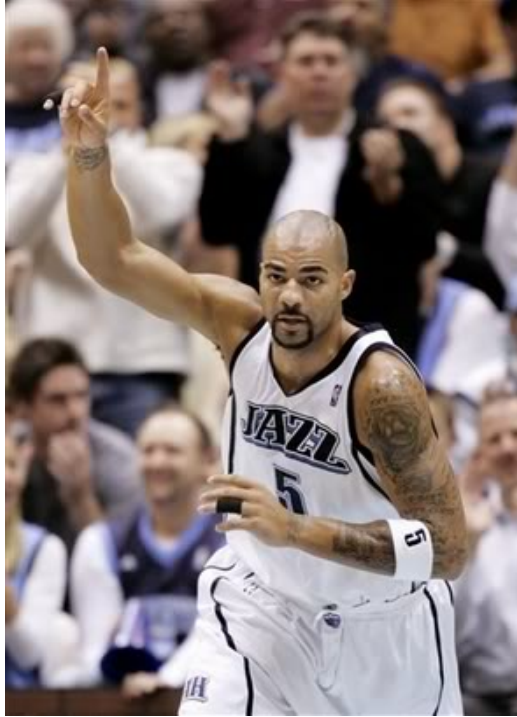


Cavs/Jazz: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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The Cavs dropped a heartbreaker in Utah last night, falling 103-101 to the Jazz on a last second running layup by standout Utah point guard Deron Williams. LeBron had a monster game, a triple double, and hit a three to tie with six seconds left before Deron's game winner. John Hnat checks in to recap the game, introduce "The Z Bald Watch" and the "Sasha Pavlovic Factor", and comment on Drew Gooden's phobia of inboundng the ball in today's PHENOMENAL column.



THE SUMMARY:

As Cleveland sports fans, we're used to heartbreak. We're conditioned to accept losses by our beloved sports teams. We know that if one of those teams can find a way to lose a game in disappointing fashion, they'll find it. We also know that before too long, one of the other teams in town will find a way to lose in an even more devastating manner.

Like last night.

After LeBron James tied the game with a three-pointer with six seconds

remaining, Utah's Deron Williams responded with a coast-to-coast drive (he was the hot knife; the Cavs were the soft butter) for a layup that gave the Jazz a 103-101 win over the Wine 'N Gold (And Sometimes Navy) at EnergySolutions Arena.

Cleveland trailed almost the entire game - they fell behind right from the start, held only one lead (during the third quarter, when a James layup gave them a short-lived 57-56 advantage), and were tied only three times (including 0-0). At the same time, they were never out of the game either. They fell behind by eight points with a minute remaining in the first quarter ... then closed to within three to end the quarter, thanks to a buzzer-beating three-pointer by the [World's Greatest Shooter](#). Utah pushed their lead back to nine points early in the second ... only to have the Cavs storm back to within a point, at 43-42, after Sasha Pavlovic drilled a three-pointer of his own.

Fast-forward to the final minute, with the Jazz holding a 99-94 edge. With 27 seconds remaining LeBron rebounded a missed layup by Zydrunas Ilgauskas to cut the lead to three. He was fouled on the play, but missed the resulting free throw. And that may have been the best thing he could have done, as the ball caromed to Ilgauskas. After a time out, James drove through the Jazz' defense for a layup, making it a 99-98 games with 11 seconds left.

Utah's Ronnie Brewer got the ball on the inbounds play, and was immediately fouled, putting him at the line for two crucial free throws with nine seconds to go. Prior to the first free throw, Cleveland's Damon Jones gave Brewer his own particular "pep talk" of sorts, one that came pretty close to him drawing a technical foul. (At least, that's the vision I had. Coming from a sports world in which games have been lost because of players throwing their helmets,

having a last-minute technical seemed very possible.) In any case, Jones's words did nothing to distract Brewer, who sank both free throws.

On the resulting inbounds play, LeBron caught the ball some 25 feet away from the hoop, with a defender draped all over him. With six seconds left, he rose for a three pointer. *Swish*. Game tied at 101. Utah's going to call a time out to set up their final play. Right? Right? It's in the Big Book of Coaching, so they have to do that, right?

Not so much. We've been over this territory already, anyway: Williams drove the ball the length of the court, none of the Cavs seemed particularly interested in getting in his way, and he laid the ball in for the game-winner.

After coming within one assist of a triple-double the previous night against Oakland (*don't you mean Golden State*, you ask; we'll get back to this subject later), LeBron broke through against Utah, getting the triple-double with six minutes to go in the *third* quarter. He finished with 32 points, 15 rebounds, and 13 assists, all numbers that led both teams in those categories. Ilgauskas backed him with 18 points, and Pavlovic (who continues to get into game shape after his long holdout) added 17. Paul Millsap (yes, *the* Paul Millsap) paced the Jazz with 24 points, and Cleveland's favorite son Carlos Boozer added his usual double-double (23 points, 12 boards).

