

Cavs/Bucks - The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Ouch. Playing at home, on several days' rest, against a Milwaukee team that had not won in Cleveland in years, the Cavs choked away an early 14-point lead and lost, 111-107, to the Bucks. In John's recap of last night's events, he comments on the lack of plays ran for Boobie Gibson, the Cavs allowing over 103 points per game this season, Ira Newble seeing time at power forward, and the brutal broadcast team of Fred McLeod and Campy Russell.



THE SUMMARY:

What a bomb. Playing at home, on several days' rest, against a Milwaukee team that had not won in Cleveland in years, the Cavs choked away an early 14-point lead and lost, 111-107, to the Bucks.

Frankly, I can't bring myself to discuss the game in much detail. I've already forgotten about it. Who did you say the Cavs played last night?

LeBron James had his usual MVP-level effort, pacing the Cavs with 34 points. Daniel Gibson backed him up with 26, and the double-double twins, Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Drew Gooden, did it again, as Z put up

16 points and 12 boards, and Gooden posted 11 and 13. Michael Redd led the Bucks with 34 points of his own (including an 18-point outburst in the third quarter, when he hit shots from everywhere east of the Mississippi), and Mo Williams scored 20 points and had nine assists.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Maybe They Should Have Called The Game After Eight

Minutes: Unlike past games, the Cavs got off to a very quick start. They scored eight of the game's first ten points, had built a double-digit lead less than halfway into the first quarter, and held leads of 22-8 and 25-11 (there's those 14 point leads I told you about) later in the first frame.

And Here's Why They Had Those Leads: Gibson scored nine points in the first quarter en route to his career-high (at least in the regular season) 26 points. As you would probably guess, he was deadly from three-point range, delivering on five of eight from beyond the arc. But he also showed his developing interior game, proving that he can take the ball to the rim. His first two points of the game came on a drive in which he adroitly used his body to shield the ball from Bucks center Andrew Bogut.

Here's a thought. Why not involve Gibson in the offense more? He's the team's best outside shooter ... and he is a guard ...

maybe he could be a *shooting guard*? Okay, enough sarcasm; I just wonder if this offense would be further ahead if it ran some plays (like maybe an occasional Rip Hamilton-esque screen) for the Cavs' second-year guard.

Lather, Rinse, Repeat: LeBron: 34 points, seven assists, seven rebounds, one huge blocked shot, 11-of-12 from the free-throw line. I think I even saw selling popcorn in the stands during one timeout. His two best plays of the night: one, a Jordanesque show-and-go for a layup that gave the Cavs a 36-24 lead; and two, a driving no-look pass to Gooden for a dunk that put the Cavs up 53-49 late in the first half.

Hey, Somebody Else Can Pass Too!: Sasha Pavlovic neared a career high with five assists in the game. His best one: an over-the-top entry pass to Ilgauskas for an easy layup in the game's opening minutes.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Somewhere In Brazil, Anderson Varejao Just Made Another Million Dollars: I don't presume that Coach Mike Brown reads this column - hell, I don't presume that *anyone* reads this column - but if he does, here is a statistic that

will make his skin crawl:

The Cavs are seventh-worst in the league in team defense, giving up 103.45 points per game.

They are nowhere near the top of the league, like they were last season. They are well behind the San Antonios and Detroits of the world. Hell, they are giving up more points than *Phoenix*, a team that doesn't "play defense" as much as it "waits for its turn to get the ball back."

Yes, they have been hurt by injuries, particularly to players with reputations as tough defenders (Eric Snow and Larry Hughes). And yes, they are hurt time and again by speedy point guards (Mo Williams being just the latest example of that trend). But what is truly killing them is the lack of a defensive presence down low. Last year, that presence was Anderson Varejao. This year, that presence is ... who, exactly? A valiant but slow-footed Ilgauskas? A "whoops, I missed another rotation" Gooden?

The situation has become so dire, Ira Newble is seeing time at the four. *Ira Freaking Newble*. Understand, this diatribe is not against Mr. Newble. He's being told what to do; we can't blame him for not being big enough to be a strong interior defensive presence.

The real problem is with how this roster has been constructed. Even when the entire team is healthy, there is no big man who has the capacity to be in position on defense and to save the fort when the perimeter defense gets beat. That was Varejao's specialty, and he saved the Cavs' bacon a time or hundred last season.

I suspect the M.O. in the Cavs' front office is to hope that LeBron can keep the team around .500 for now, until players like Donyell Marshall (*we are counting on Donyell Marshall to provide a defensive boost?* ☹ *Ye gods*) and Cedric Simmons (*ditto*) return, and then re-evaluate. Until then, I would not expect many defensive improvements, no matter how blue in the face Coach Brown gets while yelling at his troops.

One Page. No Additional Comments.: Note how many season highs (yes, I know it is a young season) that [Royal Ivey](#) set last night.

