



On the spectrum of atrocious shooting nights, tonight's 98-78 Cavalier loss to Portland would rank snugly between your dad's weekly pickup game at the Y and the Butler-Connecticut 2011 NCAA title game. Even with a 21 point, 9-17 shooting night from Kyrie Irving, the Cavs (4-4) collectively knocked 'em down at a woeful rate of 37 percent, spoiling a golden opportunity to steal a win against a Blazer team that looked lifeless for a good portion of the ballgame.

In the first quarter, in particular, Portland (6-2) still seemed dazed from the 102-77 punch to the mouth they'd taken from Phoenix on Friday night. LaMarcus Aldridge and Co. had managed to shoot just 33 percent from the field in that game, and they picked up right where they left off in the early going against the visiting Cavs, clanging outside jumpers and inside bunnies alike. But with the door swung wide open, Cleveland's trigger-happy shooters preferred to attempt their entrance through the wall instead, hurling up a baker's dozen of wide-open three-pointers before a single one of them managed to rattle through its target. The result was an U-G-L-Y first half of play, with Portland taking a 42-35 edge to the locker room.

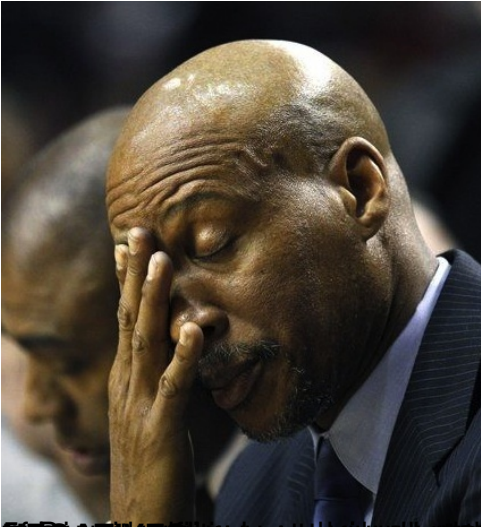
This motif continued into the third quarter, with the Cavs somehow hovering within striking distance despite an almost astonishing display of sloppy, graceless (but at least not uninspired) basketball. The equalizer, at least for a while, was defense and rebounding, as Anderson Varejao was an inside force again (8 points, 10 rebounds, 2 steals, a block, and a few nicely timed flops as always). Cleveland would actually out-rebound Portland for the game by a 46-42 count, but a good chunk of those were offensive boards created by the wild ricochets of a 3-for-24 shooting night from beyond the arc (although Portland hardly fared much better at 6-for-23). Again, U-G-L-Y. We're not talking about heavily contested shots here, people. Just the failure to put a ball in a basket.

In any case, with three minutes to play in the third quarter, Antawn Jamison finally (accidentally?) connected on a triple—his only bucket of the night—to pull Cleveland within 4 points at 57-53. That's when the ever-dangerous LaMarcus Aldridge decided to put an end to this embarrassing brick-a-thon once and for all, scoring 8 of his game-high 28 points in the next two minutes—6 of them converted from the foul line after wisely taking the game into the paint.

Things got substantially more U-G-L-Y from there, but only from the Cavalier perspective, as their turnover total shot up to 24 on a slew of stupid passes, fumbled dribbles, and other buffoonery. The Trail Blazers, led by Aldridge, Wesley Matthews (24 points), and perennial Cav killer Gerald Wallace (16 points), were more than happy to cash in these prizes on the other end, and the rout was on.

POSITIVES

1. We're eight games in, and all remains silent on the Kyrie Second Guessers front.
2. Another solid 17 minutes from the #4 pick, as well, as Tristan Thompson had himself 5 rebounds and 10 points on 4-6 shooting.
3. The Cavs only shot 71% (17-24) from the foul line, but considering they came in shooting 68% as a team, this is actually an improvement. Same goes for Tristan cashing in a promising 2 of 4 free throws to raise his season percentage above 40%. Congrats!
4. Semih Erden is back! One point, one rebound (which should also be the Semih Erden t-shirt slogan).



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