

Hide The Women & Children

Written by {ga=samamico}

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Good God! The Cavs were absolutely blown out of the water from start to finish last night, falling to the Dallas Mavericks 94-72 before a packed house at The Q on opening night. LeBron was held scoreless in the first half and finished with just ten points. The Cavs defense was atrocious as well, as the Mavs big men had their way all night. Sam Amico pens about last night's disaster for us this morning.



The Cavaliers couldn't rebound, defend, or make an open shot, and struggled to get the ball to LeBron James.

Other than that, things went great for the defending Eastern Conference champions in their season-opener, a 94-72 loss to the visiting Dallas Mavericks.

Did I mention that James had ZERO points and THREE fouls in the first half? Or just ONE measly field goal by the end of the third quarter?

This isn't intended to rip on James or the Cavs, but if this is the new offense Coach Mike Brown promised, most fans are probably asking, "Can we go back to the old one?"

The defense wasn't to be excused either, as the Cavs allowed Mavs center DeSagana Diop to come out and do his best Wilt Chamberlain impersonation -- hitting four of his first six shots on an array of layups, post moves and dunks. By the end of the first quarter, Diop had scored more than half as many points (eight) as the Cavs had as a team (15).

Remember, we're talking about DeSagana Diop -- a nice player, but one who averaged 2.3 points per game last season.

As Brown said, "We have to get back to the basics defensively. We have to be in the right position to help our teammates, and not allow layup after layup or dunk after dunk."

Obviously, the Cavs' loss was about more than just Diop having his way. Much more, in fact. It was mainly about their ability to contain any of the Mavs' big men. Reigning MVP Dirk Nowitzki barely had to work on his way to 15 points, and even relative unknown Brandon Bass finished with six points and three rebounds in 16 underrated minutes. Just imagine if All-Star forward Josh Howard had been in uniform for the Mavs (instead of serving the first of a two-game suspension for a preseason shoving incident).

Add it up and suddenly, Cavs holdout forward Anderson Varejao may have some bargaining power. And suddenly, it may go further than his marketable hairdo, catchy "Wild Thing" nickname and penchant for taking charges.

Varejao is largely responsible for the overused NBA phrase "energy off the bench," and the flat Cavs certainly could have used a major pick-me-up on this night.

Cavs guard Larry Hughes implied as much afterward. "From the jump tonight, we didn't have any energy," he said. "That's something we'll need to correct."

Granted, Varejao isn't likely to provide more than the six points per game he contributed last season, but at least Brown could use him to frustrate Nowitzki and shut down (gulp) Diop.

Then there was the Cavs' guard play, which feature Hughes' Cleveland-long shooting slump. The Mavs left Hughes open, but he was only able knock down 2 of 13 shots for seven points.

Meanwhile, neither Devin Brown nor Damon Jones proved to be worthy replacements for Sasha Pavlovic, who sat on the bench in street clothes after ending his holdout the previous night. And it's pretty obvious that Shannon Brown isn't ready for regular minutes.

"Sasha gives us another scorer, and we sure could have used that

tonight," said Cavs forward Drew Gooden.

They also could have used someone to guard Jason Terry, who came off the bench and sizzled to the tune of 6 of 8 shooting on three-pointers, finishing with a team-high 24 points. Or at the very least, the Cavs could have used someone to keep Terry occupied on defense.

So like the frontcourt with Varejao, the backcourt may have missed Pavlovic more than even some team insiders predicted.

But most troubling for the Cavs was the fact James made just 2 of 11 field goals and scored a paltry 10 points. This from a guy who was picked as this year's league MVP in a preseason vote by general managers, and a guy who probably needs to score close to 30 every night for the Cavs to have a chance.

Again, that was hardly the fault of James -- as before the game, a dry-erase board in the Cavs' locker room warned the team to be ready for their opponent's "blitz against LeBron." Well, the Mavs blitzed and the Cavs buckled.

Also before the game, James addressed the low expectations most of the national media has for his team. "It's nothing new to us that we're always the underdog or that no one ever gives us credit," he said. "We're not that good on paper, and it's some people's job to report what they see on paper."

On paper, the Cavs are likely better than what they displayed against the team that finished with the best record in the league last season. And yes, this was just one game in a very long season.

But maybe it's time to make getting Varejao in uniform a high priority. It may not make the Cavs better on paper, but it sure couldn't hurt on the court.

Notes: The Cavs waived forward Anthony Tolliver before tip-off to make room for Pavlovic. Tolliver played in three preseason games and averaged 2.0 points. ... Mavs veteran swingman Eddie Jones wasn't about to crow about the defensive job his team did on James. "He just missed shots," Jones said. "That's all, he missed shots."

Sam Amico can be reached at amico@probasketballnews.com .