

Cavs Win Wild One In Charlotte

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Wednesday, April 02 2008 7:00 PM -

Losers of six straight on the road, the Cavs looked to break that dismal streak at Charlotte against a Bobcats team that has been a handful for the Cavaliers in three previous meetings. They were a handful again on Wednesday night, but the Cavaliers, despite having LeBron James foul out late in the fourth quarter, were able to withstand a hot Bobcat shooting night and escape with a wild 118-114 victory. Jesse recaps the win for us.



March 5. That - the night LeBron hung fifty on the Knicks and was given a standing ovation at MSG - was the last time the Cavaliers had won a road game. They'd dropped six in a row away from the Q since then, and looked to break that dismal streak at Charlotte against a Bobcats team that has been a handful for the Cavaliers in three previous meetings. They were a handful again on Wednesday night, but the Cavaliers, despite having LeBron James foul out late in the fourth quarter, were able to withstand a hot Bobcat shooting night and escape with a wild 118-114 victory. With both Washington and Toronto blowing fourth-quarter leads and losing, the Cavaliers (42-33) now hold the all-important fourth spot in the East by a full four games over the Wizards, Raptors, and Sixers, with just seven to play.

Game Recap

First Quarter

The Cavaliers didn't start the game as if they intended to break any kind of losing streak. Scoring with unseemly ease from outside, from inside, and off transition, the Bobcats shot 70 percent in the first period, taking command with a 14-2 mid-quarter run. LeBron had 11, including a few spectacular finishes, but his teammates shot a combined 5-of-16, and all too often, while the Bobcats attacked the rim, the Cavaliers settled for jump shots. Charlotte led by as many as ten and enjoyed a 34-25 advantage at the end of one.

Second Quarter

The track meet continued in the second quarter. Cleveland shot 71 percent and scored 33 points in the period, but never trailed by fewer than four and found themselves behind 62-58 at halftime. That's because the Cavaliers, while heating up offensively, had neglected to shore up their defense. Charlotte tacked on 28 points, taking advantage of Cleveland foul trouble to go 10-of-12 from the stripe for the period. Alarmingly, the Bobcats had done this damage with minimal contributions from normal Cavaliers-killer Raymond Felton (two points on 0-of-3 from the field). LeBron, hampered by three fouls, took just one shot in the second quarter. The Cavaliers were shooting 55.6 percent, had 15 assists as a team, had out-rebounding the Bobcats 22-19, and had exactly squat to show for it thus far.

Third Quarter

After being blowtorched the entire first half, the Cavaliers said what the hey and decided to start guarding people, and seized control of the game in the third

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quarter. Four minutes into the period LeBron gave his team a 69-68 lead on a pair of free throws. The King extended the lead to three on a couple of more charity tosses, and made it a 74-70 game with a three-pointer at 6:41. After a couple of Charlotte free throws, Devin Brown hit three-pointer off a Delonte feed and knocked down two free throws, and LeBron followed with a threw-down off transition. It was now 81-72 with 4:03 left in the third, and the Cavaliers had outscored the Bobcats 23-10 since the break. Apparently satisfied that they'd defended enough for the quarter, they then slacked off. Charlotte ripped off 17 points in the last four minutes of the quarter and, a buzzer-beating three by Matt Carroll cut the lead to 92-89 after three.

Fourth Quarter

With 8:35 left and the Cavaliers clinging to a 97-95 lead, LeBron was hit with an offensive foul, his fifth, and had to leave the game. Wally Sczcerbiak replaced him and immediately hit a pair of clutch jumpers, extending the lead to six. Back-to-back dunks by Emeka Okafor cut it to 101-99, and a long jumper by Jason Richardson tied it. LeBron re-entered the game with 5:11 left and the score tied. Seven seconds later, he drove the lane and got a three-point play, giving the Cavaliers the lead back, this time for good.

It was nice to see the King back on the floor, but the welcome sight didn't last for long. With 3:56 to go, LeBron was hit with a blocking violation and, for the third time in his career, fouled out of a game. It was now up to the supporting cast to hang on to the tenuous lead and break the road losing streak- without the assistance of the greatest player on the planet.

They did it, thanks mainly to Sczcerbiak, Ilgauskas, and Devin Brown. Wally hit another big jumper to make it 107-103. Devin Brown made it 109-104 with a

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couple of free throws. After a Bobcat turnover, Devin penetrated and found Ilgauskas wide-open on the baseline, and Z's jumper made it 111-104 at the two-minute mark. Charlotte rallied, riding a couple of Jason Richardson treys to narrow the gap to 116-114, but Devin Brown hit a couple of free throws, and after a flurry of Bobcat misses, the game, and the streak, was over.

Odds and Ends

How the game was won: The Cavaliers never really shut down Charlotte defensively- the Bobcats shot 53 percent and scored no fewer than 25 points in any period- so they were forced to win it with offense. Aside from the chuck-erific first quarter, Cleveland played very well, moving the ball well (28 assists), avoiding turnovers (just ten), shooting 52.9 percent, and out-rebounding the Bobcats 47-38.

LeBron's line: 29 points on 11-of-19 shooting with five assists, four rebounds, three steals, and two blocks. Due to foul trouble, the King only played 31 minutes, but he still managed to run up his usual spectacular numbers.

Other heroes: Nobody played well- or at least consistently well- defensively. But seven Cavaliers scored in double figures. Anderson Varejao made several circus shots down low and ended up with 17 points and 12 boards on 8-of-9 shooting. Devin Brown shot just 4-of-14, but went 11-of-12 from the line on the way to a 20-point, eight-assist, and five-rebound performance. Ilgauskas hit some gigantic shots down the stretch and finished with 16 points and 12 boards. Delonte ran the floor game with aplomb and passed out seven assists. And off the bench, Wally and Joe Smith were deadly off the bench, combining for 24 points on 11-of-14 from the floor, with Wally's offense critical in the moments after LeBron fouled out.

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Next: Thursday night at 8:00, when the Cavaliers host the Bulls.