

Sometimes Ugly Is Beautiful

Written by {ga=samamico}

Wednesday, March 11 2009 7:00 PM -

When it comes to the Cavaliers, sometimes ugly can be beautiful. That's what we learned in their 87-83 win Tuesday over the Los Angeles Clippers, the first of a three-game road swing out West. For three quarters, the Cavs looked more like the Clippers than the Clippers themselves. I mean, the Cavs REALLY stunk. Then the Cavs roared back and dominated the 4th quarter 35-14 to steal the win. Sam looks back on the Clippers win and ahead to tonight's game against the Suns in his latest.



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That's what we learned in their 87-83 win Tuesday over the Los Angeles Clippers, the first of a three-game road swing out West.

For three quarters, the Cavs looked more like the Clippers than the Clippers themselves. I mean, the Cavs REALLY stunk. Ball movement and cutting to the basket were mere rumors. Defense seemed optional. Overall team energy apparently was thrown off the plane on the long flight from Ohio to California.

Then there was prized off-season acquisition Mo Williams, who had his worst game in a Cleveland uniform by making just two of his first 15 shots. Delonte West

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was a non-factor, and Daniel Gibson continued his season-long stretch of being pretty much useless on both ends of the court (although he sure does a swell job of keeping LeBron James entertained during pre-game introductions). Basically, the backcourt was a disaster, and the Cavs got off to an embarrassing 0-of-17 start on three-pointers. You could almost see the rim cringe with fear every time they took a shot from beyond 12 feet.

The Cavs' first three quarters could best be described in four words: Yuck, yuck and double yuck.

By the end of the third, they trailed perhaps the worst team in the entire NBA by a 69-52 count. That's right. The Cavs scored a whopping 52 points against the Clippers.

It was past midnight, and I sat there thinking, "Why on earth am I watching this when there are 'Golden Girls' re-runs on A&E right now?"

Meanwhile, the Clippers weren't great, but they weren't entirely Clipper-like. At the very least, they were able to take advantage of the Cavs' laughable effort during the game's first 36 minutes.

Before the start of the fourth quarter, I actually said the following out loud: "The Cavs will have to go on something like a 33-13 run to even make this close -- and they were barely able to score more than 33 points in the first half!"

Then suddenly, LeBron turned into LeBron. He drove, he drew fouls, he finished near the basket, he dished pinpoint passes to teammates. It was all part of a 17-2 run by the Cavs. A 17-2 run that resulted in them still trailing by nine points with time running out.

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So I figured even though the Clippers finally remembered the name on the front of their jerseys by playing mistake-prone, fairly selfish basketball, the Cavs would run out of gas.

Besides, it seemed no matter what James would do, or how well big men Zydrunas Ilgauskas or Anderson Varejao were playing, Williams and West, and especially Gibson, would continue to mess things up and miss shots.

But as critical as I've been of Gibson this season (please, Mike Brown, give Tarence Kinsey a chance!), he came up with a huge rebound and putback in traffic that went practically unnoticed. Then he broke the Cavs' slump with a three-pointer at the 5:02 mark to trigger a game-ending 18-7 run.

As much as I've ripped the guy for underperforming, I'll be the first to admit that on Monday night, Gibson was HUGE.

Earlier Monday, I watched a couple of those college basketball conference tournament championship games -- and saw Cleveland State and North Dakota State (yes, NORTH DAKOTA STATE) advance to the NCAA's Big Dance. At the time, I thought, "Man, these college kids just play with so much emotion."

Not long after, I surprisingly found myself thinking the same thing about the pros, as Williams broke out of his daylong slump by burying a couple of monster shots late, including a three that proved to be the game-winner. Following that shot, Williams turned to the crowd and displayed the "Cleveland" on his shirt. Then he and James embraced, LeBron whispering something in Williams' ear before they walked to the bench during the Clippers' ensuing timeout.

It was ugly, it was beautiful, it was Cavaliers basketball at its worst and its best.

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And, oh yeah, the Cavs outscored the Clippers 35-14 in the fourth.

Bottom line: With this team, in this season, even bad can be good. Sometimes, that can be the sign of basketball destiny. And anyone familiar with March Madness ought to know that.

CAVS-SUNS STUFF

* Tonight's game in Phoenix (10:30 p.m., TNT) is the tale of two teams. The Cavs are aiming for home-court advantage throughout the playoffs, and the once-proud Suns are trying just to make it. They're currently five games out of the final playoff spot in the West, but are still plenty potent with the likes of Steve Nash, Grant Hill, and yes, Shaquille O'Neal.

* The Cavs also must be careful not to get caught up in the Suns' "Seven Seconds or Less" breakneck pace. Phoenix is simply better at that game. The Cavs, meanwhile, are at their best when playing a controlled tempo and running when the opportunity presents itself.

* The Cavs are 20-4 against the West, with two of those losses coming to the Lakers. They beat the Suns on Feb. 11, a game in which Nash (back spasms) did not play.

* The Cavs have lost nine straight in Phoenix, dating back to March 1999.

* Nash has scored 20 or more points in six straight games -- but the Suns have only won one of them. They're currently riding a five-game skid.

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