

The Race For Homecourt - April 13

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Sunday, April 12 2009 7:00 PM -

The four-team race is now officially down to two, and with three days left in the regular season, that number will very soon be shaved down to one. The Lake Show is currently sniffing the tears, because Cleveland is in the driver's seat for the top overall seed. The Cavaliers lead L.A. by two games with two to play, and short of an abject choke, the road to the NBA Finals, like I-90, will pass through Cleveland. And I don't see the Cavaliers choking on anything at this point. Do you? Jesse breaks it all down for us.



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1.) Cleveland: 65-15: --

Streak: Won 4

Last 10: 8-2

Last Week: 3-0

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Last Game: Sunday, Apr. 12: Beat Boston 107-76

Monday, Apr. 13: @ Indiana

Wednesday, Apr. 15: Philadelphia

The Cavaliers locked down the top East seed and put a hammerlock on the top overall seed with a perfect week that climaxed in Sunday's erasure of the injury-riddled Celtics. Cleveland needs only to win one of its two remaining games to clinch home-court throughout. They also need to beat Philadelphia on Wednesday to secure a tie for the best home-court record in NBA history at 40-1. At this point, rest patterns are an issue, and it'll be interesting to see how the Cavaliers approach the potentially historic, yet contemporarily insignificant (possibly) season finale. Will they go full-bore in pursuit of the record, or will this team's leading lights be in civvies? [Windy says](#) the Cavaliers will suit up everyone in Indiana on Monday night; we'll see what happens if they beat the Pacers and turn Wednesday into a moot point, at least as far as the current standings are concerned.

2.) Los Angeles: 63-17: 1.5

Streak: Lost 1:

Last 10: 7-3

Last Week: 3-1

Last Game: Sunday, Apr. 12: Beat Memphis, 92-75

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Tuesday, Apr. 14: Utah

The Lake Show was once again tripped up in the Northwest, and it's probably going to cost them the number-one overall seed. L.A.'s eighth straight loss at Portland has them in an almost impossible situation, two games down with only one to play. Andrew Bynum came back last week and looked good, averaging 15.7 points and six rebounds in his first three games off the injured list. And Kobe Bryant had a decent week shooting the basketball, putting together three 50 percent-plus performances, including 7-of-9 against that noted NBA power, the Memphis Grizzlies. Alas, his 9-of-24 brick-fest- including five straight misses late in the fourth period- helped doom his team in Portland. All that's left for L.A. is to keep getting healthier, find Kobe's stroke on a semi-permanent basis, and get ready for their anticipated roll through the West.

Player of the Week- LeBron James, Cleveland: LBJ averaged 25.7 points, eight assists, and four rebounds, shot 52 percent, and made 23-of-26 free throws to lead the Cavaliers to the East's top spot. He sent a message to longtime rival Paul Pierce on Sunday, holding Da Troof to a dismal 4-of-17 from the field while pouring in 29 points on a variety of circus shots, short and long.

Race for the Eighth Seed: With home-court in the East a done deal, it's time to lend some space to the splashing going on in the fetid swamp at the bottom of the East, from which will emerge Cleveland's first-round opponent. Currently three teams are vying for the honor:

6. Philadelphia 76ers (40-40)

7. Chicago Bulls (40-40)

8. Detroit Pistons (39-41)

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The best opponent of this bunch, in terms of "beat-ability" is Philadelphia. Cleveland has owned the rivalry of late, winning five in a row at the Wachovia Center. With poor outside shooting and no discernible post presence, the 76ers are an ideal match-up for the Wine & Gold: what's more, they're reeling, with five straight losses and games remaining against the Celtics and Cavaliers to close the season. Unfortunately, Philadelphia owns tiebreakers over both the Bulls and Pistons, making their descent all the way to the eighth spot an unlikely prospect.

It's probably going to come down to Chicago or Detroit. The teams meet Monday night in Auburn Hills in the game that could decide Cleveland's first-round opponent. If the Bulls win, they lock Detroit into the eighth spot. If the Pistons win, they tie the Bulls in the standings, clinch the conference-record tiebreaker, and keep Philadelphia alive for the eighth spot. Detroit still wouldn't be out of the woods, though- they finish the season at Miami, while the Bulls finish at home against the Raptors.

My guess is that the Cavaliers will ultimately face Detroit, and that's fine with me. I'm not buying the talk about the Pistons being a particularly dangerous opponent, at least not to *this* team. Detroit doesn't score enough to beat Cleveland. They're not explosive enough, not athletic enough, and don't shoot from deep well enough. Besides, they barely beat the Cavaliers in the Playoffs *and* lost to them when they were inarguably a better team than now and the Cavaliers were inarguably worse. They couldn't hang in 2007; how are they going to hang now?

Chicago is more dangerous. The Bulls are 22-13 since late January, 15-10 since they swung the deal to bring in John Salmons and Brad Miller (and just as importantly, get Larry Hughes and Drew Gooden out of town) and 11-3 in their last fourteen. They're a hot team, and they're capable of being a major nuisance to the Celtics in that seventh slot, at least until Vinny Del Negro out-brain-deads Doc Rivers. Better to put age-old revenge on hold for another year while the Bulls (possibly) make mischief in another part of the bracket.

Detroit? They just need to be put out of their misery. We know [just the man](#) for that task.

Here's a Little Trivia You Might Like: The Cavaliers are one of two teams to defeat Utah and Portland on the road this season, the Magic being the other. The Lake Show went 0-3 on the road against the Jazz and Blazers, just in case you're wondering.

Here's a Little Development You Also Might Like: It looks as if L.A. is going to have an immediate chance to improve on that 0-3 record- or worsen it. A 6-10 skid- including home losses to Minnesota and Golden State- has dropped the Jazz past Dallas into the eighth and final playoff spot in the West. Utah currently has 33 losses, and loss number 34- the loss that will likely ice the final seed- should come in the season finale Tuesday night at the Staples Center. Utah is, after all, 1-18 on the road against teams with winning records.

Meanwhile, while Utah sinks, Portland rises. The Blazers have now moved into position to grab the fourth spot, setting them up for a potential second-round series against Los Angeles. Utah and Portland match up better with the Lake Show than anyone else out West, with size, physicality, and the playmaking ability of Deron Williams and Brandon Roy, and both teams have been near-impossible for L.A. to beat on the road. These are *not* the preferred first couple of roadblocks to a ninth Lake Show title. Much better the pliable Mavericks and crippled Spurs than these two, even taking Utah's recent struggles into account. The Jazz won't beat the Lakers, but they're too good at home to be swept. Portland just looks good, period. All [tough talk](#) aside, you know the Lake Show would love to see the Blazers end up on the other side of the bracket.

On that note: How great would a Lakers-Blazers second-round series be? They're the two most talented teams in the West; they have an acrimonious history both present and past, and the atmosphere at the Rose Garden will be at a [G-State-in-2007](#) level of fervor. Blazer fans are as loud and loyal

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as any in American pro sports, and after six years of being on the outside looking in at the postseason, they will be stark raving loony this spring- especially at the sight of those despised Forum Blue uniforms. Between

[Game Seven of the 2000 Western Conference Finals](#)

,
[Game 6 of the 1991 Western Conference Finals](#)

and New Edition's

["My Secret"](#);

video, Portland owes the Lake Show more than a couple. This would be a fun series to watch.

Worth mentioning: Portland has the second-best point differential in the West, behind Los Angeles. Which brings me to...

The Power of the Pythag: The Cavaliers are on the verge of clinching not just the top overall seed, but the NBA's best point differential. That's a good omen for springtime. Of the twelve teams since 1983 that have won both the regular-season and [Pythagorean](#) championships, nine have gone on to win the NBA Championship. The three exceptions are the 1993-94 Sonics (who were upset by Denver in the first round), the 2001-02 Kings (who [choked away](#) the West Finals against L.A. with a little help from the officials) and the 2002-03 Mavericks (who tied with San Antonio for best record, finished behind the Spurs thanks to a tiebreaker, and lost to them in the West Finals.)

The complete table of best won-loss/Pythagorean leaders since 1970-71, the year the Cavaliers entered the Association (**bold** denotes teams that won the title; the capital T denotes teams that finished tied for the top record):

1970-71: Milwaukee Bucks (66-16)

1971-72: Los Angeles Lakers (69-13)

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1973-74: Milwaukee Bucks (59-23)

1974-75: Washington Bullets (60-22) T

1975-76: Golden State Warriors (59-23)

1977-78: Portland Trail Blazers (58-24)

1979-80: Boston Celtics (61-21)

1980-81: Philadelphia 76ers (62-20) T

1981-82: Boston Celtics (63-19)

1982-83: Philadelphia 76ers (65-17)

1983-84: Boston Celtics (62-20)

1986-87: Los Angeles Lakers (65-17)

1991-92: Chicago Bulls (67-15)

1993-94: Seattle Supersonics (63-19)

1995-96: Chicago Bulls (72-10)

1996-97: Chicago Bulls (69-13)

1998-99: San Antonio Spurs (37-13) T

1999-00: Los Angeles Lakers (67-15)

2001-02: Sacramento Kings (61-21)

2002-03: Dallas Mavericks (60-22) T

2007-08: Boston Celtics (66-16)

As you can see, ever since Moses took the Sixers to the Promised Land and the parity of the '70s gave way to the era of the Super Team, it's been a pretty solid seat. Not a guarantee by any means, but a good sign for the purposes of the Cavaliers. Because this club- defensive-minded and superstar-driven- has more in common with the nine teams that *have* gotten it done since '83, than with the three that haven't.