

Sleepy Cavs Fall in Boston, 97-87

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Monday, May 10 2010 1:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, May 10 2010 4:25 AM



No Urgency

After handing the Celtics their worst home loss in franchise history, the Cavs regressed back into the same kind of lethargic play which has marked most of their post-season thus far, falling to the Celtics 97-87 in Boston this evening. It was an extremely frustrating game for Cavs fans. The Celtics weren't more talented or even more experienced than the Cavs – they simply put forth a stronger collective effort.

The Cavs were backed into a bit of a corner after getting embarrassed at home during game two, and they responded with a tremendous effort on Friday night. That victory put all the pressure onto the Celtics, but instead of coming out focused and ready to take a 3-1 lead back to Cleveland, the Cavs looked flat, tentative, and lazy. Once again, these Cavaliers failed to show the mental toughness to play hard for 48 minutes in a game that wasn't a "must win," and that's a tough pill to swallow.

The Cavs are still going to win this series because they have home court, and because all things considered they're simply a more talented bunch than the Celtics. But the Orlando Magic loom in the Eastern Finals, and they'll provide a very even match for the Cavs. When facing the Magic, the Cavs are going to have to become more effective self-motivators and press their advantages when they're given opportunities, otherwise they're going to suffer the same fate as their '08-'09 counterparts.

Transitions

Sleepy Cavs Fall in Boston, 97-87

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Monday, May 10 2010 1:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, May 10 2010 4:25 AM

If you want the biggest reason why the Cavs came up short today, it was getting beat again, and again, and again in transition. Getting back on defense to prevent easy buckets is something that's emphasized from the earliest stages of organized basketball and all the way up to the professional level, but apparently our Cavs haven't received the message. That failure comes down to lousy fundamentals and lack of hustle, both of which are very unsettling.

Rajon Rondo and company deserve credit for going back to the well and hustling down for easy baskets, but most of this was on the Cavs. Mike Brown has become an easy target for frustrated Cleveland fans in this series – and at times for good reason – but if his players aren't getting back, it's not because he hasn't harped on the subject repeatedly. This is the playoffs, and if these guys can't get themselves motivated for the playoffs against a huge conference rival, then there isn't a coach alive or dead who can help them.

LeBron needs to cowboy up

We all know how important LeBron is to the Cavs, and nobody's debating that. But with LeBron, it's not just the numbers that make this team go – it's his attitude and his focus. The Cavaliers are 100% LeBron James' team, and as such, he sets the tone for the entire squad. When LeBron comes out like a raging inferno like he did on Friday, we've seen how the rest of his compatriots follow suit. When LeBron comes out tentative and a little passive, well, we've seen that too.

I'm sure that LeBron's elbow is bothering him, but it didn't stop him from giving the entire city of Boston an open-handed slap to the face on Friday. Everybody's hurting at this time of year, and if LeBron and the team doctors think that it's okay for him to be out there, then his elbow shouldn't be a huge issue once the adrenaline starts pumping. We've seen plenty of players, including one Kobe Bean Bryant (this very season, no less), grit their teeth and play effectively through worse.

LeBron has to realize that these guys are following his lead, and if he doesn't hold himself accountable for the energy and focus of the entire team, more stale performances are on the way. As LeBron goes, so go the Cavs. My money's on seeing a more focused, assertive LeBron in game five. However, the real test is going to come if the Cavs win game five and have a chance to close the Celtics out in Boston.

Sleepy Cavs Fall in Boston, 97-87

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Monday, May 10 2010 1:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, May 10 2010 4:25 AM

Today's P.J. Brown

When the Cavs lost to the Celtics in the Eastern Semifinals two years ago, it took a hot quarter from an unlikely hero – P.J. Brown – to finish them off. Today, Tony Allen played P.J. Brown. Sure, Ray Allen, Kevin Garnett, and Rajon Rondo did the heavy lifting. Well, in Rondo's case, he did more than heavy lifting, but of those three only Garnett cracked 50% shooting.

On the other hand, Tony Allen scored 15 points on 6-of-7 shooting. That sneaky little performance was responsible for doing the Cavs in as much as any other. The Cavs didn't get that kind of shot in the arm from their bench, and it's a big reason why they fell short.

The return of the Shaqtus

Shaq probably had his best game of the post-season tonight, chipping in with 17 points and 5 rebounds, including a solid 7-for-11 at the line. O'Neal was also shooting an impressive (for him) 70% from the line in the playoffs entering Sunday, so it looks like he was working on more than just his conditioning while he was sidelined. It was good to see Shaq very active around the hoop, and although his first priority should be defense, a consistent offensive contribution from the big man could also be a terrific asset.

So this is the part where I start to rip on Mike Brown a little bit. I mentioned earlier that the lack of focus on fundamentals and hustle can be blamed on LeBron and the rest of the players, but some of Brown's substitutions were a little questionable. Shaq was one of the few Cavs who was delivering on offense, and once he got his fifth foul he never reentered the game.

I know that Mike Brown doesn't like to play Shaq late in the game because of his free throw shooting, but Shaq was riding the pine for the whole fourth quarter. Considering how the Cavs were struggling to score consistently and find an offensive identity, that move didn't make sense. Shaq doesn't have to be on the floor inside of two or three minutes, but let him go out there, make some baskets and put the Celtics deeper into foul trouble. Plus, the way Shaq has shot free throws in the playoffs doesn't really make him a huge liability at the line, although whether or not he could shoot that well during crunch time certainly remains to be seen.

Sleepy Cavs Fall in Boston, 97-87

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Monday, May 10 2010 1:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, May 10 2010 4:25 AM

One of the few things the Cavs had going for them was accumulating lots of early fouls on the Celtics, but they took their collective boot heel off of the Celtics' throats late in the game by staying out of the paint. Shaq might have been able to knock Kendrick Perkins and/or Kevin Garnett out of the game. Yes, he had five fouls himself, but so what if he had fouled out? What was Mike Brown saving him for, overtime? The next time Shaq clearly has his A-game, he needs to stay on the floor until he fouls out or he's rendered ineffective.

More on Mike Brown

Most of the Cavs looked half-asleep for the majority of the game, and Mike Brown only gave significant bench minutes to Delonte West and Anderson Varejao. Weren't we stroking Danny Ferry for putting together a deep roster just a few months ago?

J.J. Hickson only played five minutes and Jamarion Moon only played three. Daniel Gibson, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, and Jawad Williams didn't take their warm-ups off all game. Gibson and Ilgauskas are limited defensively, but they can make jumpers. It would have made sense to put those guys in for at least a few series, if for no other reason than to try to catch lightning in a bottle.

Mike Brown can definitely be an easy scapegoat when things don't go swimmingly for the Cavs, and while I usually find myself defending Brown, he's not great at making mid-game adjustments or finding the best mix of players during the game. Brown hasn't shown any marked improvement in these areas in the last few years, and you can bet that his job will be under review if the Cavs blow this series.

Up Next: 5/11, Game Five vs. Boston, Quicken Loans Arena, 8:00, TNT