

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Tuesday, May 08 2007 7:00 PM -

It's May 9th. The Cavaliers have not lost a basketball game since April 8th. And they now lead the New Jersey Nets 2-0 ... as the series moves to Joisey for games three and four. LeBron broke out last night in a big way, and like in game one ... Sasha was once again the X-Factor and the Cavs destroyed the Nets on the boards. The Man, The Myth, The Hnat tells us all about it.



THE SUMMARY:

The pressure is all on New Jersey now.

With their 102-92 victory over the Nets last night, the Cavs extended their lead in the playoff series to 2-0. That gives them a huge advantage – teams that take a 2-0 lead at the beginning of a seven-game playoff series will win the series 94% of the time. (In the interests of journalistic accuracy, I should mention that I just now made up that number, after countless seconds of fruitless searching for the actual figure. But I am sure the percentage is very high.)

The game was a nail-biter the entire way. Until the final minute, neither team held a double-digit lead. Until the final five minutes, and excluding a 20-second window in the second quarter when New Jersey led by seven, neither team led by more than *five*.

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The Cavs were able to pull away in the final few minutes, going on a 22-8 run that ended with confetti falling from the Quicken Loans Arena rafters. LeBron James keyed that run, scoring seven points and assisting on three other baskets. Cleveland really ratcheted up its defense in the final minutes, holding the Nets to 2-of-8 shooting (and one of those makes was a meaningless three-pointer by Vince Carter in the final seconds) and forcing three turnovers.

LeBron had a brilliant game, scoring 36 points and dishing out 12 assists (both game highs). Interestingly, he had only one rebound the entire way. (Even Superman needs to pause to put on his cape every now and then.) Sasha Pavlovic scored 17 points, and Drew Gooden notched his second straight double-double with 10 points and 14 rebounds. The Nets' Carter once again had a rough shooting night, but still managed to score 26 points. Richard Jefferson added 22, and triple-double threat Jason Kidd scored 17 points, grabbed 10 rebounds, and dished out eight assists.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

“Shame On You, *TV Guide*, A Man’s Ass Is Not ‘Nudity’”: In a pregame e-mail to [Rich Swerbinsky](#), the mother hen of TheClevelandFan, I predicted that the Cavs would win by double digits. That statement proved to be *literally* true, but it was not quite what I had in mind. As mentioned earlier, it was a very close contest the entire way; the Cavs did not get that double digit lead until the last minute of the game.

And that is not a bad thing. For most of the playoffs – heck, for *all* of the playoffs until last night – the element of playoff excitement has been missing. Many fans have treated the first two rounds as a cakewalk to the Eastern Conference Finals. Granted, an Arenaless and Butlerless Wizards team had little chance of challenging the Cavs ... but New Jersey is a good team. A trio of All-Stars plus a couple of nice role players equals an opponent that is not going

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to go away easily. Last night was the first time I sensed that the Cleveland crowd was *truly* involved in the game, and that the playoffs have really arrived.

A NICKNAME IS BORN: From now on, Rich shall be called "The Mother Hen" in this space.

I Think He's Gonna Make It In This League: LeBron had been a bit below his usual standards in the first five playoff games (i.e., he was only "very good", as opposed to "brilliant"). Not so last night. He not only stuffed the stat sheet; he played his best when it mattered the most.

After a Jason Kidd three-pointer gave the Nets an 81-78 lead with eight and a half minutes remaining, LeBron responded with a three-pointer of his own. That basket was probably the most critical hoop of the game. The Kidd basket sent a shiver of *oh boy, this one's slipping away* through the home crowd; LeBron's shot erased that feeling. Somehow, you just *knew* that he was not going to allow the Cavs to lose.

The next time down the court, LeBron drove hard to the hoop, then kicked the ball out to a wide open Hughes at the three point line. *Swish.* 84-81, Cavs. LeBron followed that up with an assist to Zydrunas Ilgauskas and a knifing layup. Finally, James delivered a perfect pass to a cutting Gooden for an easy dunk, giving the Cavs a six point lead (their largest of the game to that point). The clock still read 4:25 at that point, but it may as well have said 0:00, because the game was over.

Apologies To D-Wade: With the way Cleveland is rebounding the ball these days, former NBA rebounding champ (and current pitchman for a wireless provider) Charles Barkley would be proud. In those commercials, Miami's Dwyane Wade has been angling for a place in Sir Charles's "favorite five." Alas, Wade has no chance once Barkley sees the tape of last night's game.

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That is because the Cavs once again hit the boards with a vengeance. They outrebounded the Nets 49-32, including a crushing 19-3 advantage on the offensive boards. Gooden led the way with his 14 rebounds. Ilgauskas grabbed nine. So did Anderson Varejao, who by all appearances played last night's game on a pogo stick. Hughes pulled down seven boards, very impressive for a guard (and even more impressively, he boxed out some of New Jersey's big men on a couple of those occasions). Even Donyell Marshall came off the bench to add three boards, including a rebound and put-back of a missed James free throw.

