After getting out to a great start, the Cavs completely fell apart in the third quarter, getting outscored 25-9 in that frame to squander a 12 point halftime lead. The Cavs were plagued by turnovers and terrible shooting as they came out of the halftime break, and fell to 8-5 on the season. John Hnat checks in with his daily dish.

THE SUMMARY:

It was heartbreaking. Thousands of Cavs fans who know the Heimlich Maneuver watched helplessly as the team choked away yet another huge lead, falling to the Indiana Pacers by a score of 97-87. (The Cavs led by as many as 16 points and went into the locker room at halftime with an apparently comfortable 56-44 lead.) LeBron James had 30 points and Drew Gooden scored 17; they were the only two Cavs in double digits. Jermaine O'Neal paced (heh heh) the winners with 29 points, Jamaal Tinsley added 19, and almost-Cav Sarunas Jasikevicius chipped in with 15.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

The First Half: The Cavs got off to an excellent start in the game. They led by as many as 16 points in the first quarter, and ended the quarter with a 27-12 lead. Indiana shot a terrible 25% (5 for 20) in the first quarter; the 12 points in the quarter was a season low for them.

The Cavs' defense certainly had much to do with it, as they were swarming to the ball and not allowing the Pacers very many uncontested shots. On the offensive side, the Cavs were moving the ball nicely and often hitting the resulting shots, with 12 assists in the half. The Cavs did see their lead cut to 7 points at one point, but extended it back to 12 points by halftime.

Dr. Jekyll Showed Up Tonight: The enigma that is Drew Gooden continues to amaze and surprise us all. Tonight, we got Good Drew: the kind that scores 17 points (many of them on long range jumpers; he has really increased his range this season) and grabs a dozen rebounds. He is showing a knack for contributing at critical points in the game. For example, as mentioned a moment ago, the Pacers has whittled what had been a 16 point Cavalier lead to 7 points, at 47-40. On Cleveland's next possession, LeBron missed a jumper. However, Gooden charged through the paint and grabbed the rebound, leading to two points for LeBron. The next time down the floor, Gooden hit a jumper. The lead was back to double digits, and the momentum had shifted back to Cleveland.

Damon: He's Not Just A Three Point Shooter Any More: Damon Jones provided a nice spark off the bench in the first half, scoring all 9 of his points and dishing 3 assists (all of them on consecutive baskets near the end of the first quarter). The key to Damon's game is that he is not simply standing at the three point line and looking to bomb away. His first basket was a good illustration of this: he took a pass at the arc, the defender flew by him, then he dribbled closer to the basket and hit a 17-footer. Last year's Damon would have launched the three ball, and likely would have missed it.

I Can't Call A Grown Man "Boobie": But I may have to, as that is the preferred nickname of rookie PG Daniel Gibson. Gibson got some more minutes and generally made the most of them, scoring 7 points (including a three pointer and a powerful dunk). He gives the team an offensive dimension that just is not present when some of the other guards are on the floor. And that brings us to…

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

The Second Half: 31 points scored (including 9 in the third quarter). Only 4 assists. 8 turnovers. 7 for 32 (22%) from the field. Are you getting the idea of how futile the Cavs were during the second half, or shall I go on? (I would, but then this column would get one of those "Parental Advisory" type ratings.)

The Donut Offense: Some of the blame for these losses has to be given to the coaching staff. The Cavs fall into a very predictable pattern when they are losing: they launch outside shot after outside shot. That is a Bad Thing for several reasons. First, the farther you are from the basket, the less likely your shot will go in. Second, missed long shots lead to long rebounds, and that can mean fast breaks going the other way. Third, when you are shooting jump shots, you are much less likely to draw fouls, and thus are not visiting the free throw line very often. It's the Donut Offense – everything is outside, and nothing's in the middle.

And so it was again last night. The Cavs have few designed plays for Ilgauskas and none for Gooden, and it shows. (Here are some numbers to consider. In 12 games this season, Gooden has been to the free throw line 42 times, Ilgauskas only 31.) Both Ilgauskas and Gooden have nice arrays of offensive skills. It is about time that the Cavs use them.

The Dead Horse Department: I know I have been hard on Eric Snow and David Wesley this season. More often than not, one or both of them have appeared in the "Didn't Like It" section of this column.

And dammit, that is not going to stop me from putting them there again. They are absolutely killing this team. In nearly 30 minutes, Snow scored 6 points while displaying an impressive array of masonry. Just as we have seen the previous two years, opposing teams are leaving Snow wide open, daring him to hurt them, and he rarely does. Most of those misses were wide-open mid-range jumpers. (To be fair, he was absolutely jobbed on one non-call. Midway through the third quarter, after the Pacers had cut the score to 61-54, Snow received a pass along the baseline and drove to the hoop. His shot was blocked cleanly by O'Neal … except for that matter of O'Neal body-checking Snow. But the refs did not blow the whistle … at least, not until calling a T on Snow moments later.)

As for Wesley, he had one assist and one shot attempt (missed) in approximately 18 minutes of play. That's it.

So the totals for the two players: 47:28 played, 6 points scored on 2-of-8 shooting, 5 assists, 2 rebounds, 4 turnovers. Coach Brown, I beseech you: these guys aren't getting it done. Please look past the "veteran leadership" that they bring (which is dubious; the best kind of leadership is the kind that hits shots) and give minutes to players who won't hurt the team.

In The Spirit Of Thanksgiving: Thanksgiving is a time for giving, for sharing your bounty with others. Somebody has to tell the Cavs that it should not extend to NBA games. The Cavs turned the ball over 19 times. The entire ballgame was peppered with bad passes, dribbles into traffic (even LeBron had the ball stolen from him a couple of times, something you rarely see), palming violations, and guys hanging out in the lane long enough to be charged rent. Not that there are good times to turn the ball over, but the Cavs' turnovers seemed to come at especially inopportune moments. The worst sequence occurred about halfway through the fourth quarter. With Indiana clinging to a 79-76 lead, the Cavs turned the ball over on three of their next four possessions (a bad dribble by Gooden, a travel on Ilgauskas, and a wayward pass by LeBron). Just like that, Indiana had pushed the lead to 85-76, and the game was over.

Thanksgiving, Part II: The turnovers are part of a larger, more disturbing trend: the Cavs are not putting teams away when they have the chance. Frankly, this team should be 12-1 right now. They have coughed away games to the Bobcats, Hawks, Raptors, and now the Pacers – none of whom have any chance of competing for the NBA championship, mind you. We've seen flashes of LeBron's absolute will to win, particularly in the Wizards series last year. But the entire team needs to develop that mindset – that killer instinct that sees an opponent on the ground, and then kicks him a couple of times for good measure.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Philadelphia 76ers, fresh off a 123-108 drubbing of the Chicago Bulls (who are now 2-9 since that opening night shellacking of the Heat, incidentally), come to The Q tonight. As usual, Allen Iverson is leading the Sixers with almost 29 points per game (good for third in the league), so the key will be keeping him near or below his average.