



Here for his lone visit to Cleveland this season, Dirk Nowitzki—the slayer of the beast—was roundly cheered during pre-game announcements at the Q. But as it turned out, the giant German had still more gifts left to bestow upon his adopted devotees; coughing up five of the Mavericks' 21 turnovers in an improbable 91-88 Cavalier victory.

And to be clear, the improbability factor was less about Cleveland beating Dallas (the defending champs have been a shell of themselves most of this season) and more about how the Cavs (9-13) pulled it off—shooting a pretty abysmal 39.8% from the field and 26% from three-point range. By comparison, Dallas (14-11) connected on 48.5% of their efforts and 50% from downtown. So how does a team outshoot another by nearly 10 percentage points and lose? Well, simply put, by letting the other team hoist up almost THIRTY more shots, as Cleveland attempted 93 shots to Dallas' 66! Schnikes!

Kyrie Irving (20 pts, 7 asts, 4 rbs, 2 stls) will likely get the bulk of the headlines again, as he came up big down the stretch in the Cavs' first triumph over a winning team this season. But make no mistake; this was Anderson Varejao's game yet again. After years of being "the guy whose contributions don't show up on the stat sheet," Varejao (17 pts, 17 rbs, 3 asts) has gone graffiti artist on the boxscore lately—visibly eclipsing the efforts of every other name in it. He's a quantifiable all-star, and bloody well better be in Orlando for that particular exhibition game.

In tonight's contest, Varejao was central to the Cavaliers' massive shot-attempt advantage in two ways—keeping possessions alive for his own team (seven offensive boards), and pressuring the Mavericks into a slew of silly turnovers on the other end. For a veteran-laden

team, the Mavs looked surprisingly out of sync and lackadaisical without Jason Kidd (strained calf) in the lineup. Along with Dirk's five turnovers, guards Jason Terry, Rodrigue Beaubois, and Delonte West (who was cheered almost as loudly as Dirk) combined for 10 more giveaways between them—many of them on ill-advised, Charlie Frye-style passes into traffic.



Despite the Mavericks' best efforts, though, Cleveland was hesitant to cash in their prizes in the early going. Dressed in their alternate home uniforms ( [ostensibly paying homage to the He-Man character Cyclone](#) ), the Cavs hit their first three shots of the game before plummeting into a seemingly bottomless chasm of offensive ineptitude; missing 21 of their next 24 shots—most of which were pretty open looks. When the dust had settled on the first quarter, Irving was 0-for-5, Antawn Jamison was 0-for-5, Ramon Sessions was 0-for-3, and Mychel Thompson and Luke Harangody were each 0-for-2 (with special commendations for hoisting up two of the ugliest bricks ever captured in high-definition). By no coincidence, the Mavericks led 24-15.

As you likely noticed, the injuries to Anthony Parker, Boobie Gibson, and Tristan Thompson forced Byron Scott to round up his D-leaguers for extensive minutes again. Mychel Thompson (2-6, 6 pts) went 20, Harangody (0-4, 0 pts, 5 rbs) went 15, and the two-headed, 14-foot tall bag of uselessness (Semih Erden and Ryan Hollins) combined for 15 minutes, managing 2 points and 2 rebounds between them. And yet, somehow, Cleveland did what they've done in the vast majority of games this year—they hung around.

Trailing 51-43 at the half, the Cavaliers burst out of the gate in the second half, getting a spark from some unlikely sources. Mychel Thompson-- who had earlier looked like a man possessed by a demon with horrendous depth perception—keyed the rally with a pair of three-pointers, and the oft-shitty Omri Casspi hit two deep jumpers of his own, the second of which gave the Cavs a 64-59 lead with 5:11 to go in the third. Five minutes and 11 seconds later, it was 70-64 Cavs,

and all the momentum appeared to be with the home team...

...This was not the case. Now, submitted for your approval, here is every Cleveland possession from the first *four minutes* of quarter #4:

*Casspi bricks a 3*

*Casspi bricks another 3*

*Casspi misses a lay-up (just getting started, folks!)*

*Harangody bricks a 3*

*Harangody has a second shot-attempt blocked*

*Irving turns the ball over*

*Jamison bricks another triple*



During this same four-minute stretch, Nowitzki (24 pts, 8 rbs) and the Mavs had done what real NBA teams do, and made some shots, thus taking a 72-70 lead. The increasingly relevant Alonzo Gee (12 pts, 4 rbs, 2 steals) did his best to stop the bleeding for the Cavs with a tough lay-in and a clutch three, but it still looked like Dirk Time was upon us, and that the Finals MVP would will his team to a win over an inferior foe. With five minutes to go, Nowitzki dropped in a bunny to make it 82-79 Mavs. But somehow, like an especially weak M. Night Shyamalan twist, those would be his final points of the contest. And with the ghosts of Vince Carter (4 pts), Shawn Marion (4 pts), and Lamar Odom (7 pts) providing no backup, the Cavs regained the edge.

Gee was in the middle of it again, dunking home two, then dishing to Jamison and Irving for back-to-back buckets that put Cleveland up 87-86. Subsequently, after Dirk and Terry uncharacteristically kicked the ball around on key possessions, Varejao connected on a floater

and Irving spun in another diagonal, bishop-takes-the-pawn lay-up to seal the deal, as Brandon Wright's Hail Mary three fell well wide at the buzzer.

The message is getting repetitive at this point, but the proof is in the pudding pops. The Cavs--with two good players, a couple mediocre players, and a half dozen absolute schlubs—are playing some inspired basketball. On the off chance that any of the guys not named Irving can learn to shoot (a key component of the game of basketball), who knows what Dirkian heights they may yet reach.