

Cavs Beat Kings In OT

Written by {ga=samamico}

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It was a thriller last night in Sac-town for those of us who stayed awake into the wee hours of the morning to watch this one. It was a contest that was tit for tat throughout, and Cavs fans first look at emerging star Tyreke Evans, the Kings first round pick out of Memphis. LeBron James went for 34, 16, and 10 ... and also shut down Evans defensively down the stretch and in overtime. And the forgotten man, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, scored 25 points and buried three huge three pointers in OT to help put away the young and talented Kings. Sam Amico tells us about the win.



The television networks and other powers that be in pro basketball want you to believe that the Christmas Day game between the Cavaliers and Lakers isn't really about the Cavs and Lakers at all. They would just as soon have you believe it's a game of one-on-one between LeBron James and Kobe Bryant.

ESPN even conducted its annual (and quite unoriginal) poll, by asking viewers, "Who is better -- Kobe or LeBron?" Oh the drama.

But anyone who witnessed the Cavs' exciting 117-104 overtime win in Sacramento on Wednesday knows that this team doesn't necessarily have to be All LeBron, All the Time. Anyone who saw how the Cavs held the Kings completely scoreless on their own home court in the overtime period understands

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that LeBron can't shut down an entire opposing offensive unit by himself.

And anyone who watched center Zydrunas Ilgauskas bury three 3-pointers in the OT realizes the Cavs need contributions from everywhere to be a true contender.

With his pasty white skin, bald head and 7-foot-3 frame, Ilgauskas looks like the world's tallest light bulb. And it was lights out for the Kings, as Ilgauskas was a sizzling 10-for-14 shooting on his way to a season-high 25 points.

Afterward, Cavs forward Anderson Varejao laughed and joked that Big Z's crucial threes were "lucky" shots. Varejao, of course, is one to talk. After all, the man they called Wild Thing hit a wild shot of his own -- nailing a deep corner shot at the third quarter buzzer that was clearly out of his range. (Actually, considering how many shots around the basket Varejao either misses or, at best, leaves reason for doubt, you can't help but wonder if he even has a "range.")

Either way, the bottom line is the Cavs are becoming something closer to the team they say they are, and Wednesday's win offered more evidence.

In their past two games (which includes a win in Phoenix), they have displayed balance, chemistry and an ability to turn it on when it appears all might be lost. They didn't play as well against the Kings as they did against the Suns, but that's OK. The victory in Phoenix may have been the Cavs' best performance in more than six months.

The win over the Kings was up there, too.

That's because the Cavs did something they have been known to do only on

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occasion, even during last year's dream of a regular-season in which they finished with a league-best record of 66-16.

It's true. Against the Kings, they made adjustments.

That was especially the case on defense, as the Kings seemed to drive to the basket a will during the majority of the first three quarters. And when they weren't doing that, they were getting wide-open looks from the perimeter -- and then knocking them down.

So Cavs coach Mike Brown mixed things up. He put James on Kings rookie wonder Tyreke Evans, a bulldozer of a point guard who is a master at creating space (and shots) to score near the rim. All of that changed when he got checked by the stronger and almost-as-quick LeBron.

James referred to his advantage over Evans as "length and experience," and a defensive "mindset" that included a whole lot of physical play and, you guessed it, a little bit of trash talking.

"Toward the end of the game, [LeBron] was laughing at me, saying 'This is where superstars step up,'" said Evans, who attended James' basketball camp as a youngster. "He's big and strong and quick. I had him beat a couple times but couldn't finish. I was rushing."

LeBron, no question, had a lot to do with that.

On the offensive end, James was again absolutely magnificent (would you expect anything less?), finishing with a whopping 34 points, 16 rebounds and 10 assists. Perhaps most impressive was HOW he played, rarely settling for long jumpers

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and instead penetrating and kicking the ball back out for good looks when the Kings' defense converged in the key.

So if the league and the folks who broadcast its games are hoping for LeBron vs. Kobe, they're likely to be disappointed. Both are superstars who have no issues when it comes to finding an open teammate -- and both have teammates who can do something once the ball is their hands.

The Cavs made their case in each of the past two games, especially in the fourth quarter. And while James was undoubtedly in lockdown mode himself against the Kings, he was not alone. Good defense, it should be noted, takes no less than five guys at a time.

"The fourth quarter is where we make our mark defensively," James said. "We hate to continue letting teams get comfortable [in] those first three quarters. It's a great thing for us to be able to turn it on defensively like that, but we need to learn how to do it for 48 minutes."

Christmas Day against Kobe Bryant ... er, the Lakers ... would be a good place to start. In the meantime, the Cavs are happy to keep winning games the old-fashioned way. That is to say, to win by playing team basketball in its truest sense, and then letting their superstar do the rest.

Sam Amico covers the Cavaliers and NBA for NBA.com, and is a regular contributor to SportsTime Ohio and The Cleveland Fan.