

The Roundtable: Cavs-Celtics Predictions

Written by {ga=consigliere}

Monday, May 05 2008 7:00 PM -

With all three teams in Cleveland now contenders all at once, for Cleveland to win a championship over the next few years in any sport that road will have to go through....Boston. A rivalry is being born between the two cities, which was kickstarted last October when the Indians and Red Sox squared off in the ALCS. Now, the Celtics arguably are the best team in the NBA after a 66-16 regular season and are poised to make an NBA Finals run, but the Cavaliers stand in their way. With that, another war between Boston and Cleveland gets set to tip tonight, and our panel of writers offer up their predictions.



Cavaliers vs. Celtics. Cleveland vs. Boston. For a Cleveland sports fan these days, it really does not get much better than this.

There is some recent playoff history between the two cities as the Indians and Red Sox have matched up four times since 1995, the classic Cavaliers/Celtics matchup from 16 years ago in the 1992 Eastern Conference semi-finals the Cavaliers won in seven games, and the Browns/Patriots matchup in the 1994 playoffs.

But the stakes have never been higher between the two cities. With all three teams in Cleveland contenders all at once, for Cleveland to win a championship over the next few years in any sport that road will have to go through....Boston. The Red Sox are already the champions of Major League Baseball, the Patriots still the team to beat in the NFL even after their Super Bowl loss, and now the Celtics arguably the best team in the NBA after a 66-16 regular season and poised to make an NBA Finals run.

With that, another war between Boston and Cleveland gets set to tip tonight. The Celtics come into the series with the best regular season record in the NBA this year, and one of the best trios in NBA history with All-Stars Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce and Ray Allen. The Cavaliers come in with a team that underachieved during the regular season, and with All-World player LeBron James who has

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shown he can carry the Cavaliers team on his back and seemingly will his team to a win in any big game or series.

Here is the game schedule for the series:

Game 1: Tonight, 8pm TNT

Game 2: Thursday 5/8, 7pm ESPN

Game 3: Saturday 5/10, 8pm ABC

Game 4: Monday 5/12, 8pm TNT

Game 5: Wednesday 5/14, TBD TNT

Game 6: Friday 5/16, TBD ESPN

Game 7: Sunday 5/18, TBD ABC

This series is going to be electric and filled with high pressure and intense moments, and there are lots of interesting matchups and subplots to this series. Bottom line, will the Cavaliers win this series? TheClevelandFan.com panel offer up their thoughts on the series, and make their predictions below:





Cavs in 7

Celtics in 7

Cavs in 6

Celtics in 6

Cavs in 7

Celtics in 7

Cavs in 7

Celtics in 5

John Hnat: In most situations, three aces beats a King. The Cavs-Celtics series is not most situations. Although the Celtics had a terrific regular season, their series with the Hawks showed that the playoffs are a whole 'nother ballgame.

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I see this series going seven games. I see Boston clobbering the Cavs in a Game One that has most Cavs fans doubting that the series will go more than four games. I see Cleveland rebounding to take Game Two and swinging the home-court advantage in their favor. I see them losing that advantage by dropping one of the next two games. I see each team holding serve on its home court in Games Five and Six.

That leaves us with Game Seven. Will it be a game for the ages? Will it be an anti-climactic blowout, like Cavs-Pistons 2006 or Celtics-Hawks this past weekend? And most importantly, who will win it? After consulting with my most trusted adviser, and wading through its answers of "Reply Hazy, Try Again" and "Ask Again Later", I have to say I see the Cavs advancing to the Eastern Conference finals for the second straight year.

Cavs in 7

Jesse Lamovsky: For all the big names in this series, the most important player of all may be Rajon Rondo, the Boston point guard who may not be as well-known as his illustrious teammates and opponent, but can cause fits for the Cavaliers, a team that always seems to have difficulty with quick, penetrating guards. Rondo's driving and dishing down to the Celtics big men caused Cleveland problems in each of the teams' four regular-season match-ups, and unless Mike Brown has a new defensive strategy cooked up, it will cause problems in this series as well.

