

Cavs Shut Off Heat Late, Win 93-86

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Saturday, December 27 2008 7:00 PM -

You know it's going to happen. At some point, the Cavaliers are going to lose a game at home. And for quite a while it looked as if it could happen on Sunday night against Miami. The Heat came in winners of four straight, and dominated the action for the first three quarters. But, in the fourth quarter, Cleveland finally got out of its own way. The whistles became a little friendlier. The shots stopped dropping for the Heat, and started dropping for the Cavaliers. They made their big run, passed Miami with 5:22 left, and never looked back for a 93-86 victory. Cleveland is now 26-4 overall, the best start in franchise history, and 16-0 at home.



You know it's going to happen. At some point, the Cavaliers are going to lose a game at home. Could be to whomever. It doesn't have to be an elite opponent: the only loss in the Garden for the 1985-86 Celtics [wasn't](#) to Magic's Lakers, after all. They could have lost to tough Houston last Tuesday, and they should have lost to the woeful ex-Bullets on Christmas night. Any team, at any time- at some point, it will happen.

And for quite a while it looked as if it could happen on Sunday night against Miami. The Heat came in winners of four straight, fresh off the victory that lifted them above 2007-08's win total. They came in with enthusiasm on defense and on the boards, and they came in with the revitalized Dwayne Wade, spectacular in his drives to the bucket and ever-zealous in his quest to shatter the career record, unofficial or otherwise, for the most bullshit fouls in NBA history. Actually, for three quarters, it looked like a Cavaliers game circa 2006, with solid defense, dysfunctional offense, and LeBron lugging the entire concern on his back.

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start in franchise history, and 16-0 at home. It's going to happen sometime. But not on this night.

True Superstar: In the first half of Sunday night's game, with his teammates performing like the Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight, LeBron brought the spectacular. Here's a sample of Two-Three's contributions:

- Looked like Dr. J minus the slimness, Afro, and steam-shovel hands on a reverse lay-up with the foul (He clanked the free-throw.)
- Put a shoulder into Marcus Banks' chest and threw in an off-balance jumper to get the hoop and harm (and again, missed the free throw.)
- Hit a pair of three-pointers late in the second period to keep the Cavaliers within striking distance of the lead.
- Drilled buzzer-beating jumpers at the end of both the first and second quarters, and followed up the latter by high-fiving the denizens of the courtside seats before going to the locker room.

LeBron scored 20 of his team's 44 points in Sunday night's first half. He scored them on 8-of-12 shooting, while the rest of the team shot a combined 6-of-25. He also scored with a timing and flair that kept his team and the Quicken Loans crowd fully in the game amid a very uneven, frustrating 24 minutes. Magic won a lot of games in May and June, but he got to those games because he stepped up on those long-forgotten nights against the Kansas City Kings when the rest of Showtime was running a little funky and he had to carry the load. It wasn't easy for the Cavaliers on this night. Maybe it should have been, but that's the way it works sometimes. LeBron's greatness helped carry the team through.

I would be remiss to not point out that the Chosen One shot 7-of-12 from the foul line on Sunday and is now 13-of-22 (59 percent) in his last two nights at the stripe. It's always a little jarring to see LBJ to something superhuman and follow it up by front-rimming a shot overweight, middle-aged, knee brace-clad men hit in their sleep.

By the way, LeBron James has a birthday in two days, so a premature Happy 24th to Two-Three. I can't remember exactly what I was doing that day in 1984 when the man who will save this city from sporting hell was brought into this world. I do recall my parents being out of town that week at the Consumer Electronics Show in Vegas, the weather being crappy, my brother and I staying with my uncle, and him dragging us to see

Dune

instead of the movie we wanted to see:

Beverly Hills Cop

. I love my uncle and am grateful for him opening his home to a couple of rugrats like us, but seriously- how can anyone expect a nine-year old to sit through freaking

Dune

?

They just... wouldn't... fall: Cleveland shot 40.8 percent from the field, a frosty number on an unseasonably warm night, and only a warm-up during the fourth quarter run that won the game kept the number from being in the 30's. Miami played decent enough defense, but it seemed more like a matter of the Cavaliers getting what they wanted on the offensive end, and not converting. An unusual number of the misses were from in close- lay-ups and tip-ins, the shots usually made but that on this night just wouldn't go down.

