

Cavs/Thunder: The Good, The Bad, & The Summary

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Sunday, December 21 2008 7:00 PM -

When Ben Wallace drains a jumper for the first two points of the game, you could say it is a sign that it is your night. It wasn't quite that easy, but the Cavs prevailed over a scrappy Oklahoma City Thunder team, 102-91, last night at the Ford Center. The win was Cleveland's third in a row and improved their record to 23-4. They went 3-1 on their road trip. The Anti-Branson, John Hnat, gives us The Good, The Bad, & The Summary of last night's win.



THE SUMMARY:

When Ben Wallace drains a jumper for the first two points of the game, you could say it is a sign that it is your night.

It wasn't quite that easy, but the Cavs prevailed over a scrappy Oklahoma City Thunder team, 102-91, last night at the Ford Center. (*Note how "scrappy" is a euphemism for "they're usually pretty awful, but they actually had a good game.*

You never hear teams like the Cavs, Celtics, or Lakers described as "scrappy".)

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Oklahoma City actually held the lead several times, and was still trailing by only one point late in the third quarter, when a 16-4 run gave the Cavs some breathing room.

As you'd expect, LeBron James led everybody with 31 points (although he isn't quite stuffing the stat sheet this year, as he had "only" four rebounds and seven assists). The starting backcourt of Mo Williams and Delonte West provided a needed boost, tallying 20 and 18 points respectively. Kevin Durant led the Thunder with 26 points, and rookie Russell Westbrook added 24.

It's the NBA. Where "teams with nicknames that sound more appropriate for indoor soccer leagues" happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Starting With The Obvious: What did I like about the game? That it did not involve the Cleveland Browns in any way, shape, or form.

The LeBron Efficiency Watch: A recent story that has gained some traction is how LeBron is having statistically the best season of all time, according to the Player Efficiency Rating (PER) developed by ESPN's John Hollinger. Even though his

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"counting" statistics (points, rebounds, assists) are slightly down this season, James has been significantly more productive because (a) he is making a higher percentage of his shots and (b) he's playing fewer minutes (the PER accounts for playing time in its calculations).

Bron did not do anything to hurt his rating last night. 14 of 24 shooting from the field is a pretty solid game.

(In case you were wondering, he has a plus-minus rating of +16, meaning that the Cavs outscored the Thunder by 16 points while he was on the floor.

That was easily the best number for the team.)

The Cavs Efficiency Watch: LeBron's performance drove the entire team to a strong night from the field, as they shot 55% (42 of 76) as a team.

The Brother Red Watch: West had his third straight high-scoring game, pouring in 18 points on 8 of 12 shooting from the field.

Funny how putting him at his natural position of shooting guard has made him a much better player, no?

No, They Didn't Repeat That Line By Mistake: West was 8 of 12 from field, 2 of 3 from three-point range, had four assists, and scored 18 points.

Williams was 8 of 14 from the field, 2 of 3 from three-point range, had four assists, and scored 20 points.

A key concept in building a team is acquiring players with different skill sets.

You can't just throw 12 athletic kids out there and expect to win, as Portland has done the past couple of seasons.

You can't have a team of greyhounds who like to run and gun, like the Phoenix and Golden State teams of recent years.

You need a mix of players - young and old, speed and size, scorers and "intangible" guys.

Although he has not had the most visible season, Mo has taken this team to a new level because he adds skills that the Cavs do not otherwise have. No other player on the team has Mo's quickness, and he ranks behind only LeBron in being able to drive to the hoop at will.

For years, we wondered what the team would look like with even a *serviceable* point guard, never mind a *good* one.

Now we know.

Play Of The Night: No, I'm not going to pick any of LeBron's dunks (not even the big jackhammer that he threw down in the first quarter, the kind that has the crowd oohing two seconds ahead of time because they can already see what is going to happen); nor am I going to pick any of Mo's blurry-fast drives to the hoop.

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Instead, I am selecting a play by James in the fourth quarter, when he rebounded a ball, and in one motion delivered a two-handed pass to a streaking Williams at the other end of the court. (Williams was fouled as he drove to the hoop; he made both free throws.)

Cavs announcers Fred McLeod and Austin Carr were effusively praising LeBron's pass, describing it as the kind of play Magic Johnson would have made.

Frankly, those are the plays that make LeBron great.

Any six-foot-nine guy can dunk the ball (okay, the jury is still out on Ben Wallace); not many can out-jump everybody for a rebound, see a teammate thirty feet away, and snap him a pass before his feet return to the floor.

Uncle Austin: Speaking of A.C., we have to give him props for trying to build up the Thunder prior to the game. It has to be tough to be an announcer when there is little excitement for a particular contest, or where it looks like one team will blow the other one out of the water.

Trying to find something positive to say about Oklahoma City, A.C. noted that "the Thunder won their last game!"

When you're describing a 3-24 (now 3-25) team, you have to scramble to find the positives.

Imagine a graphic of the Thunder's best features:

- The franchise hasn't moved in **over five months!**
- They have **yet to forfeit** a game this season!
- They spelled "Thunder" **correctly** on their uniforms!

Anything else (aside from having some good young talent)? (To be fair, they did play pretty well last night.

The proof?

The Tarence Kinsey Brigade

did not make it into the game until the final 38 seconds, far less than the official pre-game forecast of "they'll play the entire fourth quarter".)

Did I Mention This Already?: I liked that the game did involve the Cleveland Browns in any way, shape, or form.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

I Suppose It's Progress: Let's pretend it is a year ago. Williams is exiled in Milwaukee, West is on the bench for the then-Sonics.

The Cavs' roster features the likes of Larry He Who Shall Not Be Named and Drew Gooden.

