

LeBron, Cavs Stave Off Bobcat Rally

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Sunday, March 16 2008 7:00 PM -

The Charlotte Bobcats arrived in Cleveland sporting a lackluster 24-41 record, making them a long shot for an Eastern Conference playoff spot. But the feisty young Bobcats always give the Cavaliers a hard time, and last night was no exception. Coming off two straight bad losses, the Cavs needed this one bad, and were able to hold on for dear life thanks in large part to a one King James. Nick Allburn recaps the win.



The Charlotte Bobcats arrived in Cleveland sporting a lackluster 24-41 record, making them a long shot for an Eastern Conference playoff spot. February absolutely killed the Bobcats; they were 1-11 during the shortest month of the year. But take February out of the equation, and Charlotte's nearly a .500 club.

The Bobcats are one of those teams (read: mediocre, but they don't quit) that can give the Cavaliers trouble, and although they came to Cleveland without ever logging a win at The Q (in just six attempts), they beat the Cavs back in December, and LeBron and the boys needed two overtimes to knock off the Cats in mid-January. Charlotte has a few guys like Raymond Felton and Jason Richardson who usually play well against the Cavaliers, and after embarrassing losses against the Nets and the team formerly known as the Washington Bullets, the Cavs couldn't afford to take anyone lightly.

First Quarter

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Zydrunas Ilgauskas returned from his nagging back injury and made his presence felt on Charlotte's first possession with a blocked shot. Z also stroked his first jumper a few possessions later. LeBron James was in distribution mode early, as the Cavs scored 13 points before James completed an impressive three point play to get himself into the scoring column of the box score. The James/Ilgauskas pick and fade was certainly a sight for sore eyes.

Sasha Pavlovic has had more of an impact since his return than I had anticipated. Pavlovic's athleticism and slashing scoring style had been sorely missing from Cleveland starting five, particularly since the Cavaliers traded (*gulp*) Larry Hughes. Pavlovic gave the Cavs some early offense with a dunk and a three ball.

LeBron took over late in the quarter, accounting for 11 of the Cavaliers' last 14 points, including a thunderous dunk, and a pair of exceptional 3-point plays via jump shots and fouls.

Second Quarter

The Bobcats hung around for the first eight minutes or so, even taking a 36-35 lead at one point. Then the Cavs erupted, ripping off a 9-0 run faster than you could say "Wham with the right hand!", opening a 44-36 lead with 2:27 to play in the half. A Delonte West trey a few possessions later pushed the run to 12-0, and the Cavaliers would ultimately take a 47-40 lead into the break.

The Cavs really tightened up on defense late in the second quarter, with Ben Wallace squeezing eight rebounds by halftime. Rebounding was a definite key to the Cavs' success in the second quarter, as they out-rebounded the Bobcats 17 to 7 in the period. Cleveland was significantly more aggressive than Charlotte during the second quarter and the zebras rewarded them accordingly. The Cavaliers shot 13 free throws to Charlotte's 2. However, the Cavs weren't making the

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Bobcats pay at the line, converting only eight of their 13 attempts, which is one reason why the game tightened up later on.

Third Quarter

LeBron James and Charlotte's Jason Richardson battled back and forth in the early minutes of the third quarter, LeBron finishing a spectacular alley-oop from Delonte West, and Richardson drilling threes on consecutive possessions.

LeBron had an "and one" layup during which his momentum almost carried him down the tunnel and out of the building, Forrest Gump style. The ensuing free throw made the Cleveland lead 63-51.

LeBron James and Damon Jones hit late threes, pushing the Cavalier lead to 75-63 heading into the final stanza. It was nice to see the Cavs post a strong third quarter, something they hadn't done in New Jersey or (especially) in Washington.

Fourth Quarter

But the Cavaliers had trouble dealing the Bobcats a [death blow](#). With 7:30 to go, the Bobcats had the ball, trailing by just 6 points. Wally Szczerbiak stepped up in the fourth by hitting a jumper and contributing a couple of big defensive plays, including a block. That's saying something, because the last time Wally made a key play on defense, gas was well under three bucks a gallon.

But the Bobcats simply refused to go away. An 8-0 Charlotte run cut the Cavs' lead to 88-85 with 2:30 to play. LeBron missed the rim on a long jumper and although Devin Brown grabbed the rebound, he was unable to get the ball back up in time. The officials awarded the ball to the Bobcats, but a replay revealed

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that LeBron's shot had in fact hit the rim, and the refs gave the ball back to the Cavaliers.

Ben Wallace miraculously had baskets on two consecutive possessions, but those were more than matched by consecutive threes from Jason Richardson. The lead had shrunk to one. The Cavs were in dire straits, but Delonte West don't give a damn about any trumpet playing band, and he drained a jump shot from the foul line that increased the lead to three points.

