

NBA Finals GAME THREE - The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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No, the Cavs are not dead. But they are on the bed, with a passel of nearby strange machines beeping occasionally, and with a stream of family members stopping by to say goodbye. And why is that nice man in the black suit with the white collar leaning over and saying some choice words in Latin? Cleveland lost to San Antonio last night, 75-72, in Game Three of the NBA Finals. The loss puts the Cavs in a 3-0 hole in this best-of-seven series. They now need to beat the three-time NBA champions four games in a row, including the last two in San Antonio. Johnny Hnat takes us through the disappointing Game Three loss for the Cavaliers.



THE SUMMARY:

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Cleveland lost to San Antonio last night, 75-72, in Game Three of the NBA Finals. The loss puts the Cavs in a 3-0 hole in this best-of-seven series. They now need to beat the three-time NBA champions four games in a row, including the last two in San Antonio. Of course, no team has ever come back from a 3-0 deficit in a series (at least in basketball; I suppose you never know if the Cavs have a little [Red Sox](#)

in them).

Unlike the first two games, in which the Spurs held huge leads throughout most of the games, Game Three was a nail-biter. San Antonio briefly took 10 point leads a couple of times during the fourth quarter (a Tim Duncan bank shot gave the Spurs a 60-50 lead early in the frame; later, a Michael Finley three-pointer provided them a 67-57 lead with 6:38 to go); otherwise, neither team led by double digits.

The Cavs led for most of the first half. They took their largest lead of the game with just under three minutes remaining in the second quarter when Daniel Gibson (*he is no longer "Boobie" after last night's performance*) made a layup, pushing the score to 38-30. San Antonio roared back, scoring the last 10 points of the half (a couple of Tony Parker baskets mixed in with three-pointers by Robert Horry and Brent Barry) to give the Spurs a 40-38 lead at the intermission. As it happened, the Cavs would not hold another lead for the rest of the game.

San Antonio began to pull away in the fourth quarter, eventually extending their lead to 10 points (see above). Realizing that their season was on the line, the Cavs fought back. Sasha Pavlovic drilled a three-pointer to cut the lead to seven, then LeBron James scored on a layup and hit the resulting free throw to further slice the lead to four. Both teams decided not to score for the next three and a half minutes (they combined for seven missed shots and four turnovers during this stretch; somewhere out there, Marv Albert was hoping to die, so that he could turn over in his grave). LeBron finally broke the ice with a pair of free throws, making the score 67-65 with 1:55 to go.

Both teams scored on their next two possessions. Duncan was fouled and sank both free throws ... then James responded with a knifing drive to the hole for a layup ... then Mr. [Longoria](#) swished a three-pointer, putting the Spurs up by five with a minute left ... then Pavlovic responded with a three-pointer of his own from the corner to cut the lead back to two.

Parker then had a shot blocked by Anderson Varejao, giving the Cavs the ball and the chance to tie or take the lead. And then ... I can't even describe it here. If you need to know what happened, just skip ahead to the "What I Didn't Like" section.

James had the usual stat-stuffing effort, finishing with 25 points (tops in the game), seven assists (ditto), and eight rebounds. Zydrunas Ilgauskas (12 points, 18 rebounds) and Drew Gooden (13 points, 12 rebounds) both posted double-doubles. Unlike the first two games, San Antonio's trio of Parker, Duncan, and Manu Ginobili did not lead the way; while Parker and Duncan were the team's top two scorers (with 17 and 14 points, respectively), Ginobili had a horrible game (three points on 0-of-7 shooting from the floor). Bruce Bowen had the Damon Jones line, scoring 13 points with 12 of those coming on four three-pointers. (It's not truly a Damon Jones line, as that means Bowen actually went to the free throw line for that other point.)

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

His Defense Is Now His Defense: Pavlovic had his best

game of the Finals and maybe even the entire playoffs. Offensively, he was not THAT terrific: 5-of-15 shooting is not going to win you many awards (also his two three-pointers were huge, and he also had a very nice reverse layup in traffic). More impressive was his defense. If you took any game-action photos of Sasha, you might see him in Ginobili's jersey; that's how little room Sasha was giving Manu to operate.

