

LeBron Lights Up The Garden

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Wednesday, February 04 2009 7:00 PM -

Not to be upstaged by Kobe Bryant's 61 points there on Monday night, King James was in rare form at the Garden on Wednesday, erupting for 52 points on 17-of-33 from the field, with two blocked shots, 11 assists, and ten rebounds ... leading the Cavs to a very exciting 107-102 win over the Knicks. Jesse Lamovsky checks in to recap the win, and also to fire a shot across the bow of all the media types convinced LeBron wants to leave Cleveland to go lose 45 games a year in NY.



"This Wednesday, LeBron James will, once again, play in New York City.

Cleveland shudders."

Henry Abbott, [Truehoop](#)

Mr. Abbott thinks we should shudder whenever LeBron James steps onto the hallowed floor of Madison Square Garden, I suppose in dread of cone-headed journalists with nothing better to talk about. Mr. Abbott also asked Cleveland fans to explain their side of the LeBron-to-NYC story for Truehoop on Wednesday. Now, just my opinion, Mr. Abbott has his mind made up about the whole thing, and he likes to watch us dance. He thinks we're cute, trying to explain in earnest

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tones the non-inevitability of the inevitable. I think he's a cruel bastage like that, and we shouldn't dance to his cruel tune.

But I do have one question for Mr. Abbott and for my fellow Cleveland fans as well: Why should we shudder when LeBron plays at MSG? Should we be having nightmare flashbacks like Clint Eastwood in *Firefox* to that fifty-point [bonanza](#) last season? Sweating balls in anticipation of a vintage performance by the Chosen One that ends in a Garden ovation, a little love from his buddy Hova, and, most importantly, a Wine & Gold Winner?

Maybe he meant that we're *shivering*, amidst the Hoth-like conditions that are prevailing here in Northeast Ohio. If anyone was shuddering in the wake of Cleveland's tingling 107-102 win over the Knicks, it was in reaction to LeBron's historic answer to Kobe Bryant's 61-point Madison Square Gauntlet. Otherwise, I'm not so sure why we should be dreading nights like these, when Cleveland basketball and its sensational ringleader are the cynosure of all eyes. We should be enjoying this stuff. And if you aren't- stop shuddering. Life is good. So are the Cavaliers. There it is, Mr. Abbott.

LeBron's Line: 52 points on 17-of-33 from the field, 2-of-7 from three-point range and 16-of-19 from the line (nice), with two blocked shots, 11 assists, and ten rebounds, the final carom secured as time ran out: a buzzer-beating triple-double. Raiding passing lines like a U-Boat among Allied merchant vessels, he grabbed two steals as well as countless near-steals and deflections. You had to figure he was going to bring the spectacular, and he did. There were the requisite exasperating fall-away jumpers, but those kind of just go with the territory. You've got to live with them. LeBron also dominated the ball at times to the detriment of his team's offensive flow, but I guess you've got to live with that too, sometimes.

Nice Company: According to whoever feeds Austin Carr information, the last fifty-point triple-double before LeBron's was produced by Wilt Chamberlain. Or maybe that's just at the Garden. According to [Basketball Prospectus](#), the

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last in NBA history unofficially belongs to Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, who sky-hooked the number on Atlanta as a member of the Milwaukee Bucks on January 2, 1975. Hard to quibble with things like shot selection when LeBron is keeping company with the magna-elite big men of the game- as a perimeter player.

Just a thought: I feel compelled to point out that I've handled the recaps on each of LeBron's last three triple-doubles, against Memphis, Sacramento, and now New York. Which means nothing, of course.

Fast Start, Redux: The Cavaliers pretty much buried the Raptors early on Tuesday night by jumping out to a 37-15 lead at the end of the first quarter. They got the drop on the Knicks Wednesday, taking a 10-0 lead at the 9:16 mark of the opening period. After letting New York creep within six, they rebuilt their lead to fifteen before settling for a 36-24 bulge at the end of one. LeBron put in 18 points before picking up his first assist, so he was getting off, but the Knicks had stayed in the game. The Cavaliers maintained essential control, but maintaining distance on the scoreboard would be a challenge.

Al Harrington is a stud: Any player willing to match LeBron James bucket for bucket is worthy of respect and Al's performance was more than respectable, save for the fact that he forgot to pass (zero assists.) He was too busy pouring in 39 on 16-of-24 with 13 boards. For much of the night Wally Szczerbiak was assigned to cover Harrington, a match-up that produced predictable results. In between abusing Wally, Al amused himself by putting Anderson Varejao on skates at the end of defensive switches. On all-too sporadic occasions LeBron covered Al and battered him into fumbling submission. Unfortunately, LBJ was a little busy on the offensive end himself, which happens sometimes.

