

Time is Now for LeBron, Cavs to Click ... or Else

Written by {ga=samamico}

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When it comes to the Cavaliers' second-round playoff series against Boston, the issues go beyond just LeBron James' elbow. After all, you can't write off an 18-point home loss to a tender arm.

And the Cavs don't plan to.

But they do need to come up with a game plan that is unlike any they have instituted against the Celtics, who have won three of the four halves in the first two games. It's resulted in a series that is tied at one game apiece as it heads to Boston. Game 3 is Friday (7 p.m., ESPN).

For one, James has been lethargic. That sounds funny to say about a man who is averaging 29.5 points on 48 percent shooting for the series, but it was clear in Game 2 that James was missing that extra something that makes him LeBron James and not, say, Kevin Durant.

James had more turnovers (5) than assists (4) for one of the few times in his career, and really didn't do much worth noting until the Cavs trailed 91-66 in the fourth quarter and the Celtics were taking a breather.

He refuses to blame his fairly lethargic performance (for him) on his elbow, and that is indeed admirable. But if it's not an elbow problem, it's an offense problem -- namely, Cavs coach Mike Brown hasn't done a good enough job of putting James or anyone else in position to score.

Of course, before we go pinning all the blame on the coach, we should mention that Celtics point guard Rajon Rondo has outplayed the Cavs' Mo Williams in every way imaginable. And that truly seems to be the difference in this series.

When Williams plays well, as he did in the third quarter of Game 1, it keeps Rondo busy on defense and opens things up for the rest of the offense. When Williams clanks his way to 1-for-9 shooting, as he did in Game 2 ... well, the Cavs have no chance.

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We've all heard Brown's comments about Williams following Game 2, in which Brown said if his point guard continues to play so poorly "we won't win a series." Williams agreed at practice on Tuesday, promising to be better next time.

It's easy to keep the faith in the Cavs, because they did win 61 games during the regular season. They also won in Boston earlier this year, blowing out the Celtics with a second-half charge in late February.

But it's also obvious there are some serious issues in this series.

Aside from defending Rondo (or has been the case lately, not defending him), the Cavs haven't been nearly as physical or played with nearly as much energy as Boston. While the Celtics treat each game like the deciding game of the Finals, the Cavs seem to be lollygagging and acting like it's the regular season.

They've been out-hustled, out-defended and out-classed in both games. Truth be told, the Cavs are very fortunate that the series is deadlocked.

All of that said, no one expected the Cavs to sweep. The Celtics are much too talented, much too experienced for that. Most experts even predicted that the Cavs would lose a home game -- that the Celtics are certainly capable of winning on the road.

But no one expected the Cavs to play so poorly in defeat.

A win in Game 3 would change all that. It would return the home-court advantage to Cleveland and help the Cavs regain their confidence. It would also enable them to avoid a must-win situation in Game 4 on the road.

But as the Cavs have found out, it's not just gonna happen. They have to make it happen. As Brown indicated after Game 2, the Cavs have to be the aggressors. They have to play as well, or better than, they have all season.

They have to move the ball, take good shots and defend with a purpose. They have to be the Cavs we knew during the regular season. That means considerably better performances from the likes of Williams, Shaquille O'Neal, Anderson Varejao and even the King himself.

Otherwise, this thing is going to be over quickly, and a nasty game of blame will certainly follow.

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

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