Cleveland needs to take at least one game in Boston and sweep the games at the Q to win this series, because they'll need to win it in six or less. That will be a tall order, considering the Cavaliers weren't able to hold serve at home against a Washington team that is drastically inferior to the C's. My gut says this series will be tight throughout, it will go seven- and the Cavaliers will not be able to win a Game Seven on the road.

Celtics in 7

Erik Cassano: When I made my prediction for the last round, I was among the dissenters, picking the Wizards to win in six because, in the immortal words of Bill Belichick, "I can only go by what I see." And what I saw in the weeks

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leading up to the playoffs was a Cavs team that was losing most fourth-quarter battles.

The six games the Cavs played in the first round renewed my confidence in this team a great deal. While they did get blown out once, and had an inexcusable Game 5 loss, this team once again looks like the playoff team of the past few years. A team that might not win beautifully on most nights, but a team that understands from the coach on down that defense and fourth-quarter play win playoff games.

It's a concept the Celtics have struggled with so far in the postseason, and with good reason. This is the first year that Kevin Garnett, Ray Allen and Paul Pierce are going through the playoff wars together. Generally, in the playoffs, teams with more experience together beat teams with less experience together, until the less-experienced teams gain enough experience to knock off the more established teams. That usually doesn't happen in the span of one postseason.

The Cavs underwent a major overhaul this season, but LeBron still has his most important role players from last year's Finals run in his supporting cast, not to mention Ben Wallace, a veteran of many deep playoff runs. Combine that with the physical and emotional hide-toughening this team went through in the Washington series, and they're probably in as good of a shape as they'll ever be to face the Celtics juggernaut.

If Boston gets this to a seventh game at home, I think they win the series. If the Cavs can take a 3-2 lead into Game 6, I think they win. So I'm going to think positive.

Cavs in 6

[Brian McPeck](#): ☐ I love a mulligan. Despite the Wizards beating the Cavs in 7 games in the first playoff series just like I predicted, I'm back to talk about the Cavs-Celtics series and give my thoughts after learning a hard lesson about just how good LeBron James really is.

Celtics in 6.

What? Like after picking the Wizards in 7 games in the first series I'm going to

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'mush' the Cavs and jump on that bandwagon? Negative.

This series has Celtics in 6 written all over it due simply to the fact that Boston is not stone-cold stupid like the Wizards were. Their stars may actually play rather than ridiculously run their mouths or quit on their team and sit on the sidelines in canary yellow or salmon colored suits. Boston actually has three 'Go To' guys which is two more than the Cavaliers can claim.

Seriously, I hope the Celtics series against the Hawks was a harbinger of good things to come for the Cavs. But it's also entirely possible it was a wake-up call for Boston. If the Cavs keep games close, hit wide open shots and get great end-game play from the King they can advance. But I'm not betting on 'ifs'. I have to go with three outstanding players facing the best player in the game. It's a numbers thing.

[Cris Sykes](#): Game on. The Eastern Conference semi-final has all the makings of a classic. The undisputed best team from October throughout the regular season matched up against the defending Eastern Conference Champions. LeBron versus KG. Delonte West and Wally Szcerbiak facing their old team.

I think the Celtics are one of the great regular season teams of my lifetime. I think the Cavs are one of the underperforming regular season teams of my lifetime. I think neither of those two facts means squat starting Tuesday night. As good as the Celtics have looked at home thus far, one of the biggest strengths of these Cavaliers with Mr. James on the roster has been their ability to go on the road and steal home court when needed. The Cavs struggle from time to time at home, but the Celtics have been terrible through their first three trips outside of Boston.

In an odd mix of games, I see the Celtics scoring more points than the Cavs through seven games. Fortunately for the Cavs, series' are not accumulative. I see them squeezing out four close wins to offset the three defeats and walk into "The Arena Still Called The Garden, That

Is Nothing Like The Old Garden" and ride King James to a nail-biting Game 7 victory.

