

Mo Williams' Big Game Bails the Cavs Out Against Memphis

Written by {ga=jdclevelandfan}

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There are two ways to look at the Cleveland Cavaliers' 92-86 victory over the Memphis Grizzlies on Saturday night. You can think: Mo Williams had one of the best games of his career to lead the Cavs past the Grizzlies at The Q. Or: It took a career game from Mo Williams to *just* slip past the Grizzlies at home.

I guess it just depends on if you're a "glass-half-full" or "glass-half-empty" fan. (And there's no "right" answer, by the way. As enjoyable as it has been to watch the Cavs when they're clicking this season, it's been equally difficult to accept their disjointedness . . . whether you feel like that's something inevitable at *this* point in *this* season, or not.)

Here's the "glass-half-full" angle:

Mo had an absolutely epic game . . . scoring 25 points (on 10-of-21 shooting), with 12 assists, five rebounds, two steals and a block. He went 4-for-6 from beyond the arc, and had a game-high plus/minus of +27.

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At halftime, he had seven points and seven assists . . . and the Cavs were down 45-51.

With the Cavs still down six with 8:00 left to go in the third, Mo hit his first shot of the second half. That ended up being the beginning of an incredible five-minute run, in which Mo shot the lights out . . . and Cleveland out-scored the Grizzlies 20-2. With 3:00 left in the third, the Cavs were up by 12, 72-60.

During that five-minute stretch, Mo torched the Grizzlies for 12 points (on 5-of-6 shooting) with two assists. It ended with Mo hitting back-to-back 3s.

Most of Mo's help offensively came from J.J. Hickson and Joey Graham. J.J. had 16 points (on 6-of-11 shooting) with five rebounds. Joey had 12 points (on 5-of-10 shooting; 2-of-4 from beyond the arc.)

There's been a lot of talk about how the Cavs have the top-scoring bench in the NBA. Well, against Memphis, the bench took a back seat. The five starters: Williams, Hickson, Graham, Anthony Parker and Anderson Varejao all finished with plus/minuses of +17 or better.

The five reserves: Daniel Gibson, Antawn Jamison, Jamarion Moon, Ramon Sessions and Ryan Hollins all finished with a plus/minus of -11 or *worse*. That's a pretty sharp divide. (And with a -21, Sessions watched the Cavs outscore the Grizzlies by a total of +27 . . . from the bench. It was also a pretty bad game for Gibson, who had just six points (on 2-of-9 shooting) with zero assists.)

Here's the "glass-half-empty" angle:

It was nice to see Mo Williams tear the Grizzlies up . . . and it was nice to see the Cavs grab a solid win in a competitive, back-and-forth game . . . but Cleveland can't realistically expect for Mo to continue to put up those kind of numbers in order to win. At least, not to this degree.

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That's because the last time Mo went 25 and 12 he was playing *against* the Cavaliers. On March 22nd 2008, Mo, who was a member of the Milwaukee Bucks, outplayed LeBron James with 29 points and 13 assists. Mo's career high in assists is 15. He's had more than 12 six times - all of them from back when he was with Milwaukee. (He had 12 assists one previous time with the Cavs. It happened last April.)

Mo's had more than 25 points 43 times in his career, but the combination of the points, assists and energy is what made Saturday's game one of Mo's career best. But even *that* - the assists and the scoring tear in the third - almost wasn't enough.

That's because long stretches of the second and fourth quarters were plagued with bad team offense.

After coming back from being down eight points early . . . to claim an 18-17 lead . . . the Cavs just started jacking up three-pointers and long jumpers, without much creativity on offense. The Cavs shot 34.8% (8-of-23) from beyond the arc. If you subtract Mo, they were 23.5% (4-of-17). On the season, Cleveland is just shooting 3s at a 35.4% clip, which is 15th in the NBA. They're not a team that's going to shoot their way back into games from long range . . . so they should stop trying to.

In the eight minutes after their 18-17 lead, they were outscored 29-11, and were trailing by 16. The Cavs were fortunate to be able to bring it within six just before halftime.

Then in the fourth . . . after that surge that put them up 12 in the third quarter . . . the Cavs didn't score a field goal in the first nine minutes. Mo finally ended that drought by feeding J.J. for a lay-up with three minutes left to go in the game. If you include the end of the third quarter, the Cavs went 11 minutes (11 minutes!) without a field goal. They did get to the stripe a few times during that span, but let's be honest . . . the Cavs are fortunate that the game was still within reach (they were tied) when they finally made a bucket.

Extremely fortunate.

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The Cavs may not have the personnel to tighten things up as much as they would like to defensively. And they may not have a star who they can go to when they need someone to break down the other team's defense, but speaking from both a "glass-half-full" and a "glass-half-empty" perspective, the Cavs need to get better at finding and/or creating high-percentage opportunities on offense . . . especially when they hit a dry spell. That should make the offense more enjoyable for them *and* the fans.