

Cavs Stave Off Lowly Nets

Written by {ga=samamico}

Tuesday, December 15 2009 7:00 PM -

It wasn't the prettiest of wins last night at The Q. The Cavs continued to look disinterested against the dregs of the league, staving off the 2-23 Nets, who were down just two points before LeBron James started to take over at the end of the third quarter. The game also featured a near fracas in the fourth quarter when Nets guard Devin Harris committed a flagrant foul against the Cavs Jamario Moon. Sam Amico was there, and he tells us all about the win in his latest column.



CLEVELAND -- You can't completely blame the Cavaliers for looking like the New Jersey Nets in Tuesday's 99-89 home win. When the wretched Nets are in town, it's easy to lose focus.

On top of being a young team that's been beset by injuries, roster upheaval and a coaching change, the Nets still haven't learned the value of sharing the ball or showing a passing interest on defense.

Other than all that, things are great.

But as far as the Cavs are concerned, a win is a win is a win. Even if you do struggle to beat a team that features a 2-23 record and seems to be filled with

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more tension than Tiger Woods' dining room at a family meal.

"We'll take it," said Cavs coach Mike Brown.

Actually, when it comes to the Nets, they'll give it.

In other words, while you can't fault the Cavs for playing half-heartedly in a game they could have won by 20 with even a B-minus effort, you can't be overly pleased with the fact they were too often content to coast.

It's been an ongoing issue with this team one year after it finished with the league's best regular-season record. There has regularly been a lack of focus, determination and willingness to kick sand on the face of opposing 90-pound weaklings.

As the Cavs discussed at Tuesday morning's shootaround, five of their seven losses have come against teams with losing records.

The reasons are many -- from failures to communicate on defense to carelessness with the ball on offense (the Cavs committed 14 turnovers Tuesday, compared to just eight for the dreadful Nets) to just plain bad chemistry and confusion.

The good news is, the Cavs care. They don't want it to always be this way. And the bottom line is, they are still in the thick of the Eastern Conference race with an 18-7 record, and it is still very early.

While the chemistry isn't there, it could be worse.

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On the plus side, the Cavs have returned to their winning ways at home, having won eight straight at Quicken Loans Arena. They lead the NBA in first-quarter scoring (29.1 points per game), having topped 30 in the first quarter 13 times.

The bench is also improving, contributing 35 or more points in seven of the last nine games. Against the Nets, the bench had 36 points and 20 rebounds.

Leading the way was Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who quietly gave perhaps his best performance of the year, finishing with 16 points on 7-for-9 shooting.

Meanwhile, the starters were led by You Know Who, as LeBron James looked completely average yet still tallied game-highs of 23 points and seven assists. Shaquille O'Neal tacked on 16 points, and Mo Williams had 13 points and uncharacteristic team-high eight boards.

New Jersey was led by center Brooke Lopez, who scored 22 points (but just a measly two after halftime, when the Cavs decided to stop fouling him and make him score from somewhere other than the free-throw line).

Granted, this wasn't exactly the type of win that the Cavs can plan to build on, or one that will have them proclaiming, "We've arrived." Far from it, actually.

But for a Tuesday night in mid-December, it could have been worse. All we can hope is the Cavs stop making games like this the norm. Because when you're trying to win an NBA championship, just good enough isn't good enough.

HARRIS FORGIVEN

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The Cavs, and Jamarion Moon, weren't upset about the flagrant foul committed by New Jersey's Devin Harris on Moon late in the game.

The play happened when Shaq (of all people) stripped the Nets' point guard of the ball near the top of the key on the Nets' end of the court. Moon ended up with the ball and raced down the floor for a fast-break dunk, but Harris practically removed Moon's head while the Cavs forward was taking flight.

James rushed toward Harris and wrapped his arms around him, and it looked as if a hockey-like fracas might ensue. Instead, the players calmly separated and Harris was hit with a flagrant-two foul -- meaning automatic ejection.

"Devin Harris is not a dirty player, he is not that type of guy," James said. "But (Moon) is my teammate and I have got to be able to protect him."

The always-smiling Moon said that he and Harris do not have a beef, so he too figured the foul was unintentional.

"I don't have a beef with anybody in this league," Moon said. "Maybe he just went for the ball and missed. I don't know. I was on the floor."

As for LeBron's attempt at a rescue, Moon smiled widely and said, "That's what friends are for."

Harris faces a fine of up to \$35,000 and possibly a one-game suspension.

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CAVS OFF TO PHILLY

The Cavs are in Philadelphia tonight to face the 76ers, who had lost 12 straight before beating Golden State on Monday. Longtime Sixers guard Allen Iverson, who is back with the team after three seasons away, scored 20 points in that game and seems to be finding his stride.

"I think it's great for the game of basketball," James said. "It's great for (Iverson) and it's great for Philly to have him back. We are looking forward to going in and getting another road win."

The Cavs return home Friday for a matchup with the Milwaukee Bucks and exciting rookie guard Brandon Jennings, who has been compared to (you guessed it) a young Iverson. Friday's game tips off at 8 p.m. and will be televised by ESPN.