

Cavs Sink Clippers 112-95

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Friday, January 30 2009 7:00 PM -

Coming off a bad loss in Orlando, the Cavs flew back home last night for a contest with the hapless LA Clippers. The game marked the return of Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who had missed the previous 13 games with a strained back. The Clippers hung around for the first half, then the Cavs used their superior talent (and a big game from Z) to pull away in the second half for a 112-95 win. The win moves the Cavs to 22-0 at home this season. Nick Allburn recaps the win.



There was good news and bad news for the Cavs on Friday. The bad news was that they lost on Thursday night in Orlando, and they looked pretty lousy in the second half of that game. The good (and much more significant) news was that center Zydrunas Ilgauskas was coming off the shelf for the first time in 13 games. Even after Anderson Varejao filled in admirably, the Cavs were more ready to have their sharp-shooting center stretching out defenses with his silky smooth jumper. More good news: Ilgauskas looked great in his first game back.

Synopsis

If this had been a table tennis game, the Cavs would have skunked the Clippers, as they took an early 11-0 lead. Buoyed by a healthy Zydrunas Ilgauskas, the Cavs continued to pour it on to stretch their lead to 16 points (20-4). Early on, this game looked like a laugh.

Surprisingly, the Clippers didn't cave. Fueled by some strong outside shooting --

not to mention the Cavs cooling off -- the Clippers miraculously managed to tie the game by the end of the first quarter.

Apparently Mike Dunleavy told the Clippers to "fire at will"; in between the first and second quarters, because his troops were launching three-pointers with no fear of reprisal. Unfortunately for the home team, too many of those shots were falling. LA's Steve Novak won the "Walter Herrmann Obscure Scrub Who Burns the Cavs Award." Steve Novak. Remember that name, because you may never see it in print again.

Both teams scored 28 points in the second quarter, leaving us with a 54-all tie at the half. Who knows what Mike Brown said to his club in the locker room, but they deserved a tongue lashing. Aside from being tied with the Clippers (THE CLIPPERS!), the Cavaliers allowed 54 points to a team that was averaging less than 93 points per game. The Clippers hit 8-of-15 treys in the first half, which is absurd considering that they were 28th in the league in shooting coming into the game. While there were a dozen guys on the court wearing Cleveland's colors, the Cavaliers' trademarked defense had yet to show up.

After mystery man Steve Novak opened the third quarter with a 3-ball, the Cavs answered with a 7-0 run to take a 4-point lead. Cleveland's defensive intensity was dialed up a notch or two, and the offense followed suit. Midway through the quarter the Cavs had opened up a 10-point lead. In the third quarter, it seemed like the Clippers remembered that they were the Clippers, and they started to fade. The Cavs closed out the quarter with an 83-73 advantage.

The Cavs could basically put things on cruise control in the fourth quarter, as it was clear they weren't going to let the game get away. The defense stayed solid, and the Cavaliers finished by allowing just 41 points in the second half after a lackluster showing in the first half.

Final: Cleveland 112, Los Angeles 95

Quick Hits

The Z factor

I was in the camp that wanted to give Z all the time he needed

to get back to 100-percent. Sure, losing him for an extended period of time might cost the Cavs a game or two, but they had to make sure the big man was healthy for the playoffs. It looks like Z's rehab wasn't rushed, as he played a surprising 28 minutes in his first game back.

Ilgauskas provided a big boost for the home team, dropping 20 and 11 on 10-of-16 shooting. The flat-footed jumper was feathery, the tip-in was working, and it was great to see Ilgauskas back in action. With the exception of a shot of Z huffing for air on the bench in the first quarter, you wouldn't have known that he had just missed 13 games. Keep your fingers crossed that Ilgauskas can stay healthy through the playoff run, because as the losses to the Lakers and Magic showed us, his presence in the middle is crucial to slowing down quality bigs.

Twenty-two and counting...□

The Cavs improved on their league leading home record, stretching it out to 22-0. This team has always played well at home, but this is getting ridiculous. That record should be all the motivation they need to reclaim the number one seed from the Celtics. Well, that and dodging either Boston or Orlando in round two.

