

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Friday, March 13 2009 7:00 PM -

Didn't stay up until the end of last night's game between the Cavs and the Sacramento Kings? You missed a good one. Once again, the Cavs rallied from a fourth-quarter deficit to win, beating the Kings 126-123 in overtime. LeBron James did not have another triple-double, but he did score 51 points, and basically willed the team to victory down the stretch. John Hnat recaps the game.



THE SUMMARY:

Stop me if you've heard this one before.

The Cavs were down by double digits in the fourth quarter against a normally bottom-feeding West Coast team.

They were looking like a team that ... well, like a team that has been on the road for most of the past month.

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Coach Mike Brown was in the locker room, having been ejected after vehemently arguing the foul that wasn't called when Mo Williams was hammered while driving to the hoop on a play in the third quarter. (Okay, that part is new.)

But they whittled away at the lead, thanks to a heroic performance by LeBron James, and found themselves on the right side of the score when the final buzzer sounded.

Sound familiar? It should. Just as they did Tuesday night against the Clippers, the Cavs fought back in the fourth quarter to nip the Sacramento Kings, 126-123, in an overtime game last night at Arco Arena. It was the tenth time this season that the Cavs won a game despite trailing at the outset of the fourth quarter.

And it may have just been the most entertaining game of the season.

Unlike the past three games, James did not get the triple-double, but he posted a game-high 51 points and nine assists. I guess that'll do. Anderson Varejao backed him up with 18 points and 12 rebounds. Sacramento's Kevin Martin scored 34 points, and Jason Thompson and Bobby Jackson (*he's still in the league?*)

I remember my dad telling me stories of watching Jackson play
) each had 19.

The win improved the Cavs' record to 52-13, and guaranteed them the Central Division title. That's right - it is March 14th, with a month remaining in the regular season, and the Cavs already have the division title locked up.

More importantly, the win allowed the Cavs to remain 2.5 games ahead of the Celtics (who also won last night) in the race for the best record in the Eastern Conference.

It's the NBA. Where finally getting to sleep in your own bed happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

I Don't Care If It Was Against Sacramento, And Neither Should You: With about six minutes left in regulation, and the Cavs trailing by nine points, LeBron turned to Varejao and said, simply, "it's time."

And then he went out and proved it.

Mind you, Bron had already been working on a stellar game. He scored 16 points in the first quarter. He snapped off some of his usual laser-precision passes (most notably one to Varejao for a dunk on a third quarter play). He started the fourth quarter with a resounding, highlight-reel dunk.

In the final minutes of regulation, he more or less willed the team from a loss. He finished off regulation with two critical plays in the final minute - a steal of a pass, leading to a free throw that tied the score at 116 with 24 seconds to go; and then smothering defense on Martin (who had been shredding the Cavs's defense all night) as the final seconds of regulation ticked away.

(Martin did attempt a shot, which James blocked.)

At that point, the Cavs' win was inevitable ... and it became even more so after LeBron hit a dagger of a three-pointer to give the Cavs a six-point lead halfway through the extra session.

Yes, it was the Sacramento Kings; yes, it was a regular-season game. But we are (*ahem*) witnessing LeBron turn into one of those truly elite players who can seemingly will a team to victory on a night when it probably should lose.

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By The Way: Remember when free throw shooting was a weakness for LeBron? He was 15-of-17 from the stripe last night.

Did Somebody Tell Him It's 2007 Again?: Varejao, starting yet again in place of the injured Ben Wallace (who is now walking without a cast and will hopefully return to action by the end of the month), had a very strong game. He scored, he grabbed rebounds, he had his usual complement of hustle plays.

None of them were bigger than the two back-taps he had in the final minute of overtime, allowing the Cavs to twice retain possession and drain time off the clock.

The Boomerang: Time for a dirty little secret. Most of the GBS is written by the time the final buzzer sounds. That's nothing new for sports journalism - most game recaps you read, in any sport, are mostly written during the game.

In the case of Real Journalists, they write most of the story, hustle to the locker room immediately after the game for a couple of choice quotes (just once, I want to hear an athlete say that his team didn't play hard and didn't give 100 percent), file the story, and then enjoy a variety of adult beverages at local watering holes.

The problem arises if events late in the game contradict what you've already written. For example, in every major league stadium, you will hear a press box-ful of groans if there is a late lead change.

That wonderful column you wrote two innings ago is now obsolete, and you have to re-do the whole story, mindful of the looming deadline (and the possibility of less drinking time).

It is in that spirit that I relate the evening of one Sasha Pavlovic. For the first 46 or so minutes of the game, Sasha displayed a level of effectiveness best described as "suck";

He blew two layups in the first quarter; got whistled for a silly technical foul for arguing a foul call, when he clearly was hacking the Kings' Martin; played a lot of "ole!" defense on Martin; and temporarily stalled the rally in the fourth quarter by trying to softly lay in the ball (and throwing up an air ball; he was fouled on the play, and promptly bricked both free throws).

