

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Thursday, December 20 2007 7:00 PM -

Late in the third quarter of last night's game at The Q against the Lakers, the Cavs looked dead to rights. Trailing 78-67, and displaying many of the traits that have contributed to the teams bender in December. Then, they turned it on, rattling off 16 straight points, and actually playing defense like the team that won the East last season. In John's morning column, he recaps the exciting win, busts out some Seinfeld references, checks in on The Sasha Pavlovic Factor (SPF), and unveils a new contest for his readers.



THE SUMMARY:

Earlier this week, the Cavs were facing back-to-back games.

The first game was against the second-worst team in the conference, a league-wide laughingstock, a team in such disarray that fans were encouraged to display signs calling for the coach to be fired.

The second game, the next day, would be against one of the league's glamour franchises, a good young team featuring one of the best stars

not named LeBron. ([Some would say](#) that the game featured one of the best stars not named Kobe; unfortunately for them, this is a Cleveland-themed column and web site.)

The Cavs won one of the two games, and got blown out of the other. If you're a long-time Cleveland sports fan - and if you are reading these words, then you probably are; it's not like folks are going to find their way here from the Lifetime web site - then you would probably guess that the Cavs lost the "easy" game, then came back to win the "hard" one.

That's exactly what happened. One night after their humiliating 108-90 defeat at Madison Square Garden to the Knicks (now unofficially known as the third stop on the Isiah Thomas "Killing The NBA One Team At A Time" tour), the Cavs redeemed themselves with a 94-90 victory over the Lakers last night at Quicken Loans Arena.

As a writer, I'm not sure how to react. When the Cavs fell behind by 11 points (78-67) late in the third quarter, seemingly en route to another loss, I was ready to call the team on the carpet. Mentally, I had already written a [Festivus](#)-themed column, with "The Airing Of The Grievances" prominently featured in lieu of "what I liked"/"what I didn't like" sections. (I was even going to solicit reader donations to [The Human Fund](#).)

But then the Cavs did something funny. They rattled off the next 16 points, turning that 78-67 deficit into an 83-78 advantage. They did it with LeBron James on the bench for most of that span. The Q was

rocking with an energy not seen since the fireworks display during the introductions.

The Lakers did not just fold up their tents and go home - they tied the game at 86 apiece, and the two teams traded baskets for the next few minutes - but the Cavs would not be denied. A pair of James free throws with 1:44 remaining put the Cavs up for good. (Another pair of free throws, this time by Daniel Gibson with three seconds left, would provide the final margin of victory.)

LeBron led all scorers with 33 points (in the spirit of Pointing Out That He Approached Yet Another Triple-Double, he added 10 rebounds and five assists. Gibson backed him up with 15 points (hey, he actually got nine shots from the field!). The Lakers got 75 of their 90 points from four players: Kobe (21), Lamar Odom (19), Derek Fisher (18), and Andrew Bynum (17).

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

No Jokes About Cheap Lawn Chairs Or Five-Dollar Whores Today: The Cavs deserve plenty of credit for coming back from the double-digit deficit late in the third. I thought they were done for the night. So did you, if you were watching the game and are being honest with yourself. So did the increasingly restless home crowd. Instead, they tightened their defense, started taking better shots, and grabbed the lead as their own.

They didn't roll over and play dead, but instead showed the determination to not fall for a second consecutive night. And much of the credit goes to...

The Devin Brown Factor: Devin Brown is showing signs of becoming a contributor off Coach Mike Brown's bench. He drilled a three-pointer to tie the game at 78 ... then he grabbed the rebound at the other end off a missed Lakers shot, which eventually led to a Zydrunas Ilgauskas jumper ... then he stole the ball on the Lakers' next possession, and drove to the other end for a dunk. I will always shudder a bit when I see him dribbling the ball - I am forever expecting Devin to explode (literally) and for Flip Murray to jump out of the resulting debris - but he has earned his way into significant playing time. Just as the Cavs didn't roll over and play dead last night, Devin didn't roll over and play dead when he gathered some DNP-CDs recently.

