

Cavs/Celtics: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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For weeks, the date January 9 had been circled on the calendar. The date of the big game against the Celtics. The date of one of the big tests of the season. Consider the test passed. Behind a suffocating defense that held the Celtics to 41% shooting from the field, the Cavs crushed Boston, 98-83, last night at Quicken Loans Arena. It was supposed to be a nail-biter; instead, it turned into a runaway. John Hnat recaps the exhilarating win for our readers.



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runaway. Cleveland's lead stood at 10 points after the first quarter (33-23) and a dozen points after three (72-60), and then they effectively ended the game with a 17-5 stretch. The **Tarence Kinsey Brigade** (Now Jawad-Free!) even saw some action.

Okay, it wasn't *all* about the defense. LeBron James picked a nice time to have one of his best games of the season, as he put up 38 points, seven rebounds, and six assists in his 35 minutes of action. Anderson Varejao followed with 14 points, and Mo Williams scored 13. (*Thirteen?? It sure seemed like a lot more.*) Everybody's favorite Celtic, Kevin Garnett, paced Boston with 18 points and 15 rebounds.

It's the NBA. Where passing the torch happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Let's Talk About That Free Space On The Bingo Card: Of course, James lands on the good side in pretty much every game we review. He's a prolific scorer, a visionary passer, a tenacious defender. And for my money, it doesn't get any better than when he sings "When A Man Loves A Woman";.

Like any other great player, James can simply take over the entire game. Last night, he did just that in the waning moments of the third quarter. Boston had cut the lead to 61-56, and was looking to slice the deficit even more on a fast break. As Ray Allen went in for a left-handed layup, LeBron smacked the ball off the backboard.

Moments later, on offense, James caught Boston's Rajon Rondo trying to hand-check him. He raised his arms right through Rondo's hand, drawing the foul, and continued into a jump-shot motion. *Swish*. He tacked on the free throw for the three-point play. (We may need to refer to this play as a

Drew Gooden

, as the former Cavs' forward used to draw those fouls all the time. However, a

Drew Gooden

could also mean sprouting a patch of hair on the back of your head, or fumbling a pass out of bounds, or forgetting to rotate on defense. So for now, we'll have to stick with "one of those plays where he raises his hands, draws the foul, and still makes the jump shot".)

On Boston's next possession, Paul Pierce was trying desperately to score. It was becoming one of those star vs. star battles. You know the story - Star #1 makes some great shot, then Star #2 has to respond with an even greater shot, and they go back and forth until they have proven, conclusively, which

one has the larger penis. Well, LeBron was having none of that. He blocked Pierce's attempt to drive to the left ... then blocked his attempt to go right ... then stayed right in his shirt as Pierce pulled back. Pierce eventually had to pass the ball with the shot clock winding down, and a desperate Leon Powe jumper missed the mark, giving the ball back to the Cavs.

A minute later, James capped off this little run with a deep three-pointer. Boston was now down 69-58, and they would never recover. On behalf of the rest of the Cavs (not to mention all their fans), I'd like to say: thanks, LeBron.

Department Of Great But Meaningless Plays: It didn't count, but LeBron made a half-court shot midway through the fourth quarter. More impressive than making the shot was why he *took*

the shot. The Celtics, who had turned to page "throw everything at the wall and see if something sticks" in their playbook, were fouling the Cavs' Ben Wallace on every possession. (We'll talk more about that later.) LeBron, seeing that Wallace was about to be fouled yet again, launched the half-courter, knowing it would be a free shot. Unfortunately, the foul had already been whistled, so the shot was waved off. But remember:

LeBron is always thinking

.

Department of Fast Getaways: Worried that the Cavs were going to come out tentative and fall behind? Not a chance. The Cavs made their first four shots, scored on eight of their first nine possessions, and shot a blistering 72% (13 of 18) on their way to 33 points in the first quarter.

