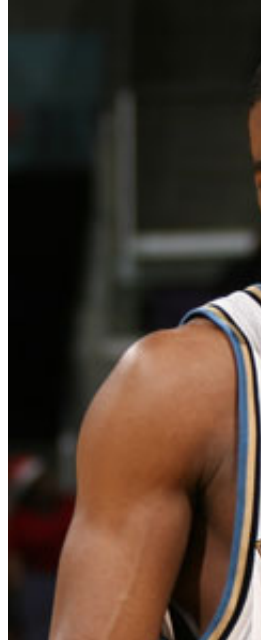


## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}  
Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

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Has it really been half a season already? Technically, it hasn't been. The Cavs' game at Golden State last night was their 40th of the year, so they are just shy of the halfway pole for the 82 game season. But it's close enough. At the almost-halfway mark, the Cavs find themselves with an Eastern Conference-best 30-10 record and they hold a 12-game lead in the Central Division over Chicago. In this weeks column, John Hnat looks back at the last week of Cavaliers basketball, makes some of his usual amusing observations about the team, and attempts to Jedi Mind Trick Antawn Jamison into forcing a trade to Cleveland. Enjoy!



### THE SUMMARY:

Has it really been half a season already?

Technically, it hasn't been. The Cavs' game at Golden State last night was their 40<sup>th</sup> of the year, so they are just shy of the halfway pole for the 82 game season.

(Never mind that the regular season is the NBA's way of figuring out which four teams DON'T make the playoffs, which then last another two months.)

But it's close enough.

At the almost-halfway mark, the Cavs find themselves with an Eastern Conference-best 30-10 record. I'll mention that they hold a 12-game lead in the Central Division over Chicago for one reason: it makes this column that much longer. (Speaking of the Central Division, Detroit has now lost 13 games in a row.

Think that Rip and Tayshaun don't want to chew their legs out of that bear trap?)

And they've posted that record while playing an NBA-leading 23 games on the road, compared

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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---

to 17 at Quicken Loans Arena.

(By contrast, the Lakers have played only 13 of their 37 games away from home.)

In other words, this team is Really Good. They probably won't quite match last year's 66-16 regular season tally, but they won't be far away.

This past week, the Wine and Gold took three of the four games they played. Last Wednesday, they dismantled a broken Washington squad 121-98.

When the home crowd has already won their free chalupas by the end of the *third* quarter, you know that it probably has been a good night.

The only Wizard who seemed to show up was power forward Antawn Jamison, who scored 26 points in a losing effort.

Hey, let's try something here ...

### **JUST IN CASE ANTAWN JAMISON IS READING THIS COLUMN:**

*Stare very closely at these words. Let yourself go. You are getting very sleepy. Very, very sleepy. Ke  
ep staring.*

*Let yourself go.*

*Deeper and deeper.*

*Way, way down.*

*Wait a minute, I have turned into that shrink from the movie "Office Space", and it means I'm going to have a coronary any minute now.*

*Let's go back to you getting very sleepy.*

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

*Very, very sleepy.*

*Now: call your agent and tell him "I want to be traded to the Cavs." I do not want to play for any other team.*

*I want to play for the Cavs.*

*I want to bask in the 22-degree warmth of January in Cleveland.*

*I want to scrape ice and snow off my car five times a day.*

*There's no place like Cleveland ... there's no place like Cleveland ... there's no place like Cleveland ..."*

It was worth a shot.

## THE REST OF THE SUMMARY:

After the Washington game, the Cavs packed their bags yet again and hit the road for their longest road trip of the season - a five-game Western Conference swing. So far, they're handling it pretty well.

After a tough 99-97 loss at Denver last Friday, the Cavs rebounded to win back-to-back games at Portland (106-94) and Golden State (117-114).

Oh, and LeBron James won the NBA's Player of the Week award, thanks largely to a 35-point game against the Nuggets and a 41-point outburst (which was almost a triple-double; he also

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

notched ten rebounds and eight assists) against the Blazers. Just another week at the office.

### THE GOOD:

**All Wins Are Equal, But Some Are More Equal Than Others:** The most impressive win of the week, easily, was the double-digit win at Portland Sunday night.

Not to say that the wins against Washington and Golden State weren't impressive in their own right; and in the standings, all three wins look the same.

But some wins are more important than others.

The most significant difference between the 2008-09 Cavs and this year's model is that this team can go into any arena in the league and win. Last year, the Cavs had no problem with the bottom three-quarters of the league, but fared rather poorly against the Boston/Orlando/L.A. Lakers level of teams. Then again, *everybo*

*dy* struggles against those teams; that's why they are elite.

