

## Opportunity Knocks, Cavs Can't Answer

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Tuesday, May 06 2008 7:00 PM -

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What a weird basketball game. The Cavs hold Ray Allen SCORELESS, Paul Pierce to 2-14 from the floor, force 21 Celtic turnovers, and hit 22-26 from the foul line. And lose. How you ask? The Cavs shot 30% from the floor. LeBron was 2-18 with 10 turnovers. And KG just killed us, scoring 28 of the Celtics 76 points on a dizzying array of jumpers and bank shots over Ben Wallace and Joe Smith. The Cavs fell, 76-72, and Nick Allburn checks in to tell us about it.



If there's one role that Cleveland revels in playing, it's that of the underdog. We're certainly used to it. This time it's the Cavaliers reprising that underdog role as they look to slay the three-headed hydra that is the Boston Celtics. Rested, confident, and facing a Boston team that was invariably shaken up by their tough series with the Atlanta Hawks, the Cavs had to like their chances Tuesday night, but ultimately it was not to be.

### ***Game Recap***

#### **First Quarter**

The first few possessions of the game featured some bad shots (mostly by Wally Szczerbiak), but LeBron James broke the 0-0 tie by slithering into the lane for an easy two. Both teams looked out of synch, with numerous early turnovers, and 3:30 into the game it was still just 2-0. A pair of Ilgauskas free throws doubled the Cavalier lead.

After yet another stop, the Cavs ran out and James was fouled in the lane. The foul appeared to be on Kevin Garnett, but it was called on Paul Pierce, giving Pierce two early fouls and forcing him to sit down less than four minutes into the

game.

Kevin Garnett banked home a three-footer, finally putting the Celtics on the board with 8:00 to play in the opening stanza. Rajon Rondo scored on a nice give-and-go with Kevin Garnett, making the score 5-4, Cavs. Kendrick Perkins slammed home a fast break basket to give the Celtics their first lead of the game and energize the TD Banknorth "and you thought 'Progressive Field' was bad"; Garden crowd.

As many predicted, Rajon Rondo was an early thorn in the Cavaliers' collective side, scoring eight of Boston's first 12 points, and with 5:00 to play in the quarter the Celtics had a 12-7 lead. Rondo collected assists on the Celtics' other pair of early buckets. After missing their first seven shots, the Celtics made their next eight to open a 16-9 lead.

James Posey hit a late three for the Celtics as the first quarter came to a close, and the Cavs found themselves at a 25-15 disadvantage going into the second quarter. Frankly, the Cavs were lucky only to be down 10 considering that they just shot 21 percent in the quarter.

Kevin Garnett had 12 first quarter points, and proved to be an awfully tough guard for the Cavs. Garnett is an excellent post player, but he did most of his damage with his jump shot, as he was shooting over the shorter Ben Wallace.

### Second Quarter

The second quarter began much like the first ended, with a Kevin Garnett jumper, increasing the lead to 27-15. With the Celtics leading 29-19, Kevin Garnett finally sat down, to the elation of Cavs fans everywhere. The Cavs' bench was able to keep the team in the game as LeBron James rested on the bench, and the score was 29-22 with 8:00 to play.

With James on the bench, Boston, dogged by turnovers, missed a golden opportunity to pull away from the Cavaliers. James enjoyed a full 4:30 of rest.

With 5:35 left in the quarter Sam Cassell committed a hard foul on James, grabbing the collar of James' jersey as he went up for a layup. James took an awkward spill and had to recompose himself for a few moments under the basket. The Boston crowd, being the classy bunch that they are, booed James.

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Cassell was hit with a flagrant foul, as the referees correctly stated that he wasn't making a play on the ball. Regardless, it was a questionable flagrant foul call. In fairness, the flagrant call was probably to ensure that things didn't escalate like they did in the Cleveland/Washington series.

Kevin Garnett scored 16 of Boston's first 32 points. Ben Wallace made a great hustle play to force a turnover on a Celtics' inbounds pass, which culminated in a Wally Szczerbiak jumper. Szczerbiak, trying to make amends his first quarter of garbage, made a jump shot on the ensuing possession, and the Cavs found themselves trailing by only two (32-30) with less than 4:00 to play in the half.

A Rajon Rondo jumper and a Paul Pierce fast break bucket increased the Boston lead to six. The tandem of Pierce and Ray Allen had been held scoreless up to that point.

With just a few second left in the half LeBron fired a brilliant pass to Zydrunas Ilgauskas for an easy finger roll. James then made a rare boneheaded play, blocking Rajon Rondo as Rondo sprinted up the court for a buzzer-beater. Rondo made both of his free throws to increase the Boston lead to four.

The Celtics led 41-37 at the half, and the Cavs were lucky to be down just four considering that they were shooting a WNBA-like (ZZZZZING!) 28.9 percent.

