The Cavs tripped the Los Angeles Clippers last night, 94-77, in a game that wasn't quite as close as the final score might have you believe. Much as the Detroit Pistons displayed against the Cavs on Sunday, the Cavs had a very balanced offensive attack led by Sasha and Big Z with 16 apiece. John checks in with the recap, even mentioning to hit on Walter Herrmann and the astronaut love triangle in the process.

THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs tripped the Los Angeles Clippers last night, 94-77, in a game that wasn't quite as close as the final score might have you believe. Much as the Detroit Pistons displayed against the Cavs on Sunday, the Cavs had a very balanced offensive attack. Sasha Pavlovic and Zydrunas Ilgauskas each led the way with 16 points (Ilgauskas also added 16 rebounds, and some of them were actual rebounds in traffic, rather than the tip-the-ball-to-himself-six-times-in-a-row variety); Larry Hughes added 15; Drew Gooden scored 13 (on only six shots from the floor); and LeBron James (what's he doing this far down in the paragraph?) added 11. Elton Brand paced the Clippers with 21 points, and Shaun Livingston added 19.

The Clippers put up a fight for about a quarter and a half – the game was tied 35-35 approximately halfway through the second quarter – but the Cavs would not be denied. A 13-5 run to end the half (not counting a three-pointer by Daniel Gibson at the buzzer, which was initially allowed, then reversed after the refs reviewed the tape) gave the Cavs a 54-43 lead at the break.

Los Angeles never got closer than nine points the rest of the way, and by early in the fourth quarter, the Cavs had opened a commanding 20 point lead at 82-62. (*One of the great benefits of writing these columns is that I get to use words like "commanding".*) Interestingly, Coach Mike Brown never turned the game over to the Human Victory Cigars, keeping LeBron, Hughes, and Z on the floor until the final minute. (Scot Pollard was inactive for the game, so the move won't draw as much heat from this corner as it normally would.)

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Maybe Coach Brown Knows Something After All: Earlier this week, the rage in the Cleveland media was the Cavs' lackluster offense. LeBron is unhappy! Larry is unhappy! The team is unhappy!

How does Coach Mike Brown respond? With a game plan that emphasized ... defense. And wouldn't you know, it worked great. The Cavs smothered the Clippers all night long, forcing the Clips into 35% shooting from the floor. The double-teams were working, and the Cavs did an excellent job of rotating when the double-teamed Clipper kicked the ball out. The only kink in the whole plan was Gooden, who apparently pissed enough in Coach Brown's Cheerios to get a hook barely four minutes into the game.

How did this defense help the offense? Because the Cavs appeared to make a concerted effort to push the ball upcourt after Clipper misses, instead of settling into the routine of walking the ball into the front court. The result? The Cavs scored 94 points despite an off night from the floor (34 of 83 from the field, or 41%). Shoot closer to 50%, and you're suddenly talking Phoenix numbers.

The fallacy in the whole “defense first” thinking that some commentators propose is that defense and offense are not inextricably tied together. You can play tough defense while still having an open offense. You do not have to shut it down at your end of the floor, simply because you are trying to shut the other team down at their end. Once you've gotten the rebound off the other team's miss, it's time to push, push, push the ball. Don't let the defense get back and get set; hit them while they're still reeling from the missed shot.

Last night, we saw some signs of that philosophy. We also saw a 17-point victory. I would suggest that the two are not merely coincidental.

Z: It was a rare trifecta for the big guy:

- He scored 16 points
- He notched 16 rebounds;
- He looked much less goofy than his counterpart, Bad Hair Day Hall of Fame charter member Chris Kaman (to be fair, Kaman's shorter 'do is much better than his previous “if I grow my hair to my shoulders, maybe you won't notice how badly it's thinned in the crown” look).

He notched a game-high 36 minutes (edging out LeBron by three seconds), and looked very active during that time.

