

Ten Points: Cavaliers 104 Wolves 87

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, October 29 2009 7:00 PM -

After a pair of disappointing losses, the Cavs finally notched their first win in Minneapolis. The Cavs took the lead early, extended it in the second quarter, and cruised to a comfortable 104-87 victory. LeBron James sat for most of the fourth quarter and scored 24 points; his lowest total of the young season. The Cavs sported some very balanced scoring, as Mo Williams, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Daniel Gibson, and Anderson Varejao all chipped in with 20, 15, 14, and 13 points, respectively. Nick Allburn recaps the win for our readers.



After a pair of disappointing losses, the Cavs finally notched their first win in Minneapolis. The Cavs took the lead early, extended it in the second quarter, and cruised to a comfortable 104-87 victory. LeBron James sat for most of the fourth quarter and scored 24 points; his lowest total of the young season.

The Cavs sported some very balanced scoring, as Mo Williams, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Daniel Gibson, and Anderson Varejao all chipped in with 20, 15, 14, and 13 points, respectively. If the Cavs have four guys who aren't named LeBron James scoring in the double-digits every game, they're going to be tough to beat.

1. The Twin Towers.

We saw more of Shaq and Z on the floor together, and we also saw that it can be relatively effective against a team who doesn't run the floor or play a particularly effective pick 'n roll game, like Minnesota. I didn't expect to see Shaq and Z playing together this much, especially this early in the season, but Mike Brown might be trying to get a feel for whether or not that combination can work.

If that's the case, it probably makes sense to do your experimenting early, before the team's dynamics have been completely formed. One of the reasons why the Cavs might not be able to grab the number one seed heading into the playoffs is that there's going to be a significant learning curve for the players and the coaching staff as they try to figure out how to integrate the new personnel - especially Shaquille O'Neal - into the system that's already in place. There will be some growing pains, and we felt them during the first two contests.

2. Grading Anthony Parker.

Admittedly, I didn't know much about Anthony Parker when the Cavs signed him this summer, and I was actually a little wary of the move because Parker was 34, and the Cavs gave him a 3-year deal. But Parker has assuaged some of my fears, as he looks much closer to 27 than 34.

Parker gives the Cavs some size and length at the starting two position, which is something Mike Brown was looking for. I'm a huge Delonte West guy, but starting two undersized guards in the backcourt gives opposing teams matchups to exploit, and Delonte West can still be the first guy off the bench when he returns to the team. Parker should be able to match up with most of the league's best twos, and he could guard smaller threes if necessary. I like Parker's athleticism and three-point range, as you can never have enough shooters on a team with LeBron James and Shaquille O'Neal.

3. Ball movement.

The Cavaliers' passing and ball movement was excellent when they were willing to work at it. There were still too many lazy jumpers that short-circuited several possessions, with LeBron and Mo Williams being the two biggest culprits.

Something that I didn't realize about Shaq is that he's a pretty good passer. The Cavs had a handful of offensive sequences when they moved the ball beautifully, and it was often playing off of a great Shaq pass. When the Cavs set Shaq up on the block early in a possession, it immediately draws the attention of the defense and creates mismatches and open shots. Look for Mike Brown to take advantage of this as the season progresses and he gets used to his new roster.

4. Daniel Gibson: Fact or Fiction?

Daniel Gibson has one job, and one job only: making threes. He struggled with that last season after an excellent 2007-2008 campaign. Gibson's struggles last season have largely been blamed on a nagging toe injury, but Boobie's going to have to prove that it was just an injury holding him back.

If Gibson isn't hitting open shots, he just isn't very valuable because he's not a true point guard and he's undersized. It's only been three games, but Gibson's hitting threes at a rate of 47 percent so far, so here's hoping he can keep it up.

5. Frontcourt depth is still shady.

Outside of Shaq, Z, and Andy, the Cavs don't have much up front. Outside of Varejao, they have zero athleticism in their front line. That's why the Cavs desperately need JJ Hickson to continue his development this season and deliver meaningful minutes.

If Hickson can give the Cavs a solid 15 to 20 minutes a night, it will give Mike Brown much more flexibility both with the rotation and matchups, and it will also help limit the regular season minutes of Ilgauskas and O'Neal. Leon Powe provides an interesting wild card in the front court. If he can get fully healthy, we've seen him be a solid contributor in Boston, especially last season. If neither Hickson nor Powe can step up and fill the void as that fourth big, then Danny Ferry might be looking for some front court depth at the trade deadline. I know that Joe Smith signed a deal with the Hawks in August, but I'm sure we can work something out to keep that spring tradition alive.

