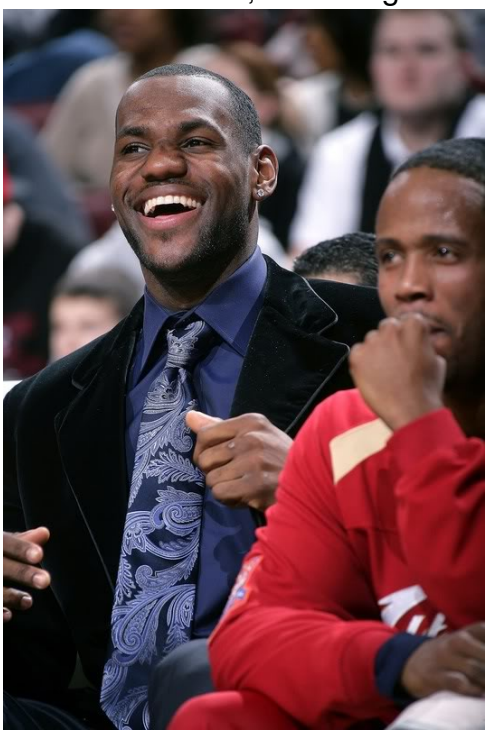
No LeBron James, no problem for the Cavs last night as they stormed back from a 17 point halftime deficit to defeat the Sixers in Philly by a count of 105-97. Coach Mike Brown went with a small lineup for the stretch run, taking Eric Snow and Big Z off the floor in favor of Daniel Gibson and David Wesley. The result was a much needed, hard fought win. John Hnat stops by this Saturday morning with the recap.



THE SUMMARY:

The Philadelphia 76ers came into the game with momentum following their double-overtime victory against the Cavs on Wednesday night. They were up by 17 points at the half. Nothing that the Cavs were doing on offense or on defense was working. LeBron James was sitting on the bench in a brilliant suit, nursing a toe injury.

Yep, the Cavs had the Sixers right where they wanted them.

The Cavs stormed back into the game in the second half and prevailed over the Sixers by a score of 105-97. Drew Gooden led the LeBron-less Cavs with 21 points and 10 rebounds. Donyell Marshall scored 17 points, and Larry Hughes added 16. Andre Iguodala led the Sixers (who appropriately enough had six players in double digits) with 22 points.

Let's just blow right past the unfortunate events of the first half (except to mention that Philly had runs of 14-2, 10-0, and 16-6) and start our game report at the beginning of the third quarter. That approach harmonizes with the Cavs' game, since that's about the time when they showed up too.

In the first few minutes of the third quarter, the Cavs cut the 60-43 lead to 65-58. Zydrunas Ilgauskas hit a jumper, then Eric Snow made a shot, then a tip-in by Ilgauskas, then a jumper by Hughes, followed by a Gooden three-point play, and capped by a driving left-handed dunk by Hughes. Philly temporarily pushed the lead back into double digits (we'll talk more about that later), but the Cavs finished the quarter strong, with Marshall hitting a three-pointer, Hughes slamming home another dunk, Damon Jones turning on the three-point faucet twice, and finally with Anderson Varejao getting a layup on a nice pass from Daniel Gibson. The flurry cut the Sixers' lead to seven points, at 79-72.

Gibson provided the major spark in the fourth quarter, scoring all 11 of his points during the period and playing in-your-face defense on the Sixers' Kyle Korver. Marshall also added nine points during the quarter. The Cavs went with a very small lineup during much of the final frame (with Gibson, David Wesley, and Damon Jones all on the floor at the same time), and were able to pressure the Sixers into four turnovers and several missed shots. Cleveland took the lead for good at 95-94 with 1:18 remaining when Marshall tipped in a missed shot by Gooden, and then put the game away with several free throws in the final minute.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Quod Me Nutrit, Me Destruit: It's not just ink on Angelina Jolie’s runway any more. (With that lead-in, we will set some kind of record for most-clicked link for any article on this site. Relax; it's a PG-13 picture at best.) The Cavs are now 7-2 when they are without LeBron James. Without LeBron to bail them out, the Cavs resorted to … moving around on offense, not standing around with the ball, and working the ball into the post. They shot 50% from the field for the game, the best they've done in quite some time. Of course I am not saying that LeBron holds this team back; don't be silly. But when he is not around, the team responds with more energy and with more guys stepping up to get the job done. Hey, Coach Mike Brown, is there maybe a way to put the two together?

Score Another Reverse Hex: In my review of the Wednesday night game against the Sixers, I suggested that it was time to be "very concerned" about Donyell Marshall. That was apparently all the motivation that Marshall needed to put out an impressive 17-point, 9-rebound performance. (*I also think that I am responsible for red lights turning green when I blink.*) He was one of the few bright spots in the first half for the Cavs, as he was consistently posting up his man and then getting points.

While we're at it, let's also give props to Damon Jones, who scored 15 points (yes, that means he hit five three-pointers) and was part of the Cavs' tougher defense in the fourth quarter. He rebounded nicely from his 0-for-whatever it was performance on Wednesday.