The Cavs kept things close for three reasons. 1) Free throws; the Cavs were 15/18, the Celtics 8/10. 2) Turnovers; 12 for Boston, 7 for Cleveland. 3) Offensive rebounds; Cleveland 5, Boston 2. (4) Sam Cassell's [good looks](#) .)

### Third Quarter

As the quarter began Kevin Garnett and Paul Pierce got a pair of easy layups for Boston, doubling the Celtics' lead. Thankfully the Cavaliers seemed determined to get Zydrunas Ilgauskas going in the second half, setting Z up for an open jump shot and giving him a look in the low post.

An 11-0 run fueled by Boston miscues gave the Cavaliers a 48-45 lead with 7:07 to play in the quarter. After some gritty offensive rebounding

by Ben Wallace, Wally Szczerbiak's three point shot was pure, giving the Cavs a 51-45 lead (14-0 run!). A Kendrick Perkins free throw finally broke up the remarkable Cleveland run.

Paul Pierce and Kendrick Perkins hit shots to cut the lead to 51-50 with less than 3:00 in the quarter. A questionable charging call gave LeBron James his fourth foul, forcing him to sit down with 2:12 in the quarter.

Even with LeBron James and Zydrunas Ilgauskas on the bench, the Cavs were able to hang tough for the remainder of the quarter. At the end of three, the Cavs were very much alive, trailing 53-52.

### Fourth Quarter

As the quarter opened TNT flashed a graphic indicating that the Cavs were shooting just 28 percent. Twenty-eight percent! And they were just down by one! That's a testament to how well the Cavs were playing defense and getting to the free throw line.

After 2:30 of what was tantamount to an offensive explosion (in this game, anyway), a three point play by Sasha Pavlovic gave the Cavaliers a 60-59 lead. LeBron James and Kevin Garnett re-entered the game.

Sam Cassell really burned the Cavs in the fourth, making two early threes and hitting a deuce to give Boston a 66-60 lead. Wally Szczerbiak drained a three of his own to cut the lead to three, and LeBron James made a layup, his first basket since early in the first quarter (Cleveland's first basket of the game). It was a once again a one-point game.

A Daniel Gibson trey ball tied the game at 68 with a hair over 2:00 to play. If you wanted a nail-biter, as Frank Costanza would say, ["YOU GOT IT"](#)

!&quot;

With LeBron James struggling from the field, Zydrunas Ilgauskas answered the call for the Cavaliers. Big Z drained a 20-footer to give the Cavs a 70-68 advantage with 1:30 to play. Kevin Garnett, who's a better than average player himself, answered back with a 21-footer on the ensuing possession to tie the game once again.

LeBron James was unable to hit a runner for the Cavs and Sam Cassell hauled down the rebound for Boston. Cassell was fouled on the rebound and hit both of his free throws to give the Celtics a 72-70 edge. Cleveland had possession with 52.4 seconds to play.

King James must have committed some kind of malfeasance against the Sporting Gods, because he could not get a break all night long. James must have had at least half a dozen shots go in and out. Such was the case on this particular possession. But just as he had all game, the Lanky Lithuanian came to the rescue, swatting in an offensive to tie the game at 72. Somewhere Austin Carr cried out &quot;The best tip drill man in the league!&quot; in between bites of DiGiorno Pizza. Michael Reghi couldn't believe it wasn't delivery.

But that tall guy who wears number five for Boston spun inside to lay the ball in, and Boston had the lead once more, 74-72, with 21.4 seconds to play.

So the Cavaliers had possession with 21.4 to play, and I was left pondering what they might do. They could hold and play for a two or a three at the buzzer, ensuring that they wouldn't have to play defense again if the shot went in (it would mean overtime or a win). The Cavs could also take a shot before the buzzer, and that way if they missed, they would have an opportunity to foul. There are different schools of thought on this scenario, and I probably side with the second camp. When you're losing, you want an opportunity to extend the game if you

miss your game-tying/winning shot.

LeBron James dribbled down and got a good shot in the lane, but as had happened all night long, the iron was unkind. The ball rimmed out, James Posey grabbed the rebound and was subsequently fouled. Posey made both of his free throws to make the lead four, and more importantly, two possessions.

The Cavs took their final timeout to advance the ball, LeBron James missed a three-pointer, and Rajon Rondo dribbled out the clock. Game. Set. Match. Final score: 76-72, Bahstan.

### ***Quick Hits***

**Concerning King James.** People are really going to latch onto LeBron's 2/18 shooting stat, and while the guy had a bad night in the box score, he really didn't really shoot all that badly. Call me an apologist, but at least six or seven of those misses, including James' potential game-tying deuce, were shots that usually fall and simply rimmed out. LeBron's going to be fine, and he'll probably come back with a big game on Thursday night.