This season, the Cavs aren't going quite as hard night in and night out, and that has led to a few unexpected losses and a lot fewer blowout wins. But the Cavs are doing much better against the best the NBA has to offer. Now, Portland is not quite at that elite level; particularly because they've been honoring their past all season by getting injured left and right.

(Somewhere, Bill Walton and Sam Bowie are weeping tears of pride.)

Even at that, they are not an easy win, especially in their own building.

And the Cavs beat them by a dozen.

**Not Just A Towel-Waver Anymore:** During the week, the Cavs got some bad news: reserve

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

forward Jamario Moon would be out three weeks with an abdominal injury.

And that put into motion one of Coach Mike Brown's pet strategies:

*when a player goes down with an injury, replace him with as few changes as possible*

If he can pull out the injured player and plug in a guy who previously had not been in the rotation, that's what he is going to do, as opposed to changing the roles of three or four rotation players to cover for their injured teammate.

That is exactly why Jawad Williams, formerly the end-of-the-bench spiritual successor to **The Tarence Kinsey Brigade**, found himself getting significant minutes off the bench this week.

And a funny thing happened ... Williams played well.

He scored in double digits in both the Portland and Golden State games, showing both a post game and shooting range extending beyond the three-point line.

It remains to be seen whether Williams will continue to get playing time once Moon returns. It also remains to be seen whether the NBA.com play-by-play folks will get their act together and distinguish Jawad from Mo Williams in the game summaries ("that Williams guy is everywhere!").

But when a player at the end of the bench can step in so well when his number is called, you know you are in good shape.

**Speaking Of The Bench:** Williams (Jawad, not Mo) wasn't the only highlight from the bench this past week. In the four games, the non-starters averaged almost 41 points per game. To use the technical basketball term, that kicks ass.

In particular, Anderson Varejao is taking his game to new levels. For the four games, Andy averaged 12 points and 10 rebounds per game.

He is showing new moves on offense (last night, he displayed a perfect drop-step move for an

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

easy basket), and is still his usual high-energy self on the offensive boards and on defense.

**Speaking Of The Coach:** Yes, Coach Brown is not perfect. Yes, he gets a pretty fair amount of criticism from the fan base (which goes along with being a head coach).

Believe me, though, it could be worse. As in much, much, *much* worse. Last night's game provided a glimpse of how things would be with a coach who can watch his own digestive process. The Cavs  
were clinging to a 117-114 lead.

James missed a jumper, and the Warriors rebounded the ball with five seconds to go.

Golden State's Monta Ellis immediately started signaling for a time out. That move made sense: the Cavs were  
already back on defense (the other guys in wine and gold started heading back to the defensive end as soon as LeBron went into his shooting motion), and by taking the timeout, the Warriors could advance the ball to halfcourt (saving probably two to three of those precious remaining seconds), and set up a play that could send the game to overtime.

But no. Golden State's coach, Don Nelson, waved off Ellis, telling his troops to play it out. The result?

A clumsy possession, ending with a Stephen Curry 30 foot bomb that fell well short of the rim.

A crowd whose expression could be summed up in three letters and one punctuation mark:

*WTF?*

And a Cavs team heading back to the locker room with yet another win.

**Play Of The Week:** OK, LeBron, it's a basketball game, not [a game of HORSE](#). Yes, you had some pretty sweet chasedown blocks again this week - Golden State's Monta Ellis has joined Phoenix's Jason Richardson in the "suddenly curls into the fetal position when LeBron is approaching" club - but hitting a shot from behind the backboard?

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

That's pretty rare.

Speaking of HORSE, and trick shots, if my life depended on an NBA player making a trick shot, I'd pick LeBron. Half-court, three-quarters-court, sitting down, a one-handed underhand toss while the 60 Minutes crew is filming ... Bron can make it.

### THE BAD:

**When Good Statistics Go Bad:** As I mentioned in last week's column, the rebounding differential is one of the first items I check when I look at a boxscore.

It's a quick indicator of both defensive intensity and second-chance shots on offense.

And sometimes, that number is completely full of crap.

In the Nuggets game, the Cavs seemed to be getting killed on the boards, particularly at the offensive end. Kenyon Martin had so many offensive rebound/dunk plays, I thought they were just showing the same video over and over again. Lo and behold, the numbers say that maybe it was the magic of video replay:

the Cavs trounced the Nuggets 45-33 on the boards, including a 10-8 edge on the offensive glass.

