

Cavs Avenge Loss, Crush Wizards

Written by {ga=mrburns}

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Despite the fact that the Wizards have arguably been the NBA's worst team this season, they've managed to play the Cavaliers tough all year long. In fact, they were among the handful of teams sporting a winning record against the Wine & Gold before last night's game, but the Cavaliers changed that with a comfortable 98-86 victory at the Q. Nick Allburn recaps the win for our readers.



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Although the Cavs struggled shooting the ball early, they came out of the gate playing solid defense, and as usual, the offense followed suit. The outcome was never really in doubt, as the Cavaliers played most of the first half with a 10-point cushion, then increased that buffer to 20 points in the third quarter.

Final: Cleveland 98, Washington 86

Quick Hits

It's good to be the king.

LeBron James delivered a ho-hum 21 points, 6 rebounds, and 7 assists, as he sat the entire fourth quarter due the Cavs' sizeable lead. James also grabbed three steals, playing terrific defense yet again. Put this guy on one of the NBA's all-defense teams!

The two parts of LeBron's game that aren't getting enough attention this year are his improved free throw shooting and his turnover numbers. LeBron has increased his free throw percentage over six percent from last season, to a career best 77.6-percent. When you consider that LeBron goes to the line almost 10 times per game, that's like an extra half point every game just for improving at the charity stripe. In addition, LeBron has reduced his turnovers from 3.4 per game last season to 3.0 this year, also a career best.

(Almost) 100% back.

Anderson Varejao was back in the starting lineup after missing Sunday's game with a wrist injury, and Ben Wallace played his first minutes since late February, when he suffered a broken right leg. JJ Hickson is now the only Clevelander on the shelf.

In his first game back, Wallace played nearly 18 minutes and chipped in with 7 points and 6 rebounds. He looked surprisingly good, and although he'll definitely need some time to get his legs back, it might not be too long given his reputation as the quintessential gym rat.

Varejao's presence was more noticeable, as he scored six points in the first quarter. A/V's energy and activity around the hoop make the whole team better, and Mike Brown appears poised to leave Varejao in the starting five even with Ben Wallace healthy, which is the right move.

Gibson improving?

Daniel Gibson might be coming around just in time for the playoffs. Gibson has now shot 50-percent or better in 5 of the last 8 games. While he's still been inconsistent, he's definitely showing signs of improvement, and he made his first three buckets against the Wizards before cooling off to finish 4-of-8. Boobie also had a nice shot fake to get his defender in the air and set up an easy layup in the fourth quarter. If Gibson can find his shooter's touch, it would add another dimension to the Cavaliers' bench heading into the playoffs, and could help nullify what has been, to this point, a hugely disappointing year for the former Texas Longhorn.

Transition game.

The Cavs only shot about 2-percent better than the Wizards, and Washington actually made more trips to the charity stripe. The Cavs won this game largely with defense and by taking advantage of the Wizards' turnovers. After the third quarter, the Cavs were outscoring the Wizards 21-0 off turnovers, and that basically provided the margin of victory right there.

Underachievers at their finest.

The Washington Wizards should not be an 18-win team. No way. Sure, Gilbert Arenas had been injured until last week, but they played most of last season sans-Arenas. Antawn Jamison has been healthy all year. Caron Butler has only missed 15 games or so. Andray Blatche is a guy with some potential. Their last two draft picks, Nick Young and JaVale McGee, respectively, have shown promise. That's not a great team, but there are at least a handful of NBA rosters that are less talented. Eddie Jordan had done a pretty good job with that squad in the past, and his firing remains one of the bigger mistakes in the league this season.

Finishing strong.

I've commented before on how impressed/thrilled I am with Mo Williams' ability to finish on the fast break, but another Cavs guard deserves recognition in this department, and that's Delonte West. Maybe it's West's diminutive stature or his proficiency as a shooter, but I haven't really noticed how good he is on the run-out until recently. Between Williams, West, and of course, LeBron James, the Cavs have three guys who can consistently finish on the break, and I wouldn't mind seeing them run a little bit more.

Sasha out of the rotation?

It looks more and more like Mike Brown is phasing Sasha Pavlovic out of the rotation as the playoffs approach. Pavlovic has played less than 10 minutes in 5 of the last 6 games, including a DNP against the Pistons. While it's unrealistic to expect Pavlovic to set the world on fire, I think it's a mistake to take him out of the rotation. There's a good chance that the Cavs will need Pavlovic to play some significant minutes before the playoffs are over, largely because bigger swingman types present matchup problems for all of their twos and threes with the exception of LeBron. Pavlovic isn't a great defender, but when given the choice between seeing Wally Szczerbiak or Sasha Pavlovic on a Paul Pierce, a Hedo Turkoglu, or a Kobe Bryant, I'll take Pavlovic all week long and twice on Sunday.

The *other* rookie.

I really like what I've seen from Darnell Jackson this season in limited minutes. He doesn't come close to JJ Hickson in terms of talent or athleticism, but Jackson, as a result of staying in school and playing on a national championship team at Kansas, has the experience and basketball IQ that Hickson sorely lacks.

Jackson will never start in the NBA, but is he a guy that could give you a good 12-15 minutes off the bench a year or two down the road? Sure. You need solid depth guys like that to compete year after year, and it's much less expensive to add these high floor/low ceiling types in the second round of the draft (Jackson was drafted by Miami but traded to Cleveland the same day) than in free agency. Jackson scores extra points for looking freakishly like Cuba Gooding, Jr. in this [photo](#). Maybe Darnell can replace Cuba in Daddy Day Dare 17, Mission: Octomom.

Up next: 4/10, at Philadelphia, Wachovia Center, 7:00

The Cavs have five games remaining, and two are with the 76ers. This is a crucial game for the Cavs to maintain their lead over the Lakers in the race for home court advantage, and in addition to the Boston game coming up this Sunday, it's probably one of the two most dangerous games left on the schedule. The Cavs haven't played the Sixers since December 12th, when they dispatched them with ease, 88-72. Make no mistake, the Sixers are dangerous, as Andre Iguodala always has the potential for explode for 30, and former Cavalier Andre Miller is a solid veteran point guard. Keep an eye on rookie big man Marreese Speights, who has been impressive in limited minutes.