

There has been a lot of talk about the Atlanta Hawks fast start and their place amongst the elite teams in the NBA's Eastern Conference. It's probably a good time to cease and desist on that talk. The Cavaliers went into Atlanta for the first game of a home and home series with Atlanta and the Cavs, as Austin Carr might say, completely shut off their water. They certainly did that for nearly the first nine minutes of the 4th quarter. The Cavaliers scored just eight points themselves in that nine minutes but increased their 75-74 lead after three quarters to 83-74 before Atlanta put their first points on the board. The Cavs ended up cruising to a 95-84 win, and Brian McPeck tells us about it.



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You have to kind of feel bad for the Hawks. Not only did they lose 95-84 on their home floor but Wednesday night they'll probably bear the brunt of some LeBron James frustrations. James played about as poorly as you'll ever see him play Tuesday night. LBJ was 6/20 from the floor, 0/5 from behind the arc and had four turnovers to go with just 14 points. James did deal out 10 assists and probably lost four or five more to Atlanta fouls but he did not play well. And when he doesn't play well one night it usually means bad news for whichever team is unlucky enough to see him the next night.

With James misfiring all night the Cavs needed a lift from somewhere else. They got it in spades from Delonte West. West was all over the floor in his 29 minutes of play. Brother Red dropped in 17 points, scored a couple of steals, five rebounds and turned in the play of the game when he stole the basketball at the defensive free throw line and raced stride for stride with the Hawks Josh Smith down the court. West then took off for the rim with Smith in hot pursuit and, instead of laying the ball in and risking a momentum-changing block, hammered home a dunk over Smith that drew oohs, ahhs and stunned disbelief from the crowd.

The dunk was sweet. But Delonte was also locked in all night from 12-15 feet and he repeatedly got the Cavs some needed buckets by attacking the rim and pulling up for the intermediate shot. Mo Williams actually led the Cavaliers with 20 points but it was Delonte and Zydrunas Ilgauskas who provided a spark and 32 points off the bench that carried the day.

The Hawks got 26 points off their bench from Cavalier-killer Jamal Crawford. Joe Johnson and Smith each also scored 15 points for Atlanta.

### Takeaways

- The Hawks are young and athletic and Crawford provides a big boost to them off the bench but if they were a steak they'd be raw in the middle. They have a nice squad and they can jump up and bite you if you play around but there's an underlying immaturity with that team that should concern their fans and front office. Even their veterans get a little chippy and a little panicked when an opposing team goes for a bit of a run or when they meet some adversity.

They're better than they were last season but they aren't ready for prime time yet.

- It feels wrong to call a guy out for a 14 point, 10 assist, 5 steal and 8 rebound night,

especially the reigning and future NBA MVP, but I really can't recall ever being more frustrated watching LBJ play ball. Guys will have bad shooting nights. But what bothered me Tuesday night were the times LBJ carelessly threw the ball away in a tight game and the numerous times when he brought action (and the Cavs offense) to a grinding halt when he demanded the ball 25 feet from the basket and then feinted and jab-stepped the clock away before firing up another off target shot as the shot clock wound down.

Most of the times LBJ went that route were uncalled for. There was movement and a flow to the offense that just stopped and a bailout wasn't needed or warranted Tuesday.

I'll say this though; 14, 10 and 8 is a rotten night that most guys would kill for. It's just that LeBron plays at a different level and has way too high a basketball IQ to get sucked into that LeBron-on-Five style of ball.

- Hats off to Big Z. It sure does look like the 7'3" Lithuanian has adapted nicely to coming off the bench after struggling in that role earlier in the season. His three point dagger with a minute left Tuesday night sealed the deal and led to the stoic Ilgauskas signaling a boxing referee's, "He's out, it's over!!" with his arms.

Early on Z couldn't the floor if he fell but that field goal percentage is steadily climbing back toward its career level of nearly 48% and he seems to have embraced his role off the bench.

### **They Got Next**

Same two clubs do it again Wednesday night. It's a 7pm tip at 'The Q' as the Cavaliers look to extend their winning streak to six.