Other positives for James were assist/rebound numbers; he posted nine in each column. James played terrific defense on Paul Pierce, holding Pierce to 2/14 shooting and just 4 points. LeBron was 8/10 from the free throw line, which might be a little low on the attempts side, but a nice percentage especially when you consider how he struggled from the line during the first two games of the Washington series.

But LeBron ran into some serious stumbling blocks tonight, also. He allowed himself to get into foul trouble again, and he can't afford to let that become a recurring problem in the playoffs, or the regular season for that matter. Most disturbing to me were LeBron's 10 turnovers. If LeBron's lousy shooting numbers cost the Cavs the game, his turnovers

were equally liable. And 0/6 from downtown is no good. James still shoots too many threes, and when he's shooting lots of threes it usually means he's settling for bad shots.

**It won't be ESPN's favorite highlight, but...** One of the plays of the game was LeBron's foolish blocking foul on Rajon Rondo at the very end of the first half. The foul gave Rondo two free throws, and he converted both of them. Ceteris paribus, if LeBron doesn't commit that foul then the Cavs have the ball with 21.4 seconds to play and the game tied at 72, and things could have turned out quite differently.

**Big Ticket=big problems.** Kevin Garnett had his way with the Cavaliers tonight. 28 points and 8 boards, but more importantly, that's 28 of just 76 total points. The Cavs are going to have to get creative with how they guard Garnett as the series continues, or it could end up being a short series.

Ben Wallace wasn't getting pushed around at all by the wiry Garnett, but Wallace is only 6' 9" meaning that the mid-range jumper was available to the 6' 11" Garnett all night. But hey, if Kevin Garnett is going to beat you with jump shots, you tip your cap to him and live with it.

The ugly match up was Joe Smith on Garnett. Smith is still a fine reserve, but he's no spring chicken, and the quicker Garnett stole his lunch money tonight. I have no idea why Smith was on Garnett on the possession where Boston took a 74-72 lead, but Wallace doesn't get beat inside like that, and maybe Garnett doesn't make that basket.

**A match made in heaven.** We may have finally found someone slow enough for Wally Szczerbiak to guard, and his name is Ray Allen. Allen was total non-factor in spite of playing over 37 minutes, scoring zero -- count 'em -- zero points on 0/4 shooting and turning the ball over 4 times. Wally deserves credit for keeping a hand in Allen's face for most

of the evening, because as the Cavaliers have learned in the past, Allen is a pretty safe bet to hit a wide open three.

**Speaking of Wally World...** At the risk of sounding like a broken record, what's it going to take to get this dude back on the bench? Look, I like Szczerbiak; he's clearly got passion, he's by all accounts a hard worker, and he seems like a nice enough guy in interviews, but he had two good games out of six against Washington and he just served up another clunker (5/14 shooting, 2/5 from 3-point land).

Devin Brown earned the starting job this season in lieu of Sasha Pavlovic's holdout/injury (Speaking of which, why didn't Brown see the floor at all tonight?), but if it's offense Mike Brown is looking for, why not start Daniel Gibson? Gibson is less of a defensive liability than Szczerbiak, he's the team's best three-point shooter, and he does this one thing that fans really enjoy: HE MAKES SHOTS! I'm a Mike Brown supporter, but all I can come up with on this one is that Szczerbiak has incriminating photos of that one thing Mike Brown did with that donkey that one time when he got completely trashed.

**No, no, no...the ball's supposed to go IN the hoop!** The Cavs had about as lousy a shooting night that a team, let alone a playoff team, can realistically have in the NBA. The team's shooting percentage was 30.8 percent.

Now I know what you're thinking, that it was primarily anchored by LeBron's tough luck game, right? Eh, not really. Take away LeBron's 2/18 and the Cavs are still just 21/57, good for 36.8 percent. As far as I know we're only starting one player named

Wally Szczerbiak, so that stat just won't cut it (I kid out of love). The three things that I noted at halftime (free throws, offensive rebounding, Boston turnovers) are why the Cavs were able to keep this thing close all night, and chances are that they won't be able to survive another game shooting this poorly.

**Advance screening.** Boston was guilty of some moving screens early in the game that weren't called. The Cavs, namely Anderson Varejao, are also susceptible to moving screens from time to time. Moving screens are one of those fouls that you just don't see very often, but they could be called all the time; not unlike holding in football.

**Neither a close talker nor a high talker, but a fast talker.** During his halftime interview, did anyone else notice that Rajon Rondo talks really, really fast? It's like he was doing an impression of Dr. Reid from Scrubs. If that dude's ever on the receiving end of a career-ending injury, he definitely has a future as an auctioneer.

**The Cleveland Cavaliers will return:** Thursday night for game two of their best-of-seven series with the Chowderheads. If the Cavs can come back to Cleveland with a split they will be in terrific shape. Tip off from TD Banknorth Garden at 7:00. Be there, or be square.