

The State of the Cavaliers - #4 - Two Games Short of Last Year, Not Bad

Written by {ga=jdclevelandfan}

Monday, November 30 2009 7:00 PM -

Well, the first month of the season is in the books. Last year, the Cleveland Cavaliers were 14-3 at this point. This year, they're 12-5. The difference there, for all you non-math majors, is two games. At this time last year, the Cavaliers were just shy of the best record in the NBA. By two games. This year, the same: Two games. Also, last year, the Cavaliers fell short of the Finals. By two games. It's too early to determine exactly how the Cavs stack up this year versus where they were last year, but we're already getting some returns on the individual players. And that's what we're going to break down in our fourth State of the Cavaliers rundown.



[This is a regular feature called "The State of the Cavaliers." In it, we'll rank each player on the roster, based on recent on- and off-the-court production, news, and intangibles related to the Cavs' quest for the Larry O'Brien Trophy.]

Well, the first month of the season is in the books.

That is, assuming you don't count October. And I don't. And neither does Delonte West . . . or the Indians . . . or the Browns. In fact, the only person that did count October was LeBron James, who is awesome in any month.

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Last year, the Cavs had a perfect record at home, minus two games. This year at The Q, they've already dropped: Two games. What's more than one game but less than three? Two games.

What does all this mean? I don't know. Honestly, I just got caught up in the cadence.

Seriously though, last year at this time I was "excited," and this year, I'm also "excited." The Cavs have definitely added significant talent since last year, but so have the other elite teams.

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[Up to date, through Monday, November 30th.]

Here's the complete list. Each player's previous rank and average rank are in parentheses. If, for some reason, you want to check out our previous rundown . . . you can find it, [here](#) .

#1.) LeBron James. (Prev: #1 / Avg: #1)

Since our last State of the Cavaliers report on November 16th, the Cavs are 5-2. The King, though, is 7-0. Even in (arguably) his weakest game of the season, last week's loss in Charlotte, he still scored 25 points (on 10-of-19 shooting) with six rebounds and four assists. He's simply having a monster season.

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In those seven games, he's averaging 31.6 points, 8.6 assists and 6.0 rebounds. So what do you say to that? Uh . . . maybe, "LeBron, let's work on getting those rebounding numbers up." (?)

Oh, and he also picked up an Eastern Conference Player of the Week award.

#2.) **Jamarion Moon.** (Prev: #8 / Avg: #6)

In watching Jamarion over the past two weeks, it's hard to believe that Mike Brown was having trouble finding a place for him in the rotation earlier this season. He's been absolutely electric on both ends of the floor . . . and is my favorite player off the bench right now.

In the past seven games, he's shooting 55% from the floor and 45% from beyond the arc. He's averaging 7.9 points and 4.9 rebounds, while playing some hardcore defense on just about anyone.

And his ability to finish . . . specifically off back-door cuts . . . for dunks and alley-oops sends a charge through the offense. That's something we didn't see much of off the bench last year.

#3.) **Mo Williams.** (Prev: #2 / Avg: #2)

Over three straight games earlier this month, Mo put together a string of odds-defying numbers . . . and for the most part, he kept that up over the past two weeks. He isn't lights-out, shooting-wise, in every game. But when he gets in a groove, he looks like the perfect combo guard to play alongside LeBron.

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He had off-nights against Washington and Indiana . . . but if you throw those out, he's shooting 50% from the field and 52% from beyond the arc over the past seven. In four of those games, he had more than five assists . . . but I'm still anxiously awaiting his first points/assists double-double of the season.

#4.) Anderson Varejao. (Prev: #3 / Avg: #3)

Remember when everyone was whining about how we overpaid for Anderson in the offseason? Where are those complaints now? Sure, Andy is taking a share out of the salary cap for the next five years . . . but is there any reason why he shouldn't be part of the young core to (hopefully) build around LeBron?

Andy missed two games with a hip contusion. But in the five games he did play in over the past two weeks, he's been (in my opinion) the most unrelenting player on the team.

Let's do this: Keep an eye on Andy during the games, and email me when you see a possession where he gives up on a play, or doesn't do everything he can to get the ball back in the Cavaliers' hands. Seriously.

On the offensive side, he isn't Kevin Garnett. But don't just look at the average points, look at the percentages. In the past two weeks, he's shooting 58.3% from the floor . . . with 8.4 rebounds. Of those, 3.0 are offensive rebounds.

#5.) J.J. Hickson. (Prev: #5 / Avg: #4)

J.J. has tailed off a little in the past two games . . . but the call to insert him into the starting lineup is still Mike Brown's best decision since 2005, when he sent Dan Gilbert his resumé.

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That's not meant so much as a knock on Mike as it is a tribute to the change, and making it without a peep of discontent . . . particularly from Andy. (That's another reason I'm lovin' me some Varejao right now.)

In the 11 games since entering the starting lineup, J.J. is averaging 11.4 points and 4.2 rebounds in 26 minutes per game. That's roughly 11.4 points and 4.2 rebounds *more* than the Cavs had before the move.

So why the stunted production in the last two games? Two things: He isn't getting touches. He only has six shot attempts and two rebounds, total, in the last two. Secondly: Two games ago, Shaq returned after missing six games.

Any chance those two things are connected? Yes.