Maybe He's Been Holding Them Back: The Cavs actually did better with James on the bench than on the floor. (*Relax. This is one of those "lies ... damned lies ... moments."*

) LeBron sat for the first five minutes of the second quarter; during that time, the Cavs went from being tied to holding a two-point lead. Then in the fourth, the Cavs turned a five-point deficit into a four-point edge while LeBron was in his warm-ups.

Baby Steps: The Cavs out-rebounded the Lakers last night. No, not by much, only two boards (49 to 47); but with the Cavs having been outworked on the glass routinely throughout their losing skid, we will take what we can get.

Anderson Varejao was particularly active last night, leading everybody with 15 caroms. Probably because he has been back for only a couple of weeks, he has been underwhelming. Last night was the first time this season that we saw full-throttle Wild Thing. No loose ball was safe. Remember, his body is still in exhibition season. Give him a few more weeks, and let's see where his conditioning stands.

Play Of The Game: Early first quarter, Cavs already leading 12-5. Sasha Pavlovic stole the ball, and started a three-on-one break with LeBron on his right and Drew Gooden on his left. Sasha resisted the overpowering urge to dribble right into the defender for an offensive foul, and instead passed to LeBron ... who found Gooden under the hoop ... and Gooden had an easy dunk.

Indeed, it's been a while since we've done the **Sasha Pavlovic Factor (SPF)**

Sasha didn't have a great game last night - seven points in 30 minutes - but he also had no significant mental mistakes, and he made some smart plays (like driving the ball and drawing a

foul on Kobe on the game's first possession). So, in a ground-breaking moment here at GBS, I am pleased to announce that Sasha's

SPF

from last night's game is

zero

.

When Bad Ideas Produce Good Results: I am not a big fan of putting microphones on athletes or coaches. When a game telecast trots out its

Sounds Of The Game

segment, featuring some miked participant, I know that it's time to head to the fridge for another liquid refreshment. Those segments typically feature only the emptiest of platitudes. We hear Ray Lewis yell "come on guys, wake up!", and we're supposed to think that we are

down there with the players

and are

part of the game

. We'll never hear a guy turn to another player and say, "over there ... by the Section 133 sign ... check out the rack on that chick." Until we do, I won't be convinced that hearing player's comments is a Good Thing.

So I was pleasantly surprised to hear Eric Snow semi-jokingly chide Shannon Brown for not listening to him. On a Cavs' fast

break, the Lakers' Jordan Farmar fouled Varejao. He did not prevent the basket, and gave Andy a chance at a three-point play. Snow, sitting next to Brown on the bench, quizzed Brown, "you're Jordan Farmar, what do you do?" Shannon moved over a seat on the bench, next to another (unidentified) Cavalier, causing Snow to say, "I'm giving you knowledge, what's he giving you?" (We can only guess that TNT returned to the live broadcast before we could hear Snow tell Brown to check out the rack on the chick by the Section 133 sign.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Only One Entry, And You Know Who It Is: The honeymoon from Larry Hughes's 36 point effort against Indiana last week is officially over. The Quicken Loans Arena crowd booed Larry quite often. Unfortunately, Hughes was giving them reason to boo:

- He made but two of the eight shots he attempted;
- With the score tied at 23 in the first quarter, he tried to pass the ball, only to have it slip out of his hand and go to Bryant; as Kobe was Not A Cavalier at the time, that would count as a turnover;

- Moments later, Hughes made a bad pass under the hoop that was grabbed by the Lakers' Odom;
- To start the second quarter, Hughes was whistled for a traveling violation;
- He then capped off his Run Of The Brain Cramps by nonchalantly slapping at an inbounds pass from Gooden after a Lakers' basket. The ball was almost stolen, and the Cavs maintained possession only because Gooden made a nice play to save the ball.

There is no point to continue Larry-bashing or to demand his immediate trade; we don't do "long time listener, first time caller" knee-jerk reactions here. We can only shake our heads and wonder how a player who previously was a 20-plus point per game scorer could be reduced to a very inconsistent bench contributor.

Okay, One More: In my [previous column](#), I suggested that Gooden has one clunker game per month. He's now paid in full through at least January, as last night's four-point, five-rebound, deer-in-the-headlights defense effort gave him two fughettaboutit games in the last week.

What does it say when Gooden makes the heady save that prevents a disastrous play (as he did on the previous mentioned play with Hughes)?

