It was Anderson Varejao Wig Night last night at The Q, and appropriately, Andy sealed the Cavs 104-101 win with a last minute dunk on a nice feed from LeBron. This was another one of those games that was closer than it shoulda been, and the Cavs are clearly still trying to find their groove this season. The indomitable John Hnat is here with his game review, and you will find none better anywhere on the web.

THE SUMMARY:

The Cavaliers held off the Charlotte Bobcats, 104-101, in a closer-than-it-should-have-been game (why does it seem like they are all like that these days?). LeBron James once again approached but didn't quite get the triple-double, with 22 points, 8 rebounds, and 7 assists. Larry Hughes (in his first start since spraining his ankle last month), Drew Gooden (in his first start since doing whatever exactly it was he did to himself in the pre-game warmups last week), and Anderson Varejao all added 16 points. Adam Morrison, who should have sultry saxophone music played on the sound system whenever he touches the ball, led six Bobcats in double figures with 16 points. The victory lifted the Cavs to a 13-8 record, which puts them right on pace for 50-plus wins for the season.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Points In The Paint (Part I): In the first half, the Cavs repeatedly pounded the ball inside to Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Gooden, and the strategy paid off – they took a 61-48 lead into the locker room at halftime. LeBron was adding to the cause as well, with several aggressive drives

to the hoop. When the Cavs attack the rim and press the ball, they score points. When they walk the ball up the court and settle for jump shots from somewhere in the Warehouse District, they don't. It's not a complicated equation.

Next Up: The Ira Newble "Wig Of Braids" Night: The fans in attendance received wigs patterned after Varejao's “ Sideshow Bob ” hair explosion. Their hero responded with another solid game, with 10 rebounds (6 on the offensive end) to go along with his 16 points. Varejao has always been a hustle player; his hallmarks from day one have been scrappy defense and a willingness to take a charge (he drew another opposition offensive foul last night when Charlotte's Sean May plowed into him). What has changed this year is his offensive game. As in, he's actually developing one. In years past, if Andy got the ball more than 10 feet from the hoop and so much as faked a shot, his man would double over in hysterics. "Please, Andy, shoot it! We want you to!", they would say. Not any more. Varejao has developed an outside shot, and some moves to the rim ... and he's also learning to hit his free throws. (He made 8 of 11 last night. I'm not sure that any of the other Cavalier big men, particulary Z and Marshall, have 11 free throw attempts for the season.)

Yes, You Can Make It Here On One Play Alone: Sometimes, it doesn't take much to make it into the "What I Liked" list. One crucial play at the right moment can get you there. And so it is for Larry Hughes, whose steal of an errant pass from Charlotte's May with 27 seconds remaining snatched victory from what appeared to be an ever more possible defeat. Prior to the steal, the Bobcats had whittled a 98-91 Cavs lead down to 98-96, and then got the ball again after Varejao missed a shot. The arena, filled to capacity with fans whose lives are a testament to The Cleveland Experience, shuddered at the prospect of a basket that would send the game into overtime.

What am I saying? You'd think I just moved to Cleveland last week. They were shuddering at the prospect of a three pointer that would give Charlotte the win. The Cleveland Experience is not just about Lucy pulling the football away from Charlie Brown at the last moment; it's also about ol' Chuck falling on his head and suffering a concussion. One that somehow leads to a staph infection after treatment at the Cleveland Clinic.

Anyway, with all of that emotional baggage hanging in the air, Hughes anticipated a pass and snatched it. Just as importantly, after the Bobcats fouled him, he hit both of his free throws. (Note to the FSO broadcast team: that meant free chalupas for all in attendance!) The game was still close – Charlotte's Matt Carroll hit a short jumper to close the gap to 100-98, leaving 18 more seconds of end-game cat-and-mouse – but the tide had shifted.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Points In The Paint (Part II): In the second half, the Cavs forgot all about trying to score from inside, and the game reverted into a jump shot fest. Let's illustrate the point with a recap of the shots the Cavs took in the third quarter during a six minute stretch that saw Charlotte cut their lead from 11 points down to one:

