

Welcome Back, Joe!

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Sunday, March 27 2011 8:00 AM - Last Updated Monday, March 28 2011 9:26 AM



At 6:05 p.m. Sunday evening, the familiar refrain “It’s basketball time at the Q!” echoed over the airwaves. After a long stay on the IR, the energy and electricity were finally back in Joe Tait’s voice.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said for the Cavaliers’ starting lineup, which took slightly more than five minutes of the opening quarter to score its first points en route to an 8-0 deficit and a 99-83 loss. The Cavs never led.

“Anybody who thought I was going to come back and turn this team around, well...” lamented Tait after the game.

The Hawks -- playing their second game in two days, with the fifth spot in the playoffs pretty well locked up -- played as well as they had to. The Cavaliers -- zeroing in on finishing the season with the NBA’s worst record -- were putrid.

Here’s how the lackluster Cavs opened the game:

Offensive foul on Alonzo Gee
Missed jumper by J.J. Hickson
Missed jumper by Hickson
Missed jumper by Anthony Parker
Turnover by Hickson
Offensive foul on Hickson

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Missed jumper by Ramon Sessions

Missed jumper by Gee

Missed runner by Gee

Missed runner by Gee

Missed jumper by Parker

They finally scored at the 6:53 mark of the first quarter on a put-back by Hickson off Parker's missed jumper. That first five minutes was pretty much a reflection of the way the season has gone -- and how the game would go.

"They weren't ready to play," noted Jim Chones, who joined Tait in the radio perch. "They [were] playing terrible."

It took guard Baron Davis's entrance at the 3:25 mark to finally ignite the home team, which drew to 21-18 by the end of the first stanza.

Davis scored 11 points in his first 10 minutes of play, keeping the Cavs within hailing distance. And when he went out, Sessions finally got untracked with three straight buckets, all on drives to the hoop. But a three-point field goal by Atlanta guard Kirk Hinrich just before the halftime buzzer gave the Hawks a 52-39 bulge. Had it not been for the Cavs' bench players, the margin would have been insurmountable.

At the half, the plus-minuses of the Cavs' starting five were -10, -16, -16, -15, -16, and they had made one of only two free throws.

The second half was more of the same. It was one of those 10- to 12-point games where the Cavs were never really in it, but they were never really out of it, either, if you happen to be an eternal optimist. Until the last eight minutes, that is.

With just 90 seconds left until the Cavaliers could go back home to their loved ones, the score was 95-80. At that point, Tait offered: "This is a *fait accompli* -- that means you're dead in the water."

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Atlanta's biggest lead was 99-80, after which both head coaches pretty much cleared their benches.

Perhaps the lone bright spot was the play of Baron the Bearded One, who had 19 points and seven assists in 23 minutes. But during the wild and woolly fourth quarter, you could see the disappointment in his eyes as the Hawks took complete control of the game despite his best efforts.

Besides a mammoth 31-point, 7-rebound statistic-stuffer from forward Marvin Williams, the Hawks' Al Horford had 20 points and 10 rebounds, and Joe Smith had 13 points and 18 rebounds. For the uninitiated, that's Atlanta's starting front line.

The Cavs placed five men in double figures, but only Davis's performance was noteworthy. Sessions had 13, Boobie Gibson 11, Gee and Hickson 10 each.

Miscellaneous Observations

>> After watching so much quality basketball on the tube this weekend -- the Ohio high school finals and the NCAA Regional Finals -- it was torture watching the Cavaliers play the Hawks, no matter which team you were rooting for. Sunday's NCAA games in particular (Virginia Commonwealth 71, Kansas 61 and Kentucky 76, North Carolina 69) were more exciting by a factor of 100.

>> The Cavs have the ability to make average opponents look like Hall of Famers. They allowed Williams, a career 11-and-5 guy, to run amok in this one.

>> You gotta love Ryan Hollins. Late in the fourth, Hollins flew into Atlanta's backcourt for a loose ball and did a sliding belly-flop, leaving half of his right elbow imbedded in the wood. The guy hustles his ass off all the time, but unfortunately, he has all the coordination of a drunked-up gutter tramp.

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>> For the second game in a row, J.J. Mouthguard started at power forward. The results were not as good as they had been Friday night against the Pistons. Friday night: 24 points on 9 of 13 from the floor, 15 rebounds. Sunday night: 10 points on 5 of 14 from the floor, 13 rebounds.

>> Most impressive basket of the night: a vicious right-handed slam by Samardo Samuels (who later sprained his right wrist), who inadvertently kicked the ball into the stands before it hit the floor.

>> As opposed to the Cavs, Tait was at the top of his game. The best byplay between the radio vet and Chones (which predictably had no bearing on what was transpiring on the court):
Joe: "Something I've been thinking about for, lo, these many months -- DiGiorno Pizza..."
Chones: "Do they have vegetarian pizza?"
Joe: "Isn't that a Communist plot?"

>> Tait's only apparent problem after the long layoff was pronouncing "Harangody," the newest Cav. With four more home games to announce, you can bet that he will have the pronunciation down pat by the time the team packs it in for the season.

What's Next

Cleveland is now 14-58 and holds a three-game "lead" over Washington and Minnesota in the ping-pong-ball race.

Tuesday night, the Whore of Akron brings his new BFFs back to the Q when the Miami Heat (51-22) visit. The Heat vanquished Houston Sunday night to run their winning streak to five games.