

Bullish Backcourt Leads Chicago to Win

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Friday, April 23 2010 1:00 AM - Last Updated Friday, April 23 2010 6:24 AM



Because of things not done, the Cavaliers won't be sweeping this first-round series with the Bulls; not after a 108-106 loss in Game Three at Chicago's United Center. Cleveland didn't defend Chicago's guards, didn't hit free throws, didn't control the tempo, didn't get bench help and didn't wake up until late in the third quarter Thursday night- and by then, it was a little too late. The Cavaliers made a spirited comeback from a 21-point second-half deficit, but they couldn't get over the hump- and now they've got themselves a series against a fired-up Bulls team.

Shades of Sloan & Van Lier: Chicago's Game Three victory started and ended with guard play, an area in which the Bulls completely dominated. A prime-time performance from Derrick Rose was expected and the young star delivered: 31 points on 13-of-26 shooting, including several clutch buckets to forestall Cleveland's late rally.

What wasn't expected was the performance of Chicago's other starting guard, Kirk Hinrich. A 40.9 percent shooter during the regular season, Hinrich was a nonentity in the first two games of the series, scoring a total of 13 points on 6-of-18 shooting. On Thursday night the ex-Kansas Jayhawk was outside of himself, racking up 29 points- one off his season high- on 9-of-12 shooting, including 4-of-4 from three-point range. All told, Chicago's starting backcourt combined for 60 points on 22-of-38 shooting. Cleveland's backcourt combined for 29 points on 9-of-23 from the field, and there, in large part, was the game.

Downsize It: Mike Brown has a small lineup at his disposal, and he's going to have to think about going to it as more than a desperation measure as this series continues. Shaquille O'Neal and Zydrunas Ilgauskas combined for 6 points and 5 rebounds Thursday night. The two glaciers

Bullish Backcourt Leads Chicago to Win

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Friday, April 23 2010 1:00 AM - Last Updated Friday, April 23 2010 6:24 AM

sported the worst plus/minus numbers on the team and neither showed the foot-speed to counter Chicago's dribble penetration or their corps of agile big men. Brown finally went with a smaller lineup late in the third quarter with the Cavaliers trailing by ten, and they nearly pulled the game out.

Really, Shaq's presence is only necessary against the Magic and Lakers. Z's presence is only necessary against the Lakers and on the off chance we see the Hawks in the Eastern Conference Finals, as he terrorizes Al Horford. Against a team like Chicago, a running team, we need to see more of a smaller lineup featuring LeBron at the power forward and ether Anderson Varejao or J.J. Hickson at center. Shaq and Z are no good against this team.

Starting Quarters the Right Way: Chicago did just that against the Cavaliers Thursday night. They jumped out to an 8-2 lead at the beginning of the game; hit Cleveland with a 7-2 run to start the second period and open up a 16-point bulge, and blitzed the Cavaliers with a 12-2 binge to start the second half, bringing the Bulls to their biggest advantage of the night at 68-47 with 7:52 left in the third. Chicago beat Cleveland to the punch all night long. They were more aggressive and more assertive. That's why they led for all but 2:37 of the game.

LeBron's Line: 39 points on 14-of-26 from the field, 4-of-8 from three-point range and 7-of-13 from the line with 10 rebounds, 8 assists, 3 blocked shots and 2 steals in 44 minutes. The free-throw shooting was the bugaboo and LeBron led the way there. The rest of the Cavaliers shot 13-of-18 from the stripe, 72.2 percent. LeBron hit only 53.8 percent, and that can't happen in a game like this. LeBron was outstanding in the fourth quarter, with 15 points, 5 assists and 3 rebounds. But he, and his team, dug their graves in the first three quarters.

Mo Mixed Baggage: Mo Williams gave and took away on Thursday night. The Mississippi marksman finished with 21 points and hit 5-of-11 from downtown, including a couple of big rips to keep Cleveland hopes alive down the stretch. On the other hand, Mo was also 2-of-5 from the free-throw line, and those misses were magnified as the Cavaliers tried, and failed, to come back in the game.

Where is Andy? He hasn't been around the last two games of this series, that's for sure. After his monster 15-rebound performance in Game One Andy has been a ghost, with a total of 10 points and 11 rebounds the last two games. Thursday the Brazilian heartthrob attempted just one shot and finished with 3 points, 6 rebounds and very little in the way of the extended possessions that characterize his play. Cleveland's bench had just 13 points on Thursday night.

Bullish Backcourt Leads Chicago to Win

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Friday, April 23 2010 1:00 AM - Last Updated Friday, April 23 2010 6:24 AM

Positives: Well, Cleveland did outscore Chicago 59-42 in the last nineteen-and-a-half minutes. They kept the Bulls under control on the offensive glass, limiting them to seven of those. Even after Hinrich's career performance, Rose's brilliance, the free-throw woes and everything else that had gone wrong, the Cavaliers had an opportunity to steal the game. Chicago has a match-up advantage on the Cavaliers in Derrick Rose; that's a given. Cleveland still has enough advantages everywhere else. One thing is clear: the Bulls aren't going away. The challenge has been laid down.

Next: Game Four, Sunday afternoon at 3:30 from the United Center. If the Cavaliers are going to go up 3-1 and take firm control of this series, they'll have to go through a confident Bulls team and an aroused Chicago crowd to get there. Buckle up.