

O(T) Canada: Cavs Top Raps in Extra Time

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

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Survival: that was the name of the game during Cleveland's 126-118 overtime conquest of the Raptors in Toronto on Friday.

Survival, as in surviving foul trouble by Anderson Varejao, the only man resembling a center on this basketball team right now. Survival, as in surviving an unexpected manly effort from Toronto backup Reggie Evans. Survival, as in surviving a couple of horrendous calls near the end of regulation that allowed the Chris Bosh-shorn Raptors a shot in overtime. The Cavaliers survived them all to win their third consecutive game and move to 46-14 on the season, still in firm possession of the league's top record.

Reggie Who? The Cavaliers started Friday night's game as if they were going to run away with it. Playing beautifully on the defensive end- particularly on weak-side rotations- and running with their small lineup, Cleveland jumped out to a 27-15 lead late in the first quarter. Then in came Reggie Evans, and back came Toronto. With the burly Evans banging away for ten points in less than six-and-a-half minutes the Raptors tied the score at 35-35 early in the second period- and from there, it was on. By the way, Reggie Evans was averaging 2.6 points per game going into the night.

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Big Anthony: Anthony Parker takes a lot of heat from Cavaliers fans, many of whom would love to see him replaced in the starting lineup by Delonte West (who was superb Friday night, by the way, with 15 points and 4 rebounds.) But there's no doubt Parker did the job tonight. Squaring off against his former team, Parker scored just 10 points but dished out 6 assists, hit one of the biggest shots of the game in overtime, and did a very sound job defensively on Hedo Turkoglu, who tallied 18 points but never really did get into the game in a major way.

LeBron's Line: 36 points on 10-of-17 from the field, 1-of-4 from three-point range and 15-of-16 from the free-throw line with 9 assists, 6 rebounds, 2 steals and only 1 turnover in 44 minutes of work. Friday was a demonstration of LeBron's greatness. He kept his low-percentage chucks to a minimum, hit his free throws, was aggressive to the basket, careful with the basketball, and knew exactly what to do when his team needed him to know. His driving lay-up with 13.9 seconds tied the score at 111-111 when it looked as if Cleveland's suddenly laggard offense, as well as a very, very questionable call, had put Toronto in a position to steal the game

The Run That Nearly Made it Un-Done: It looked as if the Cavaliers were going to win this game in regulation. They led 105-98 with three-and-a-half minutes left when suddenly things went sideways. Two Toronto buckets cut the lead to 105-102 and after a pair of LeBron free throws Turkoglu hit a three-pointer over Mo Williams- note, Anthony Parker was not guarding him here- to tie it at 107-apiece with 1:11 left. Cleveland then cooperated with Toronto's normally sorry defense by running a patented Lelso possession; 'Bron's long miss, a long rebound, a run-out, and a put-back dunk by Hedo put the Raptors in the lead at 50.6.

Horrible Call of the Night: After LeBron tied the score 109-109 with a driving lay-up, Andrea Bargnani dropped a hip into Mo Williams as he tried to follow Jarrett Jack around a screen. At the very least, it should have been a Toronto foul and Cleveland possession with 17.6 seconds left. Instead the whistle went against Mo; he'd committed the sin of falling into Jack when he was knocked askew by Bargnani's blatant moving screen. A pair of free throws gave Toronto a 111-109 lead. LeBron then did his thing, slicing through the Raptor "defense" for a lay-up that tied the score again.

Déjà vu? Not quite: Remember Game Two of last year's Eastern Conference Finals, when Hedo Turkoglu got right into the middle of the lane and knocked down the jumper that seemingly won it for Orlando? Friday night, Turk had another chance to deal a dagger to the Cavaliers, this time in the service of the Raptors, when he got the rock with the score tied and time running out in regulation. Only this time Anthony Parker wouldn't let him in the lane; he kept him way out on the perimeter, and Turk's wild three-point attempt was way off to send the game into an extra session.

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There You Go, Mo: Once there, Maurice Williams took over. The marksman opened overtime with two quick three-pointers to give Cleveland a 117-111 lead, and the Cavaliers were never seriously threatened again. Mo's stroke, for the time being, has returned- he hit 6-of-11 from downtown Friday night and racked up 22 points. Anthony Parker salted it away with a three-pointer and a pull-up jumper to make it 122-113 with 2:28 to play.

Quiet Production: Antawn Jamison never seemed to be in the center of events Friday night, but somehow he still managed to score 22 points on 8-of-14 shooting with 11 rebounds and 3 assists. It's hard to believe such production can be taken for granted, but 'Twan just seemed so *unobtrusive* with that line.

Good Production: I know, it's the Raptors, and they don't play any defense, but still, you can't scoff at Cleveland's offensive efficiency Friday night. The Cavaliers shot 51.2 percent, passed out 29 assists, and put six men in double figures- an impressive line despite the fact that they didn't bring a single genuine center to the arena.

They're Important, You See: Missed free throws were a hallmark of Cleveland's recent struggles, but the Cavaliers were on point from the stripe Friday, hitting 31-of-36. Considering the closeness of the outcome, they needed just about every one. Another horrible free-throw shooting performance and they would have lost this game, just as they lost to Denver and Orlando last week.

Next: Monday night at 7:00, when the New York Knicks come to the Q. The rough post-All Star ~~news is over and the Cavaliers go to the Nets and Pistons and~~ 3-3 mark
