

## Eight Down, Eight To Go

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}  
Monday, May 11 2009 7:00 PM -

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It wasn't the prettiest win of the season - more Susan Boyle than Sarah Michelle Geller in the execution - but the result was gorgeous. The Cavaliers finished off their second series sweep in two weeks, ending the season of the Hawks with an 84-74 Game Four victory at Phillips Arena in Atlanta. The win was Cleveland's eighth straight in postseason play, a franchise record, and the fourth straight postseason win on the road, also a franchise record. Every win this postseason has been by double-digits. Jesse recaps last night's series sweeping win over the Hawks.



The hottest new fashion accessories in Northeast Ohio this spring? Brooms.

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Atlanta- it's been real. I tip my Bud tallboy to y'all. Next!

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**First, the Slop:** In some ways, this might have been Cleveland's worst-played game of the entire postseason. The Cavaliers shot the three-pointer well- 10-of-18- but that was pretty much the only area in which they were proficient offensively. They shot 42.9 percent from the field, committed 18 turnovers, and were dreadful from the free-throw line, shooting just 14-of-26. For much of the game the Cavaliers were stagnant and sloppy, allowing Atlanta to hang around despite being stymied on offense and hammered on the boards. Great teams aren't always great. But they *are* great when they have to be, and when the Cavaliers needed to execute at winning time- they did.

**Nothing wrong with the D, though:** The beauty of being a great defensive team is that it you can win games even when the offense is malfunctioning. That's what happened in Monday's Game Four. After scoring 22 points in the first quarter, Atlanta logged 16, 19 and 17 in the final three periods. For the game, the Hawks shot a chilly 31.5 percent, including 2-of-13 from three-point range.

**He Painted Atlanta Red:** Delonte West was simply fabulous on Monday night. He played his usual tough defense on Joe Johnson (who shot 7-of-18, although LeBron did pick him up late in the game) and hit some massive shots to forestall Atlanta comeback attempts and keep the Cavaliers in control. The feisty man from D.C. scored 21 points on 7-of-13 from the field, 2-of-4 from three-point range and 5-of-8 from the line with six assists, four rebounds and a steal. He provided the highlight of the night early in the fourth period, when he drove baseline, switched the ball from right hand to left, and hammered it home with ferocity to give Cleveland a 64-59 lead. But that was by no means Delonte's last big play of the night. With 4:56 left and the Cavaliers clinging to a five-point lead, he drilled a three-pointer off a LeBron James feed to extend the lead to seven. Nine of Red's 21 points came in the fourth quarter. LBJ isn't the only man on this team blessed with impeccable timing.

**LeBron's Line:** 27 points on 9-of-22 from the field, 3-of-6 from downtown, and 6-of-9 from the line with eight rebounds, eight assists, and a steal in 43 minutes. Surprisingly, his +1 was the second-worst of any Cavalier who played in the game (behind Sasha Pavlovic, who somehow managed to rack up a -8 in just four minutes of action.) His three-point play with 2:20 left gave Cleveland a 79-72 lead

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and put the Hawks, and their season, on life support.

**Dagger of the Night:** For most of the night, Mo Williams wasn't exactly at his best. He shot just 4-of-11, committed four turnovers (including an egregiously dumb moving screen early in the fourth period) didn't get to the foul line, and missed a couple of wide-open three's that kept Cleveland from breaking it open early in the final session. But he wasn't going to miss forever. With 52 seconds to play and the Cavaliers leading 79-74, Mo buried a three-pointer from the top of the key to put the game, and the series, on ice.

**Board Work:** Continuing a series-long trend, the Cavaliers pounded the smaller Hawks on the boards 48-33, including 15 offensive rebounds. Anderson Varejao led the way with eleven caroms, while Z had ten, LeBron eight, and Joe Smith six off the bench.

**Wally Skywalker:** Mr. Szczerbiak had another nice game off the bench, scoring six points on 3-of-4 from the field, and provided yet another flash of his latent &quot;ups.&quot; Midway through the second period, Wally World faked Marvin Williams off his feet, drove the lane, and crammed it home on a stunned Atlanta defense to give the Cavaliers a 26-24 lead. Getting dunked on once in a series by Wally is embarrassing. Getting dunked on twice in a series calls for ritual suicide.

**Put him on a milk carton:** Remember when Mike Bibby was making big shot after big shot to lead Sacramento to the cusp of a title? Remember how Cavaliers fans spent three years pining after him? Neither do we and neither do we. The Atlanta point guard was horrible on Monday night, scoring three points on 1-of-6 shooting, dishing out one assist, and getting benched by Mike Woodson for much of the second half. Bibby, Al Horford and Marvin Williams- three of Atlanta's five starters- combined to score seven points on 2-of-16 from the field. You won't beat Cleveland with that kind of production from 60 percent of your starting five.

**Bronze this Stat:** Including the regular season, the Cavaliers have now won six

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consecutive games on the road. They're now 33-14 away from Quicken Loans Arena. Much has been made of this team's home-court dominance- and deservedly so- but for the most part, the Cavaliers have done a superb job of handling business in hostile environments, as well as in the friendly confines of the Q. Just goes to show that great defense and the greatness of LeBron James are portable.

**Next:** We await the winner of the Boston-Orlando series, which is currently tied at two games apiece. That series resumes on Tuesday night in Boston, with Game Six scheduled for Thursday in Orlando and Game Seven (if possible) for Sunday in the Hub. If this series ends in six games, my guess is that the Eastern Conference Finals will begin on Sunday; if it goes the limit, my guess is we'll have to wait until Tuesday for the Cavaliers to re-take the floor in the Q against either the Celtics or the Magic.

Hopefully it'll be Boston. The impetus for Cleveland's amazing 2008-09 sprang from last season's Game Seven loss at the Garden, and it would be fitting to go full-circle and get another crack at the Celtics on the way to a Championship. I also think Boston, paper-thin up front and on the bench, would be an easier touch than Orlando. It's no secret the Cavaliers have some match-up problems with the Magic. That's not to say our boys wouldn't beat Orlando; I think they would. Keep the Magic close, and chances are that LeBron and Co. would out-execute them down the stretch of just about any game. But I've been leery of the match-up all season, and continue to be.

My attitude toward a playoff series with Orlando is the same as my attitude toward flying. I'm not afraid to fly, *per se*; I'd just rather be doing something else. I'm not afraid of the Magic, either. I'd just rather the Cavaliers played someone else. Someone, say, wearing green.