#6.) Anthony Parker. (Prev: #6 / Avg: #5)

It's weird. For me, a lot of Parker's minutes on the floor go unnoticed. Maybe he's slid into a more passive role on offense, while he adjusts to co-existing with LeBron, Shaq, and Mo . . . which is slightly different than in Toronto when he had Chris Bosh, Jose Calderon and Shawn Marion.

Or maybe he's just carefully choosing his spots. If there's one thing I have been forced to notice about AP's game, it's how lethal he is from beyond the arc.

Over the past two weeks, he's cooled, slightly, to 39.1% on threes, but on the season, he's still nailing them at a crazy 51.7% clip. Overall, AP is shooting 43.9% from the floor in his last seven games.

#7.) **Shaquille O'Neal.** (Prev: #4 / Avg: #7)

Shaq's mild shoulder injury ended up knocking him out for six games . . . which, hopefully, was more precautionary than necessary. And maybe it was, because he was immediately able to play 30 minutes when he returned to the lineup on Friday night.

Over both of last weekend's games, Shaq shot 9-of-21 (42.9%) and averaged 10 points and seven rebounds. And against Dallas on Saturday, Shaq dished out a season-high four assists. When the doubles start coming, he should be able to find J.J. for some easy lay-ups underneath.

#8.) **Zydrunas Ilgauskas.** (Prev: #9 / Avg: #8)

After opening the season with a few good games, Z went into a deep, five-game hibernation earlier this month . . . but he's since been able to right himself. And that's a good thing, because with Shaq out, I don't think I could have withstood another 4-for-31 stretch.

Instead, Z has shot 44% (22-of-50) over the past two weeks (which is six games instead of seven like the other players, because Mike Brown didn't play him against Dallas on Saturday.)

And really, if you throw out his epically bad 1-of-12 game against Indiana, his percentage jumps to 55% (21-of-38). In that period, he's also averaging 6.8 rebounds . . . and he had two blocks in every game except one.

Oh, and he's also shooting 100% from beyond the arc. (He made his only attempt of the season against Philadelphia.)

#9.) Daniel Gibson. (Prev: #7 / Avg: #9)

Contrary to Anthony Parker, I seem to feel every minute that Boobie is on the floor. That's not necessarily a bad thing . . . although his panic fouls and stuffed drives through the lane *are* apparently more memorable than whatever it is that AP does in-between 3-pointers.

I think it's mostly my strong desire to solve the Gibson Conundrum. I believe that if Boobie jacks up eight 3-pointers a game, we're going to figure him out.

Either he is a special, 45%-plus stand-still shooter from beyond the arc and can average 12-15 points per game with regular opportunities. Or he's merely an intensely streaky shooter with a one-dimensional game. Right now, my bet is still on the former. But we have to find him those shots.

In the past two weeks, he's had three solid 50%-plus shooting games . . . and four games where he's (essentially) been 1-for-something with five or fewer points.

One somewhat troubling note: Despite averaging 20 minutes a game over the past two weeks, Boobie is only averaging 1.3 assists per game.

#10.) Delonte West. (Prev: #10 / Avg: #10)

Speaking of conundrums . . .

After a great comeback game against Charlotte back on Halloween, Delonte regressed into totally-skipped-out-on-preseason form. For most of the past two weeks, he's been completely out of the rotation . . . and in some cases,

completely out of the game.

But then Delonte goes out and has his best game of the season. On Saturday night against Dallas, he had a double-double with 10 points and 10 assists. It was only his second double-double as a Cavalier. The first came two seasons ago against Philadelphia. In that game, he had 18 points and 11 assists.

Stats aside, Saturday teased Cavs fans with the potential of having Delonte West . . . the *real* Delonte West . . . locked back into the rotation. It's exciting. But at this point, it's still a mirage.

#11.) **Darnell Jackson.** (Prev: #13 / Avg: #12)

With both Shaq and Andy out (at home against Golden State and in Washington), Darnell finally got the opportunity to log more than two minutes.

In two games, Darnell averaged 7.5 points, 3.0 rebounds and 1.0 block in 17.5 minutes. He shot 7-of-11 (63.6%) in those games. He played hard and hustled, showing that he's ready to play when needed.

#12.) **Leon Powe.** (Prev: #11 / Avg: 11)

He's still recovering from an ACL replacement and a microfracture procedure on his knee. Last weekend, *"Cleveland Plain Dealer"* beat writer Brian Windhorst [reporte](#)
[d](#) that
Leon is still on schedule . . . and that both he and the team are targeting a late January / early February return.

#13.) **Danny Green.** (Prev: #12 / Avg: #14)

Danny has only played four minutes in the past seven games . . . but in Charlotte last Friday, he made his first NBA basket. He finished with two points and two rebounds in two minutes.

That projects out to a Wilt Chamberlain-like 35 points and 35 rebounds in 35 minutes. It's way too early to know what we have in Danny Green . . . but we don't have 35 points and 35 rebounds in 35 minutes.

#14.) **Jawad Williams.** (Prev: #14 / Avg: #13)

Jawad has also played four minutes in the past seven games . . . but he didn't register a stat. And honestly, I can't remember him even being in the Dallas game, but NBA.com says he was.

#15.) **Coby Karl.** (Prev: #15 / Avg: #15)

Nothing.

Until next time, Go Cavs!