With 52 seconds remaining, King James took over. LeBron locked up Jason Richardson on defense, forcing a missed layup. James then banked home a layup on the other end as the shot clock wound down, giving the Cavaliers a five-point lead with 10.3 seconds to play, ending the game for all intents and purposes. Jason Richardson missed a quick three, Devin Brown corralled the rebound, and the Bobcats were forced to foul. Brown found the bottom on both freebies, and the Cavs went home 98-91 winners.

Quick Hits

Z Machine: Apparently the Cavs missed their seven-foot center, because his impact was felt immediately. LeBron James and Zydrunas Ilgauskas have a nice bit of symbiosis going on; Ilgauskas' ability to stretch the floor makes it much easier for LeBron to slash to the basket, and James' own knack for getting to the rack gives Z loads of open looks. Nobody was happier to see the Lanky Lithuanian back on the floor than LBJ.

It wasn't Frank Reich, but Ilgauskas turned in a very solid comeback performance by essentially posting what are more or less his usual stats; 16 points, 9 boards, a high shooting percentage (7-11), and three blocks for good measure. Most importantly, Z played nearly 32 minutes and looked very strong. Back injuries are a delicate animal, and it's significant that Ilgauskas didn't appear to tweak his back in any way. The Cavs have another game tonight (at Orlando), and if all goes well

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for Ilgauskas in the second game of a back to back, on the road no less, we'll be able safely assume that his back is pretty well healed.

Ben Comes Up Big: LeBron James wasn't the only Cavalier who was psyched for Big Z's return, Ben Wallace also sorely missed Ilgauskas. Wallace's play with Ilgauskas shelved was deplorable, which gave us all a glimpse into the world of Ben Wallace in Chicago. Without a quality big man who can score, Wallace crumbles.

But with Z back in the fold Ben can play his natural role at the four, focusing solely on rebounding and defense. Wallace excelled in that role, seizing 15 boards, including 6 of the offensive variety. Credit Wallace for sound defense, as the Bobcats had trouble getting anything consistent established inside all night long. Big Ben also plucked three steals and added a block. Thankfully, he took only four shots, making a pair, although it's worth mentioning that his two misses were dunks that he will make more often than not.

LeBron's Line: 33 points (11-24, 1-3 from deep), 7 rebounds, 10 assists, 1 steal, 2 blocks, 10 of 16 from the line, 1 turnover. I love the 10 assists against just 1 turnover, but LeBron still needs to focus more at the line. Even with the mediocre free throw percentage, he's probably worth hanging onto...

Another night at the office for James, who should be getting much more buzz for Most Valuable Player. Unfortunately, Cleveland isn't on the East Coast and more to the point isn't named "Boston" or "New York"; (thank God for that), the Cavs don't play in the Western Conference, and the Cavs are having a "wake me up in April" type of season. Fortunately, basketball is a team sport and the MVP award - though debated both frequently and vigorously - is more or less irrelevant. So go ahead, give the MVP trophy to Kobe or KG. The Larry O'Brien Trophy is the only one I really give a damn about anyway.

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Wait Until Next Year: The Bobcats really do have some quality pieces in place. Raymond Felton has the goods to be a top 10 point guard, Jason Richardson is a quality scorer, Emeka Okafor is a nice post presence, a good rebounder and solid shot blocker, Gerald Wallace is one of the most athletic players in the league, and even Matt Carroll has the potential to be a nice complementary player. Plus, the Cats have Adam Morrison, who has been injured all season long. Morrison won't ever be an All-Star, but he can score the basketball and could develop into a 15-20 point guy. Sean May is also out for the year, but he could develop into a 15 and 10 guy who could start or be the first or second guy off the bench.

The Cats need to get healthy, too. They have quite a few injury-prone players; May, Morrison, Okafor, and Wallace, just to name a few. But give this team a deeper bench, some experience, a little luck in the injury department, and maybe one more scorer to complement Richardson, and they could make some noise in a soft Eastern Conference next season.

DiGiorno Pizza® Austin Carr Quote of the Game: [responding to DeShawn Stevenson's claim that LeBron James is

[overrated](#)

]

""That's a

stupid

comment."

So Why Don't You Slide: Anderson Varejao needs to be very careful when he's setting screens, because he moves when he sets them. He moves a lot. Hopefully officials will continue not to notice, but if they do get wise to Andy's sliding, AV's going to get hit with some offensive fouls. But at least it will give me an excuse to crank the [Goo Goo Dolls'](#) smash hit single and remember how awesome the '90s were.

