

Jamison, Mo & Gibson Continue to Play, Cavs Continue to Lose

Written by {ga=jdclevelandfan}

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The Cleveland Cavaliers started yet another losing streak on Wednesday night, falling to the Hawks in Atlanta 98-84. The game looked a lot like Monday's home loss to the Utah Jazz . . . and, for that matter, a lot like most of the games since Antawn Jamison and Daniel Gibson were added to the starting lineup back on December 8th.

If you've been watching the games, you know there's some good in that . . . although the end result in the box scores might not be relaying the message.

With this loss, the Cavs are now 1-7 with this lineup. (The lone win was a very solid overtime win against the New York Knicks at home last Saturday night.) It's basically the same record the Cavs had before the lineup change. (The Cavs were 2-6 in the eight games before . . . or 2-9, if you push it back to November 19th.)

On Wednesday night, Jamison looked great, especially in the first half.

As per usual - with the new starting lineup, at least - the Cavs broke out to an early lead against

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the Hawks, and then the inevitable offensive slump hit. In this one, the Cavs found glimmers of success with bench players like J.J. Hickson, Ramon Sessions, and even (on at least one play) Jawad Williams. But it was barely enough to mention.

The only sustained success at these times came through Jamison . . . and his timely high-percentage shots. (That's high-percentage for Jamison . . . for anyone else, those awkward flip-shots are prayers.)

But even though Jamison definitely had it going early, that was essentially the extent of the Cavs' offense. Aside from two mini-spurts, the middle of the first quarter through the middle of the second quarter was pretty barren offensively.

Jamison had just under one-third of the Cavs' total points in the first half (15 of 46). He finished the game with 23 points (on 10-of-16 shooting) with seven rebounds, two blocks and a steal. It was Jamison's fourth 20-point game in the eight games he's started this season. (He hit 20 three times in the previous 18 games he's played in this season.)

And again, as usual, the Cavs were able to eventually find a lineup that could keep them afloat, which lately has been the starting five of Mo Williams, Gibson, Anthony Parker, Jamison and Anderson Varejao. But ultimately, it's too little too late . . . and the Cavs slowly sink to the point where the game is out of reach.

It's still difficult to become accustomed to.

OK, let's step back for a minute: This season's objective is more about healing, growing, and re-gelling than it is about contending or competing, so it's not worth rushing a judgment on the lineup switch yet. It's more complex than simply listing the things that have and haven't improved with the new rotations. At the end of the day, you obviously want to make the team the best it can be, and have them in the best place to succeed, but those things aren't going to be apparent eight days in. And sadly, we do have time to evaluate where we are.

The biggest things that are contributing to the recent losing streaks - the things that are

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currently frustrating the team and the fans - are largely out of the team's control. (You know, the LBJ talent hole.) But there are smaller things - the things that could excite the team and the fans, the things that could make a difference (on some level) - that need to be extracted.

Some of that can be drawn from finding chemistry in new lineups . . . some of that can be squeezed out of coaching adjustments, and a lot of that can be culled from inspired, intense and energetic play.

That's where it may feel like Cleveland leaves a lot to be desired. And they do. No one may expect these Cavaliers to be tearing up the field right now - especially in this part of their schedule - in fact, most fans may be expecting the Cavs to ultimately lose most games, but understandably still want to see a better product on the floor.

But remember, losses - even expected ones - happen for a reason.

Simply put: The team is less good than the other team. In talent and execution. While the Cavs still have plenty of room to improve their execution . . . right now, their talent is what it is. So remember to appreciate the moments of improvement, excitement and even greatness in the absence of "complete games."

On that note, here are a few bright spots:

Mo Williams was excellent passing the ball. He registered his fourth-straight double-double, with 18 points and 11 assists. It was his seventh double-double this season. In his last 10 games, he's averaging 16 points and 9.5 assists. (Mo had just six double-doubles in the past two entire seasons. Yes, LeBron James is no longer here, but Mo is stepping up and adapting his game.)

Daniel Gibson has been playing extremely well recently. He was OK against Atlanta, but he didn't light up the stat sheet this time. He had 12 points and two assists.

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And Ryan Hollins, who has fallen out of the rotation, played well. It's a small sample size - he only played five minutes - but he did have some nice rebounds and strong put-backs. He finished with six points (on 3-of-3 shooting) with three rebounds.

Oh, and for what it's worth, Byron Scott was apparently really trying to win this game. That, or he's sending a message to his bench. All five starters played heavy minutes with Jamison, Parker and Gibson all playing 40 or more. Varejao and Mo played 36 and 34, respectively. (Hickson led the bench with 15 minutes.)

The Cavs next goal should be finding a way to revitalize or reinitiate J.J. The Cavaliers' defense has actually been good enough to keep them in games, provided they get more continuity on offense. The easiest way for them to do that is to pick up the speed and motion on offense . . . and get Hickson going on some pick-and-rolls or back-door cuts.

The Cavs now have a few days off for the holidays. They'll be back in action Sunday night, when they're taking on the Minnesota Timberwolves at home.