The Other L-Train: Hughes has received a fair amount of criticism ever since he signed with Cleveland (you can check other columns on this site for some of those barbs), but his offensive flurry in the second quarter took the Cavs from “within one basket of being tied” to “commanding (yes, that's *commanding*) double-digit lead”. With the Cavs leading by three (41-38), and the Clippers with the ball, here's how Larry spent the next few minutes of his evening:

- Blocked a shot by the Clippers' Sam Cassell;
- Drove the ball on the resulting possession to the other end, hit a layup, got fouled, and made the free throw;
- Drove the ball to the hoop again on the next possession, got fouled again, and hit both free throws;
- Drilled two jumpers on the team's next two possessions, and only one of them was a

"what are you doing ... nice shot!" type;

- Threw a sweet pass to Z for a layup.

With that surge, the once-close game was suddenly a 13 point Cavalier lead. Thanks, Larry.

It's Clear: I Have To Stay On Donyell: I let up on Donyell Marshall the other day, and he turned in a clunker of a game against Detroit. Sometimes, Donyell just looks too soft out there – like he is content to just cash his checks while he stays out by the three-point line. Other nights, like last night, he gets into the paint and mixes it up ... and the result is a very productive nine points and seven rebounds in 14 minutes. Donyell, you've got too much other game to just hide out at the arc and launch bombs.

Rumors That His Foot Had Fallen Off, While Plausible, Turned Out To Be Exaggerated: Shannon Brown played for the first time in over a month, after recovering from an ankle injury (which sounds much better than the official report of "deep ankle bruise"). He didn't do much in the minute that he did play, other than attempt one ill-advised shot. But it was good to see him out there.

As life-time participants in The Cleveland Experience, we've been conditioned to expect the absolute worst when it comes to Cleveland sports. In terms of injuries, that means that a player who is reported to have an injury is probably much worse than reported. That's how we get Hughes' broken finger requiring multiple, unanticipated surgeries. That's how we get Daylon McCutcheon ("he had minor knee surgery this off-season, but he should be back in September") missing the entire Browns' season.

In that light, I expected that Brown's ankle bruise would sideline him for a minimum of the entire season, and perhaps could be career-threatening. Even after it was reported earlier this week that Brown had returned to practice, I figured there would be some setback that would land him back on the bench wearing the finest suits that an NBA first-rounder's salary can buy. So I was shocked – *shocked*, I tell you – to see Brown on the floor last night.

The Walter Herrmann Watch: As I promised last week in the review of the game against Charlotte, we're going to check in on

My Newest Favorite Player from time to time. Walter (he has already earned first-name status, like LeBron or Kobe or Magic) put up nine points and four boards last night against Philadelphia. He's had one double-digit game this year (an 18-point outburst against Golden State), and he's primed for more.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Nothing that moves me enough to put it into writing. I'd like to see Gibson involved more in the offense beyond the two three-pointers that he drilled to start the game, but we can't be too greedy.

WHAT I OTHERWISE THINK, EVEN THOUGH IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE GAME:

I cannot help it. The story about the astronaut love triangle, while technically having absolutely nothing to do with the game last night, has to be discussed. It's surreal enough that three astronauts (two of whom are the real, actually-went-into-space types) could be involved in such a twisted story. The angle I want to pursue (which makes some sense given the Bacchanalian TheClevelandFan.com staff outing earlier this week, which turned any number of Cleveland-area restrooms into war zones yesterday morning) is that the apparently spurned lover drove almost a thousand miles *while going to the bathroom in a diaper, as she did not want to stop for bathroom breaks* .

At what point did that sound like a good idea? At what point do you think, "geez, I really am going to cut it close on that trip to Florida; where are those Depends"? Wouldn't she have to stop for gas anyway? *Did she eat Indian food before the trip?* Was she strip-searched immediately after being taken into custody, and if so, did the poor officer assigned to the task quit his job immediately afterward? These are the questions we need answered.

(Postscript: NASA is now reporting that it will review its psychological assessment process in the wake of this incident.)

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The rematch again Miami tomorrow night, followed by a Nationally Televised Game (Check Your Local Listings) against the Lakers on Sunday afternoon.