

Cavs Win Ugly, Force Game 7

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Friday, May 16 2008 7:00 PM -

It wasn't pretty. In fact, it was downright ugly. They won't be sending the game tape to Springfield, Mass. But they'll be sending the series back to Boston, Mass, and that's all that matters. Despite playing horrendous basketball for most of the first half, and despite showing an alarming propensity for not standing prosperity for most of the second, the Cavaliers, behind 32, 12 and six from LeBron James, survived the Celtics 74-69. We're going to see a Game Seven.



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Game Recap

The game played out in an eerily similar fashion to Game Five, only in reverse: road team jumps out to a lead, home team puts together a huge run spanning halftime to take control, then hangs on for dear life down the stretch. In the beginning, it was Boston's game. After a tight, sloppy first quarter in which neither team led by more than three, the C's temporarily took command, with the help of some offensive play by the Cavaliers that was brutal even by their relaxed standards. Midway

through the second period, Boston led 31-25 and Cleveland was shooting well south of 30 percent.

Then the Cavaliers got hot- or, to be more precise, the Celtics went cold. Ice-cold. Boston went nearly nine minutes spanning halftime without making a field goal, missing sixteen straight from the field, as Cleveland went on a 24-2 run to take a 49-33 lead early in the third. Z knocked in a couple of long jumpers, LeBron scored both from the foul line and, amazingly, from the perimeter; but the big shot belonged to Delonte West. With Cleveland holding a 39-33 lead and time running out in the half, Anderson Varejao forced a steal and shoveled it over to Delonte, who threw up a twisting, contested three-point prayer just before the horn that banked in, giving the Cavaliers a 42-33 halftime lead.

The lead was 51-35 three-and-a-half minutes into the third when Cleveland, not for the last time on the night, displayed its complacent side. While Mike Brown fiddled Nero-like on the sideline, the Celtics ripped off a 13-0 run punctuated by several long jumpers by KG and Paul Pierce, and all of a sudden, with just under four minutes remaining in the third, the lead had shriveled to 51-48. The tone for the remainder of the night had been set- the Cavaliers giving themselves breathing room, and the Celtics taking it away. It made for uncomfortable viewing.

Just as they had in the second period, the Cavaliers finished the third strong, using a 6-0 run to springboard themselves into a 59-50 lead at the end of three. The run became 12-2 when LeBron opened the fourth by drilling two jumpers and found Joe Smith for a hook, making it 65-52 with 9:55 lead. Whew- but wait. With Garnett and Pierce still hitting from

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outside and Sasha Pavlovic playing the double-agent on the other end, the C's embarked on an 8-0 run to cut the lead back down to five. A lay-up and a jumper by LeBron made it 69-60 with 4:05 left, but Boston wasn't done yet. Eddie House, who took Sam Cassell's minutes and did good work with them, drilled a clutch three to make it 69-63, and there was still plenty of time left for the C's to pull this one out.

But they didn't. Wally Szczerbiak, who had been miserable all night, finally made himself large, dropping in a 25-foot bomb to extend the lead to nine with 2:09 left. That shot proved to be the dagger. Boston cut it back down to three with 23.4 seconds left, but Joe Smith (who could very easily have been called for steps), finally made his foul shots, hitting two to put the game away. It was ugly, scary, and at times downright unpleasant... but the Cavaliers had saved us from the unsightly sight of seeing the Celtics celebrate on the floor of the Q.

(A frankly very poor charging call on Paul Pierce with the Cavaliers clinging to a five-point lead and under a minute left didn't hurt either. Consider it a make-up for that equally poor blocking foul on Andy late in Game Five. *Hi, we're NBA officials, and we think the crowd is doing such a bang-up job we're going to do you a couple of solids. The NBA is Fan-tastic.*

But I do know this- if the Cavaliers play like this in Boston on Sunday, the season will be over. They need to be a lot better if they're going to win. That seems obvious.

Odds and Ends

How the game was won: They did it with defense and rebounding, by getting to the foul line, and by making their foul shots once they got there. After a poor effort on Wednesday, Cleveland held the C's to 39.7 percent shooting (34 percent from non-Big Ticket members of the Green). Paul Pierce hit some tough shots but overall went 5-of-15, with LeBron constantly in his shirt. Ray Allen was once again MIA, going 3-of-8. Most importantly, the Cavaliers held Rajon Rondo in check; after his massive performance on Wednesday, Rondo wasn't allowed driving space and had just two points and five dimes in 31 ineffectual minutes. Cleveland hammered Boston on the glass, winning the rebounding battle 45-37 and grabbing sixteen offensive boards. The Cavaliers basically stayed in the game early with offensive rebounding when they couldn't hit anything. And just as they had on Wednesday, Cleveland had a huge advantage at the foul line, going to the stripe 25 times as opposed to Boston's 13. Unlike on Wednesday, the Cavaliers hit their freebies, going 21-of-25 for a sparkling 84 percent.

One problem that might be even bigger than the shooting: Cleveland's assist-to-turnover numbers have been atrocious the last two games: the Cavaliers were 11-to-12 on Wednesday, and 10-to-14 on Friday night, which is a Popeye Jones level of ugly.

"Struggling" is pretty much a normal state for Cleveland's offense, but I thought the Cavaliers did move the ball better after the trade. They haven't moved it well

since Game Four. Actually, they haven't played 48 minutes of basketball since Game Four. Then again, neither has Boston.

The C's might have 66 wins to Cleveland's 45, but these are two evenly matched teams. Does Boston look to you what a 66-win team ought to look like? Me neither. Boston looks, has looked, and will continue to look extremely vulnerable. The only edge is home-court. That's it. And if the Cavaliers play Game Seven like they played Games Five and Six, they will get dusted.

LeBron's line: 32 points, 12 rebounds, six assists on 9-of-23 from the field and 13-of-15 from the line. He was far from perfect- the shooting percentage still isn't there, and he made some poor decisions passing the ball, winding up with eight turnovers- but LBJ also hit some big outside shots to key Cleveland runs, played stellar defense on Pierce, and rebounded like a man possessed. He was good tonight. He'll need to be a whole lot better than good if the Cavaliers are somehow going to end Boston's season in the *Nouve*
au *Ga*
rden on Sunday afternoon.

Other heroes: LeBron's cohorts provided some solid moments that won't appear in the box score. Ben Wallace was a forceful presence in the middle and on defense, especially early in the game. Delonte had another solid game, scoring ten points. Joe Smith came off the bench and scored nine points on 3-of-4 from the field and, more importantly, 3-of-4 from the line. Woefully underused, Z shot 3-of-11, but the big fella yanked down a few massive offensive rebounds early, when the Wine & Gold needed every extra chance they got. Wally went 2-of-11 but hit the shot he absolutely had to hit. And for the first- and probably last- time in this series, we were treated to a Damon Jones sighting, as DJ entered the game at the beginning of the second period, jacked up a couple of quick shots that didn't fall, and left the floor, never to return. Thanks for playing, DJ- you may now return to your normal role of talking the ears off every other player on the team.

Next: Game Seven, 3:30 in Boston. It's the greatest event in sports; a Game Seven; and

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we'll have the chance to see it. You can't ask for anything more than this.