



The New York Knicks—winners of four of their last five—entered the Q with Amare Stoudamire back in uniform and a #6 playoff seed still in reach. The Cavaliers—losers of three straight and positioned #5 in the draft lotto— came in with Anderson Varejao officially declared done for the season and inspirational D-Leagueer Lester Hudson unceremoniously released from the squad. ...Naturally, the Cavs won 98-90.

Against the better judgment of all believers in the Church of Tanking, Cleveland (21-41) out-hustled, muscled, and scrapped the Knicks (33-30) all night, jumping out to an early lead and never relinquishing it. And while the Knickerbocker broadcast crew tried to explain away the 52-32 rebound gap as an example of the complexities of working a guy like Stoudamire back into the rotation, objective eyewitnesses just saw a mediocre team expecting a cakewalk and performing a sleep walk. The loss basically seals New York's fate as first round fish food for either Chicago or Miami.

So, getting back to that 52-32 glass domination—whom might you presume paced the Cavaliers in that department, out-leaping Amare, Carmelo, and Tyson Chandler? Got to be Tristan Thompson, right? Nope, T.T. had a decent night (4-of-7, 10 pts, 6 rbs), but it wasn't him. Hmm, Antawn maybe? No, he was more of a quiet contributor (3-of-9, 8 pts, 8 rbs, 5 assts). Ok, how about big ole Samardo Samuels off the pine? Well, Sam had himself another solid ballgame (7-of-12, 15 pts, 3 rbs, 2 blocks), but like everyone else not named Kyrie, he was just living in Manny Harris' world tonight.

The 22 year-old shooting guard, who scored 20+ points a handful of times as a rookie last season, tallied a season-high 19 tonight (6-of-12, 3-of-5 from deep) to go along with a career-best 12 boards-- giving him his first ever double-double. Harris also tossed in about a 40-foot Hail Mary shot with the 24-second clock expiring at one point in the fourth quarter. Good on ya, Manny.

So, for at least one night, Harris helped the Cleveland faithful forget the stat-sheet-stuffing exploits of the dearly departed Lester Hudson, whom the Memphis Grizzlies happily yonked today after the Cavs decided to let the feel-good-story's latest 10-day contract expire. "We'd had just about enough of Lester's shenanigans," GM Chris Grant didn't actually say. "We're trying to align some ping pong balls here, for f%\$#'s sake."



Along those same lines, Cleveland limited its sole marketable commodity, Kyrie Irving, to just 26 minutes in his second game back from injury. But he utilized the time well, dropping a game-high 21 points in a matchup with Mike Bibby (the Knicks are still without their version of Lester Hudson—Jeremy Lin—and Baron Davis was sadly a DNP in his return to the Q).

Leading 45-34 at the half, the Cavs avoided their usual third quarter collapse and actually expanded their advantage to 16 at 72-56, with Irving scattering 8 points around a pair of Harris triples. In the fourth, the lead expanded to as much as 19 before dwindling slowly back to single digits. It never got interesting, however, as Irving sat the whole quarter and Carmelo Anthony confusingly did the same, ending his lackluster night with just 12 points on 5-of-13 shooting. New York's top scorers were Stoudamire and Steve Novak, who added 15 a piece.

With four games left, the Cavaliers remain snugly in control of the fifth worst record in the league, just a game better than Sacramento and Golden State in the dreaded win column. No real need to root against the Wine and Gold at this point, though. The top pick has only been awarded to one of the three worst teams ONCE in the past 7 years. Meanwhile, the fifth worst team has won the lottery three times in the past decade.