

The Denver Nuggets won the opening tip Friday night in the Pepsi Center. That was the highlight of their night. The Cavs went into the Mile High City in a much-anticipated game against the Nuggets and rolled Denver up in short order on their way to a 105-88 win. Cleveland forced the action almost from jump and led after one quarter 37-21. The Nuggets tried to play catch up all night long, once cutting the Cavs lead to 9 points, but the Cavs were simply too much for the Nuggets to overcome. Brian McPeck recaps the win.



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The Cavs pushed the ball up the court and played excellent defense against the up tempo Nuggets. Their switches and defensive rotations were well-executed and frustrated Denver for nearly all 48 minutes.

The match up between LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony never really materialized. James got all the looks he wanted despite numerous traps and double teams and when the King wasn't pouring in some of his 33 points he was grabbing 10 rebounds and dishing out 8 assists. Anthony, clearly frustrated, scored just 13 points on 5-14 shooting before fouling out with 4 minutes left in the game.

Delonte West was the beneficiary of numerous LBJ assists as he looked at open shots all night long. West scored 22 points and had 4 assists of his own. Zydrunas Ilgauskas returned to action Friday night and went off early while finishing with 23 points including 2/3 from 3-point range.

Chauncey Billups led the Nuggets with 16 points.

## Takeaways

- For the doubters out there waiting to see the Cavs go on the road against a quality opponent and get a win before jumping on the bandwagon, well, welcome aboard. It's difficult for any team to play at altitude, much less against a running, up tempo team like the Nuggets who were 17-8 coming into Friday. The Cavs more than held their own. They dictated the tempo and smothered Denver's offense, never letting the Nuggets get into a sustained rhythm.

- We made mention last week as to just how important Z is to this squad. He's not only a low post presence but he helps the Cavs offense go by dictating match ups and spacing on the offensive side of the court. Most of Z's 23 points came from outside of 15 feet on a variety of wide open jump shots. His defender, typically Nene, was forced to come out and guard Z, thus opening up the middle of the floor for penetration. Of course, what Nene was supposed to do and what he did are two different things. Z was 9/14 from the floor mostly because Nene

was a no-show out on the floor. Denver's 'center' did score 1 point on the night though so it's possible he was preoccupied with sucking offensively and couldn't be bothered on the defensive end.

- To call the praise that Hubie Brown and Bill Walton heaped on the Cavs 'effusive' would be too conservative. Walton and Brown, working as studio host and game analyst respectively, gushed over the Cavs internal passing and overall ball movement and were quick to fawn over the Cavs professionalism and dedication to defense. Both also stated numerous times that this Cavaliers team is for real. Not a great night for Denver, Nene or those 'ESPN is Biased' types.

- There were some moments in Friday's game when one had to check to make sure that they weren't watching a Colorado Avalanche hockey match. Things got a bit chippy out on the floor at the Pepsi Center. There were a few minor dust-ups between James and Anthony, a couple glares and stares exchanged between Dontae Jones of the Nuggets and West as well as the lamest flagrant foul in NBA history assessed against Anderson Varejao after he had the audacity to block Kenyon Martin's shot and get shoved afterward.

But the Cavs maintained their composure and stayed focus which is a huge improvement in general from this team. The Cavs go into each game with a plan and a defensive mentality and they're not getting pushed off of it by opponents or officials.

It's a departure from years past but the Cavs are forcing their will and their style of play on other teams and you can see their confidence and resolve grow stronger each night.

## They Got Next

The Cavs are 2-0 thus far on this 3 game roadie. They finish the trip Sunday at 7pm in Oklahoma City against the Thunder before returning home Tuesday at 7pm against the Houston Rockets.