

It's over.



After 82 games, the final four or five of which should never have their highlights see the light of day ever, ever, EVER again, the Cavaliers are done with the regular season.

And it didn't come a minute too soon.

On Wednesday night in Atlanta the Cavaliers once again played without starters LeBron James, Shaquille O'Neal and Mo Williams, all of whom were getting some R&R time from head coach Mike Brown.

They played without any of their remaining rotation players getting anywhere near over-worked too.

And for good measure the Cavaliers also played without any passion, pride, intensity, integrity, energy and any concept of defense as the Hawks took advantage of a depleted (albeit by choice) and listless (probably not part of the grand plan) Cavaliers team in Atlanta's 99-83 win in Phillips Arena.

There's really not a great deal to say about Wednesday night's game. In fact, if I wasn't financially obligated to actually write about it I'd take a page out of the Cavaliers' play book and stop right now, saving my energy for the first round series against Chicago.

The Cavaliers and Hawks actually did a play a competitive first half of basketball that saw Atlanta take a 48-46 lead into the intermission. Unfortunately for those of who had to watch the entire game, the Cavaliers did everything except pack up their locker room full of gear and leave a note to the Hawks advising they were checking out early.

The Hawks blitzed the Cavs in the third quarter outscoring them 29-14. Jamarion Moon led the Cavaliers in scoring with 15 points and J.J. Hickson added 14 in the loss. No other Cavalier scored in double figures. No Cavalier grabbed any more than seven rebounds and Sebastian Telfair's five assists off the bench led the Cavaliers in that category.

Well, at least no one was injured.

Cleveland was outplayed in pretty much every facet of the game as the Hawks nailed down the 3rd seed in the Eastern Conference. Jeff Teague led Atlanta in scoring with 24 points and he got help from Maurice Evans (15 points) and Zaza Pachulia (13 points).

Atlanta will meet Milwaukee in their first round series.

Takeaways

- To say the Cavaliers have less than a full head of steam heading into their first round series with the Bulls would be an understatement. There's a very good chance too much is being made of the final ten days or so of the season and the Cavs approach to it, but it was a downer and anti-climactic to watch.

Now comes the second season with (and this may be slightly overstating things just a bit) everything in the world riding on it.

Can the Cavs walk out of the tunnel for their first game of the playoffs and flip the intensity switch? Will there be a hangover at all from the LBJ downtime? Will Shaq step on the floor and re-assimilate immediately with his running mates and pick up at the same level of play and production he was giving before he was hurt?

All it takes is a sleepy quarter of play or some rust for a critical period of play for a competitive and proud team like the Bulls to steal a win and the home court advantage back from the Cavaliers.

Personally, I think James, O'Neal and the Cavaliers will answer the bell and be fine. But as a fan I'm not happy with the effort and the production I saw in the last couple weeks of the season. And I can't imagine Mike Brown is pleased either. It's true they were playing without the rudder to the ship. But that doesn't excuse the fact that the guys who were out there seemed to stop rowing the boat for long stretches of time.

It's going to be interesting to watch that first game. The Bulls have been battling for their lives for the last few weeks and are playing on the razor's edge. Will they carry the momentum

they've built into the series or has the stretch run worn them down some?

I do know the Cavs better come out with some hunger and intensity in Game 1. Key guys have been sat down to allow for a spirited playoff run. It's time to toe the starting line and run that race.

They Got Next

It's the Bulls and the Cavs in a series scheduled for seven games starting on Saturday or Sunday at a time to be determined by the NBA. On the year the Cavs and Bulls split the season series at two games a piece with each team winning a game at home and a game on the road against the other. Chicago needed a win Wednesday night against Charlotte to win the eighth seed over Toronto and the Bulls were 41-41 on the season.