

Mo Steps Up as Cavs Tip Bucks

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

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For much of their Thanksgiving Eve encounter with visiting Milwaukee the Cavaliers were slow and sluggish, looking like a group of guys in the premature throes of tryptophan lethargy. Cleveland trailed by as many as eleven in the second half and was still eight down early in the fourth quarter. But thanks to some gritty defense and the heroics of former Buck Mo Williams, the Cavaliers came back to take a buzzer-beating 83-81 victory over their shorthanded guests. Cleveland is now 6-8, a full fifty percent of the way toward fulfilling Kelly Dwyer's twelve-win prediction- and that's something to be thankful for as the holiday season gets underway.

No Bogut; No Problem: Milwaukee was missing its best player, Australian center Andrew Bogut, who sat out Wednesday night's game with back spasms. That didn't stop the Bucks from taking control early and keeping it. The Bucks grabbed a 20-18 lead with less than a minute remaining in the opening period and held their advantage until after the midway point of the third quarter. A frigid Cavalier offense was the main factor in Milwaukee's early success. Cleveland shot just 37 percent in the first half, hit only 4-of-9 from the free-throw line and went without a three-point basket in the first two periods of play. The Bucks led 44-34 at halftime, and it seemed the Cavaliers were well on their way to their fourth loss in a row and sixth in seven games.

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Mo Gets Hot: It took an ex-Buck to shake Cleveland out of its doldrums. After a quiet first half Mo Williams caught fire in the third period, pouring in thirteen points and almost single-handedly willing the Cavaliers back in the game with his scoring and playmaking. A pair of Williams assists set up an Anthony Parker three-ball and Joey Graham lay-up that put Cleveland into the lead, 53-52, with 5:49 remaining in the third period.

Keyon Moncrief: Milwaukee's three best players are Andrew Bogut and the guard tandem of Brandon Jennings and John Salmons. Bogut was *hors de combat* Wednesday night, and Jennings and Salmons might as well have been. Jennings was abysmal, scoring three points on 1-of-10 shooting, while Salmons had a church-mouse quiet fourteen points.

Fortunately for the Bucks, they had a secret weapon on hand- Keyon Dooling. The veteran guard from Missouri came into the night averaging less than four points per game, but he was Milwaukee's best player on Wednesday, leading his team with a season-high eighteen points on 7-of-14 shooting. Dooling's hot hand kept the Bucks in the game when the Cavaliers were threatening to take over in the third period and his final burst, a three-point play, staked Milwaukee to a 73-65 lead with 11:13 left in the fourth. He was nowhere near the basket on his last two attempts as Cleveland made its fourth-quarter comeback, but what do you want? It's Keyon Dooling.

This Guy's on the Masthead? Apparently J.J. Hickson participated in Wednesday night's action. I wasn't too sure myself, although I thought I saw a tall guy wearing #21 forcing up bad shots, throwing away inbound passes, getting beat on rebounds and generally being completely ineffective. The box score shows that Hickson did indeed play and end up with two points on 1-of-5 shooting with five rebounds in twenty minutes of work. Thank God this kid is our future, right?

Varej-ow: Unlike his fellow big man J.J. Hickson, Anderson Varejao did show up on Wednesday- and he was terrific. Playing with his usual elan, Varejao grabbed thirteen rebounds to go with six points and two blocked shots, all while playing in pain with bruised ribs. His biggest play came with just over three minutes to play. With the game knotted at 79-79, Varejao rejected former teammate Drew Gooden and made an acrobatic save of the ball to Mo Williams, who drove and scored to give Cleveland the lead with 3:02 left.

Oh Yeah, Mo: Just as he'd provided the go-ahead spark in the third period, Mo Williams provided the winning spark in the fourth. The sharpshooter from Alabama tied the score at

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77-77 with a jumper, re-tied it at 79-79 with a lay-up, and finally put the Cavaliers in front 81-79 with the lay-up off Varejao's stuff-and-save off Drew Gooden. But Mo's biggest shot of the night was yet to come.

Defense Never Rests: Mo and Andy were outstanding while Anthony Parker and Daniel Gibson stepped up with fourteen and twelve, respectively. But the unsung hero of the night was Cleveland's defense. The Cavaliers put the clamps on the Bucks in the fourth quarter, holding Milwaukee without a field goal for nearly six minutes as Cleveland made its late comeback from an eight-point deficit. The Bucks shot a wintry 37.8 percent on the night, including 3-of-14 in the fourth period. Tight Cavalier defense also forced a bad pass from Corey Maggette with 23.7 seconds left- the turnover that set up the play of the night.

Play of the Night: It came courtesy of the man of the night- Mo Williams, who led all scorers with 25 points on 11-of-22 shooting with five assists. With time running out Mo took an inbounds pass from center court, dribbled the clock down to the nub, jab-stepped to get free from Brandon Jennings and launched a twenty-foot jumper that found the bottom of the net as the horn sounded.

(LeBron would have missed it.)

Next: The Cavaliers head to Orlando to take on the Magic Friday night at 7:00.