

Cavs Walloped, 104-86: Series Tied

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Tuesday, May 04 2010 2:00 AM - Last Updated Tuesday, May 04 2010 7:56 AM



What started out as a night of celebration turned into one of the most ugly, unsettling evenings of Cavaliers basketball we've seen in a long, long time. The Celtics tied this Eastern Conference Semifinal in stunningly decisive fashion, devastating the Cavaliers with a 31-12 third quarter and running away with a 104-86 victory. And all of a sudden this season of near-certainty has turned into a murk of questions- chief among them the health of the man who makes this entire operation tick.

LeBron's Elbow: It's injured. Legimately. He favored it the entire game, kind of holding the right arm out loosely on occasions when he played defense (and it was occasional) and on offense when he moved without the ball. He's obviously injured. It's impossible to believe he could have played the way he did Monday night- tentative, unaggressive, passive- without there being something significantly wrong physically.

LeBron's Line: 24 points on 7-of-15 from the field, 0-of-4 from three-point range and 10-of-15 from the foul line with 7 rebounds, 4 assists, 3 steals and 2 blocked shots. The paucity of shots in a game like this is an eyebrow-raiser, as was his supine attitude during the catastrophic third quarter. Playing all twelve minutes of the stanza, LeBron scored four points and took a total of three shots from the field, all while his team was being routed out of the game. LeBron has had some rough nights in the postseason before, most notably at the hands of these Celtics in 2008. But this was different. He wasn't struggling, forcing things, missing shots in bunches and the like. He just kind of stood around and watched the Cavaliers get run right out of their own building.

And that doesn't happen if there isn't a major physical problem. Sorry if I'm belaboring the point.

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Now, Boston, on the other hand: Other than 18 turnovers they simply didn't do anything wrong. The Celtics shot 51.3 percent, made 9-of-19 three-pointers, 15-of-18 from the line, handed out 30 assists, won the rebounding battle 43-32 and had six players score in double-figures- including Rasheed Wallace, who came off the bench to hit 7-of-8 shots, including a troika of three-pointers in the second quarter. That was mortifying. Rasheed has been a foil for the Cavaliers so much, for so long, that it's almost shocking to see him light it up like that against this team. Of course, considering Rasheed shot 40.9 percent from the field and 28.3 percent from downtown this season, it's shocking to see him light it up against anyone, period. But it was that kind of night for the Boston Celtics.

Just My Opinion, But: I'd take Rondo over Rose. 13 points, 19 assists, 4 rebounds Monday night.

Cavalier Goats (This Merits its Own Section)

Mike Brown: Other than watching slack-jawed for the first 4:17 of the third quarter as Boston opened with a 12-5 run with Kevin Garnett abusing the shorter Antawn Jamison in the low post while refusing to run plays for Jamison on offense; then calling a timeout but LEAVING JAMISON IN THE GAME where he promptly gave up a three-point play to Garnett in the low post... other than allowing Mo Williams to play 34 minutes while not even considering what Daniel Gibson might bring... other than playing Shaquille O'Neal and J.J. Hickson nearly identical minutes... other than allowing LeBron to clock 41 minutes while dragging his right arm like a polio victim... yeah, other than that Mike Brown coached a whale of a game Monday night.

We All Know This: Mike Brown is coaching for his job here. If Cleveland loses this series, he can't possibly survive. Can he? Can you coach a team to the best record in the NBA twice in a row without making the Finals and keep your job? I, personally, don't think you should.

Mo Williams: 1-of-9 from the field, 0-of-4 from downtown, missed another technical free throw, scored 4 points and allowed anyone and everyone to abuse him defensively all night. The team as a whole was booed Monday, but Mo was the only Cavalier who heard boos meant specifically for him, when he pulled up for a quick-and-foolish transition jumper in the fourth quarter and didn't even come close to putting it in the basket. Mo is starting to develop a reputation as a fair-weather player- and that kind of rep can land you in the soup in this and every other sports town that values winning.

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Anderson Varejao: He had a decent line- 8 points, 7 rebounds, 4-of-5 from the line- but as he has been for almost the entirety of this postseason Varejao was a step slow, a step late and a step off. He got torched by Rasheed Wallace in the first half, a match-up he usually dominates, and he bowed out during the inglorious third quarter, when he picked up a technical foul, a flagrant (BS call) and then left the game with back spasms. Whether he's hurt or pulling a Baerga, the Brazilian has to give something better than he gave Monday night.

Shaquille O'Neal: Shaq shot 4-of-10 from the field, missed a bunch of close-in attempts during the first period when Boston took its early and permanent lead, and was slow and ineffective on the defensive end. Cleveland has to go small against Boston, a plan that doesn't involve playing O'Neal major minutes. Mike Brown needs to stop trying to force the issue here. The Cavaliers aren't getting enough out of O'Neal offensively to compensate for the defensive liability he presents in this series.

Cavalier Hero

J.J. Hickson: Yup, that's pretty much it. J.J. scored 13 points- 7 in the fourth- and helped ignite an abortive Cavalier rally that cut Boston's lead to ten at the 4:43 mark. There's not much use pumping up J.J.'s fourth period- the Celtics led by 25 at one point and slacked off defensively down the stretch- but it seems plain that Cleveland is a better basketball team against Boston with him on the floor than with O'Neal.

Third Quarter Numbers

Points: Boston 31; Cleveland 12

Shooting: Boston, 10-of-17; Cleveland, 5-of-17

Free-Throw Shooting: Boston, 8-of-9; Cleveland, 2-of-5. That's a huge number. Pierce and Garnett had three fouls apiece at halftime. Neither player picked up a foul in the third period.

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With LeBron setting the tone, Cleveland simply stopped attacking the basket.

Three-Point Shooting: Boston, 2-of-5; Cleveland, 0-of-3. The Cavaliers shot 4-of-21 from three-point range Monday night.

Rebounding: Boston, 12; Cleveland, 8

Turnovers: Boston, 4; Cleveland, 5

Game-Winning Shot: To add insult to injury, the game-winner was made by Rasheed Wallace. His turnaround jumper from the baseline gave Boston an 18-17 lead with 2:44 remaining in the first period- and the Celtics never again trailed or were even tied. LeBron has a bum arm, the Cavaliers got wiped out at home and Rasheed Wallace hangs 17 on them... it was just that kind of Cleveland Sports Night. TCE was in the house- with a vengeance.

Lakers Crowd: The fans sat on their hands all night and late in the fourth quarter some idiot threw a beer bottle onto the court. Thanks for coming, kids. I understand the Cavaliers played horrible basketball, but at times you are supposed to get up and make some noise just to see if you can get your team going. And don't throw shit. This isn't a Browns game.

Maybe I'm a Foggy, But: The empty meadow at the intersection of Route 303 and I-271 rolled over in its grave Monday night.

Next: New Garden, Game 3, 7:00 on Friday night. Cleveland now has to win at least one game in Boston. If LeBron is healthy enough to be, well, LeBron, they can. I really think they can win the next two in Boston if that's the case. If it isn't, well...