

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

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Tuesday, March 17 2009 7:00 PM -

It was not an easy win. It was not a costless win. It was not a perfect win. But it was a win. With their 97-93 victory over the Orlando Magic last night at Quicken Loans Arena, the Cavs improved their record to 54-13, and opened a 4.5-game advantage over the Celtics in the race for the best record in the Eastern Conference (and the home-court advantage in the playoffs that goes with it). John Hnat provides the recap of last night's action from the corner of Ontario and Huron.



THE SUMMARY:

Another hurdle cleared

You Cavs fans who were concerned about the Wine and Gold beating Orlando can rest easy now. Fighting back from a nine-point third quarter deficit, Cleveland outlasted the Magic, 97-93, last night at Quicken Loans Arena.

It was not an easy win - the outcome was in doubt until LeBron James hit a pair of free throws with just a few seconds left.

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It was not a *costless* win - Wally Szczerbiak left the game in the third quarter with what the team reported as a left knee sprain. (The injury came when he bumped knees with Orlando's Dwight Howard while getting position for a rebound.)

It was not a *perfect* win - Orlando repeatedly beat the Cavs' help defense by kicking the ball out for three pointers.

But all that matters is that it is a win. A win that leaves the Cavs with a six-game winning streak, a 54-13 overall record, and a 4.5-game lead over the Celtics (who lost last night to the Bulls) for the lead in the race for the best record in the Eastern Conference.

(Orlando dropped to 49-18, five games behind the Cavs.)

LeBron led the way for the Cavs in every way imaginable. 43 points, 12 rebounds, eight assists, several clutch shots. I think I even saw him selling beer in the stands at halftime.

(Hey, it beats [posting updates to Twitter](#).)

His trusty sidekick, Mo Williams, poured in 21 points.

Rafer Alston decided to become a shooter for a night, leading Orlando with 23 points.

(Before you ask, Dwight Howard had 13 points and 15 boards.)

It's the NBA. Where "the road to the Finals goes through Cleveland" ... is one step closer to happening.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

All Hail The King: We take LeBron James for granted. Don't argue with me; we do. It's human nature.

Most nights, he is great; and because of that frequent greatness, we come to expect it from him.

On those rare occasions when he isn't great - you know, the kind where he scores *only* 18 points - we shake our heads, as though we *deserve* to be in the presence of greatness every single night.

And I am as guilty as anybody. LeBron almost averaged a triple-double last week, scored over 50 points yet again, and more or less willed the team to two come-from-behind victories ... and I wrote barely a word about him.

Not tonight. The numbers tell part of the story - 43 points, 12 boards, eight assists, four steals - but not everything. The boxscore doesn't show how the Cavs trailed 75-66 late in the third quarter ... and that LeBron responded by scoring 14 of the Cavs' next 16 points, and putting the Cavs back in the lead. Or how he calmly sank a three-pointer with 45 seconds remaining to stake the Cavs to a 95-93 advantage.

Or how he alertly drew a foul from Orlando's Courtney Lee with eight seconds to go, and sank both of the resulting free throws (and encouraging the crowd in between shots).

LeBron is getting to that level of the game's all-time greats - when he absolutely refuses to let his team lose, and has the game to back up his willpower. Let's remember to enjoy it.

The "Clanks When He Walks" Award: Speaking of calmly sinking three-pointers: moments before LeBron hit his big three-pointer to give the Cavs the lead, Williams drained a

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three-pointer of his own, again to give the Cavs a lead.

If I had to bet your life on one Cavalier hitting a three-pointer, I'd probably pick Mo. LeBron would be a close second.

(Sasha Pavlovic would be the analog to having Dr. Kevorkian on speed-dial.)

Hidden Play Of The Game, Part I: In the second quarter, Anderson Varejao (at the three-point line) found a cutting LeBron with a perfectly placed alley-oop pass for a dunk.

Great pass, great finish ... and also a great play by Williams, whose back pick freed LeBron and made the play possible.

Hidden Play Of The Game, Part II: Later in the second quarter, Orlando was bringing the ball up the court. Dwight Howard was running at maybe three-quarters speed down the middle of the court, looking back the whole time.

