

Where Now? What Next?

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Monday, June 08 2009 7:00 PM -

It's been ten days. But the wounds are still sore. This Cavaliers team appeared poised to bring Cleveland their first pro sports title since 1964. But alas, it was not to be. The silver lining to that fateful matchup with the Orlando Magic is that the Cavaliers' shortcomings were finally revealed by a longer, more athletic and better-shooting team. In Jerry Roche's latest piece, he hands out his player grades for the season, and takes a look at which players the team may target this offseason.



It was "The Crying Game" -- Game 6 of the NBA's Eastern Conference Finals. And it's taken well over a week to finally roll off the couch and tiptoe through all the wadded Kleenex that litters my living-room floor. My only explanation for the lingering distaste is because expectations for this year's Cavaliers were so high. By all accounts, not one player on this team didn't hustle and really bust his butt all season and throughout the playoffs (at least until that fatal last game). The realization that this team lacked the talent -- rather than effort -- to beat the Magic came as somewhat of a surprise to most of us fans.

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In Sunday's *Plain Dealer*, Brian Windhorst published his [annual grades](#) for the Cavaliers. Being as close to the team as he is (thankfully, because he comes up with some insightful articles), he's inflated too many individual grades, basing them more on regular-season performances. However, since the playoffs mean so much more than the first 82, those last 14 games must be weighted as such. So here's another take on "Grading the Cavaliers," from a devoted, longtime fan who viewed more than 80 games with a critical

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eye.

FRONT COURT

LeBron James: A+. NBA MVP. No more need be said. **Zydrunas Ilgauskas: C.** Suffers from Bernie Kosar syndrome: "diminishing skills." Perfect role for him next season is first big guy off the bench.

Andy Varejao: C.

Slightly improved offensively, but really just a jack of all trades, master of none. A free agent, he may price himself off the Cavaliers.

Joe Smith: B.

Solid -- real solid -- scoring, rebounding, court wisdom. A shame he didn't get to play more, especially against Orlando.

J.J. Hickson: C.

Rookie woes, including an injury that ended his season.

Darnell Jackson: C-.

Lacked polish; therefore, lacked playing time. Physically strong, but not much offense -- yet.

Wally Szczerbiak: C-.

Savvy old pro, but his best days are now officially behind him.

Ben Wallace: D+.

Ditto Szczerbiak.

BACK COURT

Delonte West: B+. Solid on both ends of the court. More of an offensive threat than most expected; strong, fairly consistent floor game.

Mo Williams: B. Poor

playoffs almost negated an All-Star regular season.

Tarence Kinsey: C+.

When used, fairly effective on both ends of the court. Fearless.

Sasha Pavlovic: D.

Love the potential; hate the performances.

Boobie Gibson: F.

Strictly a shooter who couldn't shoot. (In his defense, his toe injury didn't help.)

INCOMPLETE

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Jawad Williams, Lorenzen Wright.

What is so surprising about the above list is that two-thirds of the roster is rather mediocre. Orlando, on the other hand, has four -- maybe five -- top talents (Dwight Howard, Jameer Nelson, Hedo Turkoglu, Rashard Lewis and possibly Mikhael Pietrus) and a much more talented bench than the Cavs. Boston has three stars (Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce, Ray Allen) and three more bigs on the cusp (Kendrick Perkins, Big Baby Davis and Leon Powe). And the Lakers have at least four top talents (Kobe Bryant, Pau Gasol, Lamar Odom, Andrew Bynum) and a terrific bench that includes Trevor Ariza, Luke Walton, Jordan Farmar and Sasha Vujacic.

So where are the Cavs going to find the talent to effectively compete with the current "Big Three"? Not from the draft, where they have the last pick in the first round. Perhaps via trade, although the Orlando series exposed our roster for its real faults, and none of the expendable players can have all that much market value any more. Possible trades would have to take advantage of financial considerations (salary cap) and probably be two- or three-for-one deals. Various intriguing possibilities have been advanced on the radiowaves and in other media, but they would take some intricate flimflamming by Danny Ferry -- flimflamming that is beyond the comprehension of your average fan.

That leaves free agency. Okay, so let's talk about free agents. Here are the league's top *unrestricted*

free agents this season, listed by their individual league ranking on the NBA's all-important "efficiency" chart, followed by their season stats (ppg, rpg, apg, in that order) and notes of interest.

33. Carlos Boozer: 16.4, 10.2, 2.1 - only 37 games played; player option

38. Jason Kidd: 9.0, 6.2, 8.7 - 40.6% 3PFG

43. Mehmet Okur: 17.0, 7.7, 1.7 - 44.6% 3PFG; early termination option

45. Andre Miller: 16.3, 4.5, 6.5

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53. Shawn Marion: 12.9, 8.5, 2.0

62. Ben Gordon: 20.7, 3.5, 3.4; 41.0% 3PFG

64. Antonio McDyess: 9.6, 9.8, 1.3

66. Lamar Odom: 11.3, 8.2, 2.6

69. Hedo Turkoglu: 16.8, 5.3, 4.9 - 29th in total 3PFG; early termination option

82. Ron Artest: 17.1, 5.2, 3.3 - 39.9% 3PFG

83. Rasheed Wallace: 12.0, 7.4, 1.4 - 30th in total 3PFG

86. Mike Bibby: 14.9, 3.5, 5.0 - 39.0% 3PFG

99. Jermaine O'Neal: 13.3, 6.4, 1.8 - player option

103. Allen Iverson: 17.5, 3.0, 5.0 - only 57 games games played

105. Grant Hill: 12.0, 4.9, 2.3

126. Drew Gooden: 11.9, 7.1, 0.9

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159. Trevor Ariza: 8.9, 4.3, 1.8

185. Flip Murray: 12.2, 2.1, 2.0

195. Zaza Pachulia: 6.2, 5.7, 0.7

See anything you like? Wouldn't mind having Kidd, even if he is on the downside of his career. Wouldn't mind picking up Okur with his outstanding numbers and three-point shooting stats. Miller, Ariza, McDyess and 'Sheed are interesting. Odom will re-sign with the Lakers. Don't want to have anything to do with Boozer (and his injuries and temperment), Artest, Bibby, Iverson, Hill or Gooden.

Some restricted free agents could fill the Cavs' needs (length, scoring ability and athleticism from at least one guard and one big) -- specifically, Charlie Villanueva, Josh Childress, Marcin Gortat, Carlos Delfino and Paul Millsap. But since their teams can match any Cleveland offer, their actual availability is iffy, to say the least.

The bottom line is this: If Ferry and Dan Gilbert can perform some sort of magic (I'm starting to hate that term) on this roster before October, the Cavs could build upon this wonderful but foreshortened season. If they can't -- well, we just don't want to think about the team devolving in LeBron's last year before he becomes an unrestricted free agent, do we? (It would be "The Crying Game" all over again, for one full season or, heaven forbid, for many to come.)