

## Cavs/Pistons - The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

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Tough spot for the Cavaliers last night. Fourth game in five nights. Second of back to backs. Coming off an emotional home overtime win against the Celtics where all the starters played heavy minutes. And playing the Pistons for the first time since we knocked their butts outta the playoffs. Even if LeBron wouldn't have gotten hurt last night, this would have been a tough one to win. John recaps the loss, and The Injury.



### THE SUMMARY:

The final score was 109-74. The game was more of a blowout than the score would have you believe.

The Cavs did not have the 109.

By the middle of the fourth quarter, Coach Mike Brown was playing a lineup of Eric Snow, Shannon Brown, Ira Newble, Demetris Nichols, and Dwayne Jones. We have to guess that Brown put this squad on the floor only because he misplaced the white flag that he otherwise

would have been waving.

Oh, and LeBron James left the game in the second quarter with what was diagnosed as a sprained finger. The injury came on a drive to the basket; Detroit backup center Nazr Mohammed swatted at the ball, and ended up with a paw-ful of James's hand instead. It was not immediately clear if the injury LeBron suffered was actually a sprained finger or if the diagnosis came straight from the Butch Davis Institute of Optimistic Diagnoses (e.g., "his knee's still a little sore, but he should be able to go this Sunday" translates to "the surgeons amputated his leg an hour ago").

The less said about this game, the better, OK?

## **WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:**

That it counts as only one loss.

Every team - yes, even league powerhouses like the Spurs - will have at least a couple of these games a year. (READER ADVISORY: Blatant excuse-making follows.) When you have a fourth game in five nights ... AND it is on the road ... AND it comes one day after playing one of the league's top teams ... AND it is against another tough opponent ... AND said opponent still has a bit of a chip on its shoulder after being eliminated from last season's playoffs ... well, this game was

probably an "L"; long before the opening tipoff. Then add to that mixture the absence of your superstar for more than half of the game, and ... well, that's how you end up with a 109-74 game.

The loss leads me to ask the question that I'm sure is on all of your minds: can I go to a McDonald's and be certain that I won't be attacked by a roving band of transvestites? Sadly, the answer appears to be no. According to [this article](#), a Memphis-area McDonald's was recently besieged by three men dressed in drag who entered the restaurant and attacked the manager. (Yes, according to the story, they did remove their stiletto heels and earrings before attacking. And yes, the manager suffered several scratches.) The real gem from this story, which is chock full of them, comes courtesy of one Martez Brisco, who described how the situation escalated:

I [was] ignoring them. I guess that just pissed them off worse.

On behalf of every English teacher in Mr. Brisco's educational history, I would like to say:

[collapses to floor and dies]

Anyway ... as longtime Cavs announcer Joe Tait would say, just file it and forget it. The team is not this bad, and we know they are not this bad, so write it off as a one-game aberration and move on.

## **WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:**

**My Kingdom For A Point Guard:** Okay, I've gone about a fifth of the season without discussing the issue that all Cavs fans know is the two-ton pink elephant in the room. Let's put it out there now: This team needs a true point guard in the worst way. The team's current options at point guard are:

1. Daniel Gibson, who is really a shooting guard in a point guard's body. He may be cut from the Chauncey Billups cloth of undersized shooting guards who kinda-sorta learn how to play the point; but (a) that best-case scenario has no guarantee of ever happening, and (b) even if it does, it will probably take several seasons before Gibson is at Billups's level (look at Chauncey's own career for proof; it took him several years and several changes of laundry before he became the Chauncey Billups we know today);

2. Larry Hughes, who is really a bricklayer in a shooting guard's body, and a very fragile one at that;

3. Eric Snow, who had the worst adjusted plus-minus rating of all NBA players who averaged at least 20 minutes per game in 2006-07;

4. Drew Gooden, who is not truly a viable point guard option, but he tries to take the ball coast-to-coast at least once per game.

Of course, LeBron is the de facto point guard - he's usually the one handling the ball and feeding teammates (he leads the team with 130 assists; the next-highest assist total on the team is Gibson's 46). After LeBron left the game last night, the offense resembled (as a good friend of mine described it) the Strongsville Mustangs eighth grade girls' team. (I would not say that; I have never seen the Strongsville girls play, and do not want to unfairly disparage them.)

As you know, it is the Christmas season. So I would like to offer the following letter to Santa Claus:

Dear Santa,

I want just one thing this year. A point guard for the Cleveland Cavaliers. Santa, they have played without a real point guard for so long, I do not know if they would even recognize what one looks like. But I believe in you and know you can make it happen.

Please let Andre Miller find his way from Philadelphia to Cleveland. Please let Mike Bibby go into his GM's office and demand a trade to Cleveland (just in time for him to enjoy the mild North Coast winter). Please reprogram Danny Ferry's speed-dial so that all of the numbers go to Earl Boykins's cell phone.

I have been a very very good boy this year. So I know you will make this wish come true.

John Hnat

P.S.: It's not the most emotionally healthy thing to wish for, and she is a good mother to our children ... but if you could put a giant lump of coal in my ex-wife's stocking, I

would not be disappointed.