If it had been a year ago, and I told you that the Cavs lost the rebounding battle by a count of 41-32 (particularly on the offensive end, where they were clobbered 14-7), and that they were scorched by dribble penetration time and again, what would your guess have been as to the final outcome? Cavs lose by five?

By 10?

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Well, they won last night by 11 despite those statistics. The Thunder's Westbrook, who recently was put in the starting lineup, is proving he belongs: he dished out 11 assists to go along with his 24 points, and that's Chris Paul territory.

He's a good point guard, to be sure, but the Cavs were a step slow the entire night.

We do not like to admit it, but NBA teams can have off nights. Particularly on the last game of a road trip, players can be tired from too many planes and too many nights in hotels, and it shows in their relative lack of hustle.

That's not an excuse; it's just reality.

That describes the Cavs last night. Oklahoma City repeatedly out-hustled the Cavs, found their way to more loose balls, and generally looked fresher.

(One play in particular:

late in the third quarter, the Thunder missed a shot, but got the offensive rebound.

They missed their subsequent shot too, but the Thunder's Jeff Green ran around Anderson Varejao to save the ball, providing Oklahoma City with a *third* bite at the apple.)

Bear in mind that despite all of those negatives, the Cavs still won by double digits.

Time For A New Word: For some time, I have struggled with how to describe a shot that goes in, but that should not have been taken based on the circumstances. The kind where you say "what are you doing ... nice shot!"

After some discussion with GBS Number One Fan Tom Oktavec, I think we have a winner: a **frankfurter**. We all enjoy hot dogs (to the extent we're not vegans, I suppose), but we really don't want to know how they are made.

So too it is with frankfurters:

we appreciate the result, but the process was not something we wanted to see.

The word **frankfurter** describes the three-pointer that James made to put the Cavs up 24-21 in the first quarter. It came after Green had tied the game with a three-pointer of his own.

Bron dribbled, dribbled, dribbled, and then hoisted.

Yes, it went in, and yes, we as Cavs fans are happy about that ... and yes, James is so hot right now, he could make shots from pretty much anywhere on the court ... but it wasn't exactly the *smartest* shot.

Time For Wondering About An Old Word: On the Cavs' following possession, James dribbled to a spot perhaps four feet beyond the three-point line, then launched another three-pointer, despite there being 16 seconds left on the shot clock.

(He missed it, by the way.)

Announcer McLeod dismissed it as a "heat check";.

Somebody smarter than me is going to have to explain why a "heat check" is acceptable. It is almost expected that a player who has just made a few consecutive shots is allowed to take any wild-ass heave at the hoop the next time down the floor in the name of a "heat check";.

Possessions are pretty valuable things, and it does not make sense to essentially turn the ball over just to prove that a player actually can miss a shot.

(As A.C. would put it, when a player takes a "heat check" shot, he'll miss it at least nine out of ten times.)

Time For A Pet Peeve: More than once in the past, I've complained (okay, *whined*

) about the baseline camera - the hand-held camera from under the basket, at ground level, that shows approximately zero percent of the action.

For some reason, Fox Sports Ohio loves this angle.

Maybe they paid way too much for the equipment and want to see something for their investment.

Maybe their baseline cameraman has pictures of FSO's president with a donkey.

I do not know.

Anyway, in the fourth quarter, LeBron stole a pass near midcourt and had a wide-open path to the basket. Everybody knew it was going to be a breakaway dunk. I did. You did. And so did the baseline cameraman, apparently.

As Bron approached the free throw line, FSO switched to the baseline view.

Again, the baseline camera vantage point is essentially worthless:

it's like saying "if you were an ant underneath the basket, this is what you would have seen";

(Note that FSO did switch to the more conventional camera angle to show the replay; sure enough, the dunk was much more majestic from that view.)

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

It Stays!: Fans of **The Boobie Meter**, the feature that debuted in this column a couple of weeks ago, can rest easy.

[Last time](#)

, I asked whether the GBS should continue running this segment, which ranks the performance of the Cavs' Daniel "Boobie" Gibson on a constantly-evolving scale of female celebrities.

The response was overwhelming:

you readers want your Boobie!

So we'll continue brightening the days of male and alternatively-lifestyled female readers everywhere.

And wouldn't you know it, Gibson returned last night after missing several games with a toe injury. It may not have been his best game - 2 of 4 from the field, and an uncharacteristic 1 of 3 from the free throw line for a total of six points - but it's good to have him back, and besides, it's the holiday season. So we'll rate his effort a [Bar Rafaeli](#) .

It Goes!: Ever spent the better part of your Christmas trying to open your gifts, only to be stymied by that "clamshell" packaging (the sealed, hard plastic shells that are practically impossible to open)?

Apparently so has the CEO of Sony, because Sony has announced that they are going to [stop using the annoying packaging](#) for its products.

It may be a bit too late for this holiday season, but we can all look forward to future Christmases free of Band-Aids and trips to the emergency room.

It Should Go!: Without trying to sound like too much of a Grinch, I could live quite well the rest of my life if I never again heard "Feliz Navidad" or "Rockin' Around the Christmas Tree".

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

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Now that the four-game road trip is in the rear-view mirror, it's time for some home cooking! The Cavs will face Houston tomorrow evening, Washington on Christmas night, and Miami next Sunday, with all games taking place at the corner of Ontario and Huron.

Looking ahead, the date to circle on your calendar is January 9. Yes, we know that you're not supposed to look ahead in the schedule, and that you're supposed to take each game one at a time.

But we're not actually playing, so it is okay for us to look ahead to that date, as that is when the 26-2 Boston Celtics come to Quicken Loans Arena.