

Well, we did it. After two heartbreaking losses in Detroit that the Cavs easily could have (should have) won, LeBron and the boys came back home, took both games, and tied the series up at two games apiece. In his latest, Papa Cass touches on last night's thrilling win ... and talks about the Cavs being so close, yet so far from the franchise's first NBA Finals appearance.



In the NBA Playoffs, you are only one win away from feeling a whole heck of a lot better about yourself, so let's not overblow the depths of the Pistons sorrow as they head home for a pivotal Game 5 Thursday night.

The Cavaliers do not yet have the Pistons "on the ropes." What they do have is an even series and the knowledge that if they can figure out a way to win two of the next three, they will advance to the franchise's first-ever NBA Finals.

(Aside: How crazy-good does it feel to say "Cavs" and "first-ever NBA Finals" in the same breath? So close, and yet, still so far at the moment.)

What the Cavs also have is a thoroughly-frustrated Pistons club that is searching for answers. The Pistons got away with a pair of shaky games in their house when the Cavs failed to hit enough clutch shots. The Cavs, on the other hand, surged ahead in the fourth quarter with great authority in their two home wins.

In short, the Pistons survived Games 1 and 2. The Cavs made huge statements with Games 3 and 4. The series is tied, but there is no question which team feels like it has the momentum heading into Game 5.

But now, the real test: Cleveland has to get at least one win on the road to win the series. One win with the crowd cheering against you. One win in which the Pistons are likely to get some home-cooked calls while LeBron James get steamrolled to the tune of utter silence from the refs' whistles.

But this is how good teams become great: They figure out how to deal with the

petty injustices of being the underdog without letting it get under their skin.

I've said it all along: This series is a litmus test. If the Cavs are good enough to fight through the bad calls and non-calls, if they are good enough to stick some clutch baskets and win a game or two at The Palace of Auburn Hills, they will be good enough to win this series, and possibly good enough to vie for a championship this year. If not, we're going to have to wait a bit longer, like it or not.

But back to Game 4...

The cast of heroes probably isn't going to change much from win to win. You know LeBron is going to factor heavily into any Cavs postseason win, and he did again on Tuesday night. It wasn't as spectacular as his 32, 9 and 9 outburst in Game 3, but LeBron still dropped in 25 points, 13 of them in the fourth quarter.

And until further notice, LeBron and Daniel Gibson are officially Cleveland's Butch and Sundance. Batman and Robin. The King and Boobie.

Larry Hughes ended up starting, thanks in large part to a pre-game cortisone shot in his ailing foot. But once again, it was Gibson, not Hughes, on the floor in crunch time.

Gibson scored 21 points, but not how you'd expect it. He went just 1-for-4 from beyond the arc. Tuesday, he did his damage by driving to the hoop and drawing fouls.

At the free-throw line, in a season in which the Cavs could easily have earned the nickname "Mikey's Rimbangers" for their atrocious free-throw shooting, Gibson turned in one of the greatest free-throw shooting performances in Cavs playoff history. He took 12 free throws, and didn't miss one of them.

In a game won by four points, every single one of those converted free throws was crucial.

LeBron got in on the act as well, making 8-of-9 from the stripe, including 5-for-5 in the fourth quarter, which included the Cavs' final two points of the game, essentially securing the win.

Drew Gooden also gets major props for having his 15-foot jumper working all night, en route to 19 points. Of course, most of us would rather see him make his living down low, but if the shot is falling and he has confidence taking it, let he who is without recreation-league jump-shot sin cast the first stone.

LeBron and Gibson are the stories of the past two games, but perhaps the story of the series to this point is Cleveland's ability to stifle Chauncey Billups.

Billups had 23 points, but finished just 2-of-9 from beyond the arc and was once again harassed into critical turnovers. Billups, a sure-handed point guard who averaged two turnovers a game during the regular season, has been averaging about five per game in this series. Tuesday, he hit that mark, including a costly throwaway to Drew Gooden in the closing minutes.

Shortly before writing this, [Joel Hammond](#) and I had a brief conversation about the series. Joel feels the Cavs are in Billups' head. He might be right.

I chalk it up to Mike Brown's defensive schemes and the players' willingness to execute them. As I told Joel, Brown might have a ways to go as an offensive strategist, but give him a large amount of credit: His defensive schemes so far in the playoffs have been nearly flawless.

Brown knows that Billups is the engine that makes the Pistons go at both ends of the floor, but particularly on offense, where the Pistons don't possess a true go-to superstar like LeBron. Contain Billups, and you are going to make life a lot harder on Detroit at the offensive end.

Based on the Pistons' point totals of 79, 79, 82 and 87 so far in this series, Brown knows what he is doing on defense, and his players realize he knows what he is doing on defense.

If you're Brown, you don't change a thing heading into Game 5, and just hope that your team can handle the fourth-quarter pressure of a road playoff game better than they did during their first two tries at The Palace.

It's a tall order, but one that can be accomplished by a team that is suddenly starting to think in terms of this year, not just next year.