



The Cavs really do care after all. They're just not very good.

Wednesday night, almost two weeks after obediently shuffling their way to a 118-90 loss to the Heat in LeBron's return to Cleveland, the Cavs played Miami on the shores of Biscayne Bay, and achieved the acceptable result we all wanted earlier in the month.

The Cavs are probably incapable of beating Miami unless LeBron and Dwyane Wade get lost on the way to the arena. But they can at least play the Heat tough and force them to work for the win.

That's what the Cavs did. Miami hasn't lost since that game in Cleveland, and the Cavs haven't won. But recent performance didn't seem to matter to either team. The Cavs stiffened what backbone they do have and forced Miami into a staredown that lasted well into the second half.

The Cavs held a two-point lead at the end of the first quarter and a three-point lead at halftime. Anyone in Cleveland who bothered to tune in and watch the game was undoubtedly waiting for the Miami scoring spurt that would seal the game. It didn't ever really come.

Miami's lead did balloon to double digits midway through the fourth quarter, but a 12-1 run pulled the Cavs (7-18) to as close as three points before the team effort ran out of gas. But not before Daniel Gibson and Mo Williams had the opportunity to tie the game with three-ball tries.

Sink either one of those, and the Heat's growing reputation as a team that chokes when seriously challenged might have come into play. But the Heat were just good enough -- and the Cavs just bad enough -- for it to not matter.

The Heat (19-8) struggled due to off nights from LeBron and Chris Bosh. LeBron (5-of-15, 21 points) broke 20 points thanks only to 11 free throws. But he needed 18 tries to make 11. Bosh was a lukewarm 6-of-15 from the floor and predictably contributed next to nothing on the boards, collecting four rebounds.

But when you're facing two future hall of famers and a third all-star, everything is a war of attrition. One of them is going to get you. Wednesday, Wade got the Cavs with 28 points -- 17 of them in the fourth quarter. He finished 10-of-18 shooting, including a trio of three-balls.

On the Cavs' side, Byron Scott treated it like a playoff game, going only three deep on his bench. And none of the three bench players who saw action was on the floor for even 20 minutes. In other words, Scott was going to ride his starting five as far as they would take him.

To that end, Scott continued to get good mileage out of his new-look veteran starting lineup. All

five reached double figures in scoring, paced by Gibson's 26. Antawn Jamison added 15 and Mo 13. Varejao was easily the game's most dominant interior player, using his relentless energy to score 18 points and grab 15 rebounds -- six of them on the offensive glass, including a critical late rebound that helped keep the Cavs' upset chances alive.

The Cavs are now losers of nine straight, and this road trip will afford them one last chance to get back in the win column. They'll face the Pacers in Indiana on Friday night at 7. Saturday, they return home to face Amare Stoudemire and the resurgent Knicks.