And this is with Wally OUT of the lineup: In the third quarter, while working industriously on turning a two-point lead into a nine-point deficit, the Cavaliers shot 4-of-16 from the field, went three-and-a-half minutes without scoring at one point, and turned the basketball over *nine* times. Not coincidentally, they were also outscored 25-14 and trailed 67-58 going into the fourth.

The Run that Got it Done: The Cavaliers won the game with a 28-10 run that spanned the first nine-and-a-half minutes of the fourth quarter. After Michael Beasley's jumper gave Miami a 75-67 lead with 8:08 left, the Heat missed seven of their next eight shots and committed four turnovers in the next five-and-a-half minutes, while the Cavaliers piled up the 18-2 run-within-a-run that gave them the lead for good. Cleveland had its only good team-wide run of shooting in the fourth, hitting eight of their first twelve, including large-sized three-pointers by Mo and Delonte, and a couple of other big scores as well:

Z for Three! Ever since his big shooting night in Denver on December 19, Big Z has struggled a little bit. He's 11-of-29 in his last four games and for the most part was chilly on Sunday, shooting 3-of-9 for nine points and six boards. One of those three made shots was big-time, though. With 9:50 left and the Cavaliers down 69-62, Z set up in the right corner and buried a three-pointer off a James feed. Not only did the shot fuel Cleveland's game-winning run, it put the self-effacing Lithuanian over 50 percent on the year from downtown (8-of-15.)

I love seeing Z add the three-point shot to his arsenal. The threat of him hitting from out there stretches the defense, pulls opposing big men away from the basket and opens up driving lanes, and its actuality provides a momentum boost almost on par with a LeBron fathead-dunk. It's such a unique sight- a seven-foot-three man bombing away, and looking damned smooth doing it, I might add- that when the shot goes in, it affects the crowd and the players on the floor in a way a three from an ordinary shooters doesn't. It's a game-changing play, and the guy has good range at eighteen feet as it is. I see no downside to Z continuing to hoist them up.

Play of the Night: With just over four minutes left and the Cavaliers leading 82-77, Delonte West- who picked pockets like an East End urchin at a Lord Mayor's Parade on this night- landed the gold watch. He took the ball away from Shawn Marion, dumped it off to LeBron- conveniently streaking toward the basket- and Two-Three hammered home the breakaway to give the Cavaliers an insurmountable seven-point lead.

The Rest of the Bunch: Like that of many of his teammates, Delonte's shot was off- he went 2-of-9- but he hit his free throws, knocked in a clutch three during his team's decisive win, and picked up four steals as he constantly invaded passing and dribbling space. He also drew the primary assignment on Dwayne Wade, and although Wade did his thing, scoring 29 on 12-of-25 shooting, at least he didn't go crazy and take over the game single-handedly or anything like that.

Mike Brown only went eight-deep on Sunday, but with the way Anderson Varejao played he didn't need the '89 Pistons bench to pull this one out. Andy got a double-double 12-and-10 in 32 energy-filled minutes, made big plays down the stretch, and provided the emotional centerpiece of the night as the clock ran down, when he plain out-wanted several Miami defenders for a free-throw miss and tipped it in on the third try to provide the final margin of 93-86.

Mo Williams scored twenty points before fouling out late in the fourth quarter, after which he gave a lingering proud-but-hurt glare to Bennett Salvatore. This being the NBA, the officiating was awful. I'm sure Heat fans would agree: their team attempted 20 free throws, fewer than the Cavaliers made (24) and Cleveland spent the last 8:19 of the crucial fourth period in the bonus. Sucks to be them.

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Ben Wallace opened the scoring with a driving lay-up- whenever Ben scores, it feels like stealing- and went on to a 14-rebound, three-block performance that landed him a lusty +16 on the plus-minus.

Tough night: Not only did Udonis Haslem have his noggin flayed open by a shot from LeBron's shoulder during a second-half scrum, he also put up the worst plus-minus of anyone on the floor (-23.)

Up Next: Tuesday night at 7:30, the Cavaliers and the Heat meet again, this time in Miami.