

Duel in Dixie: Hawks Edge Cavs in OT

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Wednesday, March 21 2012 11:11 PM - Last Updated Thursday, March 22 2012 8:37 AM



It just wasn't meant to be for the Cavaliers in Wednesday night's 103-102 overtime loss to the Hawks at Philips Arena. Despite leading by as many as sixteen in the first half, by three with 5.4 seconds left in regulation and by six with 1:27 left in overtime, Cleveland lost its seventh in a row to Atlanta and dropped to 0-3 in overtime games this season.

For the Hawks it was a much-needed salve for their frustrating home loss to Boston two nights earlier. For the 17-27 Cavaliers, the defeat dropped them further behind in the playoff race. They now trail red-hot New York by four-and-a-half games for the eighth spot and Milwaukee by three-and-a-half for the ninth spot.

It doesn't look as if there will be any postseason for the Wine & Gold; which is just as well. This team needs to stay in the Lottery for at least one more year.

Speedy Starters: Fresh off their win in New Jersey Monday night, the Cavaliers came out of the gate white-hot and jumped all over Atlanta. Cleveland converted nine of its first ten attempts from the field and led the slow-starting Hawks 23-10 by the middle of the first period. The Cavaliers continued to dominate the opening stages, building their lead to sixteen early in the second period.

Duel in Dixie: Hawks Edge Cavs in OT

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Wednesday, March 21 2012 11:11 PM - Last Updated Thursday, March 22 2012 8:37 AM

Like a Bakery: That big lead didn't stick around very long, thanks in large part to sloppy play on the part of Cleveland's offense. Turning turnovers into easy buckets, the Hawks took off on a 19-4 run that gave them their first lead, 51-50, with 1:14 remaining in the opening half. Cleveland committed five turnovers in the last six minutes of the first half and added seven more in the third period as Atlanta built a 72-64 cushion. For the evening the Cavaliers committed nineteen turnovers, twelve occurring in a ten-minute span of the second and third periods- a span in which they were outscored 40-18.

Resiliency: Trailing by eight late in the third and with all the momentum against them, the Cavaliers could have very easily packed it in and called it a night. Instead they fought back with a critical run at the end of the period. Holding Atlanta without a field goal for seven-and-a-half minutes, Cleveland scored the last nine points of the third to take a 73-72 lead. That run, climaxed by Kyrie Irving's jumper to beat the third-quarter buzzer, gave the Cavaliers a chance to win the game in the final twelve minutes- a chance they should have capitalized on.

Kyrie Time: Cleveland's sensational rookie once again stepped up his scoring when needed. Sitting at a lowly seven points going into the final minute of the third period, Kyrie exploded down the stretch with 22 in that final minute, in the fourth quarter and in overtime. He completely lost Kirk Hinrich and floated in for a left-handed layup to give the Cavaliers a 101-98 lead with 5.4 seconds left in regulation; midway through the OT he converted a five-point play, swishing two free throws after an intentional foul and bottoming a long three-pointer on the ensuing possession.

Still, despite a line of 29 points on 10-of-19 shooting with nine assists, the night had its drawbacks for Irving, who turns twenty on Friday. He missed an off-balance jumper with the Cavaliers trailing by one at the end of overtime (Alonzo Gee then was short on what should have been a fairly routine tip-in at the buzzer, which stung worse than Kyrie's miss.) Irving also committed seven turnovers, one of them a behind-the-back, no-look pass he threw directly to the Hawks mascot, who was seated in a court-side chair.

Square One: The honeymoon from Tristan Thompson's career-best performance in New Jersey lasted long enough for the kid from Canada to step back on the floor. Despite scoring 13 points on 5-of-9 shooting, Thompson was not good in Atlanta. He collected only five rebounds

in 41 minutes, committed five turnovers, missed a dunk and spent much of the night either getting the ball ripped out of his hands or having his shot stuffed at the rim.

Duel in Dixie: Hawks Edge Cavs in OT

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Wednesday, March 21 2012 11:11 PM - Last Updated Thursday, March 22 2012 8:37 AM

Gee for Effort: Despite shooting 1-of-9, Alonzo Gee had a fairly solid night. The former Alabama star pulled down a team-high 13 rebounds, dished out four assists and, up until the end of regulation, frustrated Joe Johnson, Atlanta's go-to guy. Johnson shot just 7-of-19 on the night, a performance caused in part by Gee's tenacious defense. Unfortunately, Gee and his teammates couldn't keep Joe Johnson down forever.

Slipping the Leash: After struggling for most of the night, Johnson finally came through- and, quite literally, not a minute too soon. The veteran from Arkansas started his closing drive with 1:11 left in regulation by hitting a three to make it 87-85, Hawks. With Atlanta trailing 91-88 at the end of the fourth quarter, Johnson got free at the top of the key and drained a three-pointer at the buzzer to tie the score. His third clutch trey, with 1:23 left in overtime, kick-started a game-ending 8-1 run after Cleveland had taken a seemingly comfortable six-point lead. Johnson finished off the run by hitting the game-winning jumper with eighteen seconds left in OT.

In the first 46 minutes of the night Joe Johnson had seven points on 2-of-13 shooting. In the final seven minutes he had 13 points on 5-of-6 shooting. Kyrie Irving was clutch on Wednesday night. Joe Johnson was more clutch.

How Did That Happen? I could have sworn Josh Smith had an off-night Wednesday. He took a ton of terrible shots (nothing new for him,) picked up a technical foul and looked a bit frustrated and off-kilter all game. Then I checked the box score and saw he had 32 points, 17 rebounds, five assists and three blocks. So I guess he did play well, although at times he certainly didn't look good doing it.

Next: Cleveland heads to Confederated Products Arena Friday night at 7:00 to take on the Magic, whose suntanned fans will happily experience Dewey Howard's superhuman strength, fearsome defense, fearful offense, stupid fouls and bad jokes until at least 2013. (Dewey tries way too hard to be funny, and he isn't.)