

The Race For Homecourt - Feb 23

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Sunday, February 22 2009 7:00 PM -

L.A. maintained its hold on the league's number-one overall seed, the Celtics absorbed the injury to Kevin Garnett that will keep him on ice for two to three weeks, the Cavaliers became whole again, and Orlando found a point guard. The All-Star Break seemed to invigorate the elite: the Lakers and Cavaliers went a combined 7-0, Boston finished with a flourish at Phoenix, and Orlando stubbornly continued to win. Jesse gives us the updated race for homecourt advantage for the NBA Playoffs.



L.A. maintained its hold on the league's number-one overall seed, the Celtics absorbed the injury to Kevin Garnett that will keep him on ice for two to three weeks, the Cavaliers became whole again, and Orlando found a point guard. The All-Star Break seemed to invigorate the elite: the Lakers and Cavaliers went a combined 7-0, Boston finished with a flourish at Phoenix, and Orlando stubbornly continued to win. The upcoming week looks demanding: 11 of the elite's 16 games will be on the road, with only Boston avoiding the dreaded back-to-back.

1.) Los Angeles: 46-10: --

Streak: Won 4

Last 10: 9-1

Last Week: 4-0

The Race For Homecourt - Feb 23

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Sunday, February 22 2009 7:00 PM -

Last Game: Sunday, Feb. 22: Won @ Minnesota 111-108

Tuesday, Feb. 24: @ Oklahoma City

Thursday, Feb. 26: Phoenix

Friday, Feb. 27: @ Denver

Sunday, Mar. 1: @ Phoenix

The league's top team rode a high wire but escaped unscathed for the week, rallying in the second half to beat Golden State, squeezing by the Hornets in OT, and holding off the Timberwolves down the stretch. The lead in the West is now eight full games, Lamar Odom is still pretending he's [Swen Nater](#) on the boards, and the season-ending forecast calls for mostly sunny skies and wins in the mid '60s. The biggest challenge for L.A. in the last month-and-a-half will be not getting careless against inferior opponents- meaning, everyone the Lake Show will be facing from here on out.

2.) Boston: 45-12: 1.5

Streak: Lost 1

Last 10: 7-3

Last Week: 1-1

The Race For Homecourt - Feb 23

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Sunday, February 22 2009 7:00 PM -

Last Game: Sunday, Feb. 22: Won @ Phoenix 128-108

Monday, Feb. 23: @ Denver

Wednesday, Feb. 25: @ L.A. Clippers

Friday, Feb. 27: Indiana

Sunday, Mar. 1: Detroit

The Celtics almost came back to beat Utah without Kevin Garnett for the second half and routed Phoenix without him altogether, scoring a season-high 128 points, shooting 63 percent, and getting a combined 89 points from Rondo, Allen and Pierce. With the exception of Denver, which won in Boston back in November, the week's slate is forgiving. The Celtics have played roughly .800 since they got KG, so don't expect them to crumble at the prospect of a few weeks without him. I'd be surprised if they were any worse than 49-13 when they host the Cavaliers on March 6. Bastards.

3.) Cleveland: 43-11: 2

Streak: Won 4

Last 10: 8-2

Last Week: 3-0

The Race For Homecourt - Feb 23

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Sunday, February 22 2009 7:00 PM -

Last Game: Sunday, Feb. 22: Beat Detroit 99-78

Tuesday, Feb. 24: Memphis

Thursday, Feb. 26: @ Houston

Friday, Feb. 27: @ San Antonio

Sunday, Mar. 1: @ Atlanta

The triumphant return of Bro' Redz put a nice capper on a week that saw Cleveland expand its Central lead to 16, shrink its magic number to 13 for the division title, and for the first time since before New Year's, field the canonical starting five of Mo-Delonte-LeBron-Ben-Z. A compliant Memphis team comes to town on Tuesday- and then the sledding turns difficult. Starting Thursday night in Houston, eight of the next ten are on the road, including four sets of back-to-back affairs and seven games against opponents with winning records. Welcome back, Redz. You've been missed.

4.) Orlando: 41-14: 4.5

Streak: Won 2

Last 10: 6-4

Last Week: 3-1

The Race For Homecourt - Feb 23

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Sunday, February 22 2009 7:00 PM -

Last Game: Sunday, Feb. 22: Beat Miami 122-99

Tuesday, Feb. 24: @ Chicago

Wednesday, Feb. 25: @ New York

Friday, Feb. 27: Detroit

Saturday, Feb. 28: @ Philadelphia

Maybe we shouldn't pen that obituary for Orlando just yet. The Magic feel a lot better with Rafer Alston in the fold, and they looked a lot better too, routing the Heat in probably their best overall performance since Jameer Nelson went down nearly three weeks ago. Skip to My Lou scored 12 points and dished out 9 assists, the team knocked down 17 three-pointers, Dwight Howard was a terror, and all was once again sunshine and roses in the Magic Kingdom. This week will be a test for Stan Van's reconstituted bunch, with a pair of back-to-backers and three road games. Old nemesis Detroit won the season's only meeting between the teams back on December 29.

