

Judgment Night

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Tuesday, May 13 2008 7:00 PM -

8:00 tonight, game five, Cavaliers versus Celtics. The series is deadlocked at two, and for the Cavs to get themselves a rematch in the Eastern Conference Finals with the Pistons, they have to win a game on Boston's home floor, something that would not be easy to do in a game seven setting. This is a huge ball game tonight folks. Can King James relive his game five heroics from last season against Detroit? Jesse tackles the topic in his preview of tonight's contest. GO CAVS!



It's going up. Steadily, gradually- maybe a little *too* gradually, but gradually all the same- it's going up. It is LeBron James's shooting percentage in this series. From 2-of-18 (11 percent, which hurts even to write) to 6-of-24 (25 percent) to 5-of-16 (31 percent) to 7-of-20 (35 percent) it has improved in each game. And while it hasn't gotten to where LeBron, the Cavaliers, and the entire city of Cleveland would like it to be, his shooting stroke is no longer the blight on humanity it was when this series began a week ago.

For the Cavaliers to steal Wednesday's Game Five and give themselves a chance to close out the Celtics on a frenzied Friday night at the Q, that stroke might have to make a quantum leap.

The headlining stories of the Cavaliers-C's donnybrook thus far have been LeBron's brutal shooting, the mirrored woes of Paul Pierce and Ray Allen, and the play of each team's supporting cast, which might be the key to the series at this point. In Boston's opening two wins in Massachusetts, the green-clad role players badly outplayed their wine-and-gold counterparts. Sam Cassell either came off the bench or beamed down from his home planet to pour in 13 critical points in his team's 76-72 Game One win, and the C's got massive contributions from Cassell, Twinsburg's own James Posey, and Leon Powe in their rout of the Cavaliers in Game Two. Boston's bench outscored Cleveland's bench 56-34 in the first two

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games, and with two of the Big Three and James scuffling, those points might have been the real difference in the C's jumping out to a 2-0 lead.

(Speaking of Leon Powe...a buddy and I wound up with tickets to Game Three in the second row right behind the Cavaliers bench. A fellow Cleveland fan on a Spurs message board that I frequent tipped me off to his winning playoff-lottery number, and I bought the tickets off Ticketmaster without realizing the kind of money I was spending. I'm not bragging; I really couldn't afford those seats. I tend to buy things somewhat heedlessly. We sat next to a guy who was doing nothing but rooting for Leon Powe. We asked him if he knew Powe; he said he went to high school and college at Cal with him. The guy was also signing autographs and fielding questions about the Buffalo Bills and whether or not he'd make the Pro Bowl in 2008. It wasn't until early in the third quarter that we realized we were sitting next to Marshawn Lynch. Had I not been feeling no pain and had he worn his helmet, I would have figured it out sooner. Oh, and Sharon Reed looks good in person and smells even better. Okay, gratuitous name-dropping story over.)

Anyway, in the Q it was a different story. Cleveland's bench was brilliant in the 108-84 Game Three rout, outscoring Boston's reserves only 29-24, but making 12-of-16 from the field in doing so. The disparity was even more pronounced in Game Four- a 34-17 edge in bench points to the Cavaliers, including sensational play from Joe Smith (who was fantastic in the previous game as well), Anderson Varejao and Boobie Gibson. Cleveland's bench outscored Boston's 63-41 in Games Three and Four, a +22 that neatly matched Boston's own +22 in bench points in the first two games. And this number doesn't include the energy and defense each club has gotten from its reserves, Boston's in the first two games, Cleveland's in the last two.

None of this should be particularly surprising given the way the series has gone. Generally, role players and reserves perform better at home than on the road, they've done so here, and, sure enough, each team has held serve on its own stomping grounds. But to win this series, the Cavaliers will have to break Boston's serve. And that's where LeBron James comes in.

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As good as Joe Smith (who I was going to call an "old man" until I glanced at his ESPN player card and saw that he's actually a week-and-a-half younger than I), Andy, Boobie, and the rest of LeBron's Court were this past weekend-and-change, it'd be foolhardy to count on the same level of play in the smoky confines of the *Nouveau* Garden. In the playoffs, role players help you win at home, and superstars help you win on the road. For Cleveland to win Game Five, LeBron James will probably have to be great- and being great on the road means more than setting up teammates. It means taking over on the offensive end scoring the basketball in bunches. Since the Celtics likely won't let LBJ get to the rim with a great deal of consistency, and since they're likely to be allowed to inflict uncalled contact on him when he does drive, that means he will have to take the jump shots that have been maddeningly off so far... and they will have to be on.

You know, like another [Game Five](#) we all remember fondly.

Hopefully he won't have to be *that* gargantuan. It's almost unfair to ask the man to put on such a virtuoso performance again. But if LBJ can pour in 30 or 35 points and knock down the jumper with consistency, it eliminates a lot of this team's margin for error. And the way the Cavaliers are playing defense right now, if LeBron blows up, it's almost a dead issue. One big Wednesday night from the King and we'll be setting ourselves up for a knockout punch of the Celtics on Friday.

Yes, it took me almost a thousand words, including the aforementioned gratuitous name-dropping story, to state that LeBron James needs to kick butt and take names for the Cavaliers to win Game Five. It's good work if you can get it, folks. Go Cavs!