

All For One, Four For All

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}

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The Cavaliers are four games into the season, and so far only four of their players have showed up to play so far says John Hnat. In his latest, Hnat breaks down the Cavs roster, identifying those that are pulling their weight, and exposing those who are not.



The number 4.

It's a very auspicious number for the Cavaliers right now for a couple of reasons:

1. They have played all of 4 games thus far. It is probably way too early to start discerning any trends or making sweeping judgments about this season. (*Not that it is going to stop me. If it were, then this column would be awfully short.*)

2. Through those 4 games, the Cavs have exactly 4 players who are contributing. The rest of the team has either been buried on the bench or has made us wish that they would be buried on the bench.

The problem is: it is awfully hard to win games in the NBA when only four players are showing up every night. The Cavs were fortunate to get past a couple of the Association's tougher teams in Washington and San Antonio. They then suffered disappointing losses at Charlotte and at home against Atlanta.

Thus far, the four players who have shown up to play are:

1. LeBron James. Of course. LeBron is averaging 27.8 points (fifth in the league), 9.0 rebounds, and 5.5 assists per game thus far. Amazingly, those numbers seem pedestrian for him. He is definitely leaving a lot of points on the table, particularly at the free throw line (shooting a Shaq-like 58%). But those chinks in his armor are awfully small

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2. Larry Hughes. Signed last year to be the Robin to LeBron's Batman, Hughes is beginning to show us why he was signed to a large free agent contract last year. Without him, the Cavs would not have been close in the Washington game, much less have won it. He has also been the team's defensive stopper. He shut down Gilbert Arenas in the Washington game, and was limiting Atlanta's Joe Johnson until Coach Mike Brown decided to put Eric Snow on Johnson instead.

3. Drew Gooden. Last offseason, it seemed inevitable that Gooden was going to be traded. Does the adage "the best trades are the ones you don't make" ring a bell? Gooden has been crashing the boards this year with 12.5 rebounds per game (third in the league), and he's also adding 16 points per game.

4. Donyell Marshall. He's averaging double digits in barely 20 minutes per night. As promised, he has been more of a force in the interior, instead of being content with camping out at the three point line. His rebounding numbers are down (only 4.3 boards per game thus far); hopefully that is just a quirk that will improve as the season wears on.

That's it. Those are the four players (out of a total roster of 15) who have made any notable contribution to the team this year.

What about the other eleven players? Six of them (Sasha Pavlovic, Shannon Brown, Scot Pollard, Ira Newble, Daniel Gibson, and Dwayne Jones) have had little to no playing time thus far (combined, those six gentlemen have played 15 minutes). It's kind of difficult to lay any blame at their feet when they have been sitting on the bench almost all of the time.

That leaves us with the five guys who have not been pulling their weight thus far: Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Anderson Varejao, Damon Jones, Eric Snow, and David Wesley.

Let's consider the big men (Z and Varejao) first. After I wrote last week's article on [ten questions that will define the Cavs's season](#), I received some questions as to why I did not include Z on that list. My answer was that Z is what he is: an inconsistent player who will represent with 25 and 12 one night, and then be lucky to make double digits the rest of the week. That's the player he has been for years; there is not much questioning it at this point.

Unfortunately, Z is becoming more consistent – consistently underwhelming. His scoring average is way down, to 9 points per game. He's still grabbing almost 9 boards per game, but it seems like a fair percentage of those are tips on his own missed shots. That's not news to any Cavs fan -- Z has been doing his Moses Malone impression for years – but more worrisome is that he is ever more out of position on defense. The Cavs need his presence in the middle in order to take their position among the league's best.

Varejao has been a mystery thus far. He had a very busy summer with the World Championships, and was reported as being tired and having weakness in his legs; hopefully that has not carried over to the start of the season. For whatever reason, he has not had quite the same energy as in his first two seasons, and his numbers (3.5 points and 4.0 rebounds per

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game) show it. Is he still fatigued from the summer? If so, now's the time to rest him. Give him a couple of weeks off. Take the opportunity to see what Scot Pollard has left and to see what Dwayne Jones can do. Last year's playoffs showed just how crucial a healthy Varejao is to this team, and they cannot afford to have him slog through the year.

That leaves us with the three guards – Damon Jones, Snow, and Wesley. Snow and Jones have been longtime lightning rods for fans' criticism; Wesley seems to have had fast-track initiation into that fraternity. Have they been that bad?

The answer is: no, they haven't been that bad. They've been even worse than that.

The NBA's statistics currently list 148 players at the guard position who have played at least one game this season. Among those 148 players, in terms of points scored per game, Jones ranks 114th, Snow ranks 120th, and Wesley ranks 136th.

Those numbers are bad enough, but they do not provide a complete picture of their struggles. Consider that this list includes EVERY player who has played at least one minute (e.g., Shannon Brown is on the list, based on his having played four minutes in the Atlanta game). In other words, the bottom of the list is filled with guys who simply have not played very much this season. But that has not been the case for Snow, Wesley, and Jones. All three of them have received significant playing time.

Snow's 24.2 minutes per game is more (in most cases, far more) than the rest of the players below him on that list. The same is true for Wesley and his 14.7 minutes per game. As for Jones, the only guard who has played as least as much as him and has scored less is ... Eric Snow. (Interestingly, former Cav detritus Kevin Ollie is just above Jones on the list.)

The Cavs drafted two guards this past summer in Shannon Brown and Daniel Gibson. It may be time to see what they can do. (Coach Brown was quoted this morning as saying that Shannon Brown may well get more playing time in the near future.)

Otherwise, the optimism for the Cavs heading into this season may soon fade away.

After all, it's tough to win a five-on-five game when you have only four players.