

The Cavaliers went into Friday night's game with the Washington Wizards with six NBA players on their roster after Thursday's deadline deals sent six others packing. They came out of the game with an unlikely, improbable and highly entertaining 90-89 win over the incredulous Wizards. NBA Developmental League call ups Billy Thomas and Kaniel Dickens fortified the roster, and actually contributed, helping solidify this strange win. Peeker runs it down for us.



NBA Developmental League call-up Billy Thomas hit his first 3-pt shot of the game Friday night at 'The Q'. That moved him ahead of Eric Snow for 3-pt baskets *on the season*

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The night would only get goofier from there.

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LeBron James led a team that was fortified by two 'D' League call-ups, Thomas and Kaniel Dickens, by scoring 35 points, snagging 15 rebounds and passing out 8 assists. Damon Jones reminded his coaches and the fans that he's still around by adding 27 points and 4 assists.

Every man on the active roster played and contributed. It's been a long time since you could say that in regard to the Cavaliers. Never mind that there were only

eight players on that roster.

Fans came to hopefully get a glimpse of the four new Cavaliers and all four were on hand at 'The Q'. Wally Szczerbiak, Ben Wallace, Delonte West and Joe Smith all showed up at the arena and took in a wild game that was a much an oddity as it was an athletic contest. Fans actually gleefully looked forward to the game as much to see how a shorthanded team would respond as for any other reason. But with James all things are possible. And the Cavs superstar hit two free throws with 7 seconds left to give the Cavs a 90-89 lead that survived a DeShawn Stevenson floater from the lane to end the game and the night.

### **Loved It**

- Funny what that foxhole mentality will do for a club. The Cavs entered this game knowing they were under-manned. But they had an intensity about them and played with purpose from the opening tip. They hustled their collective asses off for 48 minutes. They switched as effectively as they could against the Wizards and scrounged and battled for every loose ball. In short, they showed some pride and they set the tone and the expectations for their newest teammates.

- Damon Jones was outstanding. Not only was he outstanding on the court in shooting 10-16 (7-11 from 3-pt range) but he was also part coach, part cheerleader and part color-commentator. Damon was miked for ESPN's coverage of the game and he did not disappoint. Well, to be honest, he did not shut up. He had a good time in a game where the Cavs weren't expected to compete and he constantly coaxed and cajoled his teammates when he wasn't himself hitting big shots. Especially nice was him urging Thomas to shoot that first three and then exploding with genuine joy when Thomas buried the shot.

- With every passing game James salts away his first NBA MVP award. In 45 minutes James was 11-20 from the field and 9-14 from the free throw line. He shook off an off night from the line to hit the two big free throws with 7 seconds left after again drawing a foul on a last second drive when everyone in the free world knew he was not only getting the ball, but that he was taking it to the rim. The scary part of LBJ's game is that you can actually see him getting better every night. This has clearly been his team for over a season and that fact was cemented with Thursday's deal. He owns the 4<sup>th</sup>

quarter and he owns the floor whenever he wants to take over. Opponents know it but they are powerless to stop it. The King is maturing before our eyes and the eyes of the NBA into a true leader. He's still got a bit of room to expand in that regard but he's as close to a dominating force as the NBA has to offer.

- Billy Thomas scored 9 points in a one-point victory. He hit a couple of early threes that really kept the Wizards off balance. They weren't counting on having to defend Thomas, and his early success kept Washington from completely collapsing on James. When Thomas went cold Damon Jones caught fire to help keep the Wizards honest on their defensive assignments. Thomas isn't bashful. He came here to shoot for 10 day and he did just that. He missed badly a few times but recovered late to hit a 3-pointer at a critical 4<sup>th</sup> quarter juncture. Thomas is a 32 yr-old journeyman from Kansas who hadn't hit a 3-pointer in the NBA in two years. He doesn't have a picture on any major sports news site. You can't help but root for guys like that and the fans erupted when he hit his first shot. At least for a night, Thomas was as big a contributor to an NBA team as any player in the league.

- You can't overlook Devin Brown's effort on Friday night. Brown played 43 minutes, scored 10 points (almost all of them in traffic), grabbed 10 rebounds and dished out 7 assists. He also provided the Cavs with some poise and composure on numerous possessions. The guy is a grinder. In hockey he'd be the guy who won face-offs, dug the puck out of the corners and blocked shots with his body while laying prone on the ice.

## **Hated It**

- With less than a minute left in a very tight game Eric Snow was replaced by Billy Thomas on an offensive set. There is nothing one can say that better summarizes where Snow's offensive skills are than that. Again, a guy who hours before the game was a member of the Colorado 14ers replaced Snow with the game in the balance. It's been said before multiple times, but Snow is an offensive liability. That's being extremely kind. He had two lay-ups blocked Friday night and received a standing ovation on the one shot he hit from the

field. To his credit he took it well. And that's the problem with Snow: he's a genuinely likeable, classy veteran. It actually hurts to watch what he's become on the offensive half of the floor.

## **Finally**

The Cavs will likely have their 4 new toys ready for action on Sunday night when they tip off at 6pm against Memphis. Expect the remaining 27 games to feature about 15 different starting lineups and 27 different rotations as guys mix in and come back from injuries. There's no way to tell if the new-look Cavs will experience success throughout what remains of the regular season or in the post season. But it's sure going to be interesting. Maybe not as interesting as Friday night, but it won't be dull.