Two nights after blowing a 26-point lead in Phoenix, the Cavaliers got a firsthand lesson in how to properly thwart a comeback, courtesy of Russell Westbrook and the Oklahoma City Thunder. In the space of just three possessions, a nip-and-tuck battle turned into an OKC runaway, as Kyrie and the road weary Cavs took another one on the chin, 106-91.

The last time they traveled to Oklahoma City, Cleveland pulled off a jaw dropping 96-90 shocker over a perplexed Westbrook and Kevin Durant, with Kyrie Irving posting a career high 12 assists in the triumph. If you don't remember that particular ballgame last March, it might be because it was the same day we all found out that the Redskins had outbid the Browns for the services of Robert Griffin III, making it difficult to process any outlying positive information. But that's neither here nor there. The point is, it was safe to assume the defending Western Conference champs weren't likely to overlook the scrappy Cavaliers this time around.

In the early going, however, it sure seemed like that was exactly what was happening. With Dion Waiters setting the tone with another long-range bomb right out of the gate, Cleveland (2-5) raced out to an 11-3 lead, quieting the raucous Thunder faithful. Just six minutes into the game, Waiters already had 7 points, and Alonzo Gee had 6 of his own. Meanwhile, Russell Westbrook committed three consecutive turnovers at one point for OKC (5-2), opening the door for the Cavs lead to expand to 17-7. Could another upset be in the works for the wine and gold?

Nope.

An 11-2 run in the span of just two minutes pulled OKC within one, and by quarter's end, the home team had a 27-21 advantage, as the Cavs went ice cold in the closing minutes of the

period.

Cleveland would never lead again, but as has been the pattern for most of this young season, they hung around within striking distance for most of the game against a superior opponent.

In the second quarter, the revitalized Daniel Gibson was again the key contributor off Byron Scott's bench, preventing Durant and the Thunder from running away with it. Gibson poured in 11 points in that period alone, picking up the slack for a second unit in which C.J. Miles has now been relegated to a Coach's Decision DNP (he is shooting 23% from the field on the season), Jon Leuer is playing big minutes in place of Tyler Zeller (and not helping the cause much with a 2-for-8 shooting night), and Omri Casspi continues to be Omri Casspi (1-for-7 with an airball AND a missed dunk).

With starters Irving and Anderson Varejao also mostly bottled up in the first half, it was the efforts of Gibson and an active Tristan Thompson that enabled Cleveland to hang around, trailing 57-46 at the half. In the third quarter, Irving rediscovered his touch and ignited a Cavalier comeback charge with back-to-back threes at the 7-minute mark, cutting the lead to 63-56. The chipping away of the deficit continued slowly but surely throughout the period, culminating in Gibson getting hacked attempting a three-pointer with just 2 seconds left on the game clock. Boobie calmly deposited all three free throws that followed, pulling the Cavaliers within just

three points at 76-73.

And that's when the sucker punch came.

With those two remaining seconds on the clock in the third quarter, Russell Westbrook (a game-high 27 points and 10 assists) heaved a 31-footer up at the buzzer and swished it—releasing the proverbial air out of the Cavs balloon in the process. Before the play, Coach Scott had instructed his players that they had a foul to give, and to use it if necessary. Apparently those directions were a bit too complex to process in the heat of battle.

For good measure, Westbrook then went ahead and stroked two more three-pointers to open the scoring in the fourth quarter, turning a one-possession game into a comfortable 12-point Thunder lead. Yes, Westbrook also racked up his usual collection of bad turnovers (8 in total), but if you still think this guy's pros don't outweigh his cons, I will have whatever you're smoking.

Anyway, the Cavs never got any closer than 9 points in the final period, as Durant (26 pts, 8 rbs) clamped down in the closing minutes as the greats tend to do. OKC also got 16 points from their newest face, Kevin Martin, off the bench, and 14 from forward Serge Ibaka. But as usual, it was on the defensive end that Ibaka really made his presence felt, stifling Varejao (just 6 pts and 8 rbs) and blocking SEVEN Cavalier shot attempts.

Continuing a disturbing trend, Cleveland again allowed an opponent to shoot well over 50% from the field (55%), while their own marksmen managed just a 41% for the night. Kyrie Irving (9-for-16, 20 pts, 5 assts) did most of his damage in the third quarter, and Daniel Gibson (6-for-12, 16 pts, 5 rbs) did his in the second. Alonzo Gee (7-for-17, 18 pts) and Tristan Thompson (3-for-6, 10 pts, 8 rbs) were solid overall. But Varejao's worst game of the year,

combined with the sad state of the bench crew, led to far too many one-and-out possessions.

In a bit of a head-scratcher, Dion Waiters also sat out the fourth quarter and played just 21 minutes on the night, shooting 3-of-6 for 8 points. Boobie Gibson was having a big night, so Scott may have just been playing a hot hand, but one wonders if there was some physical explanation for Dion's absence. As of press time, I got nothin'.

Anyway, the main takeaways from this game: the Cavs remain a fun team to watch, thanks to a mix of aggressive, energetic front court guys and dynamic scorers in the backcourt (and the way Boobie is looking, perhaps injuries really were the only thing holding him back the past couple years). We will likely continue to play teams tough so long as Irving is on the floor. We just aren't likely to win many contests until the likes of Omri Casspi and Luke Walton are jettisoned from this organization once and for all.

Next game: Tuesday, as the "west coast road trip" finally concludes in… Brooklyn. Nice, schedule-makers. Real nice.