

Cavs Crush Pistons 89-73

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Tuesday, March 18 2008 7:00 PM -

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Game Recap

First Quarter

For a guy with 32-plus years on his bones, a trick back, and titanium feet, Zydrunas Ilgauskas looked awfully good tonight, and he got it

started early. The big Lithuanian scored seven of his team's first eleven points, and staked the Cavaliers to an 11-8 lead on a three-point play off LeBron's snap pass. Detroit countered Z's early heroics with good outside shooting, especially from outside. The Pistons shot 52% as a team, with Billups and Hamilton in particular white-hot, out-rebounded the Cavaliers 11-7, and finished the period strong to take a 25-22 lead.

Second Quarter

Detroit continued to shoot the ball with proficiency at the beginning of the second quarter. Jarvis Hayes hit a circus, shot clock-beating three to make it 30-26, than another jumper after Wally split a pair of free throws. After a free throw by LeBron, Szczerbiak, off to a solid night, hit a three to cut the lead to 32-31. On Cleveland's next possession Andy found himself way out on the wing with the ball in his hands and drilled a twenty-footer to cut the lead to 34-33. Rasheed Wallace went baseline for two, but LeBron responded with a driving three-point play. After trailing for the most of the second quarter, the Cavaliers were tied- and the Pistons were finally cold. With the game tied at 38, McDyess goal-tended Sasha to put the Cavaliers in front, then seconds later, LeBron found Delonte for a transition three to make it 43-38. With time running down in the half and the score still 43-38, LeBron found Z wide-open on the baseline. Z's jumper went front-rim, but Ben Wallace, in a rare display of scoring prowess, grabbed the rebound and swished a fall-away ten-footer at the horn, all in one motion. Cleveland's 12-2 run had given it a 45-38 halftime lead.

The second period was a story of Cleveland domination. The Cavaliers outscored Detroit 23-13, won the rebounding battle 17-10, and held the Pistons, who missed their last eight shots of the half, to a chilly 28

percent from the field.

Third Quarter

The Pistons remembered how to shoot as the second half started. Back-to-back jumpers from Rasheed Wallace and Chauncey Billups, the latter a three, made it 45-43. Moments later LeBron's heat-check three made it 50-44, but Sheed answered with his own bomb from downtown, Tayshaun posterized Ben Wallace, and moments later Prince finished a Pistons run-out with a lay-in to give Detroit a 51-50 lead halfway through the period.

After a timeout, the Cavaliers immediately regained control. Sasha hit two free throws, LeBron grabbed an offensive rebound after a scrum and stuffed it in a preemptory fashion, and after a Pistons miss, Sasha banged in a three to finish the quick 7-0 run. The teams traded baskets for the remainder of the quarter, which ended with the Cavaliers in front, 63-57. Cleveland had answered Detroit's 13-5 opening run with a 13-6 run of its own, setting the stage for a fourth quarter that, like the second, would be owned by the Wine & Gold.

Fourth Quarter

Wally Szczerbiak had gotten the second quarter off to a strong start, and he did the same in the fourth. Wally bumped the lead to ten with consecutive baskets in the opening moments of the quarter. After a Pistons bucket, the Cavaliers converted an offensive rebound into an

Ilgaskas jumper. Another jumper by Z finished the 9-2 run and made it 72-59 with 8:33 left.

It was 78-68 with less than five minutes remaining when the Cavaliers put the game on ice. First Varejao drove the lane, went behind his back, and almost got the ball stuck back there before he brought it around and threw in a lay-up to make it 80-68. Prince missed a jumper, and with 3:31 left, LeBron dropped in one of his patented, dribble-out-the-shot-clock prayers to make it a fifteen-point lead. Cleveland didn't even have to shoot free throws, cruising the rest of the way to the pleasingly decisive 89-73 decision.

Odds and Ends

How the game was won: Defensive ferocity and offensive efficiency were the keys. After the rough opening quarter, the Cavaliers stifled Detroit, holding them under 40 percent from the field, including 5-of-17 from three-point range. Chauncey Billups, who never seems to bring his A game against the Cavaliers, scored seven points on 3-of-5 shooting in the first quarter and three points on 1-of-7 the rest of the way. Offensively, the Cavaliers shot a passable 44.4 percent, committed just seven turnovers, and had 22 assists on 36 made baskets. Cleveland also out-rebounded Detroit 46-39 and made more free throws (twelve) than the Pistons attempted (seven).

LeBron's Line: 30 points on 11-of-19 from the floor with six assists, seven rebounds, a steal, and a block.

Other heroes: Big Z was on all night, hitting 9-of-14, most of those long jumpers, for 20 points and eight rebounds. Wally Szczerbiak was solid off the bench, scoring ten points in fifteen minutes, and although the rest of the team didn't provide much oomph on the offensive end, they helped to contain the Pistons defensively- which was all LeBron and Co. needed.

Next: Friday evening at 7:30, when the Cavaliers attempt to stretch their home winning streak to nine and their lead in the playoff race to four-and-a-half games against the fifth-place Toronto Raptors.