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Not With A Bang, But A Whimper: In the Battle of Kobe vs. LeBron, one of the areas of debate is which player is better in the clutch. Here are the statistics from the last two minutes of last night's game:

- Kobe: 0-for-2, including a potential game-winning three-pointer with four seconds to go. (In fairness, that shot never happens without Kobe alertly crashing the lane to rebound a missed Bynum free throw moments earlier);
- LeBron: 0-for-1, two free throws.

It may have been an anti-climactic finish for the stars, but it looks good in the standings this morning.

It's Contest Time!: I really do not have much else to say about last night's game, but I have more space to fill. Fortunately, faithful reader Tom Oktavec has kindly provided an opening, with his e-mailed comment of "did Cedric Simmons' leg come completely off when he got injured?" He does seem to have The Mother Of All Ankle Sprains, no?

That e-mail gave me an idea: *e-mail me your guess of the next date that Cedric Simmons will take the floor for the Cleveland Cavaliers.*

I am going to impose two rules (hey, it's my column, and I never said it was a democracy). One, the closest guess wins. None of this

The Price Is Right

Showcase Showdown junk. Two, it's not enough

that Cedric be activated for the game: he must actually get playing time, even if it is in Human Victory Cigar mode at the end of a blowout. Merely dressing for the game is not enough.

What will the prize be? Good question. I'm sure it won't be anything that will change your tax bracket, so don't get too worked up about it. The prize may be nothing more than my undying gratitude. (Memo to site genius [Swerb](#): this is the point where you e-mail me and tell me if we have any TheClevelandFan.com stuff laying around your basement, so that we can supply a prize.)

Entries are due by **Friday, December 28th**. Should Simmons' leg actually be reattached, and he finds his way into a game by then, then the contest will be off. And no restrictions on who can enter. TheClevelandFan writers, Cedric Simmons' doctor, Cedric Simmons himself - if you enter, you'll be in the running.

A Heartbreaking Trade Of Staggering

Genius: Several times this week, I have been asked to comment on the trade of Walter Herrmann to the Pistons. (That's a nice way of saying that Indians staff writer [Steve](#)

[Buffum](#)

e-mailed me a couple of times to say "I can't believe you haven't written about this trade yet.") As I told Buff, I could not write about it earlier, as we were within the traditional five-day period of mourning. (Speaking of Mourning: good luck, Alonzo. Always wished you could have found your way into a Cavs uniform at some point.) Either that, or I missed the trade when it was first announced; it's your call. The trade didn't make headlines. It didn't even make the agate type on the Transactions page. It must have been down on the page next to the ads for the shady "full service" parlors (remember, one man's *holistic massage* is another man's *blow job*

).

Walter (remember, readers, he'll always be on a first-name basis in this space) was [traded](#) along with center Primož Brezec to Detroit for center Nazr Mohammed. I am sure you are thinking what I am thinking: just hand the trophy to the Pistons now. Forget the Celtics and their historic start. Forget the Western Conference and its high-powered teams. The already tough Pistons have added the last piece of the puzzle. Granted, it is a piece that won't play much - Walter has yet to see the floor in a Pistons uniform - but it will happen.

Give Pistons' GM Joe Dumars credit for yet another brilliant move. This one will rank up there with acquiring Chauncey Billups, or trading for Rasheed Wallace. If nothing else -

and the Pistons were already stacked, so it probably will be nothing else - the move lets the Pistons escape from that terrible contract to Mohammed. (Speaking of which ... if a [teacher can be jailed](#)

for naming a teddy bear

"Mohammed," then what fate will befall a man with that name who has spent years impersonating an NBA center?)

We'll continue to keep tabs on the career of the man they call a Fabio look-alike. But now that he's in Detroit, and figures to get even less playing time, we're not optimistic. (Memo to Cavs GM Danny Ferry: Walter is a free agent after this season. That gives you seven months to get his agent's number on speed-dial. Make it so!)

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Golden State on Sunday evening, then a Christmas afternoon tilt against the Miami Heat. So get those presents opened early, clear out the dishes from the Christmas feast, pour another cup of egg nog, and watch a couple of the NBA's more disappointing teams face off! (Or just read my column on the game the next morning. You decide.)