

## The Game We've All Been Waiting For

Written by {ga=samamico}

Thursday, January 08 2009 7:00 PM -

---

The Cavaliers versus the Celtics. It's hard to believe it wasn't the Eastern Conference finals last season. And find me someone who doesn't think it won't be this year's Eastern Conference finals. Boston pulled out this year's first meeting, in Beantown, by a score of 90-85 ... early on in the season. Tonight they meet in CTown, where the Cavs are 18-0 this season. Sam Amico previews tonight's HUGE game.



The Cavaliers versus the Celtics. It's hard to believe it wasn't the Eastern Conference finals last season.

The Cavs vs. the Celtics. Conference championship or not, it was clearly the closest series of the entire playoffs -- including the Finals. It came down to a Game 7 and an All-Everything performance from Boston's Paul Pierce, which helped overcome an All-Everything performance from Cleveland's LeBron James.

The Cavs vs. the Celtics. They met in the first game of this season, in Boston, in another close one that wasn't decided until the final moments, the defending champions finally pulling out a 90-85 win.

For most of what's ensued, the Celtics have held the conference's best record. Today, the Cavs do. The Celtics have lost two straight, having looked a little tired, a little vulnerable, a little out of sync. The Cavs have been up-and-down as of late, struggling to find their rhythm on offense on a regular basis.

But while neither team may be playing its best, there's no doubt that they are still

## The Game We've All Been Waiting For

Written by {ga=samamico}

Thursday, January 08 2009 7:00 PM -

---

the two best teams in the East, maybe the entire league.

The Cavs vs. the Celtics. No less than LeBron admits tonight's meeting in Cleveland is a big deal.

"I can't sit here and say it's another game," James said after the Cavs' blowout win over Charlotte the other night.

Added Cavs point guard Mo Williams, "They got us up there. It's our turn. It's payback time."

Payback time? In early January? Ah yes, it must be the Cavs vs. the Celtics.

And it must be the NBA's newest and most intense rivalry -- despite what NBA and television marketing types really want you to think. Marketing types want you to think that the Lakers and Celtics are closely following each other in the standings every day, not making a move until one sees what the other does.

No offense to L.A., but that's simply not true.

The league's best rivalry resides in the Eastern Conference, and the Cavs just may be the league's best team. At least, they sure look like it when they're clicking on offense, although that hasn't been as much of a sure thing lately.

Then there's the Celtics. They may be going through a rough stretch -- but it's not like Pierce and Kevin Garnett and Ray Allen have suddenly forgotten how to win. It's just that every team in every season goes through a bit of a slump. The Celtics are experiencing their very own at this very moment, having lost six of their

## The Game We've All Been Waiting For

Written by {ga=samamico}

Thursday, January 08 2009 7:00 PM -

---

previous eight. A win over the Cavs tonight in Cleveland (where the Cavs are 18-0) could change all that.

"Cleveland is the team we (eliminated from) the playoffs," Pierce told Boston reporters. "They are the best home team in all of basketball so they've been looking forward to this. We're going to get their best punch. The way they've been playing at home has been unbelievable but the way we're playing, this is a great way to get back on track."

The Cavs vs. the Celtics. Since the seventh game of the conference semifinals last season, both teams have undergone key changes.

The Cavs added Williams to strengthen the backcourt, but lost forward Joe Smith. And with center Zydrunas Ilgauskas battling foot injuries, they are now relying more heavily than expected on rookie J.J. Hickson to assist Anderson Varejao and Ben Wallace in the frontcourt.

Meanwhile, the Celtics lost two veterans off the bench in P.J. Brown (retired) and James Posey (to New Orleans), and now count on younger players such as Tony Allen, Glen Davis and Leon Powe to provide a lift. While the Cavs seem to be deeper, the Celtics have cited reserves who are still works in progress as reasons for the recent difficulties.

But regardless of stats or injuries or opinions, the Cavs vs. the Celtics will never be settled on paper.

Instead, it will be decided on the court, in a meeting of two teams who believe they're the best of 2009 -- and two teams who believe tonight's game will go a long way toward proving it.

## The Game We've All Been Waiting For

Written by {ga=samamico}

Thursday, January 08 2009 7:00 PM -

---

*Sam Amico is the editor of Pro Basketball News and a frequent contributor to SportsTime Ohio and The Cleveland Fan. He can be reached at [amico@probasketballnews.com](mailto:amico@probasketballnews.com).*