Baby Steps: Cavs rookie J.J. Hickson is raw. Steak tartare raw. But he's learning. One of his bad habits has been pump-faking when he gets the ball under the hoop. In college, you may be able to fake a defender into jumping, and goad him into a three-point play. In the pros, you're just giving the defense time to position themselves so they will swat your shot into the stands when you finally do go up with the ball. Last night, Hickson twice received the ball in position to dunk. Both times, he went right up - no pump-faking, no hesitation, just pure power.

The Boobie Meter: It's time for the Boobie Meter, that favorite feature of male and alternatively-lifestyled female readers everywhere! Probably because of the [inspi](#)
[red questions](#)
that TCF colleague Erik Cassano asked him the prior day, Cavs guard Daniel "Boobie" Gibson was motivated to post a strong performance. He scored 10 points on only four shots from the field (including 2 of 3 from beyond the arc), logged three assists, and contributed to the scrambling defense. Maybe most impressive, he boxed out Garnett for a rebound.

Add it all up, and it scores out at a
[Brooklyn Decker](#)

We Said It Before, But Here Goes Again: The Cavs held the Celtics to 41% shooting from the field.

Uncle Austin!: No, not just the usual **Uncle Austin** feature; we're adding the exclamation point because Cavs announcer Austin Carr was in rare form last night:

- On Rondo missing a layup: "That was a two-foot putt he missed that time";
- After the Cavs hustled for yet another loose ball: "They go on the floor for a floorburn" (*as opposed to those floorburns you get from the wall, one supposes*);
- Reacting to a late-game shot of Garnett on the bench, holding his head: "Garnett with an Excedrin headache, one and two";

It Had Nothing To Do With The Game, But I Liked It Anyway: In case you hadn't noticed, the Larry Hughes

honeymoon period is officially over in Chicago. According to the Chicago Sun-Times, both Hughes and the Bulls [would like to part ways](#) as soon as possible.

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WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

It Surprised Me Too: The rebounding totals for the game: Boston 42, Cleveland 30 (including a 15-4 edge on the offensive boards). The Cavs are getting outrebounded more and more these days, an unsettling trend. (Of course, when you shoot better than 50% from the field, you're not going to have as many opportunities for offensive boards.)

It Surprised Me Even More: The assist totals for the game: Boston 25, Cleveland 15. Rondo had 13 of those assists for Boston; his dribble penetration was the one thing the Cavs had some difficulty stopping.

Blood! We Want Blood!: At the start of the second

quarter, with the Cavs already up by 10, the Celtics fielded a lineup of Ray Allen, Glen Davis, Gabe Pruitt, Eddie House, and Leon Powe. It was time for the Cavs to step on the Celtics' throats ... yet that quintet managed to cut the Cavs' lead in half.

No, Not *Our* Blood: In the third quarter, the Cavs *almost* fell into their one trap on offense: the LeBron And Four Guys Waiting For A Bus set, in which James dribbles out most of the shot clock and then either (a) launches a deep jumper or (b) passes to a teammate, who then launches a deep jumper. On several consecutive possession, the Cavs came away with nothing on offense because of this approach. Fortunately, after Boston had cut the lead to three points (52-49), Coach Mike Brown called a time out, and waved whatever magic wand he needed to wave in order to get the Cavs moving the ball again.

Bush League, Table For One: As mentioned earlier, the Celtics used the hack-a-Ben strategy in the fourth quarter. With about five minutes left, they began fouling the Cavs' Wallace on every possession, sending him to the free throw line, which he makes with lottery-winning

regularity. No, the problem isn't with the strategy itself. If it's a problem, there's an easy way to avoid it: take the weak shooter out of the game. The problem was that Celtics coach Doc Rivers continued to use it even after he raised the white flag by removing Garnett, Pierce, and Allen from the game.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

A lot of planes and taxi rides and hotels, that's what lies ahead. The Cavs play six of their next seven games on the road, including the next two (at Memphis next Tuesday and at Chicago on Thursday). After returning home for a game with New Orleans, the Cavs will then take their show to the West Coast for a four-game tour.