not mine.)

I'm Too Stunned To Encourage Him: Eric Snow, where did you find that fountain of youth?

He actually PUSHED the fast break time and again, instead of the flight-of-the-bumblebee jogging across the lane that is his usual M.O. In transition. The unsurprising result: he had eight assists, tops on the team. (Overall, the Cavs did a terrific job of setting up teammates, tallying 29 assists for the game.)

Letting Others Carry The Load: Coach Mike Brown deserves credit for getting LeBron an extended rest (he sat LBJ in the last minute of the third quarter and did not re-insert him until the second half of the fourth quarter). Had the game been closer, LeBron would have undoubtedly been in there; but no need to force extra minutes on him with the playoffs right around the corner.

The Cavs' bench supplied extra ammo for the "LeBron? We don't need no stinkin' LeBron" theory, as they pushed the lead from five points to double digits during the time James was on the bench.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

This Play Works ... Let's Forget About It: Last week against New Jersey, the Cavs ignited the run that won them the game on a series of post-up baskets by LeBron. Last night, we saw that play ... once. (It did not lead to any points, as LeBron missed a bank shot, and also missed a put-back after grabbing the rebound.) On the break, LeBron is absolutely the most fearless ball-handler in the world. In the half-court, he's good with the ball when he has the opportunities to slash to the hoop. Otherwise ... let him post up and go to work down low.

The Rookie Wall Definitely Hits By Game 81: Daniel Gibson looks like he is running on fumes at this point. Twelve minutes played, zero points, missed both shots from the field, committed four fouls, and otherwise no effect on the game. I will give him the benefit of the doubt, and say that he is precociously resting himself for the playoffs instead of burning himself out the last week of the regular season. In reality, he has not been the same player since he returned from his toe injury. His drop in performance is probably the result of hitting the "rookie

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wall", as opposed to any lingering effect from the injury. Regardless, if you find his jump shot, please return it to him, as the Cavs could sure use it when the playoffs start.

And Back To The Liability Side We Go: After a run of free throw shooting prowess, the Cavs have apparently regressed to randomly lobbing grenades from 15 feet. They made only 15 of 23 attempts (65%) last night, with LeBron (4 of 7) and Varejao (3 of 6) being the worst offenders. That percentage is great for a game of 33 on the driveway hoop; in a key contest, not so much.

Who Am I?: That's right – it's time to play Who Am I, the game that captivated upwards of three readers of this column earlier this year! Let's get right to it:

I actually had a pretty decent game last night – 12 points and eight rebounds – but I had two boneheaded plays that stood out far more than anything positive I did.

The first play came on a fast break in the third quarter. We had a four-on-one break, with me running down the middle of the court. I found the ball in my hands, and rose up to deliver a powerful dunk ... whoops! The ball flew out of my hands and out of bounds!

A few minutes later, I grabbed an offensive rebound right under the hoop. I rose to slam home a powerful dunk ... whoops! The ball slipped out of my hand and rebounded all the way to halfcourt. Moments later, Strongsville police responded to a report that an obscure Cavs writer was running through the streets, yelling in frustration.

Who Am I?

A Special Thank You...: ...to the two individuals who made sure that I had to catch part of the first quarter on radio. Actually, it's probably my fault – a just-before-tipoff trip to the store is never a good idea. It's an open invitation for the God of Target to place some coupon-clutching, check-writing schmuck in front of you in the checkout line.

Sure enough, last night saw me standing behind a younger couple who unloaded their cart with all of the speed of, well, an other-than-last-night Eric Snow leading the break. (*No, they did not veer to the register three lanes over; that is where the similarity to Snow ends.*

) Glaciers melt faster. Once the cashier tallied the purchases ...

wait a minute! We forgot to give you the coupons!

Understand, I HATE coupons. (It is a symptom of my general impatience. I do not like to wait.

Hiko may

[claim](#)

he is an impatient man; he would look like a Buddhist monk compared to me.) We have a very limited number of minutes on this planet; I do not intend to use any of them finding ways to save 30 cents on Kleenex.

Fortunately, they paid for their purchases telepathically, then left. At least, that seemed to be their plan. Only after their items had been bagged, and the coupons tallied, and the increasingly fidgety man behind them glared at them, did they have the thought that they might have to actually *pay* for their purchases. Let's see ... cash? Check? MasterCard number one? MasterCard number two? Do they take Discover here? *Do I have enough pennies in my purse to pay the entire bill?* Let me count...