Cavs in 7

Hiko: Picking Cleveland to win the series against the supposed best team in basketball is difficult, harder than achieving the peak of ecstasy with nothing more than a cheese grater and a signed photo of Martha Stewart. However, this Cavaliers team isn't about to be intimidated by anyone, and let us not forget that their strongest attributes are what serve teams best in the playoffs - defense and rebounding (especially offensive).

The Celtics looked vulnerable against the Hawks in Atlanta, and we should note that the "Big Three" are all getting up there in years. They will be playing with a sense of desperation, but the pressure of "Win Now or Never" may cause them to lose their composure. The Cavs don't have that pressure. They are in the same position they were in against Detroit last year - and we all remember how that series turned out.

That being said, Boston plays well at home (Cripes, but I do loathe Boston sports). And if this series comes to a 7th game, like I think it very well could, the home court advantage is huge in the end. So, sadly...

Celtics in 7

Nick Allburn: The Celtics pose a unique challenge; while they are an older club with limited athleticism, they're very balanced offensively and sport one of the conference's better defenses. Perhaps Boston's most intriguing feature is their bench, which kept the starters very well-rested (no player averages 36 minutes per game). Boston's bench includes grizzled vets like Sam Cassell, Eddie House, and James Posey.

Two players who don't dominate the headlines but may cause big problems for the Cavaliers are Glen Davis and Rajon Rondo. Rondo is the pint-sized, quick guard that traditionally gives the Cavs fits, and Davis is a bruiser on the interior who brings energy off the bench. If the Cavaliers allow Rondo to easily drive and hit layups or kick the ball outside, they'll be in trouble.

The key for the Cavaliers isn't LeBron James; it's everybody else. If the shooters (Gibson, Szczerbiak, West) are on, the Cavs will win the series and they won't need seven games to do so. But if the shooters struggle, the Cavs could be done

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in as few as five games.

I expect a terrific series, so this is an awfully tough call. If ever there's a series that I want to label "pick 'em," this is it. In the end, I just can't pick against LeBron James.

Cavs in 7

[Tony Lastoria](#): I love the city of Boston, but I hate their fanbase. H-A-T-E them. Boston is the only sports city where I loathe everything about all three (or four in this case) of their teams. Whereas Steelers and Wolverine fans sicken me to death in the fall when the pigskin is flying, I generally don't feel the same hit toward those fanbases in other sports.

With that in mind, I wanted Boston in the worst way in this series. It would give us a chance to shut their chowder-loving pieholes and sort of make amends for the Indians collapse to the Red Sox last October in the ALCS. And after the Hawks took the Celtics to a Game 7, I believe anything can happen and I would not be surprised if the Cavaliers win this series.

That said, I don't see it happening. I think the Hawks woke the Celtics up, and got them amped up into playoff form earlier than they expected to be. This may hurt the Cavaliers as Boston won't get caught unprepared in Game 1 when had Boston easily swept the Hawks the Cavalier may have gone in and stole Game 1 against an over-confident Celtics squad. Boston will be ready to go now from the start in Game 1, and I expect the Celtics to handle Games 1, 2 and 5 at home. This means the Cavaliers will have to be perfect at home for three games to force a Game 7 in Boston.

Rajon Rondo is going to kill the Cavaliers this series. The Cavaliers weakness has always been their inability to stop quick point guards, and with the mid-season trade of Larry Hughes this problem will show even more as we do not have anyone in the backcourt that can slow Rondo down. A lot of people see this series being a close one, and I think that is certainly possible. LeBron will be LeBron and will the team to victory at home for a game, but I think the Celtics Big Three and Little Rondo will be too much to overcome and the Cavaliers lose a close and critical Game 4, and then the Celtics close the Cavaliers out in Boston in Game 5. As always, I hope I am wrong.

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Celtics in 5

(take heart Cleveland fans, I picked the Wizards to beat the Cavaliers last round, the Yankees to beat the Indians in the ALDS last year, and the Indians to beat the Red Sox in the ALCS.)