

Weary Cavs Fall In Beantown

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Wednesday, February 27 2008 7:00 PM -

A pair of weary heavyweights slugged it out in Boston on Wednesday night, as the Celtics, fresh off a six-game West Coast swing, and the Cavaliers, fresh off a hard-fought loss in Milwaukee, met for the fourth time this season. Unfortunately the C's hardly looked like a team that had just gotten off a plane from Los Angeles the day before; they shot the lights out for the first three quarters, moved well without the ball, played aggressively on defense, and tied the season series between the clubs at two apiece with a well-earned 92-87 victory that wasn't as close as the final score indicated.



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Game Recap by Quarter

First Quarter

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The opening moments were owned by Kevin Garnett. The ex-Fun Police member scored Boston's first six points, and along with several early Cavalier turnovers, helped the C's jump out to a 12-7 lead. Transition defense, a killer last night in Milwaukee, continued to be a problem; Boston scored three of their early buckets on fast-breaks and built a seven-point advantage before Cleveland took a timeout at the 5:47 mark.

Following the timeout, the Celtics caught their own case of the turnover bug, allowing the Cavaliers to briefly close the gap to three. Boston's bigs were in foul trouble early- both Kendrick Perkins and Glen Big Baby Davis had two before the end of the quarter. Still, on the strength of some solid shooting- 10-of-19 for the period- the Celtics took a 25-16 lead at the end of one.

The hallmarks of Cleveland's first period were sloppiness and a LeBron-centricity on the offensive end. The Cavaliers committed five turnovers and shot 5-of-16, with LBJ scoring 10 of his team's 16 points. And ominously, Mike Brown still seemed intrigued by the possibilities of having Ben Wallace and Andy on the floor at the same time. Not a good sign.

Second Quarter

Boston's ball movement, combined with Cleveland's confusion and disorganization on offense, turned the game into a burgeoning rout early in the second quarter. The Celtics used an 8-2 run to take a 33-18 lead with 8:43 left in the half. Boston's perimeter players continually ran

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around picks and, once Cleveland's defenders were sucked in, dumped the ball down low to Big Baby Davis, who cashed in for six points off the bench in the half, four on free throws.

LeBron's re-entrance helped stabilize the situation. Unlike Tuesday night in Milwaukee, LBJ was able to get to the line often- he shot 11 free throws in the first half to five the entire game against the Bucks. Then, with 4:36 left in the half came a moment that catches the breath of every Cavaliers fan in his or her throat- LeBron drove the lane, spun in a finger-roll, and came down hopping on one leg before crumpling in a dramatic heap by the scorer's table. LBJ was ultimately able to limp off the court under his own power, but he was out of the game- for how long, to be determined.

The score was 39-27 in favor of the C's when LeBron left the game. Thanks to a pair of three-pointers by Wally World and Delonte West (who had a total of one grazed rim on two earlier shots), the Cavaliers took off on a 7-0 run to cut the lead to five. The news came back on LeBron- right ankle sprain, x-rays negative, return questionable. The Cleveland Cavaliers continue to be a podiatrist's wet dream. And at halftime, Boston led 47-40.

The halftime numbers weren't pretty. Cleveland shot 14-of-38- 36.8 percent- were beaten on the boards 23-17, and surrendered 54 percent shooting by the Celtics, much of that shiny number garnered at the end of run-outs and in the paint thanks to crisp interior passing. LeBron was the only man in double-figures, with 15, but he looked to be *hors de combat*.

One bright spot was that the Cavaliers outscored the Celtics 13-8 after LeBron's injury, which hopefully was a portent.

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All in all, considering the statistical disparities, the Cavaliers were fortunate to be even in the game at halftime.

Third Quarter

With his right ankle taped, LeBron (cough*drama queen*cough) took the floor for the third quarter and immediately dropped a jumper to make it 47-42. The Celtics weren't exactly fazed by LBJ's Willis Reed theatrics, however- they stayed hot from the floor and ripped off a 12-4 run to make it 59-46 with 7:42 left. Boston made six consecutive shots at one point, surprising proficiency from a team that had just come back from the West Coast. Cleveland didn't get closer than nine the remainder of the period, were down by fifteen at one point, and trailed 75-62 at the end of three.

Whatever the Cavaliers did in the fourth, they would do it without the services of Mike Brown. The Human Milk-Dud got himself tossed with 41.2 remaining in the third after throwing a necktie-flying tantrum following a non-call on a mugging of Anderson Varejao (who can't catch a break from the refs since he came back). It was unusual to see Coach Brown in such high feather, and indeed, it was a welcome development, since he's usually way too slow to lobby strenuously on behalf of his team.

Boston's shooting percentage was up to 57.7 by the end of the third. If only the Celtics could miss some freaking shots...

Fourth Quarter

Cleveland again cut the lead to nine in the first minute-and-a-half of the fourth quarter, but Boston re-expanded the advantage with the same weapon- ball movement and big men diving to the post. A 9-2 run made it 84-68 at the five-minute mark, and with the way the Cavaliers were shooting the ball (miserably), it was too much to overcome. Boston's own shooting touch cooled off in the fourth quarter, but by then it was too little, too late. Not seriously challenged, the rest of the way, the Celtics put it in cruise control and won the game, 92-87.

Looks like the adjustment period is going to take a little while.

Odds and Ends

How the game was lost: Boston's ball movement and penetrate-and-dump-down low offense have been a problem for the Cavaliers all season, and tonight was no exception. Time and again, the Celtics guards went around the show by Cleveland's big men, got into the middle, and dropped it off to either Kendrick Perkins or Big Baby Davis, who combined for 6-of-7 from the floor, all of that from point-blank range. Boston played unselfishly, dishing out 27 assists. In contrast, the Cavaliers looked disjointed on offense, shooting 38.3 percent and garnering just 16 assists. Cleveland out-rebounded Boston 44-37, but the Celtics were simply more efficient offensively

than the Cavaliers, and that made the difference.

LeBron's line: 26 points, eight rebounds, and four assists on an icy 7-of-24 from the floor. You can't even blame the tweaked ankle- he wasn't hitting even before he pulled up lame. Not the King's finest game of the season, to say the least.

Other heroes: There are no heroes in a loss. The Cavaliers as a team were pretty much ineffectual on Wednesday night, although Delonte West had his moments- after the two awful, early misses, Mr. Neck Tat came through with 20 points, five boards, and two dimes on 8-of-13 shooting.

Next: The Cavaliers host the Minnesota Timberwolves at 7:30 on Friday night.