

James, Cavs Proving They're For Real

Written by {ga=samamico}

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In an 82-game season, you're not gonna win them all. Especially when one of those 82 is the fourth game of a West Coast swing. That is what make the Cavaliers' 93-91 win in Sacramento Friday all the more meaningful. And in Sam Amico's latest, he says maybe it's time for the all the Cavs' critics to start considering them one of the elite teams in the Eastern Conference. Sam recaps last nights win over the Kings out on the left coast.



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The Cavs are 2-2 on their swing through the so-called tougher conference, outplaying Phoenix for a half before losing, and falling to Utah on a shot at the buzzer.

But if we learned anything about the Cavs, it's that LeBron James (26 points) is one young star who isn't willing to rest on last season's accomplishments.

In case you missed, James proved he knows what it takes to be an all-time great

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in the Sacramento win -- saving his best for when it meant the very most. He had just seven points in the first half, seemingly sitting back and letting the game come to him. He forced nothing for the first 24 minutes.

Then came the fourth quarter, when LeBron proved he truly is the King of Cleveland basketball, and perhaps all of the NBA. And with performances like the one James gave Friday, it's easy to start believing this team really IS a legitimate contender.

"You've just got to seize the moment," James told reporters afterward. "I like to just take what the offense gives me, and I make plays happen. In the fourth, I was able to get some rebounds and force the issue more, and it turned into good things. The team did a great job feeding off me."

Sacramento is a depleted team, having been without starting point guard Mike Bibby (thumb) in this early part of the season. The Kings also have a first-year pro coach in former NBA guard Reggie Theus . Their star is none other than Zanesville, Ohio, product Kevin Martin -- the Richard Hamilton-esque shooting guard who played his college ball at Western Carolina. Martin left college after his junior year and has done well for himself in the pros.

He proved yet again to be one of the league's most underrated players, slicing and dicing his way through the Cavs' defense (and hitting a whopping 17 free throws) on his way to 32 points. And the Cavs weren't safe until Martin missed a long jumper at the buzzer.

But clearly, this night belonged to James. Or at least the fourth quarter belonged to him.

In fact, the main basketball lesson we're learning on this West Coast swing is that James has no trouble about being the team's leader. Last season, we all thought

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he was the leader. This year, he's TELLING us, in his words and his actions.

Take the Golden State win for example. At one point, James laid into power forward Drew Gooden for taking what James saw as an ill-advised shot.

"I'm the leader of this team, and he has to know what is a good shot and what is not a good shot. I got on him about it. It's nothing personal, I just want him to get better," James said. "You explain it, and then you move on as men and as professionals. It can be uncomfortable, but I have to do it. I don't want to embarrass my teammates in any way. But if it happens again, I'll go off again."

It is the type of take-charge attitude that is giving the Cavs a reason to believe in the toughest part of the regular-season schedule.

NOTES

Zydrunas Ilgauskas may not necessarily be making an effort to rebound more, but he sure has been a monster on the boards this season. Through six games, Z is grabbing 14.3 rebounds per game -- nearly double his career average of 7.8. ... Devin Brown was a big reason the Cavs were able to keep Friday's game close so that James could finish the job. Brown tallied 20 points and grabbed 11 rebounds and displayed general all-around hustle.