

Cavs Fend Off Gritty Bucks

Written by {ga=samamico}

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When was the last time the Cavaliers blew someone out?

The correct answer is it doesn't really matter. All that matters is they are finding ways to win, even when they really ought to lose.

That's the story from Wednesday's game, when the Cavs could do little right (such as score or defend) for long stretches, yet still escaped with a 101-98 win over Milwaukee.

Now, here's a little secret about these final two weeks of the regular season:

The Cavs mostly want to stay healthy. Yes, they want to remain sharp, or more accurately, get sharper. They want to win and they want to secure home-court throughout the playoffs via the NBA's best record.

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Just don't expect them to die trying.

After all, the Cavs look like the most talented, deepest team the NBA has seen in quiet some time. They are blessed with the game's best player, or at least one of it's best two for those who might not believe LeBron James is better than Kobe Bryant. And they have looked, for the most part, more cohesive on offense than at any other time in the LeBron era.

All of that, and Shaquille O'Neal, Antawn Jamison, Leon Powe and Zydrunas Ilguaskas have barely had any time on the court together for one reason or another. Granted, Shaq and Z played a lot together before the All-Star break, but that was more than a month ago.

Since then, the Cavs have had to patch together various lineups. The alterations haven't been drastic, but they do exist. And they probably seem a lot less annoying than they actually are because the Cavs just keep on winning.

In Wednesday's game, the Cavs went six minutes without a point and missed a whopping 16 free throws. They blew a 10-point lead in the third quarter and didn't seemed ready to deal with an up-and-coming team that everyone is having a hard time believing is for real.

But this much we should be clear about: The Bucks ain't messing around, folks. Thankfully, they have the Eastern Conference's fifth-best record, meaning the Cavs won't have to face them in the first round of the playoffs.

Instead, the Cavs are likely to get someone like Toronto or Chicago or Charlotte. All are formidable opponents who create their own set of problems -- but nothing the Cavs can't overcome.

That's because as the Cavs continue to prove, even when they're bad, they're good. Heck, they're great.

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The only troubling sign lately has been their habit of coasting through the first three quarters, allowing games to stay close, then pulling away at the end.

But that is more a sign of boredom than a lack of cohesion. The latter is not an issue. In fact, it's a strength. The bottom line is, when these Cavs need to pull together and pull out a win, they do. It really is that simple.

The latest example came in the final moments of Wednesday's game, when the Cavs escaped what could have been a disaster after Bucks forward Ersan Ilyasova missed a wide-open 3-pointer on the baseline and his team leading 95-93.

The Cavs caught a break and made the most of it, tying the game on a couple of free throws (amazingly enough on this night), then later taking the lead on a perfectly executed play -- in which Mo Williams found a cutting LeBron James for a layup.

Williams later closed the deal by going 4-for-4 on free throws in the final 12.8 seconds, and man, did he need a game like this (21 points, six assists, zero turnovers in 31 minutes).

Williams had been struggling lately, and the Cavs had to be wondering whether he was going to fade late in the year again, much like he did in last season's playoffs. But if he can play half as well as he did against the Bucks on a regular basis, there will be absolutely no reason for concern.

In fact, when it comes to the concern part, you can say the same thing about the Cavs as a group. Right now, there are little reasons to worry. Seriously, if the Cavs win playoff games in this fashion, will you be upset? Will you not be satisfied if they don't win by 20?

The answer is obviously no. A win is a win is a win.

Try to remember that in these final two weeks in the regular season, when all you really want to

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do is play out the stretch, stay (and get) healthy, and get ready to pursue a much larger goal.