



Man that was a lot more difficult than it should have been.

But when the dust settled and the final horn sounded the Chicago Bulls let loose their death gasp and finally gave up the ghost Tuesday night at 'The Q', 96-94.

The Cavs coasted (and at times that was literally what they did against Chicago) to a 4-1 series win over a pesky, scrappy and far less talented Bulls team. With the win the Cavaliers move onto the Eastern Conference semi-finals against the Boston Celtics who finished off the Miami Heat an hour before Chicago died.

But there were some anxious moments, even after the game ended.

LeBron James, who inflicted pain and misery on the Bulls in a variety of ways throughout the series, appeared to have injured his right arm late in the game. It's never easy to tell whether LBJ is playing for the cameras and milking every possible minute of drama from a series that was, for the most part, lacking it, but he shot his final free throw of the night with just seconds remaining with his left hand. James was obviously favoring the right arm and there was no news as to the extent of the injury immediately following the game.

James likely injured the arm in one of many late game scrums for loose balls and rebounds. It wasn't a game for the timid and hopefully James is good to go when the Celtics come to town this weekend top start that best of seven series.

James had an odd night in what was an elimination game. He score 19 points, 16 off his series average, but he did dish out nine assists and bring down 10 rebounds. He was one assist shy of securing what would have been the first back-to-back triple-double since Jason Kidd turned the trick in 2002.

But James was content to play facilitator on Tuesday night and the biggest beneficiaries were Antawn Jamison and Delonte West. Jamison went off in the first half scoring 20 of his 25 points while West just kept knocking down big shots throughout his time on the floor. Redz score 16 points on 6/11 shooting including a couple of big three balls from the corners.

Shaquille O'Neal also reappeared after three off games for the big man. O'Neal asserted himself early and often and scored 14 points to go with eight rebounds in 26 minutes of play. O'Neal also single-handedly put the Bulls in big foul trouble. He punished Joakim Noah and Noah's backup, Brad Miller, down low. Miller fouled out after scoring just two points and Noah had five fouls when the game ended.

The Bulls once again got a herculean effort from their point guard Derrick Rose. Rose scored 31 points on a variety of driving tear-drop shots and jumpers. He also dished off six assists. Luol Deng also had a big game for Chicago with 26 points while Noah contributed eight points and nine rebounds in a losing effort.

Add in the 12 points from SG Kirk Hinrich and the Bulls got the balance they needed to give the Cavs a run. It just wasn't enough when you consider the Cavs bench outscored the Bulls 28-10.

Takeaways

- I'm not a Joakim Noah fan. He grates on me the way Anderson Varejao likely grates on fans outside of Cleveland. Plus, Noah likes to hear himself talk a lot more than Varejao. But you have to give the man credit for backing up his mouth with his body in this series. Noah was all over the floor and was effective despite the size advantage that O'Neal held over him. Credit where it's due: Noah was a force in this series.

- Now that the preliminaries are over we can get ready to really unleash our hatred on all things Boston for this upcoming series. The Bulls were pesky and loud but they had no teeth. That series was predestined to go five games before it started and that's how it unfolded.

But the Celtics are different and we all know it.

I personally can't stand the core of this Boston team. Ray Allen doesn't bother me much but I will relish rolling over the Celtics just out of the disgust I have in watching Paul Pierce and Kevin Garnett for multiple games. Pierce is a drama queen even beyond LeBron. And Garnett is a TV tough guy who's always flapping his gums and in the middle of any cheap plays right up until the time he's confronted by anyone who might actually pose a physical threat. He's a phony and a fraud and I promise to enjoy every Cavalier win over that team. The bigger the margin of victory the better for me and most Cavaliers fans. When you add a punk like Rajon Rondo and a hack like Big Baby Davis to that scene it's just really easy to despise Boston.

I have to believe that Garnett's crotch-grabbing gesture to LeBron in the Cavs Easter loss in Boston hasn't been forgotten by James. I'd also venture to guess that Shaq hasn't forgotten Davis's hack job that cost that resulted in surgery to repair O'Neal's thumb and cost The Diesel six weeks of run.

It won't surprise me in the least to see one of Shaq's patented elbows planted somewhere on the face of Davis at some point during the series. It's going to get physical, it's going to get heated and it's going to get chippy.

I can't wait.

- One thing I noticed as the Bulls series progressed was Jamison becoming more animated and also demanding the basketball when he had a match up advantage. That's a good sign for the Cavaliers as Jamison appears to be enjoying the intensity of playoff basketball as well as becoming more comfortable with a team he joined just 8 weeks ago. Jamison is a tremendous fit for this Cavalier club because he understands the game so well and is rarely out of position. He'll run the floor effectively and his cuts have purpose. When those cuts create space he's adept at receiving the ball and getting off a high percentage shot from nearly any angle.

Jamison has also found his outside stroke as well as regained his form at the free throw line. Put it all together, add in the fact that Mo Williams is still playing Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde basketball and you've seen Jamison rise to the number two option on the floor for Cleveland.

They Got Next

It's the Cavs and the Celtics for a best of seven series to determine who advances to the Eastern Conference Finals. Stay tuned for scheduling news and tip times as well as a TCF preview of this series and every other series as the NBA playoffs roll on.