You don't stop Walter Herrmann. You only hope to contain him. And the Cavs were unable to do that last night, as Herrmann and the Bobcats ended the team's eight game winning streak with a 108-100 win in overtime. The Cavs controlled this game pretty much throughout, and let it slip away late ... and the indomitable John Hnat is here to tell us WTF happened.

THE SUMMARY:

As a Cleveland sports fan, I am conditioned to not being greedy. I hope that my/our teams will win championships; I don't expect that they will. Think of it this way: if you were Pac-Man Jones's mom, you'd *hope* that your little boy would stay away from guns, drugs, and strip clubs when he has 81 grand burning a hole in his pocket; but you'd know better than to actually *believe* that he would keep his nose clean. You would settle for not keeping the bail bondsman on speed dial.

I watch Cleveland sports teams in that same spirit. I *hope* that the Indians will win the World Series; I will settle for meaningful games in September. I *hope* that the Browns will be respectable; I will settle for Eric Steinbach making it to September before he contracts his staph infection.

As for the Cavs, I know they will not win every game. They entered last night's game against Charlotte riding an eight-game winning streak. If you had come to me nine games ago and told me that the Cavs would go 8-1 over that stretch, I would have kissed you. (It would help if you look like, and dress like, one of those Bobcats cheerleaders. Think Hooters girls, except with sluttier tops.) Coach Mike Brown probably would have kissed you. After all, you cannot expect to win them …

…ah, the hell with it. The Cavs should have won last night, and I'm pissed that they did not.

They fell to the Bobcats, 108-100, in overtime. LeBron James had his usual MVP-level game, with 37 points, six rebounds, and six assists. Larry Hughes and Zydrunas Ilgauskas added 17 and 15 points, respectively. The Bobcats (who were without two of their key players, Emeka Okafor and Sean May) got 27 points from Gerald Wallace and 20 from Matt Carroll. (Is it just me, or is Carroll's look borderline Bobby Brady?)

TRY THIS AT HOME: Say the phrase "borderline Bobby Brady" five times fast.

After a relatively even first quarter, the Cavs appeared to be on the verge of blowing the game open in the second. A Sasha Pavlovic dunk capped a 12-2 Cleveland run and gave the Cavs a 13 point lead (39-26) with five minutes to play in the half. Bobcats fans were wondering, *is it too early to leave and beat the post-game traffic?* But Charlotte scored the next seven points and had the lead within single digits at halftime. They continued to chip away at the lead throughout the third quarter, cutting the Cleveland lead to as little as two points.

At that juncture, LeBron essentially said, "enough of *this*", and scored 10 of the final 12 Cavs' points in the period, staking Cleveland to a six point lead at the quarter's end. Cleveland extended its lead to ten points (81-71) early in the fourth quarter, but could not put the game away. Charlotte scored the next eight points to slice the lead to two points, then pulled ahead on an Adam Morrison free throw with 2:56 remaining. The Cavs answered (actually, LeBron answered: a three-point play, followed by a put-back of his own missed shot), and took a four point lead into the final minute.

Unfortunately, it was not the Cavs' night. A foul on Eric Snow led to two free throws by Carroll; a turnover by Pavlovic led to two more Carroll free throws, tying the game and setting the stage for overtime. And in overtime, the Cavs just could not keep their energy going. They scored only six points in the extra session, and two of those were uncontested dunks in the final minute.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

You Knew He Was Going To Bat Leadoff: I don't care if this is a Cavs column on a Cleveland sports-based web site; I am leading the "What I Liked" charge with some words about Walter Herrmann. No other topic has generated more reader response (that's a clever way of saying I've already received two e-mails about him, and the game isn't even technically over as I write this).

Anyway, Herrmann is the Charlotte forward whose visible excitement and energy caused me to wax poetic about him the last time the Cavs met Charlotte. You have to see the guy to appreciate him – the double ponytail, the long limbs flying everywhere, the relentless motor. My words cannot do him justice.

Enough of this garbage; let's get down to what he did last night. He killed the Cavs, that's what he did. Pressed into extended action because of the injuries to Okafor and May,

Herrmann scored a (*drumroll please) New Career High* 19 points including a (*drumroll please) New Career High*
of three three-pointers, and also added a (
drumroll please) New Career High
10 rebounds. He also played some very tight defense, even forcing LeBron into a few tough shots. His biggest play came in the final minute of overtime. Cleveland was down by three and clinging to its last hope; Herrmann destroyed that hope by burying a three-pointer from the left corner.

There's still plenty of room on the Walter Herrmann bandwagon, but it's about to leave the station, so you'd better make hay while the sun is still shining. (*No, I do not have any idea what that means. I do know that Herrmann is developing into a quality player, which makes me feel like the guy who bought Starbucks at six bucks a share way back when.*
)

Probably In The #5-6 Range On SportsCenter's Plays Of The Day: Cavs leading, 65-61, about two minutes to go in the third quarter. Eric Snow steals the ball from Charlotte's Raymond Felton, and passes it up the court to Drew Gooden, who is running down the right side of the court. Running down the left side of the court is one LeBron James. Playing the role of deer in the headlights is Charlotte's Adam Morrison. Morrison cuts off Gooden … who flips a perfect behind-the-back pass to James for the dunk.
Niiiice.

