Make it seven in a row for the Cavs, as they steamrolled the Memphis Grizzlies, 118-96, last night at the FedEx Forum. LeBron James returned from his bout with back spasms, showing no ill effects in leading the team to a laugher of a win over the NBA's worst team. John Hnats back from vacation, and recharged for the playoff drive ... which should be a real fun ride for the Cavalier Nation.

THE SUMMARY:

Make it seven in a row for the Cavs, as they steamrolled the Memphis Grizzlies, 118-96, last night at the FedEx Forum.

This game was not nearly as close as the final score would have you believe. Memphis did take a three point lead (at 11-8) early in the first quarter; that was as good as it got for the NBA's worst team (who came into the game with a 16-49 record). A 20-4 Cleveland run extinguished whatever faint hopes the Grizzlies possessed, and the rout was on.

The Cavs led by 11 (62-51) at halftime, then put the game away for good by outscoring Memphis 35-12 in the third quarter. Cleveland led by as many as 36 points before putting in the Human Victory Cigars (yes, David Wesley and Damon Jones, that is what you have become) and giving the starters an extended rest.

LeBron James, showing absolutely no ill effects from the back spasms that sidelined him the previous night against Sacramento, scored 29 points (in only 29 minutes of playing time) to lead the way. Zydrunas Ilgauskas was also a very efficient scorer, notching 18 points in 22 minutes of action. Overall, seven Cavs scored in double digits. Rookie Rudy Gay led the Grizzlies with 24 points, and Pau Gasol (who looks as though he would be more at home in a Geico commercial) put down *the roast duck … with the mango salsa* long enough to put up 23 points and 10 rebounds.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Just Getting To The Starting Line: I was lucky that I even watched the game last night. The other day, the Barbie machine came out with its latest dose of crack for little girls DVD movie, *Barbie Fairytopia: Magic of the Rainbow*. My daughter, keenly aware of the imminent release of this movie, had been wheedling us for weeks to buy it.

Daddy? Barbie Fa-wey-topia Mageec Rainbow out?

, she would ask hopefully. We'd explain to her that the movie was not yet available. In her three-year-old mind, this explanation would resonate for all of 0.6 seconds, and then she'd ask again.

Daddy? They have Barbie Fa-wey-topia at Target?

(Target, you see, has everything in the world that a child could ever want. Toys, games, answers to life's deepest questions … they can all be found at the house of the red bullseye.)

Finally, the Barbie masterminds released the movie earlier this week. I bought it for her yesterday (had I waited any longer, then Children's Services technically could have removed her from our home for neglect; the fact that we were traveling on Tuesday and could not buy the movie any earlier would not have been a defense). Since then, she has been a zombie in front of the TV. Most days, she cannot put her underpants on correctly; but she sure knows how to hit "Play" on the remote control.

Those of you without small children are reading these paragraphs with a *what the hell is he talking about?* look. Those of you with small children are nodding knowingly, appreciative that I was able to get anywhere close to the TV to see the game.

Excuses? We Don't Need No Stinkin' Excuses: The fourth game in five nights. The second game of a back-to-back. A road game. A game in which the Cavs were already without one starter (Daniel Gibson, although he has pretty much been Wally Pipped by Larry Hughes' emergence at point guard) and looked as though they could be without their superstar.

All of these facts (most of which have conveniently been expressed as sentence fragments) can and have been used as excuses for shoddy play earlier this season. Last night, none of it mattered. The Cavs played with very fresh legs, never standing around on offense, and being particularly active on defense.

One of the markers in the Cavs' development has been their capacity to put away a lesser opponent, instead of playing down to the level of said lesser opponent and making a game out of what should be a reasonably comfortable victory. (*I know, I know. Every team can win on any given night; no sure victories on the schedule; blah blah blah.*) Earlier in the season, the Cavs would have struggled for about three quarters and eight minutes, then put together enough of a run to escape with the victory. Now, they are beating these teams by 20 or more points. It may not make for compelling fourth quarter viewing, but it is what a good team does.

The LeBron Control-The-Game-O-Meter: Not that the outcome was really in doubt, but LeBron took the game over in the waning minutes of the third quarter:

- First, he hit a long jumper from the left side of the top of the key;
- Then he swished another jumper, this time from the right side of the top of the key, and

this one with one foot on the three-point line;

- The next time down the court, he made sure to stay behind the line, and launched a three-pointer;
- Then came a stagnant offensive play, one where LeBron was still holding the ball some 25 feet from the basket with the shot clock turning red. With a defender draped all over him, he pulled up for another three pointer. *Swish*.
- Finally, the *coup de grace*. LeBron dribbled up the right side of the court. He was about to pull up for another three pointer. I knew this. You knew this. Everybody in Memphis knew this. But the Grizzlies were powerless to stop it.

Swish

.

With that, what had been a 23 point Cavalier lead (again, it's not like this streak made the difference in the game) was suddenly a 33 point Cavalier lead.

Look! It's An Open Teammate!: Ever since Hughes became the starting point guard, the entire team has shown a willingness to pass the ball and maneuver for the open shot. The results were evident last night, as the Cavs shot 54% as a team (very good), and had 24 assists (also very good).

It's not just the guards; even the big men are getting into the spirit of sharing the ball and making that one extra pass. Example: in the first quarter, Drew Gooden had the ball about eighteen feet away from the hoop. He set up as though he were going to settle for a jumper, even though his defender was covering him rather well. Many times this season, Gooden has settled for that jumper. This time, he passed the ball to Hughes, who was cutting into the lane. Hughes then pulled up and made the uncontested, much-easier 12 footer.

Similarly, Sasha Pavlovic found himself with the ball at the top of the key in the waning moments of the first half. He dribbled towards the lane, looked as though he were going to step back for a fadeaway jumper … then found a wide-open Ilgauskas with a bullet of a pass for an easy dunk.

Speaking Of The Big Guy: Ilgauskas had an excellent game, shooting 8-of-11 from the floor. His jumper seems to have returned from its vacation, and his post moves are looking strong as well. Perhaps the key is that Hughes really seems to be making an effort to work the ball to Z in the post. When they get the big guy going, the resultant interior threat opens up a lot of outside shots.

Premonition Of The Night: About four minutes into the third quarter, announcer Fred McLeod commented that Pavlovic had not yet attempted a shot. (That statement was not entirely accurate, as Pavlovic had missed a jumper earlier in the game; but that shot had been his only one to that point.) As if on cue, Pavs drove the ball and made a layup. Gotta love it when the announcer calls the shot.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

What I really liked about the game is that I am again pressed to come up with something that I did not like about the game. I could pick a few nits here and there – such as cracking on the end of the bench, which turned a 36 point lead into a 22 point lead in garbage time – but that's why they normally sit.

I also cannot say that I am thrilled with the apparent emergence of Ira Newble as a regular rotation player or with Communication Director Amanda Mercado's frizzy perm. But it appears that both of these items appeared on the radar screen prior to last night's game. (Side note: What were the odds of Newble (a) taking three three-point shots and (b) making all three of them, as he did against Sacramento on Tuesday night?)

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

We've waited three years for this one. Carlos Boozer finally returns to Cleveland this

weekend, as he and the rest of the Utah Jazz face the Cavs at The Q on Saturday night. (Although as Erik Cassano pointed out last month, continuing to hate Boozer gets us nowhere .) I expect that fans will boo lustily when Boozer is introduced, whenever he touches the ball, and quite possibly whenever he breathes; but that the story will merely be a side note to what should be a marquee matchup between the 43-21 Jazz and the 40-25 Cavs.