

Bottom line, ever since the Cavaliers big deadline deal that saw them ship half the team to Seattle and Chicago, this new Cavaliers team has simply been unable to beat any quality basketball teams. The trend continued last night as the Cavs turned a five point halftime lead into a 14 point loss down in Orlando against the Magic. Brian McPeck recaps Monday night's tough loss.



Not ready for primetime just yet.

The Cavs have struggled against quality teams since making their deadline deal a few weeks back. On Monday night they went down to Orlando and faced a quality team. The result was a 104-90 loss to the Orlando Magic.

The Cavs actually had a five point lead at the half before the roof caved in late in the third quarter. That five point lead was built on the fact that the Cavs were doing a nice job against the perimeter shooting of the Magic while forcing Dwight Howard to work for his points inside. But in the second half the Cavs, coming off a game Sunday evening against Charlotte, lost a step on defense and allowed the Magic's dangerous outside shooters some open looks that they knocked down

with regularity and ease.

Howard paced the Magic with 23 points and he was supported by three teammates that reached double digits in points. Rashard Lewis, Hedo Turkoglu, and Maurice Evans all scored 10 or more on a night when the Magic shot up an astounding 32 three-point shots and connected on 14 of them.

The Cavs actually led by seven points with two minutes to play in the third quarter before being outscored 43-22 the rest of the way. LeBron James again paced the Cavs with 30 points, 9 rebounds and 6 assists but even the King seemed to lack that extra bounce in his step. You're not going to complain about 30, 9 and 6 on most nights but James was just ordinary on a night the Cavs needed more.

Delonte West and Sasha Pavlovic added 16 points and 14 points respectively for the Cavs.

## **Outstanding**

Well, there was....umm...well...actually there was nothing and no one that would warrant a paragraph on what went well. James finished with less than his average in regard to points but scored 30 on an 'off' night. West showed some flashes of what he could ultimately become when he aggressively pushes the ball and looks for his shots.

Oh yeah, as far as we could tell no one got hurt. With that said, let's move on to 'the suck'.

## **Abysmal**

- The Cavs flat-out ran out of gas near the end of the third quarter. And on a night when all able hands should have been on deck to help out, Ben Wallace and Wally Szczerbiak combined for 4 points in 29 minutes of play.

Maybe we shouldn't assume no one was hurt.

Szczerbiak played a total of 6 minutes in the ballgame and was 1-4 from the field. His shooting has been atrocious since he arrived in Cleveland but he's not going to improve that aspect of his game playing 6 minutes per game. And let's not forget this is a player who has shot 49% from the field over his career and 40% from 3-pt range.

- Proving that multiple minutes don't necessarily lead to production, Zydrunas Ilgauskas was on the floor for 30 minutes Monday night. Not that you could tell from the box score. 'Z' was 2-10 from the floor for 4 points on the night. His Brazilian buddy Anderson Varejao played 20 minutes and scored 2 points. If you're keeping track at home, 'Z', Wallace,

Szczerbiak and Varejao combined for 69 minutes of playing time ,scoring 10 points and grabbing 16 rebounds. That's just not going to get it done against most teams, much less the team just ahead of you in the playoff standings.

- As mentioned above, Delonte West has shown flashes of excellence since joining the Cavs from Seattle. While not the prototypical PG, West pushes and controls tempo and can get to the rim. He has a serviceable deep jump shot and plays good defense on the ball. But West needs to step up and take responsibility for the offense more often. Right now he's looking to feed LBJ to the point it becomes a detriment on the offensive end of the court. West had a spurt against the Magic where he got into the lane and went to the basket. He scored on consecutive possessions and then suddenly, almost as if out of guilt, he stopped looking for his shot and ceded every possession to James.

James is going to demand his touches and he's going to take over a ballgame when he feels the need whether West is feeding him the ball or not.

West needs to assert himself and penetrate to the rim while the getting is good and to open the floor for LBJ and the rest of the Cavs. Not doing so slows everything to a crawl and works against this Cavalier team.

- By my math, Austin Carr's 'The L-L-L-L Train' count was way down Monday night. In fact, there wasn't a single reference to AC's catch phrase. That is quite possibly because this ballgame was watched with the television volume down and Joe Tait calling the action on the radio.

A man can only take so much.

## **Finally**

The Cavs are in a rugged stretch of games. Not only in quantity but also in quality of opponent. The Wine & Gold get a day off to recover Tuesday before squaring off against

the Detroit Pistons Wednesday at 'The Q'. Out of the frying pan and into the fire for the Cavaliers. The Pistons are obviously aware of what James and the Cavs can do when firing on more than cylinder. But it will be interesting nonetheless to see how the new-look Cavs fare against the Central Division leaders and the Eastern Conference's second seed.