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In other words, he was **Unfrozen Caveman Shooting Guard**. "Your airplanes and hotels confuse me, for I am but a simple caveman.

But there is one thing I
do
know, and it is airballs."

But with the Cavs trailing 112-105 late in the fourth quarter, Sasha found himself with the ball at the three-point line. *Swish*.

Moments later, with the Cavs down by four and less than a minute remaining, he again had the ball for a wide-open three-pointer. *Swish*.

And with those two shots, he turned a "what I didn't like" game into a "what I did like" one.

(Although I still did not shed any tears when he fouled out in the first minute of overtime.)

Pinocchio, You're A Real Rotation Player Now: All season, we have earnestly tracked the progress of the **Tarence Kinsey Brigade**, the end-of-the-bench bunch headed by Mr. Kinsey.

For the first half of the season, Kinsey saw action in crucial game situations ... well, never actually.

He was the in-season equivalent of having deputy commissioner Russ Granik host the second round of the NBA Draft - nothing to see here folks, just move along.

But no group can hold down its star forever. Michael Jackson left Tito, Jermaine, and the other brothers behind to launch an outrageously successful solo career.

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(
You readers younger than 30 years old, who have never known Jackson as anything other than "Wacko Jacko", will have to trust me on this one.
)

George Michael eventually realized that he could keep all the profits for himself by flying solo, rather than split them with his partner in Wham!, who went by the name "what's-his-face".

And that's where Kinsey finds himself today, as he is getting more playing time during Real Game Situations.

Last night, he played several important minutes during the third quarter (he was needed at shooting guard because Pavlovic was sitting with foul trouble and because Delonte West missed the game with a back injury), and more than held his own. Seven points in eight minutes, including a three-pointer and a put-back off an offensive rebound.

I've said it all year - Kinsey will prove to be a valuable rotation player before the season is through. He's not a star, but he doesn't need to be.

Me Too!: Speaking of the bench, Wally No Longer Just An Expiring Contract also had a very solid game. He scored 10 of his 12 points during a stretch in the second quarter, which allowed the Cavs to end the first half with a lead (60-59).

Doesn't "Wally No Longer Just An Expiring Contract" sound like one of those Indian names? I always thought that would be super cool. Something like "John Soaring Eagle", or "John Lionheart".

Imagine giving that name in a crowded restaurant for their wait list.

"Soaring Eagle, table for two."

Now THERE's a way to impress a date.

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Ever notice that all the Indian names were powerful and strong? I'm sure that somewhere in each tribe was a guy with a name like "Billy Pees Pants At Sight Of Bear", or "Sherman Delicate Flower", but you never hear about them.

About five minutes ago, I had another point to make about Wally Szczerbiak. I have now completely forgotten what it was.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Okay, This Is Getting Old: Falling behind by a wide margin in the first quarter (this time, it was 14 points, as the Cavs trailed 26-12).

Laying an egg after the intermission (the Kings outscored the Cavs 39-24 in the third quarter last night).

Generally poor defense (the Kings had 98 points after *three* quarters; not sure what the Sacramento analog is to the chalupa promotion, but whatever it was, Kings fans had it by early in the fourth).

Maybe it's the grind on the road. Maybe it's the injuries taking their toll. Maybe they just need to regroup and recapture the defensive intensity from the first half of this season.

But the Cavs have some work to do if they want to keep winning.

They can't count on LeBron to bail them out every night.

Okay, yes they can, but it would be nice if they didn't have to.

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NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Perspective: With this victory, the Cavs finished the season 12-3 on the road against Western Conference teams.

The Celtics are currently 8-5 on the road against the West (they still have games at San Antonio and Memphis).

The 1995-96 Bulls, as in the *72-10 Chicago Bulls*, went 11-3 against the West (there were only 14 teams in the West back then, before the divisions were realigned).

More Perspective: The Cavs are now 52-13 on the season. At their current pace, they will win 65.6 games.

Obviously, you can't win 0.6 of a game; let's be conservative and truncate it to 65 wins.

In the past 30 years, covering roughly 800 or so team-seasons, guess how many teams have won at least 65 games.

Nine.

In other words, if the Cavs remain at their current pace, they will post a record that is roughly within the top 1% of all teams in the past three decades.

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In case it hasn't hit you yet, this team is pretty good.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Home at last! After playing nine of their previous 13 games on the road, the Cavs now have eight of their next nine at Quicken Loans Arena. New York rolls into town tomorrow night, followed by Orlando on Tuesday.