The Cavs gutted out a tough 107-104 win over the Celtics last night. And while a 3 point win over a bad Boston team missing Paul Pierce may not sound like too much to get excited about, it was significant on two counts. The game was on the road, and was the second of a back to back .. both situations the Cavs have struggled badly in this year. The Cavs used a big third quarter run, capped off by a 83 foot LeBron James buzzer beater to fuel the win. And the trusty John Hnat is here to tell you about it.

THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs gutted out a 107-104 victory over the Boston Celtics last night at the TD Banknorth Garden. Despite trailing for much of the game, the Cavs never let the Celtics get too far ahead of them, and then pulled ahead to stay at the end of the third quarter. The Celtics had a chance to tie the game with eight seconds left, as they were down by two with Tony Allen at the free throw line. But he badly missed the first free throw, and then after he hit the second, LeBron James iced the game with a pair of free throws of his own. The win improved Cleveland's record to 19-12 on the season, putting them a half-game behind Detroit in the Central Division.

LeBron, who hit a dizzying array of tough shots throughout the game (we'll talk more about that later), led the way with 32 points. Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who played a season-high minutes due to Donyell Marshall being out with a neck injury, added 27 points and 11 rebounds. Paul Pierce led the Celtics with … oh wait, there I go again. As alert reader Tom Borish pointed out to me, I am a jackass. He was kind enough not to say so directly, but he did point out that in my review of the Spurs game, I erroneously anticipated another LeBron-Pierce duel, when in fact Pierce has been out with a stress reaction in his foot

. That left Allen to pace the Celtics with 22 points, with Gerald Green contributing 21 points in only 19 minutes, and Al Jefferson adding 18 points and 12 rebounds.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

For Once, "Back To Back" Is Not A Four-Letter Word: The Cavs were 1-7 in the second game of back-to-backs heading into the game. As the crack Fox Sports Ohio team told us during the game, that is one of the worst records in the NBA (not too surprisingly, I guess), placing them among company like the Memphis Grizzlies (owners of a league-worst 0-11 record in this category) and the Charlotte Bobcats. The Cavs' problem in the second night of back-to-backs usually seems to be the second half – they will hang around through the third quarter, then hit a mental wall and be done for the night. (Look at games like the Pistons game two weeks ago, when the Cavs were down by two points after three quarters, then got clobbered 30-16 by Detroit in the fourth quarter; or last Saturday's Bulls game, when the Bulls had that 24 point run starting at the end of the third quarter.)

Last night, the Cavs kept their focus for the entire game ... and whaddaya know, they escaped with the W. Instead of weakening in the latter stages of the game, the Cavs actually got stronger – in the final 16 minutes of the game, the Cavs outscored the Celtics 41-31.

83 Feet: That's the estimated distance of the shot that LeBron hit to end the third quarter. You've probably seen it by now – with one second remaining in the quarter, Anderson Varejao inbounded the ball to LeBron, who took one step along the right baseline and then heaved a two-handed shot that went off the glass and in. The refs originally disallowed the basket, saying that the clock had already expired. After reviewing the play (*note: had this been the Browns, Romeo Crennel would have kept the replay flag in his pocket*), the refs reversed themselves and awarded the basket to LeBron. The basket capped an end-of-the-quarter rally that took the Cavs from a 73-66 deficit to a 82-76 lead in less than four minutes.

3 Feet: That's the estimated distance of the shot that LeBron hit to end the second quarter; and as great as LeBron's court-length heave to end the third quarter was, this shot may have been even more impressive. With time running down, Larry Hughes tossed a pass into the paint. Ilgauskas and LeBron were both under the basket. LeBron, who was facing away from the rim, caught the ball in mid-air, then flipped the ball over his head and into the hoop.

15 Feet: Give the Cavs credit for finding their way to the free throw line time and again. They shot 35 free throws (and made 26 of them, for an acceptable 74% clip). LeBron (ten free throw attempts), Gooden (eight attempts), and Hughes (six attempts) continually drove to the rim and drew fouls.

