Tick, tock, tick, tock. The NBA trading deadline is today at 3 PM, and the Cavs are at the center of a number of rumors. John gives his thoughts on that, as well as last night's electrifying 86-85 win over the Raptors, fueled by another big performance from Anderson Varejao in the pivot in the absence of Big Z. Andy's great hustle play and ensuing dunk with 15 seconds left was the difference in this one, and John's here to tell us about it.

THE SUMMARY:

86 – 85, Cleveland. After watching this thrilling game, I can't say much more than that. But that would leave the column just a touch short of where it needs to be, so I'd better find my tongue (keyboard?).

LeBron James led all scorers with 29 points (although he did not have his usual stat-stuffing line; he tallied only 4 rebounds and 2 assists on the night). Anderson Varejao, starting his third consecutive game at center for the unavailable Zydrunas Ilgauskas, added 16 points and 15 rebounds. Toronto was led by Chris Bosh with 24 points and top overall pick Andrea Bargnani with 18.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

It's Beginning To Look A Lot Like April: Last night's game was a fun one to watch – and would have been even if the score had gone the other way. Two of the better teams in the conference, neither team holding more than an eight-point lead at any point in the contest, the game coming down to the final possession with a shot at the buzzer (fortunately, an off-balance

jumper by Toronto's Mo Peterson) … it doesn't get any better.

The Most Important Play Of The Season: Cavs down by one, 85-84, with 25 seconds remaining. They haven't scored a point since a jumper by LeBron with 2:50 left. Microsoft’s newest pitchman gets the ball, drives the lane, draws a double team, and kicks the ball out to Sasha Pavlovic, who has set up shop in the right corner. (Quick digression: Please, none of the whining about how LeBron should have taken the shot himself, and how He's Not A Real Superstar because of it. Pavlovic was wide open and normally hits shots like this one in his sleep. Whoops, I'm giving away the ending.) Pavlovic fires the three-pointer, but misses. The ball looks like it is going to fall into Bosh's hands.

That's when Varejao swooped across the paint, grabbed the ball with his right hand, and slammed it through the hoop for the game-winner. Incredible play. If you haven't seen it yet, turn away from the computer for a moment, dial up SportsCenter on the TV, and wait for the Plays of the Day. Oh wait, you've surfed to this column at work while hoping the boss doesn't see you. Silly me. Try to catch it when you get home tonight. It was the key play of the game, and probably of the Cavs' season to date.

He Played Pretty Well The Rest Of The Game, Too: The rebound/dunk by Varejao was the climax for one of the best games of his career. Andy's 16 points was one off his season high, and his 15 rebounds was bested only by his 17-rebound effort against Utah last week. He also drew two more charges, bringing his league-leading total in that department to 52.

I have five words for Cavs GM Danny Ferry:

Do.

Not.

Trade.

Anderson.

Varejao.

So Did That Guy Who Wears #23: LeBron had another strong game, leading us to hope that his slump/tiredness/injured toe-edness of the past few weeks is a thing of the past. He shot 12-of-25 from the field, and most of those shots were either drives to the hoop or relatively close jumpers. (He did launch a few of those off-balanced three pointers that he seems to love. Oh well; nobody said that he had to be perfect.)

Both last night and last week against the Lakers, LeBron has shown that eye for the basket, that sense of "I'm Gonna Drive To The Hoop; Let's See You Do Something About It" that makes him so unstoppable. Just as importantly, he's drawing fouls and making the resulting free throws. James hit all five of his free throws last night. That makes him 23 of 27 from the line since he abandoned his habit of kissing his wrists before each shot.

Call It A "Slightly Above Average Speed" Break: Hands-down winner for the funniest play of the night: the steal and layup by Toronto's Jose Garbajosa midway through the second quarter. After stealing an errant (and I do mean errant) pass from Pavlovic, Garbajosa dribbled downcourt, slowed down, slowed down some more, read a couple of acts from a Shakespearean play, then finally dunked the ball. (Maybe Garbajosa filled up on milk from THC-fed Swiss cows prior to the game?) As a statistical matter, I would argue that the basket shouldn't count as fast break points, as that term implies that the play is somewhat fast.

Scot Pollard Hair Update: Think of this as the Us Weekly section of the column. (Given the

choice between the op-ed page of the New York Times or the "Stars – They're Just Like Us!" section of Us, the average person will leave the Old Gray Lady in the dust, favoring pictures of Reese Witherspoon buying Diet Coke or Ben Affleck scratching his ass.) Anyway, Pollard has changed his hair again. In a tribute to the newly shorn Britney Spears, Pollard has shaved his head. It's definitely a step up from the Mohawk in burnt orange that he's been sporting in recent weeks. The real story, though, is Pollard's beard; it's getting into prime playoff-intimidation shape.

On a somewhat related note, Gooden's league-leading streak of playing with roadkill pasted to the back of his skull now stands at 54 games.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

"A Six Foot Guy Covering A Seven Foot Guy? Sounds About Right": Opposing teams are really exploiting the Cavs' tendency to switch defenders on picks, which inevitably leaves the Cavs with (1) a big man covering the little guard with the ball, and (2) a little guard covering the opposing big man who set the pick. Eric Snow was not put on this earth to guard Chris Bosh. Neither was Daniel Gibson. Yet they both had to guard the Raptors' big guy in the post more than once. They redeemed themselves rather well (Snow stole the ball from Bosh twice, and Gibson forced a turnover too), but let's not let that happy accidental result excuse the scheme.

Later, with Toronto setting up for the potential game-winner with about ten seconds to go, Drew Gooden found himself guarding waterbug point guard T.J. Ford. Ford took Gooden to the hole; fortunately for Cleveland, he missed a layup. (Fortunately for the cat's ribs, as well.) This tendency of the Cavs quite possibly cost them the Utah game last week (unless you think Varejao can defend a quick point guard like the Jazz's Deron Williams), and it almost cost them a victory last night as well.

Larry, Larry, Larry: You find yourself on this side of the column yet again, in much the same way that my three-year-old daughter always finds her way to the Chair of Shame in the corner at least once a day. I don't want you to be here. I want you to do well. But when you shoot 6 of

18 from the floor (and you hit your first three shots, so you ended on a 3-for-15 slump), what choice do you give me? (Hint: You're shooting the ball on the way down again. Release it at the top of your jump, not as you come back to the floor.)

Anybody Want To Win This Game?: Without additional comment, here are some numbers from the Cavs' fourth quarter:

- 15 points scored.
- 7-of-18 (39%) shooting from the field.
- 0-of-3 shooting from three-point range.
- Only four free throw attempts.
- All but one of those free throws were missed.
- Six turnovers, most of the meathead variety (Gibson stepping on the baseline while dribbling, Snow throwing a pass into the second row, LeBron basically handing the ball to the defender).

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs come back home to face the Chicago Bulls this evening. With their win last night, the Cavs are 2.5 games ahead of the Bulls in the Central Division race, meaning that tonight's game will be a key divisional matchup. (That's assuming that the two teams' rosters haven't been strip-mined in advance of this afternoon's trading deadline.) The schedule doesn't get much easier, as the Cavs will then square off against the Miami Heat for approximately the 18th time this month on Sunday afternoon.