

Cavs Stomp Pistons, Z Set to Return

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Monday, March 22 2010 1:38 AM - Last Updated Friday, April 02 2010 8:55 AM



1. Is it April yet?

The Cavs took care of business again, controlling the game from start to finish and beating up on the Pistons in the second half. A dominant third quarter put the Cavs ahead by 22 and erased any doubt. That third quarter also allowed Mike Brown to rest LeBron James for the final quarter, contributing to James “only” putting up 15 points, 3 rebounds, and 7 assists.

The supporting cast was strong, especially J.J. Hickson and Leon Powe, who scored 13 and 16 points, respectively. Six Cavs scored in double-digits, while Antawn Jamison only scored six points. It was a balanced dismantling of the reeling Pistons, and on a night when the Cavs displayed their second consecutive Central Division Championship banner, they reduced the magic number to clinch the top spot in the East to six, and the magic number to clinch the overall top seed to eight.

It can be difficult to appreciate just how good this team is as we just wait for the playoffs to start. Cavs fans are in NBA purgatory right now. Between the start of the NBA playoffs and the NFL

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Draft, late April will be a fun time to be a Cleveland fan.

2. You wanted a blowout? You got it!

Some fans have been grumbling that the Cavs are “just winning” games against subpar opponents. Those cynics will point to last week’s wins over Detroit, Indiana, and Chicago as evidence. Sure, the Cavs should probably beat those teams by bigger margins, but that’s just the nature of the NBA. Once in awhile teams lose to inferior teams or beat superior teams. It is really tough to bring your A-plus game every night. Other top teams have off nights too, but it’s easy to forget that because as Cavs fans we view the Cavaliers with a microscope.

In his Sunday column, Terry Pluto pointed out that the Cavs have the highest point differential in the league. The Cavs won 17 games before LeBron showed up in 2003, we just watched Derek Anderson and Brady Quinn quarterback the Browns for a full season, and no pro team has won a championship here since 1964. Honestly, how can any of us complain about a team that’s going to win around 65 games for the second straight season and clinch the top seed in the playoffs in the very near future? Enjoy this run, because we don’t see it very often.

3. Welcome back, Zydrunas.

Barring any unforeseen problems, Zydrunas Ilgauskas will re-sign with the Cavaliers on Monday, at which point his 30-day post trade moratorium on signing with the Cavs will expire. Ilgauskas will be a welcome addition to a team that has overachieved for almost a month without a true center on the roster.

Given his tendencies, it seems unlikely that Mike Brown will put Ilgauskas right back into the starting lineup on Wednesday in New Orleans, but with Shaq out until the playoffs, that should happen sooner rather than later. The Cavs have sorely missed having some real size in the pivot, and even if Ilgauskas can get bullied by some of the league’s best centers, his mere presence immediately improves the Cavs just as much on defense as on offense.

Even though it surprised no one, trading Ilgauskas was clearly painful both for Z and the Cavs,

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and especially for general manager Danny Ferry, with whom Ilgauskas is a long-time friend. If Ilgauskas had ended up on another roster, it just wouldn't have been right, and it will be nice to finally end this silly speculation about Ilgauskas signing elsewhere.

4. Mo Gotti!

Mo Williams had struggled to find his shooting touch after he returned from his shoulder injury, but it looks like he's putting those struggles behind him. Including tonight's four-of-eight performance, Mo has shot 50% or better in 5 of the last 6 games. With the playoffs looming, it would be an enormous boost to the Cavaliers if Williams could be playing at a consistently high level.

Although he definitely struggled during the playoffs last year, that can happen with a guy like Mo who puts a tremendous amount of pressure on himself. But last season Williams was the second scoring option on the team behind LeBron, and in this year's playoffs, he'll probably be the third or fourth option depending on matchups and the status of Shaquille O'Neal. The improved balance and depth of the Cavaliers as a whole should help take some of the pressure off of Mo, and hopefully that lets him play loose in this year's post-season.

5. Leon Powe, another shrewd signing.

Danny Ferry signing Leon Powe late last summer really flew under the radar, but Powe appears to be fully healthy and could be a major contributor down the stretch. Although he's undersized for a power forward, Powe is an excellent rebounder who provides the Cavs with some much needed toughness down low.

On a roster that's very deep at the four, Powe should be a consistent option coming off the bench that also brings some championship pedigree. I like J.J. Hickson as much as the next guy, but let's face it – we have no idea what we'll get from him come April, May, and hopefully June. Powe is one more guy who's played on the biggest stage with success, and he's another guy who isn't afraid of the moment. The overall depth of the roster also means that Mike Brown can find a well-defined role for Powe that won't ask him to do too much following his knee injury.

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6. Beat Detroit? No Problem.

Including the playoffs, the Cavs have now won 11 straight against their Michigan rivals. Eleven straight! There was a time when it seemed like the Cavs couldn't buy a win against the Pistons, and three short years ago the Pistons were easily number one on my NBA Hate List. That is no longer the case, as these two franchises have gone in very different directions over the last two seasons. It seems like after the Cavs beat the Pistons in the 2007 Eastern Finals the spell was broken, and the Cavs proved to themselves that the Pistons bleed. (Cue up "[He's not a machine! He's a man!](#)")

In fairness, the Pistons have had injury problems this season, but as I was watching them tonight, I couldn't help but wonder what the future holds for basketball in Detroit. The city is obviously going through economic Armageddon, and I can't see this Pistons team returning to glory any time soon. Joe Dumars appears to have hitched his wagon to the wrong horses in signing Ben Gordon and Charlie Villanueva last summer, and if you're not winning, it's awfully tough to draw in today's NBA. It is even tougher when you're playing in Detroit.

Up Next: 3/24, at New Orleans Hornets, FSN Ohio, 8:00