

## Cavs Cruise Over C's, 104-93

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Sunday, March 14 2010 7:47 PM - Last Updated Saturday, March 27 2010 2:11 PM

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On Selection Sunday a pair of NBA teams with their own postseason plans- the Cavaliers looking for that top seed, the Celtics on the bubble of elite contention- met at Quicken Loans Arena. And you don't need a closed-door committee, Billy Packer or Cleveland native Clark Kellogg to break down each team's respective chances this spring. Humming smoothly on both ends of the floor, the Cavaliers broke open a close game in the fourth quarter and, like a high seed dispatching a low seed in an early-round game, put away the Celtics with relative ease, 104-93.

The win raises Cleveland's record to 52-15, and although the full body of work hasn't been compiled, the Cavalier profile, right now, is looking plenty good enough for a number-one seed. Boston, on the other hand, is still searching for answers- and although their own Tournament chances are in the bag, their chance to survive and advance is very much in doubt.

**Run That Got it Done, Part I:** Despite seemingly dominating the game almost the entire way, Cleveland had a difficult time shaking the Celtics, who stayed within striking distance for three full quarters. The Cavaliers needed two runs to put Boston on ice. The first came in the last two minutes of the first period, and it came courtesy of- surprise- LeBron James. With Cleveland trailing 18-16, LeBron popped home a short jumper, beat the shot clock with a twisting prayer of a three-pointer, hit Anderson Varejao for a lay-up off a sixty-foot strike of a pass and split a pair of free throws with one second left in the period. Cleveland led 24-18 at the end of one and nevered again trailed.

**LeBron's Line:** 30 points on 9-of-21 from the field, 11-of-16 from the free-throw line and 1-of-3 from downtown with 8 rebounds, 7 assists, 3 blocks, 2 steals and just 2 turnovers in 39 minutes. The shooting and free-throw percentages aren't so hot and he did have a tendency to pound the basketball and waste possession-time, but LeBron, overall, played an outstanding all-around game. He took care of the ball, poured in 24 of his points in the second half and played one of

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his best defensive games of the season, both off the ball and on. He stymied Paul Pierce; the ex-Kansas Jayhawk finished with 18 points, but 8 of those came in the final five-and-a-half minutes with the issue already decided.

**Money Hasn't Spoiled Him:** You watch this guy play you'd never think he was in the first year of a contract. Anderson Varejao has been absolutely sensational this season, even after a big payday, and he was once again a difference-maker Sunday against the Celtics with 17 points and 10 rebounds off the bench- 6 of those on the offensive end. Varejao had 13 points and 5 boards in the second quarter alone, as the Cavaliers took a 54-48 halftime lead.

**Mo Balance:** Mo Williams finished just 5-of-13 from the field Sunday, but don't let that 38.5 percent number fool you. Mo was excellent all day long, hitting 4-of-7 from downtown, making smart decisions, displaying superb ball-handling, getting teammates involved, doing a reasonably sound defensive job on Rajon Rondo and putting together a nice stat-stuffing line of 14 points, 6 assists and 5 rebounds. Five Cavaliers finished the afternoon in double figures: LeBron, Varejao, Mo, Antawn Jamison (15 points, 12 rebounds, and a continuation of his free-throw struggles with a woeful 2-of-8 from the stripe) and J.J. Hickson, who made it a little too personal in his battle with Kevin Garnett- the youngster seemed a bit tilted by an early fracas with the Ticket and was a too aggressive at times afterward- but still managed to tally 12 points. Mistakes from Hickson are inevitable as he grows; it's good to see that those mistakes are usually borne out of a desire to make plays.

**Remember Me?** No doubt they do, but if the Celtics needed a refresher course in what Leon Powe is about, they got one on Sunday. Still not nearly there physically, set to return to the bench when the Cleveland frontcourt fills out, Powe did serious work against his old team, fighting for 4 rebounds and hitting all six of his free-throw attempts in eight hard-working minutes. Powe's old pro team didn't have a very good day but his college team did: the Cal Bears got an NCAA invite and will take on Louisville in one of those 8-9 games that pundits cluck over but which rarely deliver.

**Defense:** The Cavaliers showed plenty of it for most of Sunday's game. Boston shot just 40 percent on the afternoon, missed 11 of its first 12 three-point attempts, and lost the battle of the boards 51-43. After the Celtics scored on six consecutive possessions to forge a 68-68 tie with 5:13 remaining in the third, Cleveland's defense turned the screws: Boston missed 16 of its next 17 field-goal attempts, went more than seven minutes without a point, and watched the tie dissolve into an insurmountable 89-72 deficit midway through the fourth quarter.

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**Run That Got it Done II:** This one was fueled by two catalyst, one likely, the other not so much: Cleveland defense and Cleveland free-throw shooting. While the Cavaliers threw a heavy wool blanket over Boston's offense, they knocked down eleven consecutive free-throw attempts- a timely thing, because Cleveland was going through a stretch of nearly eight minutes without a field goal even as the "Diff" on the Quicken Loans Arena scoreboard grew in its favor. The Celtics, who started out 16-of-17 from the stripe, missed three straight attempts that would have stopped what became a 13-0 Cleveland run spanning the third and fourth quarters.

**Situation Report:** The red-hot Bobcats went into Confederated Products Arena and snapped Orlando's eight-game winning streak, and benefited Cleveland's position two-fold. Not only are the Magicians now five-and-a-half games behind the Cavaliers with only fourteen to play, the dreaded Bobcats are all the way up in sixth place, tied with Miami and two full games up on eighth-place Toronto (provided the Raptors be obedient and die quietly in Portland Sunday night.) If the East Playoffs started today, here's what the pairings would look like:

Cleveland vs. Toronto

Boston vs. Milwaukee

Orlando vs. Miami

Atlanta vs. Charlotte

The Raptors are a little problematic because of their length and shooting ability, but it could be worse. Orlando and Charlotte are on the other side of the bracket and we should not fear either Boston or Milwaukee in the second round.

**Next:** Tuesday night at 7:30, when the Cavaliers are in Auburn Hills to take on those erstwhile archrivals, the Detroit Pistons.