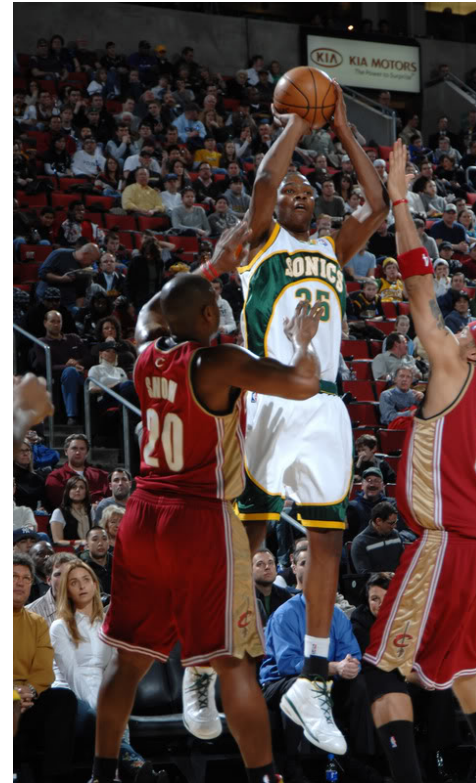


LeBron Sits, Cavs Get Burned In The Emerald City

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, January 31 2008 7:00 PM -

Playing the second of back to back games out west, and this one without an ailing (resting?) LeBron James, the Cavaliers fell 101-95 to the Sonics last night out in Seattle. The Cavs were smoked out of the gates, losing the first quarter 40-24, and then were just never able to get that all back as the game progressed. Nick Allburn recaps last nights loss.



The Cavaliers fell 101-95 to the SuperSonics in the Emerald City in a game that shouldn't have been that close. Given that it was the second of back-to-back road games for Cleveland (in which NBA teams are statistically atrocious), and that King James was on the shelf due to the right ankle sprain he suffered the previous evening, it's not surprising that the Cavs came up short. However, this was a strange game with lopsided scores in the opening and closing quarters sandwiched around the second and third stanzas, during which the two teams played each other almost dead even.

First Quarter

This was arguably the worst quarter of basketball the Cavs have played so far this season. Power forward Chris Wilcox opened the game by scoring the first 10 points for the Sonics. Wilcox's scalding hand would later cool, as he scored only 8 points from that point on.

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The Cavaliers appeared confused on both offense and defense. On offense, the Cavs were rudderless without their All-Star point forward to dictate the tempo and create open looks. If anyone wanted to argue that LeBron James wasn't this team's starting point guard prior to Thursday's game, that conversation has been rendered unequivocally moot. For a team with a tall frontcourt that should have been pounding an undersized Seattle frontcourt on the block from the opening gun, the Cavs were taking far too many jump shots.

Defensively, Cleveland couldn't stop dribble penetration, which is old hat. The problem that arose lay with the interior defense, which was completely impotent. Missed assignments, no help defense, lousy rebounding, and an inability to fill the lane; there was no semblance of fundamental interior defense. And the Sonics made the Cavs pay with scads of layups and dunks, many of which were uncontested.

The result? The Cavs were outscored 40-24 as Seattle had their highest scoring quarter so far this season, shooting a blistering 63-percent, over 25 points higher than Cleveland's harrowing 37-percent.

Second Quarter

The Cavs managed to slow the bleeding in the second quarter, although they shot even worse than in the opening quarter, with their shooting percentage dipping to a pathetic 34-percent by halftime. Damon Jones provided a spark off of the bench, but truth be told, the Cavs were very fortunate that the Sonics didn't put them away by pushing the lead over 30 during the second quarter.

The same problems that plagued the Cavaliers in the first quarter were alive and well in the second; lousy interior defense, nonexistent offensive post play, and a surplus of jump shots. It looked like this game was headed south in a hurry.

Third Quarter

The Cavs managed to hang around, but they needed to whittle away at the Seattle lead more than they did. Kevin Durant used his ogre arms to block two Larry Hughes jumpers on consecutive possessions. It turns out that the 19-year old phenom can play a little bit, in spite of worries about his [bench pressing abilities](#) last spring. As it turns out, benching 185 pounds doesn't have much bearing on one's abilities to run the floor, or pass and shoot a basketball. Who knew?

Lost in all of the buzz over Durant is the fact that the Sonics have another pretty good rookie on their hands in Georgetown product Jeff Green, who was picked fifth overall in last June's NBA Draft. Along with Wally Szczerbiak and Delonte West, Green was shipped cross-country from Boston to Seattle in the Ray Allen deal. Green was a perfect 8-for-8 from the field on Thursday, including one trey ball, and paired with Durant, the Sonics appear to have a young duo that could give the opposition headaches for the next decade or so.

