

His House: LeBron Owns Cavaliers

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

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Winter arrived in Northeast Ohio this week, with freezing temperatures, ice-cold winds and scads of snow in the cracks of the streets and sidewalks.

Winter has also arrived for professional basketball in Cleveland. The difference is we have a good idea of when the climactic winter will end. The basketball winter could go on for quite a while longer.

Cavalier fans got their last bitter taste of the LeBron James era in Miami's 118-90 rout Thursday night at the Q. We aren't going to see TNT back in town any time soon. The brief era of Cleveland as an NBA headliner is over. It came to an emphatic end Thursday and the coffin nails were hammered deep by the man who played here for seven years and put the franchise in the limelight like no one had before- and perhaps no one will again.

Playing in front of the crowd that had once revered him and now reviled him, LeBron was wholly

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in his element. He had everything he needed: a reason to be motivated, an outmanned opponent and a captive audience to give a show. His magnificence Thursday was entirely predictable.

Playing just thirty minutes, LeBron poured in 38 points on 15-of-25 shooting to go with eight assists, five rebounds, a steal and a blocked shot. He didn't commit a turnover all night and after a 5-of-13 first half he barely missed, drilling ten of his final twelve attempts from the field.

LeBron's biggest impact came in the first and third quarters. After Cleveland built a five-point lead late in the first, the man from Akron scored eight points and assisted twice in the 14-0 Miami run that turned the game for good. He gave the Heat the lead for good at 19-17 with a breathtaking reverse lay-up to temporarily stun a Quicken Loans crowd that booed, cheered and chanted lustily long after the Cavaliers on the floor had run up the white flag.

But LeBron saved his biggest salvo for the third quarter. In twelve blazing minutes he helped turn a 19-point Miami halftime lead into a bulge that swelled to as many as 38 by displaying every weapon in his deluxe offensive arsenal. Fall-away prayers, acrobatic and-ones, long-distance bombs: they all fell for LeBron, who knocked in 10-of-12 during the quarter before exiting the game for good.

It wasn't as if he was a man alone, either. Dwayne Wade and Chris Bosh combined for a crisp 37 points on 59 percent shooting, giving the Miami Thrice 75 points between them. And reserve James Jones, who for some reason resembles a cartoon turtle, struck off the bench for 18 points on 6-of-8 shooting, including 5-of-7 from downtown. Miami shot a blistering 56.6 percent from the field in perhaps its best team performance of the season.

The Cavaliers seemed as if they were caught off-balance by LeBron's, and Miami's, onslaught. They shouldn't have been. The storm warning should have gone out long before tip-off that LeBron was going to turn this game into a statement. The potential for embarrassment was high and the Cavaliers should have recognized this. They did not. Instead of fighting and clawing and keeping themselves in the game with a chance to steal it, Cleveland simply crumbled at the first sign of trouble.

The Cavaliers shot poorly, hitting on an icy 35.5 percent of their attempts from the field. They

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were beaten decisively in the rebounding department by a Miami team that had struggled off the glass all season. The Heat out-rebounded the Cavaliers 43-35 and repeatedly won the races to what Mike Brown used to call the “fifty-fifty balls.” The turnover total, thirteen, was deceptively low. It was a sloppy, disheartened performance by a team that, at least for this night, should have had a lot to play for.

Worse still was the love-fest between LeBron and several Cavaliers players prior to the game. I understand these guys are friends, and they should be. But it shouldn't be difficult to put that stuff on hold for 48 minutes and treat the man as an opponent, someone they should be trying to destroy in a competitive sense. Watching the game, I half-expected the Cavaliers to pose with LeBron in one of those fake “photo-ops,” circa the 2008-09 season.

No Cavalier was truly effective. J.J. Hickson had a couple of nice plays at the beginning, including a coast-to-coast dunk over LeBron, but fizzled to a six-point, four-rebound, 3-of-9 performance. Mo Williams shot 2-of-8 and made zero impact. Anderson Varejao had four points and maybe even fewer of his patented hustle plays. Daniel Gibson scored 21 and nailed four three-pointers, but it was an empty stat line.

The crowd was beautiful. They didn't do anything collectively stupid, cheered their hearts out, booed and chanted at LeBron with fervor all night and provided a touch of class by lustily cheering LeBron's teammate and fellow ex-Cavalier Zydrunas Ilgauskas upon his introduction. Not for the first time, Cleveland fans were better than their team.

Where do we go from here? Into the winter; that's where. Thursday was the night every Cleveland fan should have seen the abyss-and how deep and wide it can possibly be. It's going to be a while until this team emerges back into the springtime of contention. The Heat has left town and taken the man who used to be our favorite son with it. We're alone in the winter.