It was supposed to be an easy victory for the NBA's best team on Monday night. The struggling Cavs (3-11) were missing their young superstar Kyrie Irving and the Memphis Grizzlies (10-2) had the benefit of playing at home. The Cavs didn't get the memo. The underhanded team played Memphis tough through three quarters and were within striking distance of winning the game.

The Cavs got off to a poor start and found themselves in a quick 9-2 deficit. It looked to be a long night for the Cavs until Dion Waiters capped off a 12-6 run with a pair of converted free throws. The Cavs took the lead with a Dion Waiters 19 foot jump shot with 1:22 remaining in the first quarter and held onto that lead until the fourth quarter. The Cavs were outscored 22-9 in the last quarter.

Perhaps the Cavs were exhausted from putting up such a tough fight against the Grizzlies. Whatever the reason, it looked like the Cavs were completely incapable of scoring in the fourth quarter unless it came off of a broken play or an extremely lucky shot. The Grizzlies defense did not make things easy for the Cavs and it cost them the victory. Kyrie Irving could have probably made a difference in the final quarter, but he was still sidelined with the fractured left finger. It is a shame that Irving did not get to play because it was the exact type of game that Irving thrived in during his rookie season. If his teammates can help him keep a game close through three quarters, he has an extra gear that is entertaining for Cavs fans to watch.

All was not lost on the entertainment standpoint due to the presence of Anderson Varejao. Going into the game, Zach Randolph and Anderson Varejao were the best and second-best rebounders in the NBA. Although Varejao was pulling down half a rebound more per game

than Randolph, it was not a given that he would have a better performance than the Grizzlie's starting power forward. Randolph has the benefit of playing alongside Marc Gasol and that could have been all the difference in Varejao having a dominant performance and a lackluster one like he is capable of having. It didn't matter. Varejao scored 15 points, recorded 22 rebounds, distributed 3 assists, had 2 steals, a block shot and only 2 fouls in 37 minutes. The Cavalier center was a headache for the Grizzlies big man rotation throughout the game with his constant movement and penchant for going after every rebound.

Dion Waiters looked promising at times. The rookie shooting guard recorded 3 assists and 4 steals for the Cavs. In addition, he had 15 points. What was promising was the fact that Waiters abandoned his three point shot and spent most of his energy driving. On the contrary, he once again had a poor night shooting the basketball. Rookie or not, 5-16 from the field is not going to help the Cavs win games on most nights. More concerning is the fact that Waiters came into the game on Monday night shooting a dismal 38%.

The Cavs mostly played an even game with the Grizzlies. There were not any glaring differences between the two teams in major statistical catergories. Cleveland was called for more fouls (23-15) than Memphis, but the Cavs had more possessions than Memphis (76-71). Perhaps the most noticeable difference was that the Cavs had 41 rebounds compared to the Grizzlies' 33. Going into the game, Memphis was averaging 41.5 rebounds per game. Cleveland, with major assistance from Anderson Varejao, did a fantastic job of keeping the Grizzlies from rebounding.

There were a few small, but highly influential, plays in the game. One of them was Jerryd Bayless converting on a contested jump shot down the stretch. Tony Allen was a pest for the Cavs and he made life miserable for the Cavalier guards as the fourth quarter progressed. Up 4 points with only 16 seconds left, Tony Allen stole the ball from Anderson Varejao. Alonzo Gee was forced to foul Jerryd Bayless, who proceeded to put the game away at the line with two made free throws. The icing on the cake was Dion Waiters missing a layup from 2 feet away from the basket as time expired.

The game was entertaining. Although Memphis was missing Mike Conley Jr. due to flu-like symptoms, it was nice to see the Cavs play an elite team that tough. These close losses are frustrating to watch, but they are infinitely more entertaining than blowouts.

The Cavs take on the Phoenix Suns on Tuesday night in Cleveland. Tip-off is at 7:00 PM.