Hey DJ, Fire Away: In case you've been asleep for the first 65 games, Damon

Jones is having a pretty solid season. Before Sunday's game, DJ was hitting threes at a 43.7 percent clip. That's a nice bit of shooting, and that's the Damon Jones that Danny Ferry thought he signed back in 2005. As long as the Cavs have LeBron, they'll always need shooters, and Jones contributed once again against Charlotte, hitting two of three from beyond the arc.

Wally's Playing Like the Beav: There were countless different takes on the Cavs' big trade, but the one guy who everyone generally thought would fit in well with the Cavaliers was Wally Szczerbiak. Szczerbiak's a good shooter, and as we all know, LeBron's game tends to make shooters' lives much easier. But sometimes, check that - frequently - things don't work out like you plan them. If good plans always came together, then LeCharles Bentley would be the anchor of what would probably be the best offensive line in football.

Szczerbiak hasn't suffered a freak injury on the first day of practice, but he has been very Jiri Welsch-like since donning the Wine & Gold. Coming into the game, Welsch - *er* - Szczerbiak, was shooting 31.8 percent from the field, and taking nearly 11 shots per game in the process. A one of four night against Charlotte certainly won't do anything to boost those numbers.

And Szczerbiak's defense has come as advertised: lousy. In fact, on defense Szczerbiak is eerily reminiscent of Damon Jones, except he's taller and has a better haircut. Wally simply isn't all that quick, which makes it damn near impossible for him to effectively guard on the perimeter. Mike Brown has obviously detected Wally's weakness; Szczerbiak played less than 10 minutes against Charlotte.

Sure, he went to school in Ohio. Sure, he seems like a nice guy. Sure, his kid's name is Maximus. But the patience of both Mike Brown and the fans is going to start to wear awfully thin if Szczerbiak doesn't start to produce. The new team butterflies excuse won't fly anymore, pal. Start hitting some jump shots.

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Mea Culpa, Raymond Felton: I didn't think that Felton would be a very good pro, and during the 2005 Draft I remember thinking that the Bobcats were reaching for him with the number five pick. Maybe it was Felton's size (listed as 6-1, which is probably generous), maybe it was that he wasn't really the headliner for that '05 Championship UNC team, maybe it was just that I strongly dislike the Tarheels, but I didn't like Felton's chances to develop into a good pro. My bad, Ray-Ray.

Felton is following up a strong sophomore campaign with comparable numbers, except he seems to be getting more comfortable at the point and his shooting percentage has risen. It looks like the Bobcats will have a pretty good point guard for the foreseeable future.

Brady Quinn Sighting: BQ was sitting courtside for Sunday's game, and he got a little airtime by way of a Jeff Phelps interview, revealing that he's been hard at work training in Arizona. I'm sure Derek Anderson will be thrilled to hear that.

I wasn't at the game, but if Brady's mug was put on the Jumbotron it wouldn't surprise me if he got one of the biggest cheers of the evening, which brings me to another point. If Quinn eventually wins his duel with Derek Anderson, becomes the starter, and is successful, he's going to displace LeBron as Cleveland's signature athlete. It might be unfair, but let's face it: dude's thrown eight regular season passes and half the fans that fill CBS on Sunday would already take a bullet for him (although probably not in the chest). His jersey is the [17th most-purchased](#) since last April.

We are now on a tangent that has absolutely nothing to do with basketball, and I'm not taking sides. I want the best quarterback, not the best celebrity. But if Brady Quinn becomes the Browns' quarterback, to say that he'll be insanely

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popular is the understatement of the year. Go Browns.

Hey.....That's Not His Real House: That Cub Cadet (is it for Cub Cadet?) commercial with that goofy white dude in suburbia, his riding mower, and LeBron always kills me. One of these things is not like the other.

LeBron lives in a middle class suburban neighborhood? Hmm...something doesn't seem to fit there. LeBron starts each morning by donning his robe, pouring himself a cup of mud, and reading the paper? Riiiiight... And why would LeBron be walking out to get the paper himself? Isn't that [LeBron Junior's](#) job? Kids these days, I swear...

And finally, goofy white dude is going to, number one, taunt LeBron, and number two, challenge robed LeBron to a game of one-on-one? Not very neighborly. Nor smart, for that matter. Hasn't this guy seen LeBron when he's angry? He wouldn't like him when he's angry.

The Cleveland Cavaliers Will Return: Tonight, when they travel to Orlando for a 7:00 date with the Magic at Amway Arena. This is a big game for los Caballeros, as they are presently five point five games behind the Magic for the Eastern Conference's third seed. With only 15 games remaining this game is an unmistakable must-win if the Cavs are going to make a run at that number three spot.