

## Bulls Want the Cavs? They Got 'Em ...

Written by {ga=samamico}

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Chicago forward Joakim Noah insisted he wanted to play Cleveland in the first round of the playoffs.

“He got us,” LeBron James said, with a steely gaze, from the Cavaliers practice facility on Thursday night.

Ah, yes. It’s good to be a King.

James’ Cavaliers are deep, talented, hungry and built to win a championship. And with good health, there is no reason they shouldn’t.

They now have the energetic wing defenders needed to match up with all those perimeter shooters in Orlando.

They have the size and athleticism to overtake the defending champion L.A. Lakers.

And they could beat the Bulls in a seven-game series with their eyes closed. But since the Cavs are likely to play with their eyes open, expect them to skate past the Bulls in four or five.

Now, Cavs fans have been worried about the possibilities of Shaquille O’Neal being “rusty” after

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nearly two months off following thumb surgery. They are concerned with the fact James sat out the final four games (all losses) of the regular-season, for no reason other than to rest. They are worried about how Shaq, Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Antawn Jamison will all play together for the first time, and whether or not J.J. Hickson can hold on to the ball.

Yada, yada, yada.

What too many Cavs fans do not realize is this is the deepest, most talented and most motivated team in franchise history. The Cavs would not be able to win a championship without LeBron, but they could win it without anyone else. They are just *that* gifted.

As for the Bulls, well, they have Derrick Rose and not much else. This isn't the same team that took Boston to seven games in the first round last season, providing an abundance of overtimes and thrilling finishes.

This Bulls team no longer has scoring machine Ben Gordon (signed with Detroit in off-season) off the bench, or shot-blocking extraordinaire Tyrus Thomas (traded to Charlotte).

Yes, the Bulls still have point guard Derrick Rose, and he certainly has the potential to create some problems for the Cavs. Namely, how do you guard him?

Rose is unbelievably quick with the ball, and a great leader who carries himself with a winning demeanor. He is cool, calm, collected and the ultimate teammate.

But he's no LeBron, and concerned Cavs fans need to remember that.

Besides that, the Bulls have no one other than Rose who plays with any type of consistency. Noah gets rattled easily. Starting power forward Taj Gibson too often makes rookie mistakes. Center Brad Miller stopped being a true threat about four years ago. Luol Deng left college about two years too early, and Kirk Hinrich is just sort of ... there.

The Cavs, meanwhile, counter with a rested Shaq and James and point guard Mo Williams. They have a regular All-Star at power forward in Jamison, who is too good from the perimeter for other big men to defend, and too effective in the low post for smaller forwards to have a chance.

They will have Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Anderson Varejao, Leon Powe and Hickson off the bench in the frontcourt. They will have Delonte West, Jamario Moon, Sebastian Telfair and, in times of desperation, Daniel Gibson, in reserve as swingmen and guards.

Mostly, they enter the playoffs having learned the difficult lesson that you cannot overlook anyone -- thanks to last season's crushing loss to Orlando in the Eastern Conference finals.

The Cavs are no longer overconfident. Now they are just focused, determined, and entering the playoffs with a chip on their shoulder.

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"I am serious," James said, glaring straight ahead. "This is the playoffs."

He later added: "I've been waiting personally on this since Game 6 of the Orlando series. It kind of hurts for a long time. You kind hold that in for all summer and all regular season to get back to this point. I'll be happy Saturday when I get the opportunity to release it."

That's awful news for the poor Bulls and pretty bad news for everyone else, too.

*Sam Amico covers the Cavaliers for NBA.com and is a regular contributor to SportsTime Ohio and The Cleveland Fan.*

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