

## Cavs/Nets GAME FOUR - The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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What a game last night! 13 lead changes. A couple almost-fights. A 6-23 performance from Vince Carter, including two turnovers in the last 45 seconds. And a thrilling 87-85 win that puts the Cavs up three games to one in the series. Rebounding from a crummy game three, LeBron led the way with 30, 9, and 7. And the Cavs have a chance to finish things off at home tomorrow night. John Hnat recaps the ein.



### THE SUMMARY:

Last night's game between the Cavs and the Nets was what playoff basketball is supposed to be.

Plenty of lead changes (13 overall; there were also 12 ties). Neither team ever led by more than eight points (that would be the 50-42 lead that the Nets grabbed early in the third quarter). A tense fourth quarter, capped by a potentially game-tying (or even game-winning) final possession.

Because this is a Cleveland sports site, after all, let's also add

&quot;the Cavs won&quot; to our criteria for a great playoff game. And win they did, edging the Nets by an 87-85 margin in last night's game at Continental Airlines Arena. (*Does anybody else get a mental image of 20,000 people nibbling on little bags of peanuts and clicking on the overhead lights?*)

The victory gave the Cavs a commanding 3-1 lead in their best-of-seven playoff series. I can confidently state that the Cavs now have a [98.2% probability](#) of winning this series, not to mention an 80% chance of closing the deal in Game Five tomorrow. These numbers come courtesy of the [WhoWins web site](#), which was brought to my attention by several readers, including Mike Carroll. THIS is the site that I needed last week when I guessed that teams with 2-0 leads win 94% of the time. (Then again, that guess turned to be almost spot on. So now that I think about it, don't visit the site. I'll just continue to throw numbers off the top of my head.)

You could be excused for thinking that the Cavs played a mirror; that's how close the two teams' numbers were. Both teams made 27 field goals (although New Jersey had 10 extra attempts). Both made five three-pointers. Both attempted and made approximately the same number of free throws (28-of-37 for the Cavs; 26-of-32 for the Nets). Both teams had approximately the same number of rebounds (43 for the Cavs versus 41 for the Nets), assists (17 vs. 21), personal fouls (25 vs. 27), steals (6 vs. 4), and turnovers (12 vs. 13). It's a wonder that they aren't still playing, right this second, with the score being 300-300 after the 21<sup>st</sup> consecutive overtime. (Hey, maybe we finally found a way to get Scot Pollard some playing time!)

Rebounding from a so-so Game Three, LeBron James led all scorers with 30 points. He also added nine rebounds and seven assists, ending up with yet another close-but-not-quite triple-double. (For those of you who know how much I love cherry-picked statistics: yes, I am wondering if we'll get the graphic showing the all-time playoff leaders in games with at least 30 points, eight rebounds, and seven assists.) Larry Hughes drained several key jumpers en route to his 19 points.

For the Nets, Vince Carter almost notched his own triple-double, as he collected 25 points, nine rebounds, and nine assists. He was joined by Mikki Moore, who scored a career-high (as in his *entire career*, not just the playoffs) 25 points while shooting an amazing 11-of-14 from the field. One can only wonder what two other wishes the genie will grant to Mr. Moore. (Aside to Mikki: No fair using one of them to get "three more wishes.")

## WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

**For Once, It Happened On Defense:** The play of the game, that is. With 10 seconds remaining, and Cleveland holding its 87-85 lead, Carter dribbled to the right side of the lane. He tried to back down Eric Snow.

As other opponents have discovered, E-Snow doesn't like to be backed down. He takes it personally. If you back him down, it is as though you walked through his front door, grabbed one of his beers from the fridge, and plopped down in his couch. Not just in any space, but in *his* space (meaning the one with his ass print embedded in the foam).

That's a lot of syllables to say that "Snow didn't move." And that stop allowed Larry Hughes to pressure Carter from the weak side, causing Vinsanity to fumble the ball out of bounds. Cleveland ball, 1.9 seconds remaining. Game Over.

**The Other 47 Minutes And 50 Seconds Weren't Bad Either:** Generally, the Cavs played very stifling and active defense. As is their hallmark, they consistently double-teamed the ball-handler up top, and rotated to cover any open men. Eventually, this rotation will likely lead to somebody being wide open; but against a team like New Jersey, which has so many weapons, you kind of have to pick your poison. I can definitely live with

Moore shooting 20 footers after Carter, Richard Jefferson, and Jason Kidd have all had to pass up shots. If he hits them (as he did last night) ... good for him.

The Cavs' defense held New Jersey to 36 percent shooting from the field as a team. Some of the Nets' individual numbers were downright Hughesean: Kidd shot 2-of-13, Carter went 6-of-23, Jefferson was 3-of-12, and Bostjan Nachbar was 1-of-7. Most impressively, the Cavs prevented the Nets from making a single field goal in the final 6:58 of the game. Cleveland's own offense was sputtering during that period, but having that lock-down defense made it possible to sneak out of Jersey with the W.

**When He's Good, He's Really, Really Good:** LeBron rebounded from a &quot;so-so&quot; Game Three performance (18 points, 12 assists, six rebounds; we should all have &quot;bad&quot; days like that) to lead the Cavs in Game Four. He had two particular spurts:

1. From late in the first quarter through the early minutes of the second, he scored ten consecutive points

for the Cavs.