Fourth Quarter

The Cavs entered the fourth quarter facing a 17-point deficit, but they made things interesting with a late flurry, spurred by a pair of Damon Jones threes. An 0-for-6 Seattle drought allowed the Cavs to cut the lead to nine. Zydrunas Ilgauskas showed real grit when he was clearly fouled on a shot attempt in the paint but the refs didn't give him the call. Z responded by snagging his own rebound and was fouled on the put-back attempt. Ilgauskas would hit both of his free throws, which helped keep the Cleveland rally rolling.

With Ilgauskas' pair of free throws, the Cavs trailed by only three, 91-88, with 2:51 remaining. Kevin Durant answered with a pair of buckets and Kurt Thomas added a layup to extend the Seattle lead back to nine. But Cleveland made one final push, as a Daniel Gibson three ball and a Hughes layup cut the lead to 99-95 with

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37 seconds remaining. Dwayne Jones swatted a shot by Luke Ridnour on the ensuing possession, but on the resulting fast break Gibson was whistled for what was a clear charging violation, which essentially put the kibosh on the Cavaliers' comeback.

Ultimately, that first quarter deficit was just too daunting for Mike Brown's troops to overcome. That said, the Cavs deserve serious credit for refusing to pack it in and finally coming to life in the fourth quarter. After all, when Seattle dropped 40 on them in the first quarter, nobody would have been surprised if the Cavs would have started packing for their flight back to Cleveland, getting embarrassed by a 30 or 40-point loss in the process. But the Cavs proved to themselves that they can hang tough without LeBron James, and maybe the next time James is confined to the bench the rest of the squad won't hesitate to play a full 48 minutes of basketball, instead of the six minutes they played against Seattle.

Quick Hits

Durant: The Kid Can Play - Kevin Durant led the Sonics in [+/- efficiency](#)

(+10, tied with Earl Watson), a metric which is fairly accurate at reflecting player performance. Durant led all Sonics scorers with 24, and his baskets late in the fourth quarter helped Seattle put the game out of reach.

Wilcox Killed The Cavs - Sonics big man Chris Wilcox poured in 18 points and corralled 13 rebounds, including five of the offensive variety. Wilcox was the key to Seattle's white-hot first quarter, as he scored the SuperSonics' first ten points. Wilcox could end up being a solid power forward in the league. He probably doesn't have the offensive tools to be a 20-10 guy, but he works hard enough around the bucket that 15-10 isn't out of the question.

Damon For Three - Jones was a decent 5-12 from the field, but all five of his field goals were three-pointers. The Best Shooter in the Universe gave the Cavs a boost off of the bench in the second and fourth quarters, and his pair of threes in the final quarter helped spark the Cavs to a near comeback. Damon Jones still has value to this team as shooter, and it would be most unfortunate if Danny Ferry ships Jones off for a different pricy contract that probably doesn't shoot as well as Damon.

DiGiorno Pizza ® Austin Carr Quote of the Game: "If you're gonna foul a guy, you might as well let him have one. I mean, that's the way I like it." Carr followed this statement with an off-air fist pump. Well played, sir.

Charity Stripe: Much of the Cavs' comeback can be credited to their performance from the free throw line, where they went 23-of-27, 85.2-percent. The Cavs entered the game shooting 72.06-percent from the line, 25th in the league, a mark which must improve. Big ups to Zydrunas Ilgauskas for posting a perfect 11-11 from the stripe, which helped make up for his ugly night from the field (3-13).

Fast Broken: The Cavs were outscored 15-1 in fast break points, which is a strong indicator of how the Sonics simply out-hustled them for the first three and a half quarters. Transition defense isn't rocket science, it's almost purely a function of hustle.

Killer D's: Of the 12 players who dressed for the Cavaliers tonight, half have a first name that starts with the letter D. They won't make anyone forget Dwight Howard, Dirk Nowitzki, or Dwyane Wade, but three of the C's D's played pretty well in Washington state. In fact, Damon Jones, Dwayne Jones, and Daniel Gibson were three of only five Cavaliers to post positive efficiency numbers, and the team leader wasn't who you'd guess (it was Dwayne). Drew Gooden was awful, posting a horrid -19 efficiency, while Devin Brown and Donyell Marshall didn't see much action.

Keep Your Shirt On: Donyell Marshall played in his first game since the season's second contest against New York. Marshall wasn't just rusty **on** the court, apparently he's having problems dressing himself, as well. When Donyell entered the game in the second quarter, he pulled off his warmup top at the scorer's table. When the warmup came off, Marshall's jersey came with it, exposing a somewhat comical navy blue compression tank top that covered Marshall's doughy physique. I suppose it's a mistake that's easy enough to make. If only trading away Marshall's \$5.6 million contract was so simple...

The Cleveland Cavaliers Will Return: Tomorrow night, when they square off against the Los Angeles Clippers on Saturday night at Quicken Loans Arena (7:30). That's Groundhog Day, so sleep in, enjoy a viewing of Bill Murray's classic (and quite

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frankly, underrated) comedy, and head to The Q to cheer the Cavaliers on to what will hopefully be their eighth win in ten games.