

Cavs/Celtics Game Five: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Wednesday, May 14 2008 7:00 PM -

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The Cavs did play quite well the first half - they ended the first quarter ahead 23-18, and continued to expand their lead during the second quarter. That's when Boston woke up. They cut the lead to three points (46-43) at the half, and then took command with a dominating third quarter. At the end of that frame, the Cavs found themselves down by nine, at 72-63.

Cleveland had one more run in them, as they pulled to within four points (91-87) with 45 seconds remaining. Then came the dagger ... and for once, it wasn't a shot. Rather, it was an offensive rebound by Ray Allen with 19 seconds to go. With no other option, Cleveland started to foul and send the Celtics to the line. Actually, they sent a Celtic to the line - Paul Pierce. And he made seven consecutive free throws in the final minute-plus of the game.

LeBron James led all scorers with 35 points, but was uncharacteristically quiet in the rest of the stat sheet, as he grabbed just three rebounds and had five assists. Boston was led by the threesome of Pierce (29 points), Kevin Garnett (26 points on 12-of-19 shooting from the field, 16 rebounds) and Rajon Rondo (20 points, 13 assists).

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

The First 20 Minutes: For roughly the first quarter and a half, the Cavs played great ball. They were hustling on offense and defense. Some of the more illustrative plays:

- With the game tied at seven apiece, Boston's Pierce tried to drive from the top of the key. LeBron, from behind, grabbed the ball right out of Pierce's hands, and drove to the other end. Allen fouled him, but LeBron still made the shot, and then sank the free throw to complete the "and-one";

- Moments later, Ben Wallace grabbed a rebound. He was off balance, and falling out bounds, so he tossed the ball in the general direction of a teammate. It was also in the general direction of Garnett, who stole the ball and passed it to Boston center Kendrick Perkins. But Wallace recovered and blocked Perkins' dunk attempt, stripping the ball before Perkins could fully extend his arms;

- After a Rondo drive and layup cut the Cavs' lead to 18-15, Wally Szczerbiak drilled a three-pointer, immediately quieting the hometown crowd;

- After the Cavs pushed their lead to seven points early in the second quarter, Boobie Gibson almost stole the ball from Sam Cassell in the backcourt. The ball was briefly on the floor, and James - the King, the Chosen One, he of the \$90 million Nike contract - dove for the loose ball, getting a nice floorburn on his elbow.

It's Good To Be The King: Much has been made about LeBron's struggles thus far this series. While he still did not have his best night from the floor (12-of-25), and his outside shot is still very dicey at this point, he finally was able to get some shots to drop, and he was

particularly aggressive in attacking the hoop. His 35 points far exceeded his total from any of the first four games. In the game's first couple of minutes, James hit a pair of jumpers, and you could almost sense the entire Boston crowd thinking, *uh oh, he's finally waking up*

. He did slow down a bit in the second half (12 points then versus 23 points in the first half), but he finally looked like the kind of player who gets his likeness plastered on the sides of buildings.

But It's Not Necessary To *Have* The King: During the second quarter, James left the game and dashed to the locker room. (We're still not sure why; I suspect LeBron may have had Indian food before the game. If you know what I mean.) During those few minutes, the Cavs held serve, outscoring the Celtics 8-7. Always a good sign when the other guys can step up while LeBron is out.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Where Choking Happens: We mentioned it

earlier, but now we have to look at it more closely. The Cavs had taken a 14 point lead (43-29) with just under four minutes to go in the first half. Their defensive intensity was amazing, and they kept hitting their shots.

And then it all went down the drain.

The biggest culprit was Rondo, who hit back-to-back three pointers to cut the lead to six. Not only did he cut the Cavs' lead almost in half, but he (a) established himself as yet another option on offense (as opposed to the "go ahead, Rajon, shoot the ball" defense that the Cavs had been getting away with to that point), and (b) got the Boston crowd into the game.

So instead of closing the half strong, the Cavs closed it with Boston having scored 14 of the last 17 points. But surely they would make some adjustments in the locker room and come out strong in the second half, right? Right?

Where "Does Anybody Here Know The Heimlich Maneuver?"

Happens: Um, not so much. Here are the Cavs' first three possessions from the second half:

- Delonte West slipped and fell to the ground, losing the ball;
- James threw a pass that was Derek Anderson-esque in its possibility of being intercepted (which it was);

- Zydrunas Ilgauskas was whistled for a three second violation.

It's kind of difficult to turn the tide when you're not even getting the chance to take shots.

While the struggles on offense were quite visible, the real problem was the overall loss of intensity. Most possessions started with West walking/jogging the ball upcourt. The Cavs are not a strong halfcourt team (*we report only the breaking news here in this column*)

); if they don't get the ball into the frontcourt right away, and the defense gets a chance to set up, then they are pretty much out of luck.

Where "You Sure This Rim Is Fifteen Feet Away?" Happens:

The good news is that the Cavs made their way to the line 41 times last night. The bad news is that they made only 28 of those attempts (for a 68% percentage), and only a late flurry of West free throw makes brought the percentage up that high. Late in the third quarter, it seemed like Anderson Varejao and Joe Smith were trading misses at the stripe. Ultimately, the missed free throws probably did not

make the difference, but they sure didn't help. When you are trying to get back into a game, every point truly counts (*I know; as opposed to other times when the points don't count*), and squandered opportunities sting that much more.

Where An Invisible

Seven-Foot-Three Man Happens:

Ilgauskas's totals for the night: 2-of-5 from the floor, six points total, seven rebounds. He was a complete non-factor on defense (well, an almost complete non-factor; he did have one nice block of a Rondo layup attempt early in the game, causing more than

one observer to wonder if the Celtics' point guard had changed his name to Sasha Rondo). He also had only one offensive rebound the entire game; we've seen single *possessions* in which he's gotten more. (Granted, most of them are off his own missed shots, but they still count.)

Where Every Man For Himself Happens: In Games Three and Four, the Cavs did a terrific job of passing the ball on offense and setting up plenty of easy baskets. That did not happen in Game Five,

not at all. The most damning evidence of this: Cleveland had a total of 11 assists for the game. (By comparison, LeBron James alone had more assists in Game Four. By further comparison, the Celtics racked up 25 assists on the evening.) We saw all of the offensive traits that cause our pets' ribs to become sore: standing around on offense, little movement, and being forced into bad shots as the shot clock wound down.

Where "Man, The Whole

Night Sucks"; **Happens:**

The game ended around 10:50, so Cavs fans who wanted to catch the last few minutes of *Top Chef*

could see who would have to Pack Your Knives And Go this week. Unfortunately, the Turk (or whatever they call it in the culinary world) visited Andrew, who always made for good television. Even worse, he went willingly (explicitly saying that "you don't have to call security"). I was truly expecting a Three Mile Island

level meltdown from him, and he disappointed me.

Doesn't he know that he's supposed to ridicule himself for my entertainment?

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

It's pretty simple. Win Game Six (this Friday at Quicken

Loans Arena), or go home.
And if the Cavs do win, then
these two teams will meet one
more time in Boston on
Sunday.