

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Sunday, March 01 2009 7:00 PM -

What has been the Cavs' most impressive victory of the season thus far? Trouncing the Celtics? The commanding victory over the Spurs the other night in San Antonio? While those wins were great, last night's 88-87 over the Hawks in Atlanta may have been even more impressive, as the Cavs rallied to win after squandering a double-digit lead and falling behind by seven points in the fourth quarter. John Hnat recaps last night's thrilling game at the Philips Arena.



THE SUMMARY:

It was the kind of game that separates the league's elite from everybody else. A game that most teams would have lost, but that the best teams somehow find a way to win.

By that measuring stick, the Cavs are one of the league's best teams.

After squandering a double-digit lead, and trailing by seven points with just a couple of minutes remaining, the Cavs rallied and prevailed over the Atlanta Hawks, 88-87, last night at the Philips Arena. Cleveland scored the last six points of the game, including a free throw by LeBron James with 1.6 seconds remaining that provided the margin of victory. The Hawks had a last-second chance at the victory, but a three-point attempt by Joe Johnson clanged off the

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rim as the final buzzer sounded.

With the win, and with a loss by Boston earlier in the day against Detroit, the Cavs (46-12) are now ahead of the Celtics in the ever-important race for first place in the Eastern Conference. (They also have a 17-game lead over the Pistons for the Central Division lead, but that stopped being a race back around December.)

James paced everybody with 26 points and 11 assists. Mo Williams backed him up with 20 points, and Zydrunas Ilgauskas posted yet another double-double, this time with 17 points and 11 rebounds. Johnson led the Hawks with 21 points; overall, five Atlanta players made it into double digits.

It's the NBA. Where refusing to lose happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

2009 vs. 2008: I guess I already covered this in the opening paragraphs, but the most impressive aspect about last night's game was how the Cavs determined that they were not going to lose this game. If this game happens last season, the Cavs lose by four, and we fans mutter under our breaths about tough road trips and choking away leads.

This season ... we're talking about a last-second Cavs victory.

I know which outcome I prefer.

Shot Of The Night: Cavs down three, less than a minute to go. LeBron drove to the hole, but

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missed a layup. The ball
bounced back to LeBron, who then flipped the ball to Williams in the left corner.

Williams hoisted the three-pointer.

Swish

.

Tie game.

Slice open Mo's veins, and ice-cold water will come rushing out.

Joe Who?: The big Cavs-related story of the day (at least, the biggest story that did not take place on the hardwood) was that former Cavalier Joe Smith negotiated a buyout with the Oklahoma City Carpetbaggers and may be on his way to returning to Cleveland. T
he idea is that Smith will shore up the front line, especially in the wake of Ben Wallace suffering a broken leg.

J.J. Hickson took it as a personal affront.

Okay, I do not know whether Hickson *really* took it that way; in fact, odds are that he did not. B
ut he played last night as though determined to prove that the Cavs did not need to bring in additional big men.

Immediately after entering the game near the end of the first quarter, Hickson grabbed an offensive rebound and scored on an easy dunk. On the resulting Atlanta possession, the Hawks' Flip Murray missed a shot, and Hickson pulled down his second rebound in about 20 seconds. Moments later, after a jumper by Delonte West failed to hit the target, Hickson snared another offensive rebound and was fouled while trying to score, resulting in two free throws (which he made).

J.J.'s activity level was very high last night, and he provided more glimpses of becoming the player that all Cavs fans hope he will become.

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Granted, he won't get too many more opportunities this season to become that player, but he is showing progress all the same.

Speaking Of Which: While Hickson played well, he was not the Cavs' most valuable big man last night, Nor was Ilgauskas, despite his double-double. That honor goes to Anderson Varejao.

Although Wild Thing's numbers were not terribly impressive - seven points and seven rebounds in 35 minutes of action - he was absolutely vital to the Cavs getting back into the game.

He drew two charges in the fourth quarter, hit a turnaround jumper with a high degree of difficulty to cut the Atlanta lead to five with four minutes remaining, and then scored on an impressive "and-one" moments later to slice the Atlanta lead to two.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

The Cavs kicked away a ten-point halftime lead (53-43), scored only 14 points in the third quarter, and were stymied until the final moments of the game by Atlanta's zone defense (which they started using in earnest in the second half, and which confounded the Cavs for most of that second half).

That all said, I am in a good mood, and as such have only one item that I want to discuss here:

Brain Cramp Alert! Early in the third quarter, leading 58-47, the Cavs stole the ball and drove to the other end for what should have been an easy basket. Alas, Mo tried to connect on some kind of fancy behind-the-back pass, which was stolen by the Hawks' Johnson. G
aah!

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Not to worry though, as Delonte stole the ball back. Time for another break, and if the easy shot wasn't there, then kick the ball back out to set up a play.

Right?

Not quite.

West passed the ball to LeBron, who launched a three-pointer with approximately 23.8 seconds remaining on the 24 second clock.

Gaah!

And this shot missed, as opposed to being from the "what are you doing ... nice shot!" family.

Double gaah!

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

The Eyeworm: The new McDonald's advertisement, featuring the talking/singing fish on the wall, is one of the more disturbing spots I've ever seen. (And not just because it features the Filet o' Fish sandwich, which is one of the more disturbing foods I've ever seen.)

Why?

Because my brain (the same one that could not remember where I parked the car this afternoon) has determined that this ad needs to be replayed in my head every thirty seconds or so.

(
Note to my brain:

Stop it now, or else I'm going through my ear and stabbing you with a Q-Tip.

)

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The road trip gauntlet ends tonight in Miami, as the Cavs face the Heat at Whatever Miami's Corporate Sponsor Is Arena. (*Why bother looking it up when you can make a tepid joke out of your lack of knowledge?*) The Cavs will then return home to face Milwaukee on Wednesday evening.

Before they get too used to their beds here at home, the Cavs will then head out for four more road games, including a showdown with the Celtics in Boston on Friday, and then a West Coast swing the following week.