



Back in the early '90s, just before the Indians' resurgence, comedian and Cleveland patron saint Drew Carey once related the experience of watching a baseball team that is a gazillion games out of first place in September:

"They suck, they know they suck, and they know you know they suck."

In current times, the Cavs are already there, and we're nowhere near the final month of the season.

The Cavs were teetering on the brink of collapse in the games leading up to Thursday's annihilation at the hands of the Heat. If you cared to watch (and no one could blame you if you didn't), you could see the cracks starting to show, the competitive will starting to wane.

Thursday, it all came crashing down in LeBron's return to Cleveland. Based on what the Cavs exhibited Saturday night in Minnesota, the psychological damage from Thursday is lasting.

The Cavs (7-12) looked like a team that wanted to slit its collective wrists in a 129-95 drubbing at the hands of the Timberwolves. That would be the same Wolves that were 4-15 heading into Saturday.

The Wolves are getting better, despite their now 5-15 record. They outplayed the league-leading Spurs for three quarters on Friday before eventually losing. Kevin Love, who had 28 points and 19 rebounds Saturday, is quickly becoming one of the best inside players in the league. Michael Beasley -- who didn't play Saturday due to an ankle injury -- is flourishing in Minnesota after being the last piece jettisoned in the Heat's manic salary-cap maneuvering this summer.

Even Darko Milicic, the punch line of the historic 2003 Draft, is averaging nearly nine points and six rebounds for Minnesota. He added 14 points Saturday.

Of course, a refrigerator on roller skates could have scored 14 on the Cavs. Among the many things that are currently wrong with the Cavs, it's their complete inattention to defense that is eating them alive. They've given up 353 points in the last three games combined.

Not that Cleveland's offense is doing much better. Saturday, they shot a lukewarm 38.6 percent from the field, and a brickalicious 5-of-21 from beyond the arc.

The Wolves, by contrast, were all but sonar-guided from deep, hitting 18-of-26 three-balls, aiding a 59 percent shooting night overall.

If the Cavs get the slightest bit of free pass, starters J.J. Hickson and Joey Graham didn't play due to a virus, leaving Ramon Sessions (18 points), Antawn Jamison (17 points) and Jawad Williams (11 points) to bear the scoring burden.

Mo Williams and Anderson Varejao scored four points apiece. Varejao might need some time in street clothes to recover from assorted injuries, and Mo might need professional counseling to

get over LeBron's betrayal.

The veterans on this team can't seem to let LeBron go. They can't seem to totally get their minds around the fact that he rejected them this summer. Thursday night was a reminder that LeBron's still-living ghost haunts the Cavs, and Saturday showed that he's far from out of sight, out of mind.

That's not to say the Cavs' players think about LeBron constantly, but after LeBron reminded them of what they don't have anymore, the dejection carried over to Saturday.

LeBron is going to continue to haunt the Cavs as long as this team's cast of veterans stays intact. All the more reason to clean house -- even if it's for another cast of vets on expiring contracts -- and remove the spurned-lover sentiment that permeates the locker room right now.

In order to begin anew, you have to be able to move on. This out-of-control losing skid would seem to indicate there are some central Cavs characters who can't or won't do that.

The Cavs are right back in action Sunday evening, in Auburn Hills to renew what was just several years ago one of the league's marquee rivalries: Cavs-Pistons. Now, both teams are sub-.500 and facing rebuilds. Bet that revs you up to tune in for tipoff, which is at 6 p.m.