6. **Best of luck, Sasha Pavlovic.**

During his roller coaster career in Cleveland, I flip-flopped on Sasha Pavlovic more than John Kerry. Pavlovic always had the physical tools to be a quality NBA player, but he was maddeningly inconsistent, and to call his concentration "questionable" would be complimentary.

After being traded to Phoenix and subsequently cut, Pavlovic has landed on a pretty lousy Minnesota Timberwolves club, and that might not be the worst thing for him. Pavlovic was never going to succeed in Cleveland because he was too erratic to earn consistent minutes. What Pavlovic really needed was an opportunity to play 25 or 30 minutes a night and further develop his game and grow his confidence. On a lousy team like the T-Wolves, he might be able to do just that.

If Pavlovic can turn the figurative corner, there will be plenty of Clevelanders ready to crucify Danny Ferry for letting him go, and such criticism would be unfair. Like I said earlier, Pavlovic was never going to receive consistent minutes on a team that's gunning for a title, and thusly would never play consistent minutes in Cleveland. I'm glad Sasha's getting a shot in Minnesota, and I wish him the best of luck.

7. Z's gone too far.

One of Zydrunas Ilgauskas's greatest assets is his jumper (which in his case, could be called a "flat-footer"), which is outstanding for a center. Over the last year or two, Z's really emphasized that part of his game in an attempt to draw the opposing center out of the lane and free up space for LeBron and Mo Williams to drive inside. But during the young season we've seen far too much of Z taking jumpers from just inside the three-point line, and that's totally absurd.

First of all, I don't condone anyone taking a long two from just inside the arc - take step backwards and increase the potential value of your shot by 50 percent! But Z going that far outside not only gives him a low percentage shot, but it takes him so far away from the rim that he can't possibly affect the rebound.

Part of the reason that Z is emphasizing the "stretch" part of his game is that he's shared the court with Shaq for a few minutes this season, and that's fine. But when Z's the only seven-footer out there, he needs to move it on in and take a 10, 12, or 15-footer instead of a 20-footer. Z had his best game of the season so far, dropping in 15 points on 50 percent shooting, but he could have had an outstanding game if he would have eliminated some long range jumpers.

8. The early rotation: lean and mean.

One of the things that I really liked about this Cavs team heading into the season was the depth, especially in the backcourt. But through three games, the only players outside of the starting five who have received double-digit minutes are Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Daniel Gibson, and Jamario Moon.

Delonte West will obviously be added to that list when he rejoins the team, and JJ Hickson is consistently playing six or seven minutes per night, but I'd like to get a better look at Danny Green and Darnell Jackson, especially when the Cavs are

beating up on the Minnesotas of the league. Mike Brown likes to feel things out in the playoffs and go with the hot hand, and if he can establish a rotation that's legitimately 11 or 12 guys deep, it will give him a lot of flexibility when the post-season arrives.

9. **Jonny Flynn is a baller.**

I loved Jonny Flynn's game in college, but I had my doubts about how quickly he would adapt to the NBA. In a year or two, sure, Flynn would be a solid player, but I thought that his diminutive size would cause him some problems during his early career.

Two games into the season Flynn has poured in 35 points, and even though he'll probably struggle defensively against the league's premier scoring guards, the guy looks like he can score on just about anybody. David Kahn certainly deserves criticism for drafting three point guards, not being able to sign the one with the highest ceiling (Rubio), and trading away another who looks like a solid NBA starter (Lawson), but at least he got the Flynn pick right. How much do you think Kahn wishes he'd drafted Stephen Curry instead of Ricky Rubio right about now?

10. **Splitting the difference.**

After two rough losses, the Cavs have a chance to take two of their first four if they can outlast the Charlotte Bobcats tomorrow night at The Q. Playing .500 is underachieving for these Cavaliers, but it's never easy to play four games in five nights.

The Cavs caught a break, as the Bobcats needed double overtime to finish off the Knicks on Friday night, so if anything the 'Cats should be more exhausted than the Cavs. But the Cavs need to keep their guard up, because these Bobcats

Ten Points: Cavaliers 104 Wolves 87

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, October 29 2009 7:00 PM -

have sneaked up on them a couple of times during the last few seasons. After two early losses, the Cavs can't afford to give a game away to an inferior team if they want to keep pace in the (very) early race for the number one seed in the Eastern Conference.