The numbers are obscuring a point: the Cavs have had some real issues with boxing out opponents on the glass. It killed them in the Denver game. It allowed Portland to cut a 17 point lead down to two points in the fourth quarter, before the Cavs woke up and put the game away. It's not a problem with personnel, although ...

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}  
Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

### JUST IN CASE ANTAWN JAMISON IS *STILL* READING THIS COLUMN:

*You are still sleepy. And you still want to play for the Cavs. It has been your life-long dream.*

*So get your agent on the phone already and get things moving, chop-chop!*

**Leaving The Bandwagon:** I admit it. I am now off the Anthony Parker bandwagon.

Don't get me wrong; I think he has a role on this team. I just happen to think it involves more cheerleading than the Cavs may have projected when they signed him.

He is basically a taller, less annoying version of Damon Jones: a guy who can hit three pointers, but isn't showing much else.

Yes, he has a reputation as a solid defensive player, but I suspect that is indeed reputational.

See, when a player gets to his mid-30s, is not a star, does not put up impressive numbers, and yet is still hanging around the league, the immediate assumption is that he provides some intangible value to the team. He must, right? Because he sure isn't bringing any of the *tangible* benefits.

We see this all the time in pro sports.

Some weak-hitting middle infielder happens to

[Gantner](#)

his way into a 12-year major league career, and we (*meaning sports fans as a whole; not you personally, because if you are reading this column, you are clearly too smart to fall into this trap*

) explain it away with "he's good with the glove";

Or "he brings hustle and intensity to the team";

Or "he plays the game the right way";

Or any of a dozen other clichés that are euphemisms for "hell if we know how he sticks

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

around in the league, but he does.&quot;

I'm not ready to paint AP with that brush just yet. (Probably because before the season, I was very enthusiastic about him being with the Cavs, and wrote as much.)

But the thought is in my brain.

**Bombs Away!**: No, this item is not about the Cavs, but it does concern last night's Cavs-Warriors game. And it is definitely something I do not like, as a basketball fan.

Do you ever watch a player, even a star, and just not like his game? That's where I am with the Warriors' Ellis. By the numbers, he's a very good player - averaging 26 points per game, shooting a very respectable 47% from the field, and even his assists are well up from his career norms this season.

But once again, the statistics are lying, dammit! Ellis is a chucker, a guy who needs to shoot the ball 25 times a game to get those 26 points.

Look at last night's game.

Ellis scored 30 points, but had to shoot 25 times to get there (he made only nine of those attempts, incidentally).

By contrast, teammate Corey Maggette poured in 32 points on only 14 shots; and (*to bring this back to Cleveland sports*) LeBron scored 37 points while shooting 23 times from the field.

And chuckers almost never win anything important.

I keep a sort-of mental list of good players who I can never see winning a championship, because their style is so at odds with the type of basketball that actually wins. And Ellis is right at the top of that list.

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}  
Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

---

### JUST WONDERING:

The next time Daniel Gibson goes to the barber, is he going to get the letters "DNP-CD"; shaved into the side of his head? (Actually, he had only one DNP this past week, but he played a total of roughly 15 minutes in the other three games combined.)

### WHAT LIES AHEAD:

It's going to be a light week. The Cavs' longest road trip of the season concludes with games at Utah on Thursday night and then a Saturday evening contest against the Clippers at the Staples ... damn it. The Cavs playing the Clippers in L.A. means that it's time for ESPN's Bill Simmons to tell us, yet again, why LeBron joining the Clips as a free agent this offseason HAS to happen. Yes, I am sure LeBron is just *begging* to become a Clipper.

*Oh please, oh please, let me join L.A.'s "other" basketball team!*

*I want to fight for shots with an overrated 30-something point guard!*

*I want to be there at the exact moment when Chris Kaman decides to re-grow his skullet!*

*I want to play for a team that finishes over .500 about once per decade!*

*I want to play for the most eccentric owner in all of sports, even including Al Davis!*

*I want to sit home every May while, across town, one of my biggest rivals is in the Finals hunt year after year!*

Anyway, the Clippers game will be the final game on the Cavs' road swing. And *then* the schedule gets friendly:

11 of the following 13 games will be at Quicken Loans Arena, with only the Lakers and Orlando sticking out as particularly worrisome.

Don't be surprised if this team is something like 43-12 a month from now.

## The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

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Monday, January 11 2010 7:00 PM -

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### **JUST IN CASE ANTAWN JAMISON MADE IT ALL THE WAY TO THE END:**

Okay, you can wake up now.