

Time For The Real Cavs To Stand Up

Written by {ga=samamico}

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The Cavaliers need to decide what type of team they want to be.

They need to determine whether they want to be a team that always plays hard, gets physical underneath the basket, moves the ball and takes good shots -- or the frustrating team that makes you wonder if they really even care about winning a championship.

After four games of their Eastern Conference semifinal series against Boston, it's still hard to decide who the Cavs really are.

That's in contrast to every other second-round playoff series, where every other top seed has stepped on their opponents' throats.

At this writing, the L.A. Lakers and Orlando hold 3-0 series leads over Utah and Orlando, respectively. Phoenix has already swept San Antonio, and the Suns have less talent than the Cavs. And it could be argued the Suns played a tougher opponent.

Meanwhile, the Cavs continue to let Celtics point guard Rajon Rondo do his best Tiny Archibald imitation while they lollygag their way through most of the postseason.

Of course, this isn't meant to write the Cavs off, or disrespect Rondo or the Celtics. Sometimes, you just gotta tip your cap to the other guy -- and Rondo has been absolutely phenomenal. I haven't seen a guard play this well in the playoffs since Allen Iverson led an undermanned Philadelphia team to the Finals in 2001.

But let's face it, allowing a 6-foot-0 guard to grab 18 rebounds, as the Cavs did in Game 4, is just a lack of effort on the Cavs' part.

LeBron James insisted the Cavs were aggressive in their 97-87 loss -- but if LeBron really believes that, he's kidding himself. Either that, or LeBron still has a lot to learn, because zero second-chance points (which is how many the Cavs compiled in Game 4) is hardly a sign of

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assertiveness.

Granted, James likes to blow things off, acting like a loss is no big deal in a seven-game series. At least, he does in front of the media, and there's certainly nothing wrong with him thinking it's not the end of the world when it's not. After all, nobody expected the Cavs to sweep.

But when losing is the result of a team-wide lack of passion, well, that needs to be taken very seriously. And it's up to the superstar, the back-to-back league MVP, to address it and show his teammates the way.

That's not all.

When it comes to the type of inconsistency the Cavs have displayed in the playoffs, you can't help but ask a few questions about the coach. And Mike Brown has to share part of the blame.

His rotation is almost entirely different from game-to-game as he searches for the right matchup.

He too often appears lost when it comes to his own bench, and you get the sense the players are unsettled because of it.

WHERE'S Z?

I always thought a big reason why the Cavs traded Zydrunas Ilgauskas for Antawn Jamison in February was because they were certain Z would be bought out by Washington and return. I thought it was so they could have both Z and Jamison on the roster.

Apparently, I was wrong because Brown has no use for the 7-foot-3 veteran center who played a big role in the Cavs reaching the conference finals last season.

Now it's up to inconsistent second-year big man J.J. Hickson to help lead the Cavs to the promise land. Or at least, be an effective backup for Shaquille O'Neal against a frontline of Kevin Garnett and Kendrick Perkins, both of whom have extensive playoff experience that includes a championship. Ilgauskas, on the other hand, gets to sit.

One former NBA coach told me after the Cavs' Game 2 loss that Brown suffers in the playoffs because he doesn't have a veteran assistant to help run things. Sort of like Celtics defensive whiz Tom Thibodeau, the right-hand man to head coach Doc Rivers.

It also seems that the only time the Cavs generate offense is if LeBron gets hot. When James scores less than 25 points, the Cavs really struggle. That should no longer be the case -- not with guys like Jamison, Shaq, Mo Williams, Delonte West, and in the event he ever steps on the floor for the Cavs again, Ilgauskas.

It's also interesting how Anthony Parker and Jamario Moon seem to have gotten worse since coming to Cleveland. In the three seasons before he became a Cav, Parker averaged 11.8 points on 9.6 shots per game. This season, it's been 7.3 points on 5.9 shots.

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Now, that may be considered nit-picking, because James is going to get most of the shots, and that's a good thing. But my guess is when Cavs general manager Danny Ferry landed guys like Parker, Moon and even forward Leon Powe, it wasn't because Ferry expected them to be underutilized. You could make a strong case that they have been, and for that, Brown is responsible.

As for the good news, there certainly is no reason for panic. The series is tied at two games apiece, with the Cavs stealing back the home-court advantage in their Game 3 blowout in Boston.

Also, last season they cruised through the first two rounds with a pair of sweeps, while Orlando struggled to get past Philadelphia in the first round and Boston in the second. Then the Magic upset the Cavs to reach the Finals. And two years ago, both the Hawks and Cavs took the Celtics to seven games before the Celtics ended up winning the title.

But that doesn't make it OK to not have your act together at this time of year. All it does is prove that you can play below par at times and still maybe become a championship team.

Right now, it seems that is what James and the Cavs are banking on -- because after four games of the conference semifinals, they certainly haven't given anyone reason to believe otherwise.

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