So THAT'S What His Middle Finger Looks Like: In [my review](#)

of Game Two, I chided Ilgauskas for a couple of subpar efforts ("any time you want to show up in this series, please feel welcome").

If that's all it took to get him to put up a 12-point, 18-rebound effort (including 10 offensive rebounds), I would have said it a long time ago. The big guy was incredibly active at both ends of the floor. On offense, the Cavs made a concerted effort to get him the ball in the post (not just the token "let's pass it to him on the first play of the game", followed by "and then let's forget about him for the remaining 47 minutes"). San Antonio kept double teaming him, and he kept kicking the ball out to the open man. (The open man could not hit a shot to save his life, but that's not Z's problem.)

I also liked Z's energy on the offensive boards. When you see

him with a high number of offensive boards next to his name, you figure that he got most of them on a single Moses Malone sequence ("six offensive rebounds later, the Cavs had two points"). Not so last night. He did have one tip-fest sequence, but grabbed quite a few other misses from his teammates, and also had a couple of back taps to the safety valve at halfcourt.

Z, along with Varejao, also did a tremendous job on Duncan, holding The Big Fundamental to 6-of-17 from the floor.

Doing The Honorable Thing: Did Larry Hughes willingly take himself out of Game Three (he was inactive), or did Coach Mike Brown strongly "suggest" to him that he would not see any playing time, so he may as well use a sick day? I do not know.

Regardless, it was good to see the more active (and healthy) legs of Gibson and Eric Snow chasing Parker around the court. Parker had a much tougher time in Game Three, shooting only 7-of-17 from the field, and getting very few opportunities to drive to the hoop (and none of the barely-contested ones that were far too common in the games in San Antonio).

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

LOST: One Brain. If Found, Please Contact A. Varejao, Quicken Loans Arena, Cleveland, OH: You already know which play I am referencing, don't you? (No, I am not talking about the one where he dribbled the ball out of bounds off his own foot, although that certainly would be a candidate.) If not ... well, you won't have to rewind the Tivo very far. With 23 seconds remaining, and the Cavs trailing 72-70, Varejao blocked a Tony Parker shot and collared the loose ball. (No, that is not the brain-dead part. So far, Andy gets a gold star.) He passed the ball to LeBron (also a good idea), then sprinted downcourt and set up on the left side of the lane (still no problems). LeBron passed the ball back to Andy.

I understand that the pressure of the big stage can make people act strangely. We've all sat in our living rooms and yelled at the doofus on *Jeopardy!* or *Wheel of Fortune* who cannot answer a very simple question ("this guy is so stupid ... it's Count Rushmore!") ... but the glare of the TV lights can cause a

couple of the ol' brain cells to die. That must be what happened to Andy.

The official play-by-play description of the game describes what happened next as:

Varejao Layup Shot: Missed

Actually, the following description would be closer to the target:

Varejao dribbled, spun to the hole, and as the capacity crowd of 20,562 all yelled "what the spork?" in unison (how did they ever know to chant something that would be suitable for print in a family-friendly column the next morning?), he laid the ball in the general direction of the rim, where it fell off harmlessly.

I do not know if this play was a breakdown. The Cavs still had a couple of timeouts remaining; setting up the last possession seems like a good place to use one of them. (Coach Mike Brown practically ran onto the court yelling something at LeBron, which makes me wonder if he was trying to signal for a timeout; if so, somebody should tell Coach Brown that coaches are now allowed to call for time.)

Speaking Of Setting Up Plays: A few seconds later (in game time; it was actually about 20 minutes later in real time), the Cavs trailed 75-72 with five seconds to go. This time, they did call time out and set up a play. Looks like the coaching staff turned to page 42 of the playbook, titled "Inbound The Ball To LeBron And Pray". (Note: this title also appears on pages 3, 5, 10 through 24, and 28 through 40 of the playbook.) LeBron stepped back from about thirty feet and fired away. The ball clanged off the rim, and the game was over.

