

It's LeBron James' City

Written by {ga=samamico}
Monday, April 20 2009 7:00 PM -

It was an impressive performance by the Cavaliers in Game One on Saturday. The Cavs moved the ball, they cut to the basket, they rewarded their teammates' unselfishness by knocking down open shots. And, of course, there was the award-winning performance of a certain superstar. Maybe even more impressive was the fact the Pistons didn't play all that badly. In fact, they played about as well as could be expected.



This is exactly what the Cavaliers wanted. That's all I could think after watching the Cavs dismantle Detroit to the tune of 102-84 in Game 1 of their Eastern Conference playoff series Saturday.

The Cavs moved the ball, they cut to the basket, they rewarded their teammates' unselfishness by knocking down open shots.

And, of course, there was the award-winning performance of a certain superstar. As ABC analyst Jeff Van Gundy said during the game: "It's LeBron James City."

Perhaps more impressive than the ball movement, or the solid defense, or the half-court buzzer-beating banked-in heave by James at halftime was this: The Pistons didn't play all that badly. In fact, they played about as well as could be expected.

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Still, the Cavs coasted. The win may not have been considered easy, but it wasn't all that grueling, either. It seemed like an ordinary, everyday game from a team that's done the job at home all season long.

For the Pistons, that may be even worse news than the actual defeat. Maybe it only took one game -- or heck, one six-minute stretch of the second quarter -- to discover that they just don't measure up.

That may be the thing about this series. Maybe the Pistons' best will never be good enough. It sure seems like that's the case, especially when you consider the game had by second-year guard Rodney Stuckey. He scored 20 points, keeping things close early by aggressively taking the ball to the basket and daring the Cavs to stop him.

Still, other than a strong first 16 minutes in which the Pistons stayed in it (they trailed just 37-36 with eight minutes left before halftime), the Cavs had their way for most of the day. Basically, it was close for a while -- but overall, more or less a snoozer.

"That's the type of ball game we had to have," James said. "We came out and just had a business-type attitude."

One of the keys to this series will be the Cavs' ability to control the tempo. That doesn't mean they need to play a slowdown, methodical style. It just means taking care of the ball, being opportunistic when chances to run present themselves, and keeping everyone involved.

James made sure that happened, scoring at will for a game-high 38 points on a sizzling 13-of-20 shooting. He also had eight rebounds, seven assists and committed zero turnovers despite handling the ball on nearly every possession of the 40 minutes in which he played.

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The Pistons? They were simply helpless. And how must they feel now, knowing that reserve forward Joe Smith (13 points) was the second-leading scorer and point guard Mo Williams tallied just 12 points? Yet they still lost by 18.

If nothing else, the Pistons discovered the Cavs are no longer the same old one-man team -- that they're not just the King going one-on-five while his court jesters stand there and watch. The Cavs, it seems, really are a team in the truest sense.

"A couple of years ago, we did a lot of standing," James said.
"We relied on me to just dribble and make a play."

Not anymore.

"The way we rely on teammates -- and not just myself -- to make plays is at an all-time high," James said.

That much is obvious.

In fact, the Cavs' opportunistic offense seems so natural that immediately after the game, LeBron wasn't talking about the Pistons. Instead, he was rattling off the schedule of remaining games around the league, telling anyone who would listen, "San Antonio and Dallas play at 8, then Portland and Houston at 10:30."

It was almost as if he had already moved on from a game that he had totally dominated just five minutes earlier.

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Welcome to life in LeBron James City.

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