

Cavs Edge Pistons 101-100

Written by {ga=mrburns}

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The game in 300 words or less

Wow! What a finish! A home game against the Pistons certainly seemed very winnable, but after the Pistons opened up a sizeable lead heading into halftime it didn't look like it was going to happen.

The Cavs entered the fourth quarter trailing by 11, but some big shots from Kyrie Irving and Alonzo Gee brought them back into it. A three from Antawn Jamison gave the Cavs a one-point edge with the clock showing 5:52, which is about as quickly as I can remember a double-digit deficit being erased in the fourth quarter.

The Cavs executed and closed things out. Two Daniel Gibson free throws gave the Cavs a four-point edge and a Ben Gordon buzzer beater made the game look a little closer than it actually was.

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The Pistons deserve some credit for hanging tough after blowing that big lead and feeling the crowd really come back into the game. There were several opportunities for this young Detroit team to head for the showers early, but they kept fighting.

Brandon Knight, Rodney Stuckey, and Greg Monroe all shined for the Pistons. There is no doubt that although pleased with the win, Byron Scott is going to be preaching defense in practice tomorrow. Obviously the Cavs are still adjusting to being Varejao-less, but you can't give up 100 to a team like the Pistons and expect to win many games.

Irving watch

Another very strong shooting performance by the number one pick, whose three-point marksmanship (4-for-5) helped key the Cavs' comeback. Irving had 25 points (11-for-18), 5 boards, and 8 assists; although those are very well-rounded numbers, he had another sloppy game with 6 turnovers.

The Cavs also allowed a combined 40 points to Brandon Knight and Rodney Stuckey, partially due to some defensive lapses by Irving. The kid is already pretty good, but he definitely has room for improvement.

At this point Irving has to be viewed as the prohibitive favorite to win Rookie of the Year. He is only averaging about 5 assists, but he's shooting 48.5%. His other main competitor, Ricky Rubio, averages over 8 assists per game but shoots under 38% from the field.

Rubio is a virtuoso passer, but if he continues to shoot 10 times per game he needs to be more accurate. Plus in fairness to Kyrie, his assist numbers (and possibly shooting percentage) would likely improve if he were playing with a legitimate number one scoring option like Kevin Love.

This isn't meant to knock Rubio, who looks like the heir apparent to Steve Nash at the point guard position; it's merely to show that Rubio has shortcomings, too. It is a little surprising to me

that Rubio's become such a media darling in Minnesota, while Irving doesn't seem to get the same attention from the national press (read: ESPN), in the midst of a superior rookie season.

The fall of the Pistons

It wasn't all that long ago that the Cavs and Pistons were vying for Eastern Conference supremacy. Consider that as recently as four years ago the Pistons won 59 games and the Central crown. It wasn't until Chauncey Billups was dealt that the Pistons started rebuilding in earnest, and that was a few games into the '08-'09 campaign.

Joe Dumars received plenty of credit – much of it deserved – for constructing the Pistons' powerhouse teams of the 2000s. But the guy also made some colossal errors, namely: Darko Milicic, Charlie Villanueva, and Ben Gordon. In many ways the Pistons are still trying to recover from those moves – the latter two gobbled up cap space, while drafting Milicic should probably draw more criticism than it does.

Four of the top five picks in the 2003 NBA Draft have become perennial All-Stars, and three of them could be the cornerstone of any franchise in the league. Dumars picked the one guy whose career topped out as a role player. Darko wasn't even roster-worthy in most fantasy leagues. That's a difficult mistake to recover from, and with that context it's understandable how the Pistons could devolve into the redheaded stepchild of the Detroit sports scene so quickly.

I mentioned Brandon Knight and Greg Monroe earlier, both of whom appear to be solid long-term pieces. They may not be franchise players, but they can develop into starters on contending teams, and that's all you can ask in the middle of the lottery. With one or two more good drafts and a solid coach in Lawrence Frank, Dumars might be able to right the ship. Time (read: expiration) might be the only thing that heals the Gordon/Villanueva deals.

Balanced scoring, more defense necessary

The Cavs were very fortunate to pull this one out when you consider that they had only three players score in double digits. They were even more fortunate when you consider that they received 25 points from Kyrie Irving, 32 from Antawn Jamison (in another Herculean effort), and 16 points from Alonzo Gee. That trio also combined to shoot 50% from the field.

Tristan Thompson put up a goose egg and Ramon Sessions only contributed five points. With Anderson Varejao out, it's going to be tough for the Cavs to win without one of those two supporting in the 15-point range every night, because it's rare that Irving, Jamison, and Gee will all significantly exceed their averages in the same night.

The defense also needs to put the clamps down a little more, although probably deserves some slack due to the adjustment period after losing a huge piece like Varejao. That said, it's unlikely that Byron Scott will be so lenient.

Up next: Wednesday, 2/22, vs. New Orleans, 7:00, FSN Ohio

The Cavs have won two in a row for just the second time this season. At the risk of jinxing it, they have an opportunity to win three straight for the first time this season, and it's against one of the worst teams in the league...who just happen to be on the second game of a road back-to-back. Lou Brown has some [thoughts on the subject](#).