Maybe Drew Wants His Own Recurring Theme: In earlier columns this season, I introduced the *Sasha Pavlovic Factor (SPF)*, a measure of how ... well ... less than brilliantly Mr. Pavlovic tends to play at times. (Sasha didn't do too badly last night, with one relatively pedestrian turnover and only one blocked layup. I will give him an *SPF* of **8**.)

It appears that Drew Gooden is envious and wants his own measure of blockhead-ocity. In the second quarter, with the Cavs leading 45-40, Drew rebounded a Desmond Mason miss and pushed the ball up the court. You know that when Drew believes he is a point guard, only bad things can happen ... sure enough, he passed the ball right to Redd for the turnover. Actually, the ball

sort of slipped out of his hands; but that fact simply made the difference between "he passed the ball directly to Michael Redd, who was playing for the other team" and "he passed the ball on two bounces to Michael Redd, who was playing for the other team." *And somewhere in Coach Brown's head, another vein throbbed.*

It's A Gun, And It's Smoking: I am not a huge fan of the plus-minus statistic, but sometimes it speaks volumes. Last night, it said "the Cavs' bench was awful." Specifically, it pointed the finger at Cavs' reserves Newble and Devin Brown, both of whom had -10 ratings (no other Cavs player had less than a -4). Just sayin'.

We Have A Homer Alert!: Another *Thing I Get* is that NBA teams (well, sports teams in general) encourage their announcers to be homers. Their teams will be looked upon with the dewy-eyed affection usually reserved for mothers. They can Do No Wrong, and any opponents can Do No Right. It's a blurring of the lines between media and entertainment, but it's part of the territory. (Heck, it's why Scott Williams wasn't asked to

return as a color commentator this season.)

Even so, the homerism displayed by Cavs announcers Fred MacLeod and Campy Russell went beyond the pale in the fourth quarter. With just over two minutes to go in the game, Gibson drove to the basket and charged into the Bucks' Bogut. There really was no controversy on the call - Bogut had established his position, and was standing outside of the circle below the basket, and Gibson plowed him over. Easy call. But MacLeod and Russell acted as though the Cavs had been jobbed. MacLeod in particular tried to say that the Bucks' Bobby Simmons fouled Gibson earlier in the drive, reaching around Gibson as he drove to the hoop.

Before I continue ... is anybody else disturbed (in a *not that there's anything wrong with that* sort of way) by MacLeod? He talks about "rubber rims" (and "rim jobs") quite often ... now he's expanding into "reach-arounds" ... I would guess by next week's game with the Celtics, he'll be telling us how LeBron is "teabagging" Kevin Garnett. (I want to keep digressing here - I'd like to examine the game "cornhole," and how that

game has NOTHING to do with the meaning I had always known for that word - but we'd better get back to basketball.)

The other homerism that I'd like to mention came with just over a minute remaining and the Cavs desperately trying to mount a late charge. On a Bucks' inbounds play, LeBron reached around (!) Redd to deny the pass. LeBron's right arm was around Redd the entire time - again, it was a no-brainer foul call. MacLeod/Russell practically asked for a Congressional investigation into the referees, harping about what a terrible call they made. Uh, no, guys, it was a fairly routine (and correct) call. Can we save the pom-poms for the borderline calls, please?

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Department Of Things We May Never See Again:

Redd bricked a pair of free throws late in the first quarter. He's a career 85.1% free throw shooter, so we may never see ... wait, I'd better run the numbers on that before I get ahead of myself.

If Redd is a career 85.1% free throw shooter, then the chance of him missing two free throws in a row is $(0.149 * 0.149)$, or 2.2%. So if Redd comes to the line fifty times to shoot a pair of free throws, he'll brick them both once out of those fifty. So we probably will see Redd miss both ends of a pair of free throws again. Well, maybe YOU will; I'm not planning to watch that many Bucks' games.

See, kids, you'll always learn something from this column. (*Although I expect that I botched the math somewhere along the line, and that [Buff](#) is already firing off an e-mail to tell me the error of my ways. I should have just said "it doesn't happen often" and left it at that.*)

We Are The World: This one will make David Stern beam with joy. Last night's starting lineups featured players from no fewer than five countries, as China (Yi Jianlian), Australia (Andrew Bogut), Lithuania (Ilgauskas), Serbia (Pavlovic), and the

U.S. were all represented. (Not to mention two different worlds, those being Earth and whatever planet Drew Gooden calls home.) Never before have NBA referees been told to self-procreate in so many different languages.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs will be in Minnesota tonight for what had better be a victory against the 1-7 Timberwolves, whose average player is 12 years old. Back-to-back games against two other sub-.500 teams, Toronto (5-6) and Indiana (4-7), follow this weekend. The opportunity is there for the Cavs to start a winning streak ... will they seize it?