



Among all of the other problems the Cavs are facing in this teardown season, they have one essential problem that no amount of coaching or practicing can cure:

On a nightly basis, they're seldom -- if ever -- fielding the best player on the floor.

In the NBA, where games tend to hinge on individual performances, that's a critical deficiency, and one that can only be cured through a blockbuster trade or striking gold on draft night.

In any case, the star-power riddle is months, if not years, away from being answered for the Cavs. And in the meantime, they're going to be forced to suffer through games like Wednesday's 88-83 loss to the Bulls at The Q.

The Cavs (7-15) shook off a week of lousy performances to give the Bulls (11-8) a game. They led 68-60 after three quarters, thanks to a dominant third quarter in which they outscored Chicago 33-19.

Byron Scott's new-look starting lineup of Anderson Varejao, Mo Williams, Antawn Jamison, Daniel Gibson and Anthony Parker was having the desired effect, increasing the team's efficiency and opportunism by putting the five best veterans on the floor together.

But five decent veterans simply do not equal one Derrick Rose. And one Derrick Rose is what the Bulls have.

The 2008 first overall pick gave us a taste of things to come in last spring's Cavs-Bulls playoff series. Despite the fact that the Cavs won the series four games to one, Rose was a speedy, high-scoring thorn in Cleveland's side.

Wednesday, against a Cavs roster that is all but gutted compared to last spring, Rose was far and away the game's best player, scoring 29 points with eight assists, and having a big hand in turning the tide toward Chicago in a hotly-contested fourth quarter.

When Varejao split a pair of free throws to give the Cavs an 83-82 lead with less than a minute to play, Rose took the ball on the next possession and did what a star player is supposed to do: win the game. He drove inside, drew contact for the foul and maintained enough balance to flip the ball into the hoop. The three-point play gave the Bulls an 85-83 lead and enough scoreboard margin for the win.

On the ensuing possession, the Cavs attempted to answer, but a Mo baseline jumper missed and a Gibson stickback caromed to Joakim Noah, ending Cleveland's last gasp.

The loss wasted a night in which all five Cleveland starters reached double digits in scoring, led by Jamison's 21. Varejao had a thumbs-up performance as well, with 17 points and 12 rebounds.

After this brief stop at home, the Cavs are right back on the road, and the first three don't offer much hope for a streak-breaking win. Saturday night at 8:30, they're in Houston, a place where

the Cavs seem to win about once a decade. After that, it's a whole lot of Kevin Durant, LeBron James and Dwyane Wade before the trip concludes next Friday in Indiana.