Big Z: You Can't Stop Him, You Can Only Hope To Contain Him: Mark down another double-double for Ilgauskas, who has really stepped up his game in the past few weeks. He scored 27 points on very efficient 12-of-19 shooting. He hit several jumpers; he made some of his goofy hook shots; he flushed down a couple of dunks; he even contemplated taking a three-pointer. Defensively, while his 11 rebounds look good in the box score, his biggest play may have been his lone blocked shot. With the Cavs clinging to a 95-94 lead with under five minutes remaining, Boston's Delonte West drove into the lane. Ilgauskas forcefully blocked West's shot. For good measure, Z then hit a jumper on the resulting possession.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Yet Again: The Cavs started the game with three turnovers in their first four possessions (Gooden fumbling the ball out of bounds, Ilgauskas traveling, and Snow traveling). They had seven turnovers in the first seven minutes of action. Fortunately, they cleaned up their game after that horrendous start, and committed only seven more turnovers the rest of the game. But losing so many possessions early on kept the Cavs from getting out to a fast start, and maybe taking a commanding lead early on. (The Celtics had six turnovers of their own in the first quarter, so it's not like they took advantage of the Cavs' woes.) The Cavs always seem to have that period or two during the game where they turn the ball over in droves (they had another such "run" in the fourth quarter, when they turned the ball over four times within three minutes). It's those periods that turn easy wins into either much-closer-than-they-should-be wins or kick-the-cat losses.

What Bench?: I'm not going to pound on Coach Mike Brown too much for using only seven players last night. Technically, it was eight; but I'm not counting the three token minutes that Daniel Gibson (note to reader Tom Oktavec: I still cannot call a grown man “Boobie”) received in the first half. After all, Coach Brown won the game with the horses he picked. Kind of hard to find much fault with that.

I am going to gently suggest, however, that he find some way to work others into the rotation. Granted, players like Sasha Pavlovic (who has slumped after a promising early start) and David Wesley (who has slumped after a promising first twelve years of his career) have not exactly given Brown many attractive alternatives; and with Marshall out for the Celtics' game, Brown's choices were reduced even further. But c'mon, Mike, let's really see what Boob .. er, Daniel can do. Let's give Shannon Brown a few minutes here and there. And for God's sake, all of Cavaliers Nation (well, the tiny part that reads this far into my columns) is holding its breath to see whether Ira Newble, Scot Pollard, or Dwayne Jones will be the first to score this season. The last thing we need is to wear out LeBron and Hughes in January.

Thirty Pounds: The FSO broadcasting team had a lot of enthusiasm, bordering on the obsessive, with the thirty pounds that Boston's Jefferson has lost in the past year. They mentioned this fact approximately 6,482 times during the broadcast – every time Jefferson touched the ball, every time he pulled down a rebound, every time they looked up and saw a fan munching on a hot dog. (You had to love it when they pointed out that he dropped ten of those pounds when he had an appendectomy last year. Their interest in Jefferson's weight fortunately stopped short of the flowery descriptions of young men's bodies that you'll see in NFL Draft guides over the next few months, where phrases like “nice bubble” and “thick lower body” and “impressive length” make you wonder if you are actually reading gay porn.

Starting Tomorrow, This Column Will Be “TheGood, TheBad, And TheSummary”: What is a Banknorth? Last night's game was played at the TD Banknorth Garden, so I figure it's a fair question. As Tom Wolfe wrote in
A Man In Full
:

"Then the two words … were fused into [Banknorth] in keeping with the new lean, mean fashion of jamming names together with a capital letter sticking up in the middle … NationsBank, SunTrust, BellSouth, GranCare, CryoLife, CytRtx, XCelleNet, 3Com, MicroHelp, HomeBanc … as if that way you were creating some hyper-hard alloy for the twenty-first century."

(Apparently, the TD people did not get the memo telling them to capitalize the N in North.)

Maybe I don't understand this corporate trend. (Just like I don't quite understand paying your CEO $210 million to become your ex-CEO . $210 million is a lot of hammers.) Maybe I'm nostalgic for the old Boston Garden. Or maybe Swerb is pestering me for this game review, and I need a couple of extra column inches to fill, and that's the best I can do. (It could have been worse. I could have written more about "nice bubbles".) Anyway, I see "TD Banknorth" as another tiny marker on some road to ridiculousness, one that we accept without much inquiry.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs travel to Milwaukee to take on Michael Redd, Mo Williams, and the rest of the Bucks on Friday night. The Bucks are 16-16 after losing to the Wizards; that record, which would get them respectability in any other division (and a commanding lead in the Atlantic), puts them in last place in the Central Division. After returning home to face New Jersey on Saturday, the Cavs will then play their next seven games out west.