- Gooden, missed jumper
- Hughes, missed jumper
- Ilgauskas, missed jumper
- LeBron, missed runner
- Hughes, made jumper
- Varejao fouled, misses both free throws
- LeBron, missed jumper
- Jones, made three pointer
- Marshall, missed three pointer
- LeBron, missed jumper

That's a 2 for 9 shooting spell, with only one shot (the missed runner by LeBron) coming from within the paint. (During that same stretch, the Bobcats made a short jump hook, two layups, and a dunk, along with a couple of jumpers.) That's how you make a lead disappear.

Speaking Of Disappearing Leads: I would like to present the following facts:

- The Cavs led, 61-48, at the half. With 3:17 remaining in the third quarter, Charlotte had cut that lead to 70-69.
- The Cavs led, 84-73, with just over 11 minutes remaining in the game. Barely four minutes later, Charlotte had narrowed the game to 86-84.
- As mentioned earlier, the Cavs led, 98-91, with barely two minutes remaining. Charlotte then cut the lead to 98-96 and had possession of the ball with less than a minute left.

I will not offer further comment, except to note that my cat also developed sore ribs during this

time frame. Connection? Coincidence? You decide.

Even Superman Looks Like Clark Kent Sometimes: LeBron is going through a slump ... or at least, as much of a slump as LeBron can have. When you can put up 22, 8, and 7 in a game and have people wondering why you had an off night, you're probably a pretty decent player. But LeBron definitely has not been himself the past few games. He had the 15 point game against the Hornets earlier this week, and followed it up with last night's lackluster performance. He turned the ball over six times, including a memorable fumble of a court-length pass that should have led to an easy breakaway hoop. On the ensuing possession, LeBron missed an awkward three pointer. This series of plays, which came with Cleveland clinging to a five point lead with three minutes to go, could have put Charlotte away for the night. Instead, it allowed them to get back into the game one more time.

Fortunately, LeBron did recover in the past couple of minutes with some nice plays to seal the game: a layup, a nice save of what looked to be an errant Hughes pass, and then finding Varejao all alone under the hoop for a dunk.

Dan, It's Your Turn To Wear The Waldo Sweater: After looking impressive in two starts, Dan Gibson returned to the bench last night (not surprisingly, as he was ticketed to return once Hughes was ready to start). Unfortunately, he stayed there most of the night. He received barely 10 minutes of playing time and did not make a dent in the score book aside from making the one shot he attempted. (That shot was a somewhat ill-advised, “what are you doing ... nice shot!” jumper.) Memo to Coach Mike Brown: Gibson is a weapon. Don't be shy to use him.

Incidentally, let's bring you up to date on the Coach Brown Rotation. Damon Jones and Marshall are still entrenched as The First Guys Off The Bench, and Varejao is now to the point where he is playing starter's minutes despite not actually starting. Gibson has definitely pulled ahead of Sasha Pavlovic, Shannon Brown, and David Wesley in the competition for Whatever Minutes Are Left Over. He has probably bought himself at least two to three bad games before his spot in the rotation would be jeopardized. Ira Newble and Dwayne Jones have displayed a nice variety of suits and a wide range of thoughtful frowns as they sit behind the bench.

"Quick! Somebody Find The Duct Tape!": The Fox Sports Ohio Snafu Of The

Night may have to become a regular feature. Last night's winner came with 35 seconds remaining in the first half. Varejao rebounded the ball, drove it up the floor ... and as far as I know, he's still frozen in time on the Quicken Loans Arena floor, as that's where FSO lost its feed. (The game recap tells me that he missed a jumper, so I suppose it wasn't that much of a loss.) More disturbing, I missed 15 seconds of The Scot Pollard Experience as a result (he went in as a defensive substitution for Charlotte's last possession).

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs have yet another home game on Friday, this one against the Seattle SuperSonics. After that will come a round with the divisional leaders in the Eastern Conference, with the Cavs playing at Orlando Saturday, then against New Jersey and Detroit next week.