Question: Is it too early to talk about a 41-0 home record?□

Answer: Yes.□

Wally World□

What do you make of Wally Szczerbiak? Every fiber of my being is telling me that this guy is going to break down and be the Wally we saw last spring. Szczerbiak is slow, flat-footed to the max, a lousy defender, and arguably the least athletic Cleveland player I've seen in years (biggs excluded). His play screams "unsustainable." But then he plods down the floor and drains another bomb. Whatever Wally's been eating for breakfast, sign me up for a box. Wally Szczerbiak: enigma.

At any rate, Wally had another nice night shooting the ball, going 6-of-10 for 15 points. If he keeps knocking down the deep ball, there's a spot for Szczerbiak on this team, although I'd still prefer to deal him for a big if the right trade presents itself.

Will the real Sasha Pavlovic please stand up?□

Sasha Pavlovic gets an opportunity to sneak into the starting lineup and he excels. He finally seems to be putting everything together and living up to his vast physical potential. He looks like a guy the Cavs simply must find serious minutes for every night. Does this remind anyone else of winter/spring 2007? Seriously, it's deja vu all over again.

I won't get fooled again. No, this time I'm treating Sasha like that ex that keeps running back to you as a safety when s/he blows it with someone else; this time I'm not falling for the act. Pavs has teased me and hurt me too many times, and he's a guy that I've basically written off to the

"underachiever" scrap heap. He could put it together some day, but I doubt that he does. More importantly, if he ever does put it together, I'm almost certain it won't be in Cleveland.

What's the plan?□

The Clippers don't get a ton of national publicity, but if you read as much Bill Simmons as I do, you know that Mike Dunleavy is a disaster as the coach/GM. This guy thought it was a good idea to form a front line of Chris Kaman, Marcus Camby, and Zach Randolph; how can his players look at him without giggling?

There are a bunch of teams like the Clippers in the NBA that seem pretty rudderless. Sometimes they achieve mediocrity, but they're never going to break through with their current make up. Teams like Sacramento, Chicago, and Milwaukee come to mind. Sometimes you need to roll the dice with a big trade. If it works out, then that that's great. If it doesn't work out, at least you took a chance and now you really know it's time to blow everything up. You're either going for it or rebuilding in the NBA. There's no point in being the perennial seven seed.

At least they have Al Thornton...□

Al Thornton is a guy that we rarely hear anything about in the East because the Clippers are so lousy. But Thornton is one of the few reasons for Clippers fans to watch this train wreck of a basketball team. Thornton is going to turn out to be one of the

great steals of the 2007 draft. The guy can score, shoot with decent efficiency for a young player, and he has a surprisingly quick first step. If Thornton can improve his outside shot, you're looking at a potential star in the NBA for a long time.

(T)he(y) Hate Me

It's good to know that Ricky Davis still receives a smattering of boos when he comes back to town. We Cleveland fans have long memories. But Davis' return led me to ask the question: who is the most hated ex-Cavalier?

For me, it has to be Larry Hughes. I know the majority might pick Carlos Boozer, but I've softened on him after I heard about his child's battle with sickle cell anemia. But back to Hughes; that guy battered rims with his jumper like Rocky Balboa wails on a speed bag. Hughes' play was so bad, and his contract was such an albatross, that I would have gladly given him away for nothing. Serendipitously, the Cavs were able to add some key pieces in the Hughes deal, including Delonte West, Ben Wallace, and Mo Williams in a roundabout way (Joe Smith's expiring contract was the centerpiece of the Williams deal).

DiGiorno Pizza ® Austin Carr Quote of the Game

"...in The Q!" Okay, it's not really a unique quote, but this is Austin's favorite way to end a sentence. And AC uses the phrase when it isn't even remotely necessary.
"Hello Fred -- it's good to see you tonight...in The Q!"

I might say it was getting out of hand if I didn't love it so much. If I were setting up prop bets for Cavs games, the over/under on "in The Q" would probably be set at 7.5.

Up Next: 2/1, at Detroit, The Palace, 2:30

Sunday has turned into a nice little sports day with the Cavs/Pistons game serving as a warm up for the Super Bowl. I'd make a comment about the evil team that's playing in the Super Bowl, but then the reality of it all might sink in, and I might get depressed, stop shaving, and stay inside my house until Tribe opening day. The point is that the Cavs are heading to Detroit to get some payback on a Detroit team that beat them back in November, and this is a losable game. The Pistons challenged the Celtics last night, so there's certainly reason to think that they can't at least hang with the Cavs. It should be a good game. (Rasheed Wallace is still a jerk.)