



Where is Mike Brown when you need him?

Seven months ago, with the Cavs wilting against Boston in the Eastern Conference semifinals, Brown was a mismatched part, a nuts-and-bolts, defense-minded basketball coach governing a team of massive veteran egos. When his dismissal came following the Cavs' playoff elimination, you would have been hard-pressed to find anyone in Cleveland who thought it was the wrong move.

Turns out, change is the only constant. LeBron and Shaq are gone, and the Cavs are back to being an undisciplined, bottom-feeding team in need of a coach who preaches defensive fundamentals. In other words, someone like Mike Brown.

That's not to say all blame for the Cavs' recent slide should rest at the feet of Byron Scott, who is trying to work with this roster the best he can. But facts are facts: the Cavs lost on Tuesday night in Philadelphia 117-97. It was their fifth straight loss, all by double digits, and their third

loss in the past week in which they surrendered more than 115 points.

Perhaps most alarmingly, the last three losses came against teams that entered the game with records of 4-15, 6-14 and 6-14.

Little has gone right for the Cavs over the past week and a half, but if you had to pick a single culprit out of the police lineup, it would be the team's absolute lack of defensive competency. And you can't blame it all on roster deficiencies.

Whether Scott is failing to preach the right things in practice, whether the players are tuning him out, whether the entire team has devolved into an "every man for himself" mindset, if the Cavs are going to be this bad at the defensive end for the rest of the season, they'll struggle to win even five more games. Great for ramping up the number of ping-pong balls in May's draft lottery, bad for the blood pressure of Scott and owner Dan Gilbert.

Tuesday, the Cavs (7-14) let the Sixers (7-14) shoot 51 percent from the field and allowed seven Philadelphia players score in double figures. Thaddeus Young led the charge with 26 points and 11 rebounds. Spencer Hawes also notched a double-double, with 10 points and 12 boards.

Andre Iguodala added 13 points, mostly at the free-throw line, where he made 7-of-8. From the field, he was a forgettable 3-of-12.

Offensively, the Cavs did enough to win, shooting a lukewarm 41 percent overall, but making 7-of-17 three-balls and getting five players into double figures. Good J.J. showed up, as Hickson led all Cleveland scorers with 18 points on a fairly tidy 6-of-12 shooting. Mo Williams snapped out of his post-LeBron funk long enough to score 15 points and dish out seven assists, and Daniel Gibson used a quartet of three-pointers as the basis for a 16-point night.

But the defense was so unbelievably bad, none of it mattered. The Cavs trailed by nine points after one quarter, and the Sixers pretty well controlled the game from that point forward.

Wednesday night at 7, the Cavs are back in action at The Q against Chicago. It will be their first home game since last Thursday's embarrassment against Miami. If the Cavs continue to play cooked-pasta defense against the Bulls, the crowd might start giving the guys in wine and gold the same treatment they gave LeBron last week.

Of course, if the team keeps losing at this rate, "crowd" will be a very subjective term.