

Cavs/Wizards Game One: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Saturday, April 19 2008 7:00 PM -

The playoffs are back, and with a bang. WOW ... what a ballgame today. This one had a little bit of everything. A couple of poster dunks by LeBron, a near fracas, and a 1-9 shooting performance for that moron DeShawn Stevenson. The game was much closer than the 93-86 final count, and was absolutely dripping with playoff intensity. And if that isn't great enough by itself, John "The Anti-Branson" Hnat is back on our front page. It feels good to be alive on this humid April night in C-Town.



THE SUMMARY:

The playoffs are back! The playoffs are back! After an 82-game appetizer, the main course is finally served. And the Cavs were first to the table, pulling out a 93-86 win over the Washington Wizards at Quicken Loans Arena.

The final score is somewhat deceiving - it was a one or two-possession game for most of the second half, and the final margin came mainly because the Wizards played the "foul and hope the Cavs miss their free throws" game in the final minute. Make no mistake about it - this was playoff basketball, with all the intensity and excitement that make the playoffs what they are.

For such a close game, the first half saw several significant leads. The Cavs burst out of the gate and took a seven point lead; the Wizards

responded with a huge run that not only erased the Cavs' lead, but left them with an 11-point advantage. The run was keyed by four three-pointers by the Wizards' Gilbert Arenas, including a last-second bomb from 35 feet to end the first quarter. But the Cavs battled back and tied the score at 46 apiece by halftime, setting up the nail-biter second half.

LeBron James led all scorers with 32 points. Even better, he had only (*only*) six rebounds and four assists, so hopefully we won't be bombarded with meaningless "statistics"; that "prove" LeBron's greatness by skimming over several thresholds ("LeBron is now the only player in history to score at least 32 points, grab six or more rebounds, and dish out at least four assists in the opening game of a first-round series played on a Saturday afternoon"). Zydrunas Ilgauskas, continuing his string of good games from the end of the regular season, posted 22 points and hauled in 11 boards. Arenas led Washington with 24 points; Antawn Jamison was right behind him with 23.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Great Games Make Great Players: Early in the game, I wondered whether LeBron was suffering from the back spasms that limited him the last couple of weeks of the season. He seemed tentative and content to disappear on the perimeter - in other words, he was playing like Some Guy, not LeBron James.

He missed his first four shots from the field.

And then he woke up. Big time.

Shoving the "overrated" label right down DeShawn Stevenson's throat, King James made 12 of his last 15 shots of the game, including a highlight-reel dunk (we'll talk about that one in a minute) and a floater that broke the Wizards' backs (we'll talk about that one too). He finished with 32 points on a very efficient 12-of-19 performance. And he stayed away from the dribble-dribble-dribble-off-balanced-three-pointer offense (also known as "LeTired LeBron") that we saw more than a few times in the past month.

Because I Care: Stevenson's line for the day: three points, 1-of-9 shooting from the field (including 1-of-6 from three-point range), one rebound, five assists, one steal, one turnover. I believe I speak for James when I say: *bwahahahaha*

Z-veland: Yes, I cribbed that title from a courtside poster; I'm not proud of it. But it's the best lead-in I can manage this moment to describe Ilgauskas's fine game. He set the tone early with a pair of 18-footers, and continued with a combination

of jumpers and post moves to notch his 22 points. Oh, he also made all eight of his free throws.

How To Finish A Game, Part I: The Cavs closed game on an 11-2 run. Pardon me for thinking I am

[Steve Buffum](#)

, but:

huzzah!

How To Finish A Game, Part II: Delonte West drained all of his free throws in the final minute (unlike

cough

LeBron or Daniel Gibson).

Play Of The Game, Part I: No, we're not to the dunk yet. Hold your water. (We're doing this chronologically.) With the Cavs up 13-10 midway through the first quarter, Ben Wallace alertly grabbed the offensive board off a missed shot, then even-more-alertly flipped the ball to Ilgauskas for an easy dunk.

Play Of The Game, Part II: Okay, NOW it's time for the true play of the game. Yes, it's the LeBron dunk off the alley-oop

pass from Daniel Gibson, the one where he reached back for the ball with his right hand, then slammed the ball home in one motion. Yes, it's the dunk that you've probably already seen a dozen times on various game recaps, and will see at least a thousand more times in the future. (But just in case you need to see it one more time, [here it is](#) . As a side note, can anybody image a world without YouTube?)

Play Of The Game, Part III (Jay-Z/Soulja Boy Edition):

Here's the scenario: the Cavs were clinging to an 86-84 lead and had the ball with just over a minute remaining. They coughed away the first 19 seconds of the possession, leaving LeBron some 30 feet from the basket with five seconds on the shot clock and 60 seconds on the game clock. Just the way LeBron likes it. He drove right by DeShawn Stevenson and floated the ball into the air/ The ball found the bottom of the net; the Cavs had a four point lead with less than a minute to go; and the Cavs were on their way to the 1-0 series lead.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Clang!: The Cavs' shooting in the first quarter? 5 of 20. *Yecccch*. They were lucky to be down by only five points at the end of the quarter. They did improve over

the rest of the game, and finished with a 39.5% field goal percentage (making 30 of the 76 shots they attempted). (*NOTE: Clever segue to next item coming.*) Probably the most egregious rim-bender was...