Is that honestly the best shot attempt that they could have found in five and a half seconds?

The Answer To That Last Question:□ Maybe It Was:

We really cannot blame James for not passing to a teammate in that situation: the rest of the team had a horrible game from the floor. Overall, Cleveland shot 29 of 79 (36.7%) from the field, including an "incoming!"-level 3 of 19 (that's 15.8%, folks) from three point land. LeBron and Gibson were the worst offenders: each missed the five shots that they took from beyond the arc. The Quicken Loans crowd was waiting for someone,

anyone

, to hit from long distance. Aside from the two Pavlovic bombs during the fourth quarter rally, and an earlier trey from Jones, it was not meant to be.

TRUE STORY (How Fast And How Far You've Fallen Department): Prior to the game, a vendor was hawking "got boobie?" T-shirts (think of the "got milk?" campaign from a few years back) for \$20. After the game, the price was \$10.

Stevie Wonder Was Right:□ Superstition AIN'T The Way : As you know if you have read this space recently, I am in the process of getting a divorce.

(That's right ... here we go again!)

As you also know if you read this column during the Detroit series, I noticed a connection between fighting with my ex-wife and the Cavs playing well.

Understand, I am not normally one to believe in superstitions, or that what I do has the slightest effect on a game in which I am not a participant. That being said ... I did notice a couple of, well, *correlations* between actions of mine and the Cavs playing well.

One of these correlations concerned a Cavs shirt that I own. It is actually not much of a shirt - a nondescript gray shirt (the kind you would wear when changing the oil, or that you would use to mop up the spilled oil from the garage floor) that says "Cavaliers Basketball" on it in a very vanilla font. As Cavs merchandise goes, it is about as non-Cavs as it gets.

Anyway, I wore this shirt while watching Game Four of the Detroit series, and ... the Cavs won! So I wore the same shirt while watching Game Five of that same series

(I think I washed it in between games), and ... the Cavs won! Naturally, that means that I had to wear it to Game Six, even though it was a 90 degree day and the shirt practically roasted me while waiting for the Quicken Loans Arena doors to open, but ... the Cavs won!

Now I must confess to a huge mistake: I did NOT wear the shirt for Game One of the Spurs series. Something about it being in the wash. (It really WAS a 90 degree day when it was last worn.) Well, we know how Game One turned out.

Convinced that I had established a connection between that shirt and the Cavs winning (hey, I now had *four* data points to prove the theory!), I sat down to watch Game Two, ugly gray shirt on my back. Oooops. I guess we need a new theory.

In my case, that theory goes: fight with the ex! *That's sure to bring the Cavs a win*, I thought. My ex was only too happy to comply, not realizing that bringing her new man around the kids is a

Bad Idea and will make John Really, Really Mad. By tip-off, we had a good 24-hour-plus argument going.

Those poor Spurs

, I thought.

Sure, they are the heavy favorites, with three All-Stars and a cast of solid complementary players, but they are no match for a woman scorned.□ (Even if that woman has no business feeling scorned.)

WHAT'S A SURE SIGN THAT YOU ARE WRITING TOO MUCH ABOUT YOUR DIVORCE?: When this messages comes into the imaginary e-mailbag:

Dear John,

You are writing too much about your divorce.□ Please stop.

Sincerely,

Hiko

Anyway, you know the result. So now my theory about fighting with my ex has gone out the window. Maybe, just *maybe*, the result has more to do with how the Cavs and Spurs play. (Just in case, however, if the Cavs go on a run during tomorrow's game, I will not move from wherever I am sitting. Kids, take note - you'll have to give yourselves your own baths tomorrow night.)

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs face what will hopefully be the first of four potential last games of the season tomorrow night, when Game Four of the series takes place at Quicken Loans Arena.