That's *Mister* Gibson To You: Continuing the plaudits for the bench brigade, we need to recognize Gibson for his terrific performance when the game was on the line. Gibson was given the chance to really run the offense in the fourth quarter, and he looked like Steve Nash Junior. Time and again, he drove to the hoop, and his moves led to (a) layups for himself or (b) passes to open teammates after the defense collapsed on him. He also buried a three-pointer with just over three minutes remaining.

Makes The Game Easier, Doesn't It?: The Cavs did not have a great game from the free-throw line, shooting 72% overall (18 of 25). But they hit the free throws when they really counted, in the final minute when Philadelphia turned to the Hack-a-Cav strategy. All four of the Cavs who went to the line (Gibson, Gooden, David Wesley, and Marshall) hit a pair of free throws, and those eight points provided the margin of victory. Nice to see some ice water traveling through the Cavs' veins in that final minute.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Not Consistent In Principles, Conduct, Etc.: That's how the dictionary defines "inconsistent". I have deliberately avoided discussing the first half of the game at any length because … God, it was ugly. As good as the Cavs were in the second half (when they outscored the Sixers 62-37), they were equally as inept in the first half. The Sixers scored 38 points in the first quarter alone, a season high for them. They shot *81%* during that quarter. They were getting fast break after fast break. Coach Brown looked like he was ready to hurl into his little spit-cup. TVs shut off all over the Greater Cleveland area. I actually chose to clean the cat box instead of watch the waning minutes of the second quarter. (To those readers expecting a blow-by-blow description of the end of the second quarter, I apologize. I will say that it's probably best for your blood pressure.)

Overdue For A Change: I have hit my limit. I cannot watch Eric Snow attempt to guide this team any longer. I do not care about his supposed "defensive presence" (where was it during that first quarter, when Philly sprinted to a 22-7 lead during Snow's time on the floor?). I do not care about his "veteran leadership".

As the point guard, Snow is supposed to get the Cavs into their offense. Instead, he does one of three things:

1. He walks the ball up court with the speed of a condemned man being led to Old Betsy. He finally gets to the front court with about 15 seconds remaining on the shot clock, passes the ball to another player on the perimeter, and enters the Witness Protection Program (hey, that could be a nice tie-in with the LeBron/Nike marketing push!) for the rest of the possession;

2. He drives the ball up court on the break, gets into the lane, then veers towards the sideline in much the same way that my four-year-old will steer his remote-controlled car. After setting up camp outside the three-point line, he'll pass to another player on the perimeter, and enters the Witness Protection Program for the rest of the possession;

3. Same as #2, except the opposition defense has parted like the Red Sea. On that great occasion, Snow will drive it to the hoop.

I actually do not enjoy picking on Snow. I think there is a role for him on this team – as a 10-15 minute per night bench player and defensive presence. But especially after last night, when the ineptitude of the team when Snow was playing point clashed so vividly against the offensive flow when Gibson was in the game, the need to sit Snow and start Gibson is clear. Not saying that it will happen; just that it should.

Here's Where The Cat Got Sore Ribs: About halfway through the third quarter, the Cavs had cut what was a 17 point halftime deficit down to eight points. Philadelphia was on the ropes. (*I'm going to use every boxing/"Rocky" reference that I can. It is Philadelphia, after all.*) Ilgauskas fouled Iguodala, sending the Sixers' talented swingman to the free throw line. From there, the following sequence of events unfolded:

- Iguodala missed both free throws (very significant; the guy is an 84% free throw shooter for the season and had just made all twelve of his attempts against the Cavs the other night);
- Somehow, the Sixers ended up with the rebound;
- Snow fouled the Sixers' Steven Hunter as Hunter drove to the hoop. (This was a smart foul; it prevented an almost guaranteed two points and sent to the line a guy who is shooting free throws at a 45% clip. Hey, he'd fit right in on the Cavs!);
- Hunter bricked both of *his* free throws;
- The Sixers *once again* beat the Cavs for the rebound;
- The ball was kicked out to Korver at the three-point line, and Korver promptly drained a wide-open shot to extend the Sixers' lead back to ten points.

I came oh-so-close to writing "Game Over" in my notebook (and came even closer after Iguodala stole an errant Hughes pass on the next possession, leading to a pair of free throws

that he made this time).

Speaking Of Larry: Is he good for one boneheaded turnover a game, or what? The other night, we saw him dribble a ball off his ankle in the final minute of overtime, effectively putting out whatever flame the Cavs still had flickering. This time, it was an aborted drive into traffic with two minutes remaining and the Cavs up by one. Korver stole the ball, and it led to a Philadelphia fast break at the other end. C'mon, Larry, treat the ball like it's one of your children. Sleeping with a football under his arm worked for LaDainian Tomlinson; maybe Hughes ought to go to bed with his … well, you get the point.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs will likely be running a lot the next few days. They play a nationally televised game against Phoenix tomorrow afternoon, and then host the Golden State Warriors on Tuesday evening. Amazingly, despite their recent woes, they still have a winning record for the month of January (8-6) and are only one game out of the Central Division lead.