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Interesting Stat Of The Night: Despite losing the game, and despite trailing for virtually the entire contest, four of the five Cavs' starters had *positive* plus-minus ratings. Granted, they were not huge positive numbers (Gibson and James were plus-four; Pavlovic, plus-two; Ilgauskas, plus-one; Drew Gooden, the other starter, had a minus-two), but it is unusual to see a team lose and have four of its starters on the positive side of that line. I guess we can look at it as the starters doing well or the bench laying an egg. Because I need some filler on the "What I Liked" side of the ledger, we'll take it as a sign that the starting five is actually playing pretty well.

Five Games, And Still No Hair In Sight: The Z Bald Watch continues. The big man had yet another impressive game last night: 18 points, 14 rebounds, seven offensive boards, four blocks, and at least one solid elbow to Mehmet Okur's chin. (Wrong! [Okur does not actually have a chin.](#))

) It is true that he has been playing more minutes, and that the increased run explains some of the rise in his numbers this season; however, he played only 31 minutes last night.

Besides, why it is such an eye-opener to have a \$11 million player going for more than 30 minutes a night? Z is only 32 (yes, he looks at least ten years older, but he's looked the same all along; ten years from now, he will probably look young for

his age), and it has been several years since the foot problems that threatened his career. This is not to say that Z should play every minute or should be run into the ground during relatively meaningless November games; but if he is going to make star money, then we should expect him to play star minutes.

Five Games Into The Season, And I Already Need A

Thesaurus: One of the challenges of writing these game summaries is describing just how good LeBron James is, and how much good he does for the team night in and night out. It does not take long before you run out of ways to say "LeBron had another great game last night." Well, LeBron had another great game last night, notching his first triple-double of the season. After five games, he is nearly *averaging* a triple-double (27.6 points, 9.0 rebounds, 8.2 assists). He also added two more blocked shots last night, displaying yet another dimension of his game.

One early-season trend that has somewhat slipped through the cracks is that James is putting up these numbers while often guarding the opposition's best player, even if said player is at a different position than James's usual small forward spot. Against Gold ... er, Oakland the other night, James guarded point guard Baron Davis during much of crunch time. Last night, LeBron was often assigned to the Jazz's terrific young point guard, Williams. Williams had a decent night -- 15 points,

12 assists, and the game-winning basket - but he also shot 4-of-12 from the field and turned the ball over eight times. LeBron had a little to do with Williams' often-frustrating night.

Speaking Of The Defense: It's difficult to praise the defense too much when they surrender 103 points (although Utah came into the game averaging over 110 points per game, so the Cavs did contain them in some sense), but the Cavs are pretty clearly subscribing to the Bill Belichick theory of defense: take away the thing that the opposition likes to do the most, and make them beat you in a different way. The defensive strategy on Williams was an example of this concept. Coach Mike Brown consistently rotated larger, longer players (such as James and Devin Brown) on Williams. (Coach Brown certainly recalled last season's game in Utah, when Williams scored a career-high 33 points to pace the Jazz to a narrow victory.) It is not a foolproof strategy: it may leave other players wide open; but your chances are better if you force, say, Paul Millsap to beat you. (And if he does, then props to him.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Now We Know The Truth: Have you ever noticed that Drew Gooden does not like to inbound the ball? Inevitably after an opposition basket, when he finds himself near the ball, he will run away from it as though it carries the Ebola virus; one of the other Cavs will then have to jog back to the baseline for the inbound.

Maybe Drew knew something that we didn't. After a Boozer basket gave the Jazz a 13-7 lead, Gooden took the ball for the inbounds pass. "Pass" is not really accurate; it would be closer to the truth to say that he "randomly tossed the ball like a four-year-old girl." Utah's Ronnie Brewer stole the ball, and Utah soon had two more easy points.

I will never again curse under my breath when Gooden refuses to inbound the ball.

Let's Jump On Him Some More: Speaking of Gooden, and of boneheaded plays, he had a pretty crucial one with four minutes remaining. (Actually, Gooden had a terrible night, period. He shot 2-of-11 from the floor, scored eight points, and basically looked about as comfortable as a man jogging home from his own vasectomy. But players will have off nights; that's not why he's here.) Utah's Millsap was at the line for a pair of free throws with the Jazz clinging to a 91-89 lead. He made the first, but missed the second. The rebound came to Gooden. He treated

this

ball as though it not only carried the Ebola virus, but was

also covered with boogers. Utah scrambled for the ball, retained possession, and pushed the lead to five.

We can guess that Coach Brown was none too happy about the play, as he yanked Gooden (in crunch time of a close game) for the seldom-used Dwayne Jones moments later.

Time For A New Feature!: As basketball fans, we have to accept that players are not perfect. Less than half of all attempted field goals find their mark. Not every pass will reach its intended destination. And occasional brain cramps are going to happen.

