

## Notebook: Raptors 96, Cavs 88

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Monday, March 12 2012 8:36 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, March 14 2012 6:52 PM

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### The game in 300 words or less

After winning three straight against Western Conference playoff contenders, the Cavs were due for a little bit of a clunker, which is exactly what we saw last night.

Ultimately a very hot second quarter gave Toronto the edge in this ballgame. Every time it looked like the Cavs were getting ready to make a run, the Raptors were able to answer or the Cavs were just plain cooled off.

The Raptors outshot the Cavs 50% to 38% for the game (that margin was roughly 20% in the first half) and 42% to 20% from downtown. If you want the game in a nutshell, it's that the Cavs just had a rough shooting night and the Raptors shot well. Sometimes it's just that simple.

It seems odd that in a season when most pundits would probably consider the Cavs overachievers, they have lost all three match ups with the lowly Raptors.

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Jerryd Bayless, Andrea Bargnani, and Leandro Barbosa did the heavy lifting for the Raptors, with 20, 19, and 17 respectively. Barbosa is a guy I've always liked as a sixth or seventh man, and I wouldn't be surprised to see him moved at the deadline as this is the final year of his deal. Would you have guessed that Andrea Bargnani has scored over 20 points per game the last two seasons? Yeah, neither would I.

At the risk of wading into "Captain Obvious" territory, the Cavs sorely miss Anderson Varejao. The interior defense has been awful since the Brazilian has been shelved, and if Varejao were still healthy I'm confident that the Cavs would be a playoff team.

If nothing else, between Kyrie Irving and A/V we have two out of the three guys we need to form the core for a contending team. I never expected to be typing that sentence back in December.

### **Irving Watch – 14 Pts (5-17; 1-4), 7 Reb, 7 Ast, 1 TO**

After playing beautifully the last three games, Kyrie and the team as a whole certainly earned a mulligan. This was one of Irving's worst shooting performances as a professional, which is pretty amazing. As efficient as he's been, it does seem like Kyrie has one awful shooting game every six or seven times out. Considering that his only other weakness this season has been Kryptonite, I can live with that.

Where Irving has quietly made dramatic improvements is the turnover department – he has only 11 turnovers in 7 games during the month of March. Clearly, he's maturing and getting a better feel for playing point guard in the league.

Most starting point guards turn the ball over somewhere in the neighborhood of 3-4 times per game, and Kyrie now sits at a 2.9 average for the season. That is awfully impressive for a rookie who has been asked not only to start at a very demanding position, but also to carry much of the scoring burden. Yeah, clearly this guy was unworthy of the number one pick.

## **Trade talk**

It is that time of year, and with Thursday's trade deadline rapidly approaching there are plenty of Cavs fans who are ready to part with anything that isn't nailed down. If I were a betting man – which I am – I would bet that the Cavs will make at least one deal, but there's a much better chance that the roster will be largely unchanged on Friday morning. Let's take a look at a few of the candidates who might get sent packing.

## ***Ramon Sessions***

If I had to make a wager that one Cavalier would hit the bricks, it's Ramon Sessions. Sessions is having an excellent year off the bench, and can either start on a team hurting for a point guard or be one of the first guys off the bench.

Although he's always been able to get to the rack, Sessions has really blossomed under Byron Scott the last two seasons. Sessions has become a better distributor, and has gone from being one of the league's better brick-layers to shooting 42% from downtown this season. I'm still not sure where his three-point shot came from.

Ramon has a player option for next season that he almost certainly won't exercise, as he can likely get a longer-term contract on another team where he won't be playing behind a budding star like Kyrie Irving. The speculation for weeks has been that Sessions would make sense for the LA Lakers, who have a black hole at point guard named Derek Fisher and a pair of number one picks to dangle as trade chips.

### ***Antawn Jamison***

Fans are really ready to flip Jamison for something tasty but I don't see it happening for several reasons. Yes, Antawn is in the last year of his contract, but it's a \$15 million deal. This means that the Cavs have to take back a similar cap figure, which comes in the form of either another big contract or a trade exception.

It is highly unlikely that anyone will move a guy who gets paid like a franchise player and delivers any kind of bang for the buck. Plus, the Cavs aren't going to let a bad contract hamstring them when they're on the verge of parting with both Jamison and Baron Davis in one season, who combined to chew up almost \$30 million of cap space.

Furthermore, trading both Sessions *and* Jamison would take 30 points out of the lineup without an obvious alternative. The Cavs would really run the risk of tanking the second half of the season, making the team tough to watch and possibly sending the wrong message to some of the younger players (read: Kyrie Irving). I know there is the "lose to win" contingent out there, but I'm not sure the Cavs front office buys into that notion, and I know that Byron Scott doesn't. Jamison will play out the season in Cleveland unless he requests a buyout.

### ***Anthony Parker***

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Parker is on a one-year deal at a very friendly number and could definitely be moved to a contender. The only issue there is that he probably won't command much in return. Anyone else who can be a rotation player in the neighborhood of Parker's \$2.25 million contract is probably more valuable than AP, right?

And not unlike Antawn Jamison, the Cavs value Parker's professionalism and stabilizing influence in the locker room. With such a young group of guys, Parker has some value playing big brother to Kyrie Irving and Tristan Thompson, among others.

### ***Daniel Gibson***

Gibson is the sleeper of this group. He makes \$4.4 million and has a team option for next year at \$4.8 million. The Cavs might be able to get something decent in return from a team desperate for a shooter, and at \$4.8 million next season they'll at least have a cup of coffee to discuss whether or not they want him back. I still think they would keep Gibson because it would only be a one-year deal, but it's not a lock.

This would be a little bit of a bummer considering that Gibson has been in Cleveland since he was drafted back in 2006 and has become a fan favorite, but I'd be willing to part with him if it can help the Cavs down the road.

### ***Omri Casspi***

Casspi has been one of the Cavs' worst players this season so it's tough to imagine anyone wanting him, but there might be a team or two who still likes him. This would be the classic "change of scenery" trade, but considering that Casspi has a very club-friendly deal (signed

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through next season at \$2.3 million) and that the Cavs would be selling low, I think this is probably pretty unlikely. Casspi could still be rehabilitated into a competent rotation player.

**Up next: Wednesday 3/14, at Milwaukee, 8:00, FSN Ohio**