

Cavs/Celtics: Game Notes

Written by {ga=samamico}

Monday, February 04 2008 7:00 PM -

Sam was down at The Q last night, covering what was a very big win at the corner of Huron and Ontario. And in his game notes of last night's 114-113 win, Sam says that it's performances like that one that make you believe that the Cavs are still a special team that is the frontrunner to get back to the Finals. Sam hits on the win, the Cavs winning 15 of their last 19, and Gooden's injury in his game notes.



The Cavaliers were without Anderson Varejao, Sasha Pavlovic, and for most of the fourth quarter, Drew Gooden. Boston was without All-Star forward Kevin Garnett.

The Cavs will take that tradeoff every time.

But forget about that for a moment when thinking about the Cavs' 114-113 victory over the Celtics on Tuesday at Quicken Loans Arena.

Instead, focus on what the Cavs did right -- how they came together when it meant the most, how it didn't have to be LeBron James Central for them to win.

In fact, it's wins like these that make you believe the Cavs are still a special team, that they really can get back to the Finals, and that James stands a darn good chance of being named league MVP.

That may sound like a lot of hype for a win at home with the opposing team missing its best player.

But this was about more than a win. It's about how the Cavs got the win, and other wins just like this.

They cut to the basket. They hit the open man. They created good shots, then made the most of their opportunities on offense.

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On defense, they bent their knees and shuffled their feet. Well, at least they did in the fourth quarter -- after giving up a whopping 66 points in the first half.

It was basketball in its simplest, purest form, and it was being played by the home team.

It's how the Cavs have spent the past few weeks, as James was named Eastern Conference player of the month for January, and Cavs coach Mike Brown was coach of the month. Basically, the Cavs were the team of the month -- and are playing more like the conference-leading Celtics than the Celtics themselves.

"They are still one of the teams that we have to catch," said Celtics coach Doc Rivers. "You know at the end of the season, Cleveland is gonna be there."

The Cavs have won 15 of 19, many coming without Pavlovic or Varejao, or a combination of both. And while they gave up way too many points for Brown's liking Tuesday, they have displayed determination, grit and hustle in the second half of most games -- regardless of the names and faces in uniform.

Part of the credit belongs to Brown, part of it belongs to James (33 points, 12 rebounds, nine assists), and yes, part of it belongs to starters like Zydrunas Ilgauskus (21 points, 10 rebounds) and fill-ins like Ira Newble (15 points, 6-of-9 shooting).

Are the Cavs better than the Celtics with Garnett? Who knows?

That may not be determined until April or May, when the playoffs kick into high gear.

But right now, the Cavs are a good team that is enjoyable to watch. They also have the same record as last season at this point (27-20), and we all saw how that turned out.

All of which means that if you love pro basketball in Cleveland, it should be worth your time to stay tuned.

GOODEN OUT

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Gooden may have made the dunk of the night midway through the third quarter, when he leaped from the middle of the lane to dunk a missed shot.

It would be his last play of the night, though -- as he strained his right groin. His availability is expected to be listed as day-to-day.

CAV TIES

As a player, Rivers is best known from his days as point guard on those Dominique Wilkins-led Atlanta Hawks teams of the 1980s, coached by former Cavs coach Mike Fratello.

But his ties to the Cavs don't end with Fratello (who coached the Cavs after the Hawks). Rivers is also the nephew of former Cavs guard Jim Brewer -- and was a member of Austin Carr's basketball camps in the 1970s.

Carr is one of the greatest Cavs of all-time and currently the color commentator on team broadcasts.

"I used to stay at my unlce's house in Beechwood (outside of Cleveland) in the summer, and I worshipped Austin Carr because of those camps," Rivers said with a large smile. "A lot of what I learned at those camps helped me to play in the NBA. I owe a lot to (Carr)."

NOTES

Cavs guard Damon Jones has made at least two 3-pointers in four of the last five games. ... Over his last five games, James is averaging 35.0 points, 10.0 rebounds, and 6.4 assists. ... Since Dec. 25, the Cavs have the best record among Eastern Conference teams (15-4).