



## **Huge Third Quarter Fuels Rout Over 53-18 Mavericks**

We're back baybee.

Eight long seasons. Zydrunas Ilgauskas's rookie year. A defensive minded team led by Mike Fratello. Shawn Kemp as the centerpiece.

For the first time since the 1997-98 season, the Cleveland Cavaliers are back in the playoffs, and also happen to be playing their best ball of the year.

The Cavs rode a huge third quarter to a convincing home win against one of the best teams in basketball last night. Down one point at the half, the Cavs shot out of the second half gates with a 17-4 run that would propel the team to a 107-94 win over the 53-18 Dallas Mavericks.

The win, and the manner in which they won the game, was crucial for this team in the face of what happened in Dallas two weeks ago when

they lost to these same Mavericks after leading by 19 points at the half. The Cavs had fallen into a pattern of playing poorly out of the break, and have reversed that mightily as of late, playing some of their best basketball of the season in the second halves of games the past two weeks. The Cavs have now won six straight games, and have won seven in a row at home. They are now 13 games over .500 at 42-29.

Yet again, the team was led by an inspired performance from their young superstar LeBron James. LeBron had 19 of his 46 points in the third quarter, blowing open what had been a very competitive game in the first half. James was 16-23 from the floor, and could not be stopped on his trademark power drives to the bucket. James also became the youngest player in league history to surpass 6,000 points last evening.

The game got a little physical in the midst of the Cavalier second half run, with Dallas committing two hard flagrant fouls on James as he drove to the hoop. The first by Erick Dampier, the second by D.J. Mbenga. Both times, LeBron coolly rose from the ground and drained both free throws. And much to the delight of this writer, the Cavs came right back at Dallas. On subsequent possessions, Big Z shoved Jason Terry to the floor, and Donyell Marshall got teed up for pushing Mbenga.

In addition to officially clinching the playoffs, the win also put the Cavs another step closer towards cementing the #4 seed in the East, and home court advantage in the playoffs. This is a very exciting time to be a Cleveland sports fan, and I'm loving every minute of it.