



Remember the days when a Cavs-Magic game was circle-the-date material? Remember how we used the Cavs' performance against the Magic as a barometer of where they stood in the race for Eastern Conference supremacy?

Remember when the Cavs brought in Shaquille O'Neal specifically to match up with Dwight Howard?

Of course you do. That was 16 months ago. It's also ancient history.

Now, a Cavs-Magic game is another tally mark on the schedule. The Magic need to take care of business against one of the league's lesser teams, and the Cavs have to line up and take their beating against one of the league's elite squads.

All around, it's a completely undesirable situation, and the outcome is completely predictable.

Friday night, if you were still in a food coma from Thanksgiving dinner, you didn't miss much on the central Florida hardwood. The Magic (11-4) hopped out to a 32-22 lead after one quarter, extended the lead to 62-49 at the half, and the Magic were never threatened afterward, cruising to a 111-100 win.

For some reason, trips to Florida aren't just registering losses for Cleveland teams right now. They're registering losses coupled with statistical anomalies. The Browns lost in Jacksonville last Sunday despite winning the turnover battle 6-0. The Cavs (6-9) lost in Orlando despite winning the rebounding battle 39-33, and fairly well dominating the offensive glass 11-4.

Usually, if you're consistently giving yourself second-chance points, you're putting yourself in a great position to win. But all it really proves is Mark Twain's truism about lies, damn lies and statistics.

I'll wait on the Indians to complete the trifecta when they travel to Tampa next year. Maybe Fausto Carmona will manage to throw a no-hitter and lose.

But I digress. Aside from a lack of correlation between offensive rebounds and the final score, the story of Friday's game was a balanced Orlando attack in which six players registered double digit scoring efforts. Howard led all scorers and rebounders with 23 and 11, respectively. Thirteen of those points came at the free throw line, as the Cavs tried to employ a "Hack-A-Dwight" strategy late in the game, allowing Howard to pad his stat line on what was a pretty good (13-of-24) foul shooting night by his standards.

Aside from Howard, perennial Cav killer Mickael Pietrus added 20 points, Rashard Lewis and Quentin Richardson contributed 14 each, and J.J. Redick, starting in place of injured Vince Carter, continues to round into form as an NBA shooting guard with 15 points, including a trio of three-balls. As Carter's body continues to deteriorate, Redick might find himself auditioning for the fulltime starting shooting guard's job in Orlando. And he might be up to the task.

For the Cavs, Antawn Jamison is doing his part to try and draw interest from contenders. After a slow start, he's picked up his game in November's final weeks. Friday, he led the Cavs with 22 points and 7 rebounds.

Mo Williams, historically a poor performer against Orlando, added 20 points and 8 assists. Ramon Sessions chipped in 13 points and 6 assists. Joey Graham continues to put up respectable numbers as the starting small forward, adding 10 points on an economical 4-of-8 shooting.

Among the disappointing individual performances, Anderson Varejao continues to have a so-so early season, in part due to injuries. Against Howard and the Magic's long, tall frontcourt, Varejao managed just six points and three rebounds in 24 minutes.

J.J. Hickson ran his streak of single-digit scoring efforts to six games, with seven points and a single rebound. Lucky for Hickson, Byron Scott can't afford to have a doghouse right now with the Cavs losers of five of their last seven. He needs all hands on deck. But Hickson could really use a timeout in the corner if he keeps playing like this.

The Cavs head back to The Q for a 7:30 tipoff Saturday night against the Memphis Grizzlies, who are also lugging around a 6-9 record. After that, the Cavs finish off November with a home game against Boston on Tuesday.