

Stayin' Alive: Cavs Win To Force Game Six

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Thursday, May 28 2009 7:00 PM -

Cleveland's 112-102 victory over Orlando in Thursday night's Game Five didn't erase all of the dark clouds that have settled over this Eastern Conference Final. But there were some very hopeful signs for this team. For the first time in this series, Cleveland was the team making all the big plays down the stretch. For the first time in this series, the much-maligned Mo Williams stepped up. For the first time in this series, a Cavalier- Daniel Gibson- came off the bench and provided a real spark. And because of that, our team will live to fight at least one more day.



And yet... we live.

Cleveland's 112-102 victory over Orlando in Thursday night's Game Five didn't erase all of the dark clouds that have settled over this Eastern Conference Final. Once again the Cavaliers blew a massive lead at home, once again they came out flat in the third quarter, and once again they failed to consistently contain the Magic scoring machine. But there were some very hopeful signs for this team. For the first time in this series, Cleveland was the team making all the big plays down the stretch. For the first time in this series, the much-maligned Mo Williams stepped up. For the first time in this series, a Cavalier- Daniel Gibson- came off the bench and provided a real spark.

And because of that, our team will live to fight at least one more day.

Newsflash- LeBron James is really, really good: It wasn't just the line LeBron threw up on Thursday night: 37 points, 14 rebounds, and 12 assists in 46 grueling minutes. It was how, dogged by exhaustion, the man simply wouldn't let his team go home for the summer. He willed this victory, he did it with every facet of his game, and he did it when the Cavaliers absolutely needed it the most. In the fourth quarter, with the game and the season hanging in the balance, LeBron scored or assisted on 31 consecutive Cavaliers points. In that span, Cleveland went from a 79-75 deficit to a 106-96 lead. At some point, you just run out of superlatives to describe this man and what he means to this team, this city, and the sport itself.

From No-Show to Mo-Show: You know, I was all set to rip Mo Williams a new one in this piece, regardless of the outcome of the game. I was all set to call him Mr. January, a front-runner who can light up the Grizzlies and the Timberwolves in the dead of winter, but whose shot and swag melts in the warmth of springtime basketball. I was going to be classless, rude and unfair to a guy who has helped this team immensely all season, but just can't seem to get it working now, when his team needs him the most.

I'm glad I'm not going there. Not just because to do so would be classless, rude, and unfair, but because on Thursday night Mo Williams finally, *finally*, got his game in gear. Hitting 6-of-9 from three-point range, Mo came through with 24 points on an efficient 14 attempts from the field, at long last showing the skills that made him an All-Star this season (technically, a couple of injuries made him an All-Star, but we won't quibble.) He also badly outplayed Orlando point guard Rafer Alston, who followed up his spectacular Game Four with a 1-of-10, three-point, -20 stinkaroo.

Let's just hope Thursday wasn't an aberration. Because if Thursday's Mo Williams shows up on Saturday (and Thursday's Skip to My Lou as well) we might just see some more basketball at the Q before this series is done.

Big, Bouncy Boobies: "Minimal" would be a nice way to describe Daniel Gibson's postseason contributions prior to Game Five. In twelve Playoff games prior to Thursday, Daniel scored a total of 33 points, at one point going five consecutive games without scoring a point. But on Thursday, the Texas sharpshooter flashed the form that made him the hero of the 2007 Playoffs, scoring eleven points and knocking down three treys, including an ice-cold bomb that gave the Cavaliers a 97-93 lead and touched off the game-clinching run late in the fourth quarter.

The 1992 Houston Oilers Would Be Proud: Blown leads by the Cavaliers have been a hallmark of their recent history against Orlando, but in this series that hallmark became a grotesquerie. Three times Cleveland jumped out to massive first-half leads in Quicken Loans Arena and watched them shrivel away to nothing in what seemed like a blink of an eye. Game Five was more of the same. With 1:57 remaining in the first quarter, the Cavaliers enjoyed a 34-12 lead. By halftime the advantage was down to one, at 56-55, and when the Magic opened the third period with a 9-0 run, Cleveland found itself trailing 64-56.

From the 1:30 mark of the first quarter to the nine-minute mark of the third quarter- a span of roughly 16:30 of game time- the Magic outscored the Cavaliers 52-22. That's 52 points in less than a quarter-and-a-half of basketball, against the league's top scoring defense. Unbelievable.

I expected the Cavaliers to have major problems in this series. But I would have never expected them to blow multiple 20-plus point leads at home against any opponent, even one as lethal as Orlando. I know the Magic have weapons everywhere on the court. But there's no excuse, no justification for this kind of repeated meltdown. It's a simple lack of composure, something that should never happen to a team with the talent and experience of the Cavaliers. What's funny is that prior to this series, *Orlando* was the team with the reputation for blowing big leads, not Cleveland.

The Third Quarter from Hell (Cont.): Coming out of halftime in a funk was a

Stayin' Alive: Cavs Win To Force Game Six

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Thursday, May 28 2009 7:00 PM -

continual problem for the Cavaliers in the awkward early days under Mike Brown, when legends like Drew Gooden, Larry Hughes, Damon Jones, and Donyell "Coffin with Legs" Marshall roamed the Quicken Loans hardwood. It looked as if the Cavaliers had put those familiar funks behind them this season. And they had.

Until this series, that is. Thus far, Orlando has outscored the Cavaliers in every third quarter and on Thursday did it again, winning the period 24-22. Not only are the Magic winning the third, they're coming out like gangbusters at the beginning. Their 9-0 run at the start of the third on Thursday gave them their largest lead of the night at 64-56, just the continuation of a trend that has gone on for a long time between these two teams.

There's no need to get *too* negative, not after a win. But it would be nice to see the Cavaliers, for once, lay the hammer down on this Orlando club coming out of the halftime locker room.

The Fourth Quarter from Heaven: Not only has Orlando dominated the third quarter in this series, they've dominated the fourth quarter as well. But not on Thursday. Ratcheting up the defense and letting LeBron work his wonders, the Cavaliers outscored the Magic 34-23 in the final period and, for once, made all of the clutch plays down the stretch. The keys were twofold: a late 8-0 run that transformed Cleveland's lead from a shaky 94-93 to a comfortable 102-93 with 2:21 left, and LeBron's defense on Hedo Turkoglu down the stretch. With Delonte West hobbled by a hip pointer, we might see more of LeBron on Hedo in Game Six, and that's a good thing.

Next: Game Six, Saturday night at 8:30 from Confederated Products Arena in Orlando.