

Cavs Blow Lead, Game to Minnesota

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For a team that has lived in poverty for most of this season, the Cavaliers sure can't stand prosperity- as their 98-97 loss to Minnesota on Sunday night proved.



Twice Cleveland built double-digit leads and twice they blew them as they fell to a Timberwolves team that came into the night with twelve consecutive road losses. A driving lay-up by Michael Beasley with 6.9 seconds remaining proved to be the game-decider as Minnesota stormed back from a fourteen-point fourth-quarter deficit.

What's so galling about the result is the number of things the Cavaliers did right. They got terrific games from both backcourt starters, with Mo Williams going for 17 points, 10 assists and five rebounds and Anthony Parker chipping in with 21 points, seven rebounds and seven assists. They got a big night from Antawn Jamison, who poured in a team-high 24 points and dropped in a floater to give Cleveland a 97-96 lead with 10.6 seconds to play. They got solid efforts off the bench from J.J. Hickson, Jawad Williams and Ramon Sessions, who combined for 25 points.

But the Cavaliers couldn't translate individual effort into team success. They couldn't stop Michael Beasley, who scored a game-high 28 points, or Kevin Love, who slam-banged his way to 16 points and 18 boards. They couldn't contain Minnesota from three-point country, as the T-Wolves followed up their 18-of-26 three-for-all against Cleveland on December 4 with a 12-of-23 blast in the Q on Sunday night. They couldn't keep journeyman Luke Ridenour from hitting on all five of his three-point attempts on the way to a season-high 23 points.

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And most of all, the Cavaliers couldn't hold leads. They jumped out to an 18-5 advantage and frittered that lead away with turnovers and lackluster defense, as Minnesota came back to forge a 52-49 halftime lead. Cleveland committed thirteen turnovers in the first half and the miscues were crucial in allowing the Timberwolves to get back into the game.

But that was only the first blown lead of the night. The second blown lead was far more costly. After building an 88-74 lead with less than eight minutes remaining in the game the Cavaliers collapsed completely, with Minnesota's 20-5 run putting them in front 94-93 with a little over two minutes left. Ridenour and Love each stroked a pair of three-pointers during the run, while Cleveland settled for jump shots and played passive on both ends of the floor.

That passivity on offense was a major factor in the loss. Minnesota came into the night giving up an average of more than thirty free-throw attempts per game. But the Cavaliers got to the line just thirteen times on Sunday-and made just seven of them. The Timberwolves, meanwhile, made 20-of-22 from the charity stripe. No, the Cavaliers are not a strong inside team under the best of circumstances. But there was simply no excuse for not attacking Minnesota in the paint and getting to the free-throw line more than they did.

Plain and simple, it was exactly the kind of game bad teams lose- and at 8-22 the Cavaliers are a bad team indeed.

Next: Tuesday night at 7:00 when the Cavaliers host the Orlando Magic.