They built a lead, held off a fourth quarter challenge, and emerged with the victory. Nice to be able to say that about the Cavs, isn

THE SUMMARY:

They built a lead, held off a fourth quarter challenge, and emerged with the victory.

Nice to be able to say that about the Cavs, isn't it?

Despite having what had been a 14 point advantage sliced to one point midway through the fourth quarter, Cleveland regrouped and pulled out the win, 105-93, at Indiana last night. LeBron James led the way (*shocking, I know*) with 26 points, followed closely by Zydrunas Ilgauskas's 23. Indiana's Jermaine O'Neal led all scorers with 32 points, and Danny Granger poured in 22.

The victory, which increased the Cavs' season record to 43-28, clinched Cleveland a playoff spot for the second straight year. (Not that it was ever in much doubt, but it is nice to have it be official. Especially when memories of the 2004-05 "See You Next Tuesday" meltdown are still fresh in the minds of Cavs fans everywhere.)

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Not Folding Up The Tent: As mentioned, the Cavs did lead by as many as 14 points, and they had several leads in the 8-10 point range ... yet Indiana kept coming back. With about nine minutes remaining, a Granger jumper cut the Cavs' lead to one point (79-78), and Indy looked like it was ready to take the lead.

The Cavs refused to fold, however. Eric Snow drained a jumper, then Sasha Pavlovic made a couple of baskets (including a very impressive reverse layup). A few minutes later, Sasha made another layup, followed by a pair of Ilgauskas free throws and an Eric Snow three-point play. (*Yes, we will discuss that one later.*) A LeBron tip-in with two and a half minutes

remaining capped the 9-2 run, and the game was effectively over.

How Did Free Throw Shooting End Up Here?: The Cavs' free throw shooting woes have been well-documented this year, being a frequent target of “What I Didn't Like” bombs. Last night was different. Last night, the Cavs made 77% of their free throws (they were 27 of 35 from the line), which is quite good by league standards, and terrific by the Cavs' standards.

The real reason we're mentioning free throw shooting here: the Cavs made seven of their eight free throws in the game's final minute, when the Pacers, down by nine, had to turn the game into a foul-a-thon. More than once this season, we've seen that strategy work against the Cavaliers, turning what should be reasonably comfortable victories into nail-biters. Last night, when the Pacers fouled, Cleveland players went to the line and calmly made their shots. It may be a one-game blip, but it bodes well for the playoffs.

Who Are You, And What Have You Done With Eric Snow?: Was it just me, or did Snow look like a completely different player last night? He pushed the ball up the court, instead of strolling it across halfcourt. He drove to the hoop. He made outside shots. He grabbed seven rebounds. He got on the floor after loose balls. (I thought he should have been credited with a tackle on one play, but fortunately for the Cavs, the refs swallowed their whistles and let the action continue.) *He even completed a three-point play.*

I'm reasonable enough to know that this was likely a “three standard deviations to the right” effort from E-Snow, rather than a true measure of his current skills. But I sure like what I saw last night, and hope he can bottle some of it for use in April and May.

Same Question, But With Zydrunas Ilgauskas: The big guy also had a stellar effort last night. His 23 points was just one away from his season high, and it came on a variety of shots. Z's turnaround jumper is really starting to fall, as is his spot-up jumper. When he hