

The Cavaliers made their rarefied air a bit more rarefied on Monday night, ascending to the NBA's regular season summit with their 66th win of the season. For the first time in 39 years of basketball, the Cavs will finish the season with the NBA's best record. No matter who they play in the upcoming playoff rounds, they will have homecourt advantage. Should the Cavs go for the record of a 40-1 home record? Or rest their regulars for the playoffs? Erik talks about the dilemma in his latest.



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Not even the mighty 1995 Indians could claim that, thanks to baseball's wacky pre-determined seeding of the time. Despite finishing with the best record in baseball that year, the Indians didn't have homefield advantage in any round of the playoffs that year. It played a role in their World Series loss to the Braves. Without the benefit of the designated hitter, the Indians and their powerful offense lost three low-scoring, one-run games in Atlanta in that series.

In 2007, after baseball got their league-playoff act together and started awarding homefield advantage to the teams with the better records, the Indians tied the Red Sox for the best record in baseball -- but lost homefield advantage on the head-to-head tiebreak, helping to pave the way for the Tribe's ALCS collapse.

Viewed in the light of what happened to the 100-win Indians of 14 years ago and the 96-win Indians of two years ago, the Cavs are aligned better for a title run than any Cleveland team since the '86 Browns, who finished with the AFC's best record at 12-4 that year, hosting both their conference playoff games. Even then, that doesn't account for a neutral-site Super Bowl or the fact that the NFC was the stronger conference that year, boasting the 14-2 Bears and eventual Super Bowl champion 14-2 Giants.

The Cavs don't have to worry about tiebreaks, pre-determined homecourt advantage, neutral-site championship games or anything of the sort. The Lakers have 17 losses. The Cavs can't lose more than 16. Mathematically, the Cavs have clinched everything they can possibly clinch during the regular season. And they still have a game left to play, Wednesday night at home against the 76ers.

Mission accomplished, at least until the playoffs start this weekend.

But something else is dangling out there as the Cavs prepare to wrap up the regular season on Wednesday. It would look nice in the glossy pages of the team's media guide for years to come. It would put the Cavs in the conversation among the greatest single-season teams of all time, should they win the NBA title. But now that the league's best record has been clinched, what does it really mean?

Should the Cavs play for the win on Wednesday, and try to tie the 1985-86 Celtics for the best home record ever at 40-1? Or would it be foolish to eschew big-picture thinking in the pursuit of one last regular season win?

Basically, there are two schools of thought on this: The argument against playing to win says you shouldn't risk unnecessary fatigue and/or injury to your key players by playing them big minutes in a game that has no meaning in the standings. The argument in favor of playing to win says you don't get a chance to grab a piece of history like this very often, so why would you throw it away without trying to attain it?

I've carefully considered the pros and cons, and I say Mike Brown should let them play. The Cavs should treat Wednesday's game like they would any other regular season game, not like a preseason game in April.

The fatigue argument loses a lot of voltage when you consider that LeBron is

averaging 37.7 minutes per game, by far a career low. The Cavs have been on the happy side of blowouts on such a regular basis this season, LeBron and the rest of the varsity team have turned fourth-quarter bench clowning into an art form. That's why you let your starters rest during the waning minutes of lopsided contests, so they're fresher at this time of the year.

Don't risk injuries? I suppose. But no one in Cleveland needs to be reminded that Jim Chones broke his foot in practice prior to the 1976 Eastern Conference Finals. There is no guarantee that holding players out of a game will completely thwart the injury threat. In order to do that, you'd need to cancel practices, be sure that every player refrains from heavy lifting, from using sharp kitchen utensils and from straying too near car windows while tossing around the pigskin (I'm looking at you, Ben Wallace).

The arguments for mothballing half the roster on Wednesday are rooted more in fear and a desire to stay away from the hand of fate, which Clevelanders are conditioned to believe is never more than a smite away.

The arguments for treating Wednesday's contest as another regular season game seem far more compelling from where I sit.

First off and most compelling is the chance to finish the regular season 40-1 at home, reaching a milestone that has been previously reached by only the '85-'86 Celtics, universally considered one of the best NBA teams of all time.

Even in the best of years, 40 home wins is an historic accomplishment. The 72-10 Bulls of 1995-96 went 39-2 at home. The 69-13 Lakers of 1971-72 went 36-5 at home. Those teams are considered the best in NBA history, and they couldn't accomplish what the Cavs have a chance to accomplish on Wednesday.

A chance like this comes around maybe once for a franchise -- and a lot of franchises will never get this chance. All but a microscopic sliver of NBA players will ever get to say they played on a team that finished 40-1 at home -- or even had that chance. The historical ramifications alone are hard to resist.

If you'd rather hear a more practical argument that has less to do with legacies and more to do with the here and now, there's this: What good would a week off do for a team that has been thriving on rhythm and chemistry all year?

Wallace's aching joints need rest. And that's exactly what Wallace will get as he recovers from a knee tendon strain. Zydrunas Ilgauskas can probably use whatever rest he can get. Brown can monitor his minutes with a little extra vigilance on Wednesday. Same for Joe Smith.

But spry youngsters like LeBron, Mo Williams, Delonte West and Anderson Varejao? What good will the balance of a week off do for them at this point in the season? All they could possibly accomplish is gathering rust and losing focus as they sit around waiting for the playoffs to start.

At this point, with 81 games down and one regular season game plus playoffs to go, there is no reason to deviate from what has gotten the team to this point, especially considering the fact that Wednesday's game is the only game between now and the weekend.

If the Cavs can manage to turn Wednesday's game into a laughner in the second half, I'm all in favor of taking LeBron and the starters out as soon as the game is in hand. But this is no time to sit your starters after the jump ball.

The Cavs have worked all season to secure homecourt advantage throughout the playoffs, and they've worked all season to put themselves on the verge of matching the best home record of all time. They deserve this chance. They also deserve the chance to arrive in the playoffs with momentum, not burdened by a week's worth of rust.