2. With Cleveland trailing by four (53-49) in the third quarter, James hit a three pointer ... then another ... and then made a third long jumper to give the Cavs a seven point lead.

My favorite part of the second series? After he made the second three-ball, New Jersey took a time out. As the telecast cut to a commercial, they showed LeBron sitting on the bench, absolutely glowering. No smiles, no high-fives, no premature celebrations ... just the cold glare of a man doing what he knows he needs to do, and not being satisfied until the job is really done.

**Speaking Of That Third Quarter Run:** Although Hughes generally did not have a great shooting night, making just seven of his 19 attempts, he had a very nice string during the third quarter. After New Jersey took an eight point lead, Hughes buried a pair of jumpers (both coming off cross-court passes from James) to slice the lead in half. A couple of minutes later, he buried a three-pointer to give the Cavs a 55-53 lead.

I have called Hughes &quot;Larry Lofton&quot; before, because he gets caught in Kenny Lofton Syndrome all too often. (Lofton, as you Indians fans will recall, was the Indians' light-hitting centerfielder who would occasionally crank a ball out of the park, then spend the next two weeks popping out weakly while attempting to reprise the jack.) Larry has that same tendency - he will hit a long bomb, then try five more. Last night, it worked, and at perhaps the most critical point of the game, as New Jersey was threatening to run away from the Cavs.

## **WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:**

**When He's Not So Good, He's...:**□ LeBron also had a few streaks where he essentially disappeared from the game. He did not even take a shot until 4:34 remaining in the first quarter, and generally was an observer during the critical opening minutes. He clearly likes to let his teammates get involved in the flow of the game, and that's an admirable goal ... but sometimes a star just has to take the ball and force the action.

Down the stretch, he almost kicked the game away. He made only two of his six free throw attempts during the final frame (most egregiously, he missed a free throw with 10 seconds to go, one that would have forced New Jersey to attempt a three pointer just to tie the game), and also missed several jumpers.

**Think, Man, Think!:** With a minute and a half remaining, and the Cavs leading by five (86-81), Drew Gooden missed a jump shot. The rebound came down along the right baseline. New Jersey's Carter clearly had position for the rebound. Nevertheless, Anderson Varejao jumped over Carter's back, desperately trying to get the ball. As a result:

- Andy was whistled for the foul (his fifth, putting him in danger of being told that he could not play with the other kids any longer);
- Carter made both free throws, cutting the Cleveland lead to 86-83;
- All of this happened while the clock was

stopped at 1:28.

There's a fine line between *hustle* and *desperation*.

**About Those Last Few Minutes....:** The Cavs almost kicked away a six point lead with two minutes remaining. They went up 86-80 after Varejao made a pair of free throws. Over those last two minutes, they missed all three of their field goal attempts (any of which would have essentially iced the game and turned the final minute into a free throw competition). Had they executed on just one of those plays, they would have been able to send the series back to Cleveland rather comfortably. Instead, they gave the Nets a chance to win the game in the end. Until they learn how to not let an opponent back into the game that way, they will be *just* short of the Detroit/San Antonio level.

**Memo To Big Z:** Find your jump shot. Soon. Please. (It looked like you were getting on track in the second half; hopefully that's the spark you need.)

## **ONE FOLLOW-UP ON A PIECE OF ... ER, ITEM FROM A FEW WEEKS AGO:**

**Klee Has Kompetition!:** [Several weeks ago](#), I reported on Dual Action Cleanse, the brainchild of one Klee Irwin, and the infomercials of which have been saturating the airwaves of this great nation.

*(I believe that I have now set a record for most times linking to one's previous work in an article. □ Let's see one of you readers find a Web site to confirm or deny THAT one!)*

As a result of my exhaustive research (which consisted of listening to the radio while writing

this column), I can now confirm that Klee does not have the entire natural-cleansing world to himself. The good folks at a company called Dayton Industries have introduced

### [Puranol](#)

, a product that purports to ... well, let's say &quot;cleanse you naturally.&quot; No word yet on whether the maker of Puranol is advertising via the infomercial route, or (if so) whether he also stepped off the set of *Deliverance*

. We'll be sure to investigate this situation further ( *read: maybe they'll re-run the same radio spot next hour* ), and report on any developments.

## **ONE TINY BIT OF COMMENTARY ABOUT GAME THREE:**

**Cause And Effect:** [Last Thursday](#), I poked some fun at my wife for her attention to details that really are not that important to the outcome of a game. (She still hates Seattle's

[Mickael Gelabale](#)

because of his absurdly skinny legs.

[OK, she may have a point there](#)

.) The next day, she told me that she wanted a divorce. (No, I am not kidding. You knew there had to be a reason that there was no GBS after Game Three, right? Not like I was just going to sit that one out.)

Maybe I should have praised her incisive analysis of New Jersey's high socks.

Anyway, it is good to be back in the saddle.

THIS JUST IN: Maybe my next wife will be TCF's own [Steve Buffum](#), as he just now

sent an e-mail demonstrating that same high level of perception:

*Vince Carter looks like a grandfather gardening in those black socks.*

I can't disagree, Buff. Say, what are you doing Saturday night?

## **WHAT LIES AHEAD:**

The series returns to Cleveland for Game Five tomorrow evening. The

Cavs are in prime position to close out the series and head to the Eastern Conference finals for the first time since 1992.