Power Ranking for the Week of Feb. 23

1. Los Angeles
2. Cleveland
3. Boston
4. Orlando

Player of the Week- LeBron James, Cleveland: His timing as always

The Race For Homecourt - Feb 23

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Sunday, February 22 2009 7:00 PM -

impeccable, LBJ gave us a little bit of Pippen and a little bit of Jordan this past week and got his team out of the All Star Break with a rush in the process. In Toronto he ground out 20 points, 9 rebounds, and 9 assists, playing

[Singletary](#)

in a physical team defense that rendered the Bosh-less Raptors extinct. Against Detroit he was a model of efficiency. And in Milwaukee, well... he was just

[awesome](#)

Actually, that 3:12 stretch of fury spanning the halves in which he went 8-of-8 from the field, 6-of-6 from three-point range, scored 21 points, and all but single-handedly turned a 56-48 deficit into a 69-61 lead is the single best shooting exhibition I've seen him put together since he entered the league. Better than Game 5 against the Pistons- he got plenty of the staple dunks and lay-ups that night, but on Friday he wasn't any closer than twelve feet from the hoop during the entirety of the ["He's On Fire!"](#) sequence.

The diversity of the shots was remarkable. I counted one Magic Johnson hook in the lane, one Tim Duncan banker from the wing, *at least* one Kevin McHale fade from the lane, *at least* one Karl Malone fade from the wing, one Reggie Miller halftime buzzer-beater, and about seven others that were LeBron being LeBron, just hoisting till he misses (not always the best strategy, to be sure.) The post scoring is what I really like. People are fixated on the jump shot, but a developed game on the blocks would make this man truly unstoppable. He's built like Karl Malone, as quick as the best guards, and sees the floor better than anyone. How on earth are you going to check him down there?

Best part about Friday's performance was that LeBron wasn't out there shooting in a vacuum, coldly oblivious to his teammates. He didn't just score. He was emotional and demonstrative. He flew around the court, even grabbing the ball away from a citizen at the scorer's table and firing it back to the official at one point, keeping things rolling. He barked, cheer-led, and cajoled. He took over the game, but he shared the prize. He inspired. He led.

And his fired-up teammates followed. A formerly laggard defense became energized and hands-y. LeBron switched gears and began to find his teammates for good shots as Milwaukee's defense collapsed on him. He allowed them into his zone, and in the end, even with those 55 big ones, the victory was a team victory- right down to Big Z's sturdy defense of Anderson Varejao, who yet again put on an acting job that had Ric Flair taking notes.

I used to watch Bulls games on WGN back in the day and would always wonder why, even years into Michael Jordan's career Wayne Larrivee would still pee down the side of his leg whenever His Airness pulled off something spectacular. Hadn't he seen it all by then? Now I understand.

Individual Dick-Move of the Week- Mo Williams, Cleveland: Mo had a little score to settle with his former team on Friday night, and he punctuated his 23 points and 6 assists with an array of fey waves and blown kisses directed at the Bradley Center crowd. I know he didn't leave Milwaukee on the best of terms with the fans, and being somewhat of a subscriber to

[Worthington's Law](#)

, I'm not trying to sit here in second-hand shoes and dispense sage advice to a guy with millions in the bank. But there was something

[Mace-in-a-Puff Daddy-video](#)

about the gestures, especially with the way LeBron was lighting it up. Those blown kisses seemed small and out-of-place next to the incandescence of Number 23.

Vanishing Superstar of the Week- Dwight Howard, Orlando: Clark Kent couldn't find a phone booth in New Orleans last Wednesday, taking four shots in 29 minutes and not making a field goal in the last 42:52 of Orlando's 117-85 rout by the Hornets. Dwight did hang 45 points, 19 rebounds and 8 blocks on the Bobcats the previous night and put up 32 and 17 against the Heat on Sunday, so it's not like he sucks or anything.

Spoiler of the Upcoming Week- Denver: The Nuggets are playing for the West's

second seed and a shot to get out of the first round for the first time since the [Robert Pack All-Stars](#) shocked the Sonics in '94. Losers of two straight, they'll get three cracks at the Celtics and Lakers this week, two of them at home against opponents on the second night of a back-to-back.

Game to Watch- Cleveland @ San Antonio, Feb. 27: The Cavaliers will be on the second night of a back-to-back, facing a Spurs team completing an ornery three-game home-stand that also includes Dallas and Portland. San Antonio currently leads Denver by a game in the race for that second seed. They won't have Manu Ginobili, who likes to score on the Cavaliers, but Tim Duncan will still be there using the window and cradling Tony Parker's head during timeouts. Gregg Popovich might even shave and wear a tie for his reunion with the old confederates holding it down in Cleveland. Finals preview? The Lakers are loaded, but it is an odd-numbered year...

And lest I forget, RIP [Larry Miller](#), owner of the Utah Jazz, who passed away last Friday from complications of diabetes. Miller, along with Frank Layden, is one of the two men most responsible for saving NBA basketball in Salt Lake City when it was on life support in the early '80s. He was the activist owner at its best- able to hire good people, willing to let them do their jobs, but up front and center as the leader of the concern. Building a solid NBA franchise was a long shot in an odd, remote outpost like SLC. Larry Miller did it. It's just too bad his Jazz couldn't get over the Everest wearing #23.