

Cavs Suffer First Exhibition Loss; Fall 109-104 To Wizards

Written by {ga=samamico}

Wednesday, October 14 2009 7:00 PM -

LeBron James was home with the flu. Mo Williams and Delonte West were held out once again. And Andy Varejao and Boobie Gibson sat most of the way after suffering minor nagging injuries. Yet the Cavs were still able to hang around with a new and improved Wizards team that is expected to make some noise in the East this year. Sam Amico was there covering the game for us, and tells us about the loss, his visit inside the Wizards locker room, and how he sees the final Cavaliers roster spots shaking out in his latest piece for us.



CLEVELAND - What would the Cavaliers look like without LeBron James? Hopefully, this will be the only time we'll find out.

I'm talking about Wednesday night at Quicken Loans Arena, where the Cavs dropped a 109-104 decision to Washington in the final preseason game in Cleveland.

As you surely know by now, LeBron stayed home with flu-like symptoms. Mo Williams and Delonte West sat out too, giving the Cavs four starters (including Shaquille O'Neal) who weren't starting for the team at the end of last season.

Ah yes. It must be life in the NBA when the games don't count.

Of course, you couldn't have told that to the Wizards. They are the Cleveland Browns to the Cavs' Pittsburgh Steelers. In other words, the Cavs may not care about the Wizards, but the Wizards treat every game against the Cavs like their own personal Super Bowl.

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So I went into the Wizards' locker room before the game, just to get a feel for things. And there they all were -- all the guys who love to hate Cleveland. Except for maybe Flip Saunders, the Cleveland Heights product and first-year coach of the Wizards.

Also, new swingman Mike Miller is James' friend, and even wears LeBron's brand of Nike shoes. That truth hasn't gone over well with the rest of the Wiz.

"I tell you right now that Mike Miller, whom I love, has to take those LeBron shoes off," Wizards forward Caron Butler said. "That's just not acceptable around here."

Butler said the new-look Wizards are setting their eyes on the NBA's biggest prize, and if they are able to rebound from last year's 19-win disaster and make the playoffs, meeting the Cavs there would be a treat. "I have a special place in my heart for Cleveland for putting us out of the playoffs all those years," Butler said.

And the Wizards could indeed be a threat when it counts -- having rebuilt themselves with Saunders, Miller and guard Randy Foye. They are also celebrating the return to health of old Cleveland foes Gilbert Arenas and DeShawn Stevenson. Throw in Butler and Antawn Jamison, and you could have the making of something special (or at least something not awful).

But can the Wizards legitimately expect to challenge the Cavs?

Uh, not likely.

Not unless the Wizards play the Cavs without LeBron every time. And let's hope

we never have to see THAT again.

BUILDING A SHAQ

It was strange to watch Shaq play without LeBron. After all, if it weren't for LeBron, Shaq wouldn't even be here. I mean, trust me, O'Neal likes all of his teammates -- but he didn't exactly sign up to play alongside Boobie Gibson.

Anyway, O'Neal proved he still has plenty left, swatting an Arenas layup into another stratosphere on defense and displaying the usual grit and skill on offense. Shaq went 5-of-5 from the floor in the first half, finishing with 13 points and six rebounds in just less than 20 minutes.

He promises to only get better, too.

"I'm out there playing, but I'm not really going into all of my tricks," he said. "That will come. After the first game, you will see everything. I'm shooting the ball well, feeling really good out there and feeling really loose."

GAME RECAP

While the fourth quarter featured a lot of guys whose next stop will likely be the D-League (Luke Nevill, Russell Robinson, maybe Andre Barrett), the game was still fairly entertaining.

The Cavs (or Cavs Lite, as the case be) trailed just 103-101 with 17 seconds left, but were never able to capitalize despite a few chances to tie it.

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Jawad Williams did an admirable job as the starting small forward, scoring 21 points and grabbing five rebounds, and increasing his chance to make the team.

On the downside, both Daniel Gibson (bruised tail bone) and Anderson Varejao (left wrist contusion) left the game with injuries. Neither is believed to be serious, and Gibson even told me after the game that his departure was simply "precautionary."

The Cavs dropped to 3-1 in the preseason, with their next game Friday at San Antonio. They don't return to the Q until the regular-season opener Oct. 27 against Boston.

TIME FOR A TRIM?

Cavs coach Mike Brown could possibly make some cuts before Friday's game. If nothing else, the Cavs could save themselves a little *per diem* on the road by waving goodbye to a few guys.

Centers Darryl Watkins and Luke Nevill will be released at some point, as will guard Russell Robinson. Forward Rob Kurz appears to have lost his training camp battle with Jawad Williams, and is likely to be let go just before the start of the regular season.

That leaves combo guard Coby Karl and point guard Andre Barrett, and one could stick. Give a slight edge to Karl, simply because Brown likes bigger guards. Karl is 6-foot-5, while Barrett is 5-10. Although Barrett has certainly made a case for himself, and is clearly the truer point guard of the two.

Sam Amico covers the Cavaliers and NBA for NBA.com, and is a regular

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contributor to SportsTime Ohio and The Cleveland Fan.