

## A Couple Concerns With The Cavs

Written by {ga=samamico}

Thursday, December 18 2008 7:00 PM -

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Sam Amico realizes that's it's not fashionable to point out flaws with a team that is 21-4 and won 20 of their last 22 games. But there's a couple things that have troubled Sam about the Cavs in their previous two games --one of which was a 23-point win over Minnesota (the other a close loss in Atlanta). Sam lays out those concerns for our readers in his latest contribution to the front page.



It's probably not wise to point out flaws for a team that's 21-4, but a couple of things are troubling me about the Cavaliers.

Or more accurately, I should say some things have troubled me about the Cavs in their previous two games --one of which was a 23-point win over Minnesota (the other a close loss in Atlanta).

First, the Cavs haven't been moving the ball as quickly and efficiently as they did during their 11-game winning streak. Obviously, some of that has to do with the absence of Zydrunas Ilgauskas (sprained ankle) and to a lesser extent, Daniel Gibson (sprained toe). Those two combine for more than 23 points per game (Z at 14.8, Gibson at 9.4), so the offense is bound to take a hit.

But it goes beyond that. In the past two games, it's been too much LeBron James and not enough of the other guys. It's been LeBron bringing the ball up the court, LeBron dribbling out the shot clock, LeBron hitting a remarkable shot while everyone else stands around and watches.

It's not as bad as it was last season -- but it seems to be slowly regressing in that

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direction. And it's not good. If it weren't for the King's performance in the fourth quarter, the Cavs may have been crowned by the lowly Timberwolves. Against the Hawks, not even LeBron could save them.

Granted, Delonte West and Mo Williams have played well of late, and a win is win is a win. But Cavs coach Mike Brown has always been a big picture guy, a la Gregg Popovich in San Antonio. That means Brown isn't prone to depression if the Cavs go on a little losing streak, as long as they're playing well. At the same time, he's not gonna get overly excited if they win and don't do the things they're supposed to do.

And don't get me wrong -- they are indeed playing well and I'm not complaining. But they're not playing quite as well as they were when they passing, cutting, and getting the ball to LeBron when and where he needed it most. It's not bad, just not as good.

Compared to most teams, the Cavs are world-beaters. It could be argued that they truly are the second-best team in the league right now, behind Boston and ahead of the L.A. Lakers.

My second issue has been with the substitution patterns. Again, I'm nitpicking. But why was rookie J.J. Hickson stapled to the bench for so many games when the Cavs clearly needed offense from the frontcourt, particularly with Z sitting out? And why is the ball ending up in Anderson Varejao's hands seemingly every time down the court?

I love Darnell Jackson, the Cavs' other rookie forward who seems to take great pride in setting monster picks and tossing opponents out of the way on his way to another rebound. He's not going to get you any points, though. At least, not without making the rim cringe with fear as it awaits one of Jackson's shots to touch down.

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Hickson did play in the second half of the Minnesota game, and while his numbers weren't great (7 points, 5 rebounds, 3-of-3 shooting from the field), he added much-needed energy and was one big man who's a threat to score if given the ball in the right spot.

Again, I realize it sounds like I'm whining. And overall, you can't help but be anything but thrilled with the Cavs through 25 games. I'm really not even trying to be skeptical.

I'm just worried, that's all. I just don't want the offense to deteriorate into a slower-paced, grind-out-the-win brand of basketball we have seen the past few seasons.

That's because the Cavs won't ever beat Boston playing that type of game. The Celtics are just too good at it.

Most of all, the Cavs have the talent and depth and offensive firepower to not just be the second or third best team in the league. They really can be champions.

I believe that about them now, and will continue to do so even if there's a hiccup or two during the next month.

But I want to believe it come May, too. Maybe the return of Z (and later, Gibson) will help to keep me from feeling nervous. I'm not there yet -- and really hope it stays that way.

But I'll feel considerably better if the Cavs get the ball back in the hands of Mo and just let him go, go, go. And I bet the Cavs will feel better too.

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