Speaking Of That LeBron Fellow: He had another good night, although it did take him 31 shots to get those 37 points. Most impressively, he went 11-of-12 from the free throw line. His knee bend before the shot still looks very exaggerated and unnatural, but I'm not complaining.

OK, I'll Buy What The Announcers Are Selling: The Fox Sports Ohio announcing crews are always quick to lavish praise on Snow. Last night, I think they were onto something. With Charlotte's Wallace tearing the Cavs for 20 points by the midpoint of the third quarter, Coach Brown put Snow in the game and had him guard Wallace. It was a curious decision – Wallace is a 6'7" pogo stick; Snow is several inches shorter and has
David Wesley
hops. (
Any excuse to link to that video...
)

And wouldn't you know it, the move worked. Snow took Wallace out of his rhythm – most memorably on a play where Wallace tried to post up Snow, ended up falling to the ground, and had to burn a time out to save the possession – and held him to five points for the rest of regulation.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

It's Jeff Rickel's Fault: Every time fellow writer Rickel pens (keyboards?) a piece that praises the Cavs – like he did yesterday – the Cavs are a mortal lock to lose the next game.
You can book it!
, as former Cavs announcer Michael Reghi would say. I plan to bet heavily on whoever is playing Cleveland the next time it happens.

No, It's The Fault Of Sasha Pavlovic's Ass: With 39 seconds left, the Cavs were ahead by two points (94-92) and had the ball out of bounds under the Charlotte basket. The ball was inbounded to Pavlovic, who tried to dribble behind his back. The ball smacked him right in the butt, and led to a crucial turnover.

I'll put aside my seething at players who have showy plays blow up in their faces at the worst possible moment. Has anybody out there kept track of the number of times Sasha has lost the ball when attempting to dribble behind his back? We need the folks at 82 Games to track it. I'm thinking his turnover percentage on that play is in the high 70s at least. On my list of Players Who I Do Not Want Dribbling Behind Their Backs On A Crucial Possession (a list I thought up this very minute), Sasha is second. He goes behind his back, and Cavs fans everywhere go into the fetal position.

(Larry Hughes is first, in case you were wondering.)

No, It's Coach Brown's Fault: We can't blame Sasha entirely; he should not have been in that position in the first place. Despite the obvious confusion by his team when they were about to inbound the ball (Anderson Varejao called a time out, but the officials did not see it), Coach Brown did not call a time out (which would have allowed them to inbound the ball at halfcourt, instead of below the Bobcats' hoop). In the chaos that followed, Pavlovic ended up with the ball, and … well, we know how that turned out.

(In his book *The Last Season*, Phil Jackson wrote about how he sometimes would not call a time out when all circumstances would seem to call for it. He wanted to teach his team to think on their feet. In that sense, maybe Coach Brown's non-time out was a brilliant piece of strategy, a macro-decision that will have effects beyond the game at hand. Not saying I believe it, but if I'm Coach's defense attorney, that's the best case I can make.)

Moments later, the Cavs had the ball with 7.5 seconds and the game tied. Coach Brown did call a time out to diagram a play. Based on the results, we can take "diagram" to mean "he played Tic-Tac-Toe on the white board, then said 'OK guys, give it to LeBron. Go Team!' as the timeout ended." LeBron took the inbounds pass, then dribbled … dribbled … dribbled … and launched a contested 27 footer as the clock expired. (If I'm Coach's attorney on this one, I run screaming from the courtroom.)

Maybe It Was The Entire Team's Fault: As mentioned before, the Cavs were up by ten points early in the fourth quarter, and up by four points (with the ball) in the final minute. Maybe we should just say that good teams don't blow leads like that, particularly to the third-worst team in the NBA, and leave it at that.

Pet Peeves: Now that we're getting to the end of the season, it is time to look at the standings as if they were the JFK Zapruder film. That means it is also time for any number of commentators to say that one team is X number of games behind another team, "but the numbers in the loss column are the ones that count". Fox Sports Ohio announcer Fred McLeod was guilty of this misconception when analyzing the Eastern Conference standings ("Cleveland has two more losses than Detroit on the season").

When both teams play the same number of games, ***the number of wins is equally as important as the number of losses – there is a direct relationship between the two***. A game you win is a game that you did not lose, and vice-versa. Pretending that losses matter more than wins is like flipping a coin a hundred times, then saying that the number of heads matters more than the number of tails. It makes no sense.

While I'm at it, somebody needs to tell Scott Williams that the restricted zone under the basket does not give the offensive player *carte blanche* to attack a defender. (Williams acted surprised when Varejao drew an offensive foul from Carroll although Andy was standing within the half-circle under the hoop. The replay clearly showed that Carroll clocked Andy in the jaw with his elbow.) It's not as though you can blow the defender's head off with a bazooka, and get away with a no-call simply because the defender was within that area of the court.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

No rest for the weary. Dallas comes to The Q for a nationally televised game this evening. This Friday, the Cavs travel to the Big Apple to play the Knicks; that should be good for at least two days of "LeBron secretly plans to leave Cleveland for New York" columns. New York Post, make it so.