That all being said ... the Cavs had some true brain-flatus moments last night. We've already spent enough time on Gooden's miscues; no need to continue beating that particular dead horse. Instead, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce a new recurring feature: the **Sasha Pavlovic Factor (SPF)**

. In much the same way that sunscreen has an SPF number that indicates its strength, the Sasha Pavlovic

Factor will give us a quick read on just how many lapses Sasha had the previous evening. There are at least two dimensions that contribute to the SPF: (1) the pointless, you-gotta-be-kidding-me turnovers; and (2) the "Christ, you're a six-foot-seven guy who can jump, how do you get shots blocked so often?" swats. And just as the SPF on sunscreen gets higher as it gets stronger (4 is essentially baby oil; 30 is a relatively strong sunblock; 60 means that you have gone inside), a higher Sasha Pavlovic Factor indicates a higher level of sun-baked-brain plays. In other words, as Cavs fans, we want this number to be low.

Last night, both components of the SPF were in full force. Sasha had the turnover machine warmed up early, as he made a terrible pass on a fast break, costing the Cavs an otherwise easy basket that would have cut the Utah lead to 5-4. Later in the quarter, he held the ball in front of him while in the corner. Utah's Brewer swatted the ball out of his hands, and that led to a Utah fast break. Sasha also had a "I'm shooting, no wait I'm passing!" turnover, as well as a terrible entry pass into Z in the post (this one coming when the Cave were trailing 56-55 and in position to take the first lead of the game). Pavs also missed a couple of layups, and had the obligatory swatted shot in the fourth quarter, when

Millsap sent one of his layup attempts into the middle of next week.

However, Sasha did score 17 points, and he is just rounding into shape, so we'll cut him some slack today. His SPF for the game is a solid **30**.

(Incidentally, Damon Jones probably deserves a 60 just for one play: his attempt at a *SportsCenter*-ish highlight reel alley-oop to LeBron on a fast break, which sailed over the King's head, when almost any other pass in the world would have resulted in two points.)

Every Achilles Has His Heel: The one thing that James did not do last night was shoot free throws; LeBron shot a Varejaoean 7-of-15 from the line. (By comparison, the rest of the Cavs combined shot a solid 12-of-14; the Jazz made 34-of-40 from the stripe.) Even this dark cloud had a silver lining: James' woes at the free throw line drove ESPN commentator (and former NBA head coach) Hubie Brown nuts. (Then again, Hubie is driven nuts by many events, including turnovers, blown defensive

assignments, the sun rising in the east in the morning, etc.)

All Over Again: When the Cavs played in Utah last season, I noted that the game-entertainment geniuses at EnergySolutions Arena [played an annoying sound](#)

after every Utah basket. (

Note to newer readers: I link to my previous columns the way they used to vote in Chicago: early and often.

) It sounds like the evil spawn of a cowbell and the clink of a slot machine spitting out nickels,. It is a sound that earworms its way into your brain and stays there, well, for life.

Anyway, they're still doing it this season. After every Jazz basket: *ching ching ching ching*. After every Jazz blocked shot: *ching*

ching ching ching

. Just to encourage the Jazz to make a good play on defense:

ching ching ching take AK-47 (no, not the [Jazz's AK-47](#)

; the real thing) to the nearest rooftop and start unloading

. I realize that this is Utah; I'm not expecting a cutting-edge fan experience. But dear God, you folks are one step removed from the county fair.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Just Because I'm Curious: Have any of you texted "Team" to "adidas"? In my mind, if you do this, then Kevin Garnett will jump out of your cell phone, ready for a game of pickup ball. I'm guessing that the reality is somewhat less dramatic. (
Call me cynical if you must.
)

Let's Jinx This No-Hitter ASAP: As last year's readers may have noticed, I am no longer writing this column after every Cavs game. (The reason is that I lost my pictures of Swerb with the donkey have had to scale back due to other commitments.) Anyway, after five games of this young season, I think it is worth noting the following statistics:

- * Cavs' Record In Games That I Cover: **0-3**
- * Cavs' Record In Games That I Do Not Cover: **2-0**

It's probably too early to draw any conclusions, but I suspect that Cavs fans may kidnap me and keep me away from a keyboard if it continues much longer.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The road trip continues. Sacramento Friday night, then the L.A. Clippers on Sunday evening.

I realize that creating a schedule for 30 NBA teams is not easy. You have to make sure each team plays all the other teams a certain

number of times. You have limitations on the number of consecutive games, the length of road trips, and the like. You have arenas that sometimes are unavailable because they are booked for other cultural events (read: *monster trucks*).

That all said, why did the Cavs play in Oakland (you can call them Golden State if you'd like; I call a spade a spade) on Tuesday night, then fly to Salt Lake City (some 700 miles away) for last night's game, only to return to Sacramento (another 700 miles) for tomorrow's contest against the Kings? Would it not have made more sense just to stay in the Bay Area and play Oakland and Sacramento (they are 81 miles apart, according to Google Maps) on back-to-back nights?

Is there a reason why I'm not Commissioner of the NBA?