**Department Of Using Skewed Statistics To Make A Point:** Without further comment, I want to mention that both Snow and Dwayne Jones had plus-minus ratios of -28 last night. Okay, I do want to make a further comment: that is Not Very Good. It does not bode well that these two players (plus Ira Newble) form the core of Coach Brown's bench. (That's not to blame Coach Brown. If ever a phrase involving the words &quot;chicken salad&quot; were apropos, this is the time.)

**The SPF Update:** Sasha Pavlovic was one of the few Cavaliers to have a decent game last night, as he scored 13 points on 6-of-10 shooting. But he finds his way into the column for one boneheaded play: with the score 74-57 in the third quarter (do you really have to ask which team held that lead?), Pavlovic tried a crossover dribble to get past Detroit defender Jarvis Hayes. An important component of the crossover dribble is not dribbling it right into the defender's hands; alas, that's exactly what Sasha did. The resulting steal led to a Rip Hamilton dunk at the

other end, making a blowout out of what had been ... well, slightly less of a blowout.

That play was a Forrest Gump-level moment, but Sasha did have a good game otherwise; and we have to grade on a curve, as most of his teammates earned SPFs in the hundreds. So I'll give him an **SPF** of **8** for last night's effort.

**Maybe That's Why They Refused His Option:** I was excited when the Cavs selected Shannon Brown in the 2006-07 draft. I thought he played okay - not great, but just enough to warrant more of a look - in an injury-riddled 2006-07 season. I was mildly surprised when the Cavs decided not to pick up his option for the 2008-09 season.

I am not as surprised any more. Ol' Shannon seems to be lost on the floor, and his offensive game has been relegated to attempting "And One"-level drives to the hole. He finished 1-for-6 last night, with most of those misses being wild drives to the hoop that

culminated with even wilder shots in the general direction of the basket. It's the classic Catch-22 for the end-of-the-bench player: when you finally get some playing time, you want to prove that you can help the team; but when you try too hard to help the team, you do poorly, and ensure that you will get even less playing time. Anyway, Shannon probably bought himself another month of not pulling off his warmups.

**So Much For THAT Ongoing Theme:** One of the challenges of writing a regular column is keeping readers (I will be presumptuous enough to use the plural) engaged for game after game after game. One of the best ways to do that is to have recurring themes - guideposts that we can regularly return to when we have run out of ways of saying &quot;LeBron James is really good&quot; or &quot;Larry Hughes is [suddenly remembering Mom's admonition that &quot;if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all].&quot;

Last season, loyal readers of this column became engrossed in the competition between Newble, Dwayne Jones, and Scot Pollard to see which man would be the last Cav to score his first points of the season. (I think

Jones &quot;won&quot; the competition, but my poor memory is matched only by my laziness in not searching through last season's articles to check this fact.) In any event, we had a developing contest this season between Snow and Nichols, both of whom entered last night's game scoreless for the 2007-08 campaign. (In Nichols's defense, he had yet to see the floor for even a minute of game action. Entering last night, Snow had played in four games and had missed four shots, so he at least had taken a few bites at the apple.)

Alas, the drama is over. Nichols drained a jumper (which cut the Detroit lead to a manageable 24 points) in the fourth quarter, giving him his first points for the season. So Eric Snow is now the only Cavalier to have not scored a single point this season. Will he put up a goose egg for the entire campaign? You can believe that we'll keep after this developing story with a determination usually reserved for Carl Monday during ratings month. Hey, we have to; we have column space to fill.

**NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...**

**My Answer Is That The Two Trains Met ... About**

## **A Hundred Miles From Where They Actually Did:**

Speaking of English, grammar may be the outer limit of my talents. As several alert readers (including Erich Varnes and Dan Zelman) pointed out to me, I can't calculate statistics worth a damn. (Fortunately for me, Messrs. Varnes and Zelman were kind enough not to use those exact words.) In (WARNING: GRATUITOUS LINK TO PREVIOUS ARTICLE)

[yesterday's column](#)

, I calculated the odds of Ray Allen (a 92% free throw shooter) missing two consecutive free throws, as he did near the end of regulation during Tuesday's game. More accurately, I miscalculated those odds. (Don't click the link expecting to see my error; the article now features the correct numbers. I am nothing if not anal-retentive. By the way, does "anal-retentive" have a hyphen?) Sorry for the error. I will give myself an

**SPF**

of

**15**

-- roughly the equivalent of trying to dribble behind the back while guarded by three defenders.

## **LIGHTNING IN A BOTTLE ([STEVE BUFFUM EDITION](#)):**

Danny Ferry caused a stir at the CNN/YouTube Republican Presidential candidate debate last night, saying that if he were elected, he would appoint Drew Gooden as Secretary of Defense. This statement is clearly untrue, as (a) Ferry is not running for President, and (b) no sane man would put Gooden in charge of any defense-related organization. Fire Mike Brown.

## **WHAT LIES AHEAD:**

I told you this last night; weren't you listening? Anyway, the Cavs' road trip continues with stops in Toronto on Friday and Boston on Sunday. At least this time the Cleveland sports scheduling gods got it

right, and gave the Sunday Cavs and Browns games start times that should avoid any conflicts. (I'd calculate the odds of a quadruple-overtime game crowding out the start of the Browns' game, but we've already established that I should not go there.)