Wally's World Looks A Lot Like Larry Hughes's:

...Wally Szczerbiak, who was pressed into starting duty in the wake of the injuries to Sasha Pavlovic (sprained ankle) and Devin Brown (tendinitis, jump shot). His 2-for-10 afternoon (including several missed wide-open shots) did nothing other than cement his status as Most Valuable Expiring Contract next season. To be fair, Szczerbiak showed plenty of hustle ... why did I just write that? That's the "she's such a *nice*

person" of sports evaluation. When you have nothing else good to say about an athlete, you say that he *hustled*

. But I mean it in the "no, she really *is*

nice" sense of the term - he was often around the ball making plays happen. Not that it matters all that much, since he is sucking rocks (sorry for the technical jargon, readers) at the one thing he is supposed to do really well.

"I AM A \$10 Million A Year Player! I Really AM!": In Game Three of last season's NBA Finals, Anderson Varejao made all Cavs fans wish they had sporks (for poking out their eyes) when he badly missed on a spin/drive in the waning moments. Alas, Varejao has not been deterred by the result of that play; if anything, he has been trying to prove that he CAN hit that shot, dammit.

That may explain why he tried another ill-advised drive with the Cavs trailing 63-61 in the third quarter. He missed, the Wizards got the rebound and pushed the ball, and quickly doubled their lead on a jumper at the other end. (Not content to rest on his laurels, Varejao later blew another drive in the nail-biter of a fourth quarter.)

I have busted Sasha Pavlovic all season long, introducing the **SPF Factor** as a measure of boneheaded play. Well, Sasha is on the shelf with his injury, but we're not going to put the **SPF** on the shelf with him. Instead, we'll award Varejao with an **SPF** of

45

, and suggest that the Cavs' brass take appropriate measures to keep him from post moves in the future ("Varejao gets the ball, back to the basket ... he spins, drives and [BOOM!] ... Was that a land mine?"

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Just Curious: Just before the half, LeBron and the Wizards' Haywood became entangled and gave each other a little how-do-you-do. Both benches emptied ... well, the parts of the benches that the assistant coaches call home, that is. With memories of the Suns losing two key players to suspension last post-season, both teams' assistants formed human chains, keeping any additional players from joining the fracas.

Now for the show of hands. How many of you think

that Coach Mike Brown was tempted - just a tiny bit - to push Devin Brown towards the fray with a "get in there and mix it up!" admonition?

Just Curious Times Two: Which punishment is currently being used more in the innermost circle of Hell: endlessly playing "Sweet Caroline" on a loop (thanks to the Boston Red Sox for making it the most overplayed song at sporting events), or endlessly playing the "WIZ-ard!" commercials (I don't even know the advertiser; and if I did, I wouldn't want to mention their name anyway) on a loop?

A BRIEF DISCOURSE ON PROBABILITY AND DEPENDENT EVENTS (or "How We Can Prove That Gilbert Arenas Is a Doofus")

This piece probably deserves a column of its own,

and it is going to make this game summary way too long. But it concerns an item that truly pisses me off, and I have a nice little soapbox to stand on, so here we go.

For a week now, the media has wet itself over Gilbert Arenas' now-infamous comments about the Cavs in [his blog](#):

We want Cleveland for our own reasons, we don't think they can beat us in the playoffs three years straight. It's hard to beat a team three years straight. We want to try our luck.

I wet myself too, but for a different reason: nobody, but nobody, has mentioned the hole in ol' Gilbert's logic, one that's large enough to drive a truck through. (The English hound in me wets myself for a different reason - the comma splice - but we'll leave that one alone. We don't have the room here,

and I'm making myself sound terribly incontinent.)

When determining the probability of some event occurring, we need to know whether it is an *independent* or *dependent* event. A dependent event is just that: one whose outcome depends on previous similar events. An independent event (surprise!) does not.

Most things in life can be explained through the casino, so let's take a trip there. The roulette wheel is the perfect example of an independent event: the number that will appear on the next spin has no relation to the numbers that have come before. You may *think* that they do - in fact, the casino *wants* you too (you didn't really think they have that board of the last fifteen or so numbers for no reason, did you?) - but they don't. The number that will be spun the next time has absolutely no relation to the

numbers that have come before.

The blackjack table provides the perfect example of a dependent event: the cards that come out in one hand cannot come out in the next one. (That fact makes card-counting possible, and eventually leads to [21](#) being the most popular movie of the spring.) Let's keep it simple and take a game with one deck. If all four aces come out in the first deal, then we know that there will be no more aces until the cards are shuffled. The past events directly influence what can happen.

"So why did you just waste sixty seconds of my life?," you ask. Because basketball seasons are independent events. It doesn't matter that the Cavs have beat the Wizards in the playoffs the past two seasons. It wouldn't matter if the Cavs had beaten the Wizards in the playoffs every season dating back to center jumps after each basket. (It would have been damn impressive, as

neither franchise existed then.) It wouldn't matter if the Cavs and Wizards had never met in the playoffs before. It's an independent event, and what happened in past seasons doesn't have any bearing on this year.

What Arenas says is true if we ignore the timing: *ahead of time*

, it indeed would be difficult for team X to beat team Y in three consecutive playoff series. If we could jump back two years to 2006, and we knew then that the Cavs and Wizards would meet in three straight playoffs, we could say it would be difficult for the Cavs to win all three years. But that's not the situation we have here, is it? Two of those years are already in the books. The chances of the Cavs winning three straight playoff series are much better

when they've already won two of them

.

Stick to basketball, Gilbert.

Okay, my spleen feels vented. We now return you to your regularly scheduled column, already in progress.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

As if you really need to ask. Game Two will be against the Wizards on Monday night.