Mo saw that Howard was not looking where he was going, and stepped in his path to take the charge.

I'm not sure which is more commendable:

Mo's alertness, or his willingness to have a much larger man knock him on his ass.

Blatantly Apparent Play Of The Game: Pavlovic stole a Magi pass, knocking it to LeBron, who was already running towards the other end of the floor.

Uncontested for the entire three-quarters of the court, Bron finished the play off with a resounding dunk.

All That Was Missing Was Nate Robinson Jumping Over Him: It sounds funny to say that the Cavs contained Howard, as he grabbed his usual 15 rebounds, but that's what they did.

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With Zydrunas Ilgauskas leading the defensive charge, the Cavs held Howard to 13 points, well below his 21 point-per-game average.

You're not going to stop Howard, so containing him is the next best thing; and that's what happened last night.

Yes, You Can End Up Here Without Playing One Second: Coach Mike Brown sat Daniel Gibson for the second straight game.

Smart move.

I do not know whether some rest is going to heal the toe that has obviously been plaguing Gibson all season.

(In fact, I would bet that it won't, and that Gibson will not really be on the road to recovery until a few days after the season.

That's when I fully expect an article with a lead-in of "Cavaliers guard Daniel Gibson underwent successful surgery yesterday..."

But the fact is that Gibson can do one thing well on a basketball court, and he currently does not appear physically able to do that one thing.

(Speaking of playing one second: that's precisely what **Tarence Kinsey** did last night - he was a defensive substitution for the last play of the first quarter.

Maybe it's just me, but I'm amused by seeing a "Minutes Played" of "00:01" in the boxscore.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Okay, I'm Tired Of Writing It: We're now 67 games into the season, and I've run out of ways to say "the Cavs came out flat in the third quarter" (which they did; Orlando

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outscored them 25-19 in the quarter, and only a flurry of shots by James in the waning moments made it that close) and that "Sasha Pavlovic had the boneheaded play of the night" (which he did; an ill-advised drive into traffic that led to an easy steal and then a three-pointer the other way). I really, truly am out of ideas. If you have any thoughts, I'm all ears.

(Come up with them quickly; the Cavs play tomorrow night.)

Adjustments, Or Lack Thereof: Help defense is one of the keys to the Cavs' defense. Most times, it works well.

However, it tends to break down against a team that can shoot from long range.

Look up "team that can shoot from long range" in the dictionary (*yes, I know that you would never find a phrase like that in the dictionary; work with me here*), and you will find the Orlando Magic team picture.

Far too often, the Magic were left wide open to take three-pointers, and they made ten of them ... and that was with Rashard Lewis having one of the worst shooting exhibitions of his life (3-of-15 overall, 0-of-8 from beyond the arc). Odds are that he won't miss all eight three-pointers next time.

The Damned Lies Are Feeling Envious: A pet peeve of GBS: creating statistics that have no relevance whatsoever. Our friends at Fox Sports Ohio are guilty as charged, as they whipped out a "combined blocks and steals" number, all in the name of proving LeBron James's awesomecity yet again.

Bill James, the patriarch of baseball statistical analysis, once posited a rule of "never divide A by B unless you have a damn good reason why A should be divided by B." Never add
ing
A to B unless you have a damn good reason for it seems like a good corollary.

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As if that were not enough, FSO's Fred MacLeod continued (in the same breath!) to point out that LeBron is the only player in the league to rank within the top 27 in blocked shots, steals, and rebounds. Ree-diculous. It's defining a set of statistical hurdles, carefully selected so that *only* a particular player (or group of players) skims over *all* of them, and then holding it out as proof of greatness.

What's the glory in being #27 in the league in rebounding?

Aside from being better than #28, t'ain't none.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Let the homestand continue! The Cavs will take on Portland tomorrow night, and then Atlanta Saturday afternoon, with both games taking place at Quicken Loans Arena.

After a brief trip to New Jersey to face the Nets on Sunday, the Cavs come home for another four-game homestand to finish out the month.