

Cavs Escape With Big Win Over Sixers

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Saturday, March 29 2008 7:00 PM -

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Game Recap

With 11:17 left in the first quarter, Samuel Dalembert put Philadelphia in front 2-0 with an ugly-but-successful jumper. The 76ers would maintain their lead for the next two-plus periods, and they played the first quarter-and-a-half as if they were expecting to lead for all four.

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Utilizing the fast break to frequently roar by Cleveland's lackadaisical defenders, the Sixers jumped out to an 8-2 lead, were in front by as many as ten late in the first quarter, and held a 27-22 advantage at the end of one. Keeping the pressure on, Philadelphia scored the first six points of the second quarter to take their largest lead at eleven, a plateau they would reach on two other occasions during the period.

Not only were the Sixers controlling the pace and winning in transition, they were effectively putting the handcuffs on LeBron James. Bothered by the athletic Andre Iguodala, the King didn't make his first basket until the 4:24 mark of the first quarter and went just 3-of-7, finishing the first half with a quiet six points. Fortunately, other principals stepped up- Z scored twelve first-half points, Boobie Gibson had eight, and Delonte West, just beginning an outstanding night, had eight assists by the break. Still trailing by eleven with fewer than three minutes left in the half, the Cavaliers went on a quick 8-0 run and by the half trailed by just five, 48-43.

Cleveland finally seemed to get it defensively in the third quarter, shutting down Philadelphia's running game and forcing the 76ers into a 1-of-7 start with three turnovers. While the 76ers were scoring three points in the first six minutes of the quarter, Cleveland was mounting a comeback. Back-to-back three-pointers from West and Devin Brown put the Cavaliers in the lead for the first time at 53-51, and with 6:55 remaining in the quarter, West finished off a run-out with a slam to make it 55-51. Over the previous eight minutes of game action spanning the second and third quarters, the Cavaliers had outscored Philadelphia 20-5.

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At this point, the game became a narrowly contested struggle for survival, with neither team leading by more than six throughout the remaining quarter-and-a-half. Trailing 61-55, the 76ers put together an 11-4 run, re-taking the lead 66-65 on a three-pointer by Iguodala. It was tied at 68 after three. Philadelphia jumped back on top at the beginning of the fourth quarter and led until the seven-minute mark, when LeBron's throw-down made it 77-76 Cavaliers. It was 80-76 when the Sixers made another run, taking the lead on another Iguodala three and making it 86-82 Philly with three minutes left. A pair of massive Delonte West threes, sandwiched around another Iguodala bucket, tied the score at 88 apiece going into the final minute. On its ensuing possession, the 76ers twice grabbed offensive rebounds, but couldn't get the ball in the basket and wound up turning it over to the Cavaliers with 40 seconds left.

LeBron provided the requisite heroics. Dribbling out most of the shot clock, he turned the corner on Philadelphia's defense and banked in a tough running lay-up with 19 seconds left to put the Cavaliers on top 90-88. A stop, a Joe Smith free throw, and another stop later, it was over. The Cavaliers could exhale- and escape.

Odds and Ends

How the game was won: The tide turned when the Cavaliers finally began getting back on defense and

slowing down the 76ers fast break late in the second quarter. Triggerman Andre Miller had 10 points and five assists in the first half, and only six and four in the second. I don't have the exact fast-break numbers in front of me, but I do know that Philadelphia scored off transition a lot in the first period-and-a-half, and not so much thereafter. For the balance of the second half the Sixers were stuck in a half-court game, and since they don't shoot particularly well from outside or have a reliable low-post scoring presence, that style wasn't conducive for winning.

LeBron's line: 26 points on 11-of-18 from the field, with nine assists and nine turnovers, plus the game-winning bucket. Those near-triple-doubles just kind of sneak up on you sometimes. He also went to the free throw line a grand total of three times. It's great that we have a superstar who gets all the calls at home.

Other heroes: Delonte West played as if he were in

his salad days at St. Joe's, running Duquesne or St. Bonaventure or some other denizen of A-10 shmuck-dom out of the gym. In 39 minutes, D-West (?) had 18 points, 11 assists, and six rebounds. He also made four three-pointers, including two of critical importance during Cleveland's game-ending 9-2 run. Joe Smith played 32 minutes off the bench and to borrow Clark Kellogg's phrase, played a Roberta Flack Game- killing the Sixers softly with 13 points, eight boards, and a team-best +13 for the night. And Boobie Gibson had eight in the first half, hitting a pair of threes, before leaving for the locker room late with a sore ankle.

Next: Wednesday night at 7:00, when the Cavaliers go to Charlotte to take on the always-dangerous Bobcats.