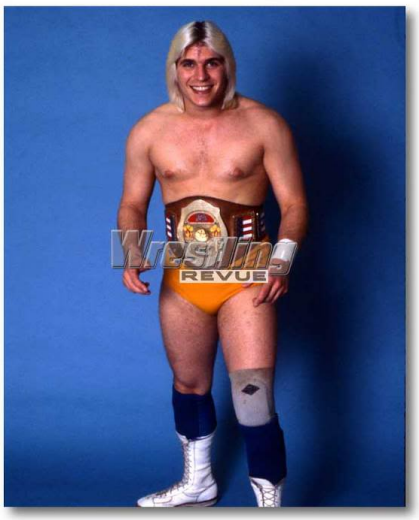
Just when you think this team is on track, they go and do us like that. The Cavs lost 86-81 yesterday, in a nationally televised game that was much less interesting than the final score would have you believe to the Dwayne Wade-less Heat. The game was so bad, it had John clicking over to "Under Siege 2" and also has him making Tommy "Wildfire" Rich analogies in today's column. Enjoy. If you dare.



THE SUMMARY:

Maybe Dwyane Wade was simply holding back the Miami Heat, and now that he's hurt, they can really play their game.

Or maybe the Cavs just played yet another uninspired game, particularly at the offensive end.

Either way, the Cavs lost to the Heat, 86-81, in a game that was much less interesting than the final score would have you believe. LeBron James, as usual, led the Cavs with 29 points. He also had seven assists, which is amazing considering the poor shooting of the rest of the team (the Cavs shot 36% from the field; take out LeBron's 10-of-22 performance, and that number drops to 33%). The only other Cavalier to reach double digits was Larry Hughes; not surprisingly, he took more shots (17) than he had points scored (14).

Shaquille O'Neal paced Miami with 19 points and 11 rebounds, followed closely by former Cav Jason Kapono with 17 points and 11 rebounds. (Yes, Kapono's 11 rebounds tied his career high. That number jumped out at me too, so I had to look it up.)

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

The only thing that I liked about this game (aside from LBJ continuing to return to the strong

player that we've known him to be) was that the ABC announcing team, particularly color commentator Jon Barry, kept hammering on the Cavs' poor offense and mis-use of talent. Definitely a nice change from the fellatorious coverage typically provided on the Cavs' telecasts. (In fairness, look who's signing their checks.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

After The Commercial Break, We'll Be Back With Tommy "Wildfire" Rich: Years ago (OK, years and *years* ago), WTBS used to feature World Championship Wrestling (which in turn came from Georgia Championship Wrestling) a couple of times a week. Invariably, the matches were between one of the main stars and some scrub that the show's producers had probably pulled off the street moments before the cameras started rolling. ("UPS, we've got a package for Ted Turner." "Thanks ... say, can you put on these tights and pretend to be clobbered for ten minutes? There's fifty bucks in it for you!") In other words, the matches had pre-determined outcomes. True, we are talking about pro wrestling ... so that means the matches had really, *really* pre-determined outcomes. The average show consisted of several of these lopsided contests ("hey UPS guy, want another fifty bucks? Put this mask on and go back out there as 'Mr Wrestling'!").

On occasion (and much less often than they should have), the crowd would get restless, and start chanting, "BORRRR-ING! BORRRR-ING! BORRRR-ING!". The chant would become progressively louder, until finally the heavy favorite would fall on the poor scrub and get the three count. Euthanasia never felt so good.

That was me (and you, and thousands of other Cleveland fans) yesterday afternoon. Only we didn't have the ability to distract the referee so somebody could pull a foreign object out of his shorts, clock Shaq, and put the game out of its misery.

The real indication of the game's incredible dullness? I was flipping back and forth between the game (which I felt some quasi-journalistic need to watch every so often) and *Under Siege II* (shown with limited commercial interruption on one of the cable channels). When Steven Seagal (who somehow was not projected to win an Oscar, if you can imagine) is more entertaining than LeBron James, you know something is wrong. (On the other hand, let's see LeBron take out an entire group of terrorists with his bare hands

and the occasional improvised-from-common-kitchen-items bomb! Maybe we should have a giant billboard of Casey Ryback on the building across the street from The Q.)

Check The Side Of The Milk Carton: Why was the game so boring, you ask? Because the Cavs' offense (what there is of it) was missing for the entire game.
Walk ball upcourt, dribble, dribble, dribble, dribble, "five seconds!", desperation heave.
That, in a nutshell, was the Cavs' offense yesterday. (A few times, they mixed in their other play of
walk ball upcourt, dribble, "bombs away!" with 18 seconds left on the shot clock
.)

Coach Mike Brown, the defensive emphasis is great, but you have to score as well. This offense will take you places ... a first round playoff exit for your team and the unemployment line for you. I don't pretend to know the dynamics of the relationship between Coach Brown, GM Danny Ferry, and owner Dan Gilbert. I suspect that a boring loss on national TV to an injury-depleted Heat team (with just Wade out, they become "injury-depleted") is not what Mr. Gilbert had in mind when he bought the franchise.

Maybe Not The *Entire* Game, Not That We'd Know: The Cavs did start the game with a 9-2 run. Those of us in TV Land never saw it, however, because ABC had to play ten commercials after the end of the preceding Pistons-Bulls game (which ended just before the 3:30 start time of the Cavs-Heat battle), and then joined the Cavs game in progress. ABC producers: yes, the Pussycat Dolls are nice to look at (although too siliconed and Restalyned, some might say), but not at the expense of the game.

Speaking Of Those Pistons: If you caught the early game, I couldn't blame you if you thought it was a replay of last week's Cavs-Bulls game. Most of the script was exactly the same: the visiting Bulls take a double-digit lead in the third quarter, the home team claws back to take the lead in the fourth.

Here's where the tape ended (and where the difference lies between a true contender like Detroit and a wannabe like the Cavs): *the Pistons kept the lead and won the game*. They did not let the Bulls regain the lead; they didn't allow any offensive rebounds or other extra possessions; and they made the clutch baskets (most importantly the game-winner by Chris Webber with two seconds remaining).

Why do I mention this in the What I Didn't Like section? Because it was a sign of how much

farther the Cavs have to go. The talent is mostly there (although the point guard position still needs to be addressed), but the effort and the scheme is not.

Things No Person Should Have To See Department: A backcourt of Eric Snow and David Wesley. This brainchild of Coach Brown came late in the first quarter, with Cleveland holding a 19-14 lead. By the time Wesley sat back down, a few minutes later, Miami had taken a 26-23 advantage. I'm not a big tracker of plus-minus statistics, but I'm guessing that Mr. Wesley would not fare too well in that department based on yesterday's performance. I really wanted to call 911 to report this situation; it wasn't really an emergency, but certainly more so than being turned away at a strip club
.

Sad Note: During the game, ABC's Michelle Tafoya confirmed the awful rumors that Zydrunas Ilgauskas's recent absence occurred because his wife, who was pregnant with their twins, went into premature labor. Not that anybody should ever have to go through such a tragedy, but Z (who is one of the league's class acts) particularly doesn't deserve it.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

It's the New Orleans/Oklahoma City Hornets tomorrow night, followed by Dallas (they of the league-leading 46-9 record and current 11-game winning streak) on Thursday night. In other words, the road's not getting any easier. If we're lucky, maybe Drew Gooden can hit Dirk Nowitzki with a steel chair. (Although it's more likely that Gooden would miss badly.)