Play of the Night, Part I: The Cavaliers were in a spot of trouble midway through the second quarter. Their once-rotund lead had been slimmed down to one at 43-42, with New York on an 8-0 run. Out of a timeout LeBron gave the ball up to Daniel Gibson, curled around a high pick, and roared through the lane to hammer down an alley-oop pass that got just over the hands of two Knick defenders

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swooping in to stop the play.

Um, Andy? Game tonight? The Wild Thing just didn't show up, logging a Cedric Henderson-like log of one point, four rebounds, one steal, one assist, and one turnover in 25 empty minutes. He passed up a 15-foot baseline jump shot late in the shot clock in the harrowing fourth quarter, a reticence that led to an LBJ prayer as the 24-second clock buzzed. His -10 was easily the worst on the team. For whatever reason, Andy was kind of out of it on this night.

Z for Three! Big Z didn't have a bad line- 15 points and eight rebounds- but he seemed to struggle to find his shot on Wednesday, hitting on 5-of-13. Deprived of his usual perch on the wing, the big man had to resort to his time-honored arsenal of glacial post moves, with uneven results. But he did shake free once, and the results were pleasing. With 54 seconds remaining in the first half and the Cavaliers clinging to a 50-49 lead, the big man finally secured his corner office and rolled in a three-point bomb to keep his team in control before the break.

Play of the night, Part III: Chris Duhon buried a long three to bring the Knicks within three at 55-52 with three seconds left in the first half. With the entire building expecting a half-court circus shot, LeBron dribbled up the right side to the timeline and whistled a fifty-foot pass to Ben Wallace, who dumped in a horn-beating lay-up.

Victory for Rec Leaguers Everywhere: Rec-League All-Star Wally Szczerbiak did some work on Wednesday night. Though he was abused by Al Herrington on defense, he conquered the legs of a back-to-back'er and found his own mismatches on the other end, hitting for 12 points on 5-of-9. He also hauled down 13 rebounds. After logging 44 minutes on Tuesday, Wally put in 40 more against the Knicks, but came through admirably. So did the entire team. The roster was shorthanded, the rotations were small, and guys had to be tired- but they came through.

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Something I liked: The Cavaliers gave up some penetration, but they also weren't shy about meting out hard fouls to Knickerbockers who were hardy enough to drive the lane. Though they were a little sporadic on offense and never really did figure out how to stop Al Herrington, they played the physical game on Wednesday, an expression of the hard-nosed San Antonio credo they've so superbly adopted.

Something else I liked: After being outscored 7-4 in the final two minutes of the first quarter, the Cavaliers finished strong in the remaining stanzas. They outscored the Knicks 7-5 in the last two minutes of the half, 5-3 in the last two minutes of the third, and 7-3 in the last two minutes of the game. Small advantages, but they added up to a win. The serious teams close out quarters efficiently. The Cavaliers, serious as a heart attack, did so on Wednesday.

Play of the Night, Part IV: The Cavaliers led for all but 17 seconds on Wednesday night, but the Knicks had their chances. Thirteen times New York cut the Cleveland lead to one or two, but just as it appeared they would finally break through, they would fail, generally through woeful shot selection. Only once did they get over the top: with 1:27 left in the third quarter, when Tim Thomas banged home a three-pointer to put the Knicks out in front 78-77. With the New York crowd cheering its own team for a change, LeBron drove left around a Varejao screen (probably Andy's best play of the night), shrugged through a weak foul, and converted the three-point play that permanently restored a Cleveland lead.

Plays of the Night, Part V: Cleveland was clinging to an 89-87 lead early in the third quarter when LeBron single-handedly generated the kind of quick burst that kept the Cavaliers out front for most of the night. First he channeled the Iceman on a finger-roll that put Cleveland up four. Seconds later he rejected a Wilson Chandler lay-up, starting a sequence that ended in a Boobie Gibson three to make it 94-87 Cavaliers.

Lucky break: The Knicks trailed 100-99 late in the fourth quarter and had the ball when Chris Duhon airmailed a pass to Nate Robinson, an easy thing to do what

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with Robinson being 2'8" and all. The pocket-sized guard saved the ball, but the officials erroneously ruled it out-of-bounds and handed possession back to the Cavaliers. LeBron quickly took advantage by going to the basket for a lay-up, making it 102-99.

Bronze this stat! Cleveland's victory pushed the Cavaliers to 39-9, the first time they've been thirty games over .500 since [April 5, 1992](#), when they knocked off a very different kind of Knicks team, 97-93.

He knows drama: LeBron went down hard himself late in Wednesday's game, landing funny on his left leg on a drive with 22 seconds left. He stayed on the floor for seeming eons, went back to the bench to stretch out the limb, and for the entire time I thought of the rash of injuries that have swept the contenders this last week. Then, having milked the occasion as much as he liked, LeBron then got up and canned the foul shots that salted it away. Shame on me for falling for LBJ's drama-king antics and forgetting he's physically indestructible as well as a shameless diva.

Next: A Sunday Showdown: 3:30 PM, Los Angeles Lakers, at the Q.