



The following fact is probably nothing worth reading into. But it's still interesting to point out:

Last year's Cavs of LeBron James and Shaquille O'Neal were 4-3 after seven games.

This year's Cavs of the post-apocalypse are 4-3 after seven games.

Nobody doubts that this year's edition of the Cavs will win considerably fewer games than last year's 61-win squad. Last year's fourth win came against the Knicks on Nov. 6. It sparked a five-game winning streak that all but sealed the Central Division crown for the remainder of the season.

This year's fourth win came against the Nets on Tuesday night, 93-91, at the Prudential Center in Newark, N.J. -- the home of hockey's New Jersey Devils and the temporary home of the Nets until their Brooklyn arena is finally built.

It was the Cavs' third straight win, offsetting a three-game losing streak, and pulling the Cavs back into a place that not many people thought they'd occupy after two games, let alone seven. That would be first place.

At the close of play Tuesday, the Cavs sat atop the Central Division, a half-game up on Chicago and Indiana, and two games up on Milwaukee and Detroit.

Again, probably not much to read into. It says less about the competitive state of the Cavs, and more about the fact that the NBA champion is almost certainly not coming from the Great Lakes region this season.

But for a team that arrived on the doorstep of the season with a toe tag and a group of mourners, it's a step toward the world of the living.

Tuesday's game was about as close to a nightly best-case scenario as these Cavs could hope for. The team spread the scoring around, with five players reaching double figures.

The Cavs were led by J.J. Hickson, the new centerpiece of the team's future, who had 18 points and 10 rebounds. He finished a fairly economical 8-for-14 from the floor. Among the starters, Anderson Varejao also reached double figures with 10 points .

Ramon Sessions, Daniel Gibson and a resurgent Antawn Jamison led a bench attack that outscored the Nets' bench 52-15. Jamison had 15, with Sessions and Gibson posting 14 apiece.

The Cavs' veterans -- specifically Jamison and Anthony Parker -- were the difference-makers down the stretch. Both hit key three-balls late in the game, and Parker sank a pair of free throws inside of 30 seconds to give the Cavs the victory margin.

Sessions played meaningful minutes, manning the point in the fourth quarter as Mo Williams struggled mightily with his shot, converting just one of 12 attempts from the floor for two points.

The Nets were paced by Travis Outlaw, who scored a game-high and personal season-high 27. Devin Harris added 18 and Brook Lopez 16. But none of it prevented the Nets (2-5) from losing their fifth straight.

This game was the first half of a dying NBA breed: the home-and-home series. The Cavs and Nets will renew vows Wednesday night at The Q. Tipoff is slated for 7:30.