

Cavs Throttle Pistons, Take 2-0 Series Lead

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

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Now the series moves to Auburn Hills. Let's hope it ends there.

How You Start: The Cavaliers wasted no time getting off the starting blocks. They jumped out to a 12-2 lead, forcing the Pistons to miss six of their first seven shot attempts, and although Detroit countered with a spurt to close the gap to 14-12, the tone for the night had been set.

Gotti Got Comfortable: Doing much of the tone-setting was Mo Williams. The Alabama gunner got off to a poor start in Game One, scoring two points in the first half and getting into early foul trouble against Rodney Stuckey. He reversed that trend on Tuesday, opening the scoring with a jumper and then finding Big Z with a pair of dimes, one a falling-backward pass that the Lithuanian converted with a floater. Mo picked up nine points and four assists in the first fourteen minutes and finished with a tidy line of 21 points on 8-of-13 shooting with seven assists. Normally a knock-down free-throw shooter (sorry to channel Mark Jackson there), he went a pedestrian 3-of-5 from the stripe, a line that hardly takes away from his contributions on this night.

Remember Him? A ghost from Detroit titles past came back Tuesday to haunt his former teammates. Ben Wallace played just eight minutes and didn't attempt a shot, but his line- zero points, three rebounds and one block- don't do justice to his contributions. Ben was everywhere in those eight minutes, grabbing two offensive rebounds, spiking Kwame Brown's feeble lay-up attempt off the glass, and tipping a Will Bynum dribble away to start a successful Cavalier fast break. When Ben entered the fray at the 2:29 mark of the first period, Cleveland led 17-12. When he exited with 6:56 left in the half, it was 34-21. Big Ben, like Detroit, isn't what he used to be. But it's a luxury to have a player of his caliber and accomplishment as a fourth big.

Hustle Points: Big Ben wasn't a man alone in his efforts. Joe Smith (five points, six boards) came off the bench and grabbed two offensive rebounds during the same surge, part of a total of twelve offensive boards for Cleveland in the first half. Despite not shooting particularly well and committing seven turnovers, the

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Cavaliers ended the half with a 46-32 lead.

LeBron's Line: It's taken a while to get to Number 23 in this here recap, but it was just that kind of night. After blowing the doors off the Pistons in the first half on Saturday, LeBron encountered some defensive wrinkles- Rip Hamilton as the primary defender, more double-and-triple-teams, and some energetically physical fouls- and was content to distribute, hammer the boards, make forays to the free-throw line, and get in his heat-checks where he could. Efficient and workmanlike (yet spectacular, of course) LeBron ground out 29 points on 7-of-14 from the field, 13-of-17 from the line and 2-of-5 from long range to go with 13 rebounds and six assists. He committed only two turnovers and, as always, hounded Tayshaun Prince (two points, 1-of-5) into fumbling uselessness on the defensive end. In the first two games of this series, LeBron has gone to the free-throw line 31 times. He's made 24 (77.4 percent, which is just about right for him.) He's been called for two fouls. Nice how that works, huh?

Not just for LeBron, either: So far, Cleveland is winning this series at the free-throw line. The Cavaliers have shot 70 so far to 28 for Detroit; they've made nearly twice as many free throws as the Pistons have attempted.

Redbush & seeing a little red: Delonte West is like Che Guevara with bling on; he's complex. He had a complex game Tuesday night, too. On one hand, Red's shot was there, and it was timely: he hit 7-of-12 from the field, including a pair of corner jumpers at the end of the second and third periods. Those are always big shots, and he stuck them. On the other hand, he was careless with the basketball. His turnovers were a major factor in Detroit's late run to make the game mildly interesting; five in all, out of a total of fourteen Cavalier miscues (too many.) It's nice to see Red being aggressive- this team will need it. More control of that aggressiveness will help.

Getting Careless: Cleveland blew the game wide open with a 31-point third quarter, and led 79-50 in the opening minute of the fourth quarter. At that point, with LeBron on the bench seemingly for the duration, the Cavaliers,

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uncharacteristically, melted down. They went more than nine minutes without a field goal, committed five turnovers (three by West), missed free throws, gave up offensive rebounds, and Detroit, which had been floating lifelessly through the game like a dead goldfish, suddenly took heart. The Pistons ripped off a 27-5 run, and with 3:50 left, Cleveland's 29-point lead had been sliced down to seven. The game was never really in doubt, but the late sag put a bit of a damper on what should have been a display of pure dominance by the NBA's top seed.

(For all of you who think I'm bitching unnecessarily in the wake of a Playoff victory, that the 'W' is all that matters, let me put it this way. When you're the fourth seed, winning is all that matters. When you're the top seed, winning is assumed. *How* you win is what matters.)

History lesson: Twice in recent postseason history, the Cavaliers have been on the other side of a fourth-quarter rally to inject some drama into a Game Two rout. In the [2006 East Semifinals](#), Cleveland's 27-12 run cut a twenty-point deficit to five in what ultimately was a 97-91 defeat. In the [2007 Finals](#), Cleveland went on a 27-6 fourth-quarter run to chop a 29-point San Antonio lead to eight, in a 103-92 loss. In the former case, the run seemed to turn the tide of the series; the Cavaliers took the next three from Detroit before ultimately losing in seven. In the latter, it didn't even merit footnote status as the Spurs finished off the sweep in the Q. We'll see if Detroit's run Tuesday night has any residual effect. Remember, in Cleveland's only loss to the Pistons this season, back in November, the Cavaliers blew a double-digit second half lead in particularly abject fashion.

Bronze this stat: Per Jeff Phelps, Cleveland has trailed in this series for a grand total of 22 seconds.

Next: Game Three, Friday night at 7:00 PM, live from the Palace of Auburn Hills.