While these questions were racing through my friends' minds, the cashier, ensuring that he will *never* get a Christmas card from me, suggested that they save ten percent on their order by opening a Target account. Their response ... let's just say that the image of sliced bread is the proper one to have. I have never seen such pure glee at the prospect of saving \$8.73. So on top of the minutes spent sloooooowly loading items onto the belt, and sloooooowly loading the

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bagged items back into the cart, and the Dance of the Coupons, and the How Will We Pay? Anguish, we now had the stage of Please Fill Out Our Application, Which Is Only Slightly Longer Than *War And Peace*.

Enough said.

FIVE GAMES THAT WILL HAVE YOU SLITTING YOUR WRISTS SHOULD CHICAGO WIN TONIGHT:

It's time for a quick trip down memory lane here at The Good, The Bad, and The Summary. When a team has just missed the playoffs or some desired seeding, it's natural to pore over the just-completed schedule, and find a handful of "what if?" games – ones that should have been won, but weren't, and are now responsible for the team's predicament. I normally don't believe in this exercise. One, living in the past gets you nowhere, as a general principle. Two, it conveniently ignores the games that your team probably should have lost, but somehow won. And three, it also conveniently ignores that the team ahead of your team also had its slate of games that they "coulda shoulda woulda" won.

The need to fill space (to say nothing of the opportunity for gratuitous links to earlier columns!) trumps all of those reasons. Besides, we're Cleveland sports fans. By definition, we enjoy ripping off the Band-Aids and poking at the scabs. Accordingly, here are the top five "coulda woulda shoulda" games of the 2006-07 season:

- [November 4, 2006](#) : Cavs lose to Charlotte at home, 92-88. It came one day after beating the Spurs in their house. Medically speaking, when you see mood swings like this, the patient should be drinking extra-large lithium shakes. The loss would have been understandable had Walter Herrmann popped off for 30 points, but Walter saw no action. (Reportedly, he was nursing an injury to his ponytail.)
- [November 7, 2006](#) : Cavs drop their second straight ultra-winnable game, falling to Atlanta at home, 104-95. Cleveland was up by 10 points, with eight minutes remaining, on their home court, against one of the Association's larger doormats.

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- [January 24, 2007](#) : In yet another disappointing home game against a lottery-bound opponent, the Cavs fell to Philadelphia in overtime. They had to work to lose this one, as they led by seven with less than two minutes to go. Cavs beat writers face the challenge of not using the words "Heimlich Maneuver" in the lead-in paragraphs of their stories.
- [February 14, 2007](#) : The Cavs fell at Utah, 99-98. This game may not have been as winnable as the others mentioned thus far; it was a road game against a quality opponent. But having the chance to pull off an impressive road win in the final minute, and not doing it ... stung.
- [April 1, 2007](#) : Cleveland falls to the Celtics, 98-96. The defining play comes in the last minute, when Varejao was whistled for a foul against Boston's Delonte West, apparently for trying to breathe the same air. That botched call masked the reality that the Cavs should have put that game away long before the final minute.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Like I need to tell you. The Cavs close out the regular season tonight against Milwaukee at home. It's Fan Appreciation Night, part of which is a promotion of the Cavs giving away their game-worn jerseys and shoes. So if you've ever had the desire to know just what Ira Newble's shoes smell like after 48 minutes of sitting on the bench, tonight could be your night! (Does the promotion extend to the players who don't dress for the game, and are on the bench in their street clothes? Picking up a pair of brand new close-fitted loafers or an expensive sport coat ... now THAT would be nice.)

After the game, and only if the Cavs win, then it will be time to watch the scoreboard. Chicago plays at New Jersey in the game that will decide whether the Cavs get the second or the fifth seed in the conference. (For a fuller description, complete with a "The Diff"-like cheat sheet on who to root for against, check out [Jeff Rickel's column from yesterday](#) .) All that jangs in the balance is whether the Cavs have a tough first-round series against Miami, followed by a likely matchup with Detroit should they survive the Heat; or a cupcake-lined road to the Eastern Conference finals through New Jersey, Washington and/or Toronto.

(Swerb has already assured me that Chicago will lose tonight. Mind you, this is the man whose avatar on the message boards is Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown at the last moment. I believe that is what the psychologists call *cognitive dissonance*.)