His Offense May Have Been His Defense, But Now His Defense Is No Longer Offensive:

Continuing his rebound (

note clever segue from previous topic

) from the Washington series, Pavlovic had another solid game yesterday. More impressive than his 17 points (which came courtesy of his very efficient 7-of-13 shooting from the field) was his defense on Carter. Sasha was assigned to Carter for most of the game, and pressured the Nets' star into a variety of wild shots. During the third quarter, Carter remembered that he is a Star (TM), and that he will get borderline calls as a result; so he started barreling into Sasha and drawing fouls. Overall though, it was a frustrating night for Vinsanity, and Pavlovic deserves credit for making it so.

We're Still Waiting For The Dunk Competition With Him And David Wesley: In the fourth quarter, Eric Snow started to drive to the hoop when a foul was called. Continuing the play, E-Snow drove to the hoop and ...

dunked the ball

. It was not a true dunk – he kind of laid the ball up while he grabbed the rim – but the ball did go in, so we're going to count it. (Even though the play itself did not count. Not even Michael Jordan in his prime would have gotten that kind of continuation.)

It Took Me 88 Games To Realize This Would Be A Good Feature?: Usually, I will watch games by myself, all the better to stimulate the creative process (also known as

how in the world am I going to write five pages

this

time?

). My wife will occasionally join me. Inevitably, she will drop at least one comment that gets a

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“it's a good thing you're pretty” reply. (Mind you, she is not a fluff chick – she's a smart woman who owns her own business – but fortunately for both of us, that business has absolutely nothing to do with analyzing pro basketball.)

Last night, she joined me with about five minutes to go. By now, you know that it was a close game – plenty of lead changes, neither team holding a lead of more than a few points – a very exciting game to watch. She watched for a few minutes, then lobbed this incisive analysis:

Those guys (the Nets) can't win. Teams who wear red knee socks shouldn't win.

It's a good thing you're pretty, honey.

Kareem. Magic. Michael. LeBron. Now There's Walter. The Bobcats' Walter Herrmann was [named to the second team](#) in the All-Rookie team announced by the NBA yesterday. This fact is of absolutely no consequence to those of you who are newer readers. Those who have been here for some time, however, know that Herr ... I mean Walter has been a favorite topic in this space for some time. With the Bobcats “missing” the playoffs the same way that Jason Davis used to “miss” the plate, we probably won't have any more Walter-related news this season (unless he cures cancer, which I will not put past him). It's been fun following his progress, and we'll definitely return with more Walter-related news in the 2007-08 season.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

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The Bear Is Heading To The Forest With The Sports Page Under His Arm: Earlier this season, the Cavs' free throw shooting woes were so prevalent, they earned a regular slot on the "What I Didn't Like" side of the ledger. At one point, I added it to the template I use to start each column, figuring I'd at least save myself a few keystrokes.

I may have to start using that template again. Unlike Game One, the Cavs did well in getting to the line (they shot 33 free throws last night, compared to a minuscule 11 attempts in Sunday's game). Like Game One, the fans sitting under the basket ducked for cover once the ball was in the air. Cleveland managed to make only 20 of those 33 attempts, a 60.6% success rate. (Fortunately for Cleveland, the Nets were polite visitors, making less than 65% of their own freebies.)

Go Ahead, Try That Long Shot: That's pretty much what the Cavs kept saying to the Nets last night. Time and again, New Jersey passed the ball to somebody on the perimeter. Time and again, the Cavs did not step out to guard said somebody, or were way too late in getting there. And time and again, said somebody knocked down a three-pointer. New Jersey shot a blistering 57.1% from three point range (and shot 52% from the field for the entire game). Granted, Cleveland's tendency to double-team at the top of the arc means that one of the other opponents will be wide open; and granted, it's better to have that open man standing 25 feet from the hoop rather than right below it. But after Kidd has already buried three pointers, not even touching the rim on any of those shots, maybe it's a good idea to play him a little closer, rather than allow him to set up for a fourth time?

Keep Shooting, You Never Know When You Might Make Something: After Game One, Hughes drew praise from some quarters for his shooting. I did not quite understand the plaudits, seeing as though he had shot 35.0% (7-for-20) from the field in that game.

Now I see that maybe those folks had a point, as Hughes dropped to an even more rim-bending 28.6% (4 of 14) in Game Two. The disturbing trend: Hughes appears to be reverting to his form of jacking up wild jumpers early in the shot clock. The best (worst) example of this trend: with five minutes to go in the third quarter, and New Jersey having just taken a 67-64 lead, Larry dribbled the ball to the top of the arc, then launched a bomb with 18 seconds remaining on the shot clock. He missed, giving New Jersey the chance to push its lead at what could have been a critical turning point in the game, and ensuring the continuing

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expansion of my children's vocabulary. (They won't have much trouble with the letter *F*.) TNT's Doug Collins accurately described it as a "random" possession.

Speaking Of The Announcers...: TNT's Collins and Kevin Harlan did a good job throughout ... but deserve a bit of prodding on a couple of small points. One, Eric Snow does not have the "whole package," contrary to Collins's description. (If he has the "whole package," then what exactly does LeBron have?) Snow is a tough veteran player who can manage the game as a point guard and who Don't Back Down on defense. He has adapted well to a reserve role. But let's not pretend that he is one of the all-time greats, OK?

Two, early in the third quarter, Collins mentioned that Hughes had removed his headband, following his practice of discarding the headband if he's having a poor game. Uh, Doug? Larry never wore the headband last night.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Game 3, at the Continental Airlines Arena in New Jersey, will tip off at 5:00 PM this Saturday.