

## Cavs Cruise Past Bucks, Clinch Playoffs

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The Cavs took the lead in the first quarter, built on it in the second, survived an early third quarter run by the Bucks, and then stretched that lead out into what ultimately became a blowout. The team defense looked very solid, holding the Bucks, who are without Andrew Bogut and Michael Redd, to just 37-percent shooting.

Richard Jefferson was the only guy getting anything done for the Bucks, as he poured in 29 points on a solid 10-for-20 shooting night. LeBron James led the Cavaliers with 23 points, shooting a very efficient 7-of-11 from the field, including 4-of-5 from beyond the arc. After setting a career-high with five steals on Monday

night, Delonte West set a new career-high with eight tonight. Stay tuned to see if West goes for a points/steals double-double Friday night in Boston.

Overall, this felt like a tune up game for Friday's trip to Boston, and you have to feel really good about how the Cavs looked. It's games like these, against an inferior albeit hardworking opponent, that the Cavs would have played close and maybe dropped in years past, but the focus of this Cavs squad is singular and steady. This team is going after the championship, and they're taking care of business against the lousy teams that they should beat.

### ***Quick Hits***

#### **Delonte West, catalyst**

You didn't appreciate it until he was on the shelf with that wrist injury, but Delonte West makes so much happen for this team. He's the scrappy overachiever; a guy who plays tough defense despite being a little undersized at the two guard position, makes open shots, handles the ball like a decent point guard, and can create his own shot when need be. Like Mo Williams, he plays a great floor game that doesn't always show up in the box score. Remember over the summer, when he was thinking about playing ball in Europe? Yeah, we're glad that didn't happen.

#### **The Jerk Store called, and they're running out of Charlie Villanuevas**

Charlie Villanueva has dethroned Rasheed Wallace as my least favorite NBA player. He's goofy looking, frequently appears to be angry, and his strangling of Zydrunas Ilgauskas really didn't get much air time, and it's mostly because he doesn't play ball in Boston or Los Angeles, but it was one of the most inexcusable acts we've seen in the NBA this year. How he wasn't suspended for that, I have no idea. Do you really think that if Ron Artest, for instance, pulls the same stunt, he's not getting hit with a sizeable fine/suspension? If the rules aren't universally enforced,

their validity erodes.

### **Yeah, those jumpers are nice, but you're 7' 3"**

As great as it is to watch Z work his silky-smooth 18-footer, I think the Cavs might want to re-commit to setting him up in the post a little more often. For Ilgauskas, the pick 'n pop should be the second option, not the first. Z isn't exactly Shaq banging down low, but he's still a solid post player, and with the general dearth of big men in the NBA, he can own the post more often than not. I'm all for opening up the lane for LeBron and Mo Williams to drive, but the Cavs have fallen in love with the jump shot a little too much from time to time this year, and feeding Z in the post is an easy way to rack up high-percentage points in the paint.

### **My new pet project: Pavlovic v. Gibson**

Daniel Gibson has made huge contributions to this team in the last three years, but for whatever reason, the guy just doesn't have it this year. Gibson is shooting an ugly 37.8-percent from the field and 36.1-percent from downtown this season, compared to 43.2 and 44.0 last season, respectively. That's not good enough to merit nearly 25 minutes of playing time per game, particularly when Gibson's size (he's listed at 6'2" -- he must have been wearing platforms when they measured him) makes him a defensive liability.

On the other hand, Sasha Pavlovic is healthy again, and although his minutes are down this year (about 15 per game), he's shooting 46.6-percent (45.7 from deep), a terrific mark for a guard. Pavlovic is also the team's best perimeter defender who isn't named LeBron James, and he'll likely be called upon for some tough defensive assignments in the playoffs. Coach Brown, I implore you, give Boobie's minutes to Sasha and vice-versa. Sure, Gibson could get hot at any time, but until he does, there's no reason for him to be on the floor that much. Wally Szczerbiak doesn't play defense either, but he makes

baskets.

### **Just what the doctor ordered**

So if you haven't heard, Joe Smith is back in Cleveland after being released from basketball purgatory in Oklahoma City. It reminds me a little bit of when we thought Gandalf died in the first *Lord of the Rings*, and then he came back with some new duds in the second movie. This is the exact same thing, except Joe didn't have to fight a demon who had a whip made out of fire. (Can you tell I was all over the TNT's *LOTR* marathon this weekend?)

At any rate, Joe's back, giving us a boost in the front court that was desperately needed after Ben Wallace was injured last Thursday in Houston. After playing with the Cavs last season, Smith shouldn't have much of a learning curve, and he gives the team another solid veteran presence in the locker room. Unlike Drew Gooden, the other guy the Cavs were rumored to be pursuing, Smith is a model of consistency. Smith's going to knock down some jumpers, shoot in the mid/high 40s, and grab some rebounds while playing sound fundamental basketball. He will give the Cavs a big man off the bench who can score, and he's exactly what this team needed.

### **DiGiorno Pizza® Austin Carr Quote of the Game**

In response to JJ Hickson's dunk in the first half, *"If at first you don't succeed, throw the hammer down!"*

### **The most politically incorrect comment of this post...**

Speaking of our favorite color commentator, I received a text message from a friend the other day wondering, *"Do you think that AC was involved in the cocaine era of the NBA?"* Eh, any speculation on

such a sensitive subject is nothing more than that: speculation. However, one can't help but notice that the time lines do appear to sync up. The end of Carr's career was about the time when the nose candy was starting to hit its stride in the league. Is it possible that AC partook in such things? I suppose, but given his character, it's more likely that he told his teammates to 'get that weak stuff outta here!'

### **Up Next: 3/6, at Boston, TD Banknorth Garden, 8:00**

To say this is a big game is a complete understatement. Boston has struggled a little bit while Kevin Garnett has been out on his [Quest for G](#), and it's unlikely that the Big Ticket will be back in the lineup on Friday. This game will be a huge factor in who gets home court in the Eastern Conference, no doubt. I'll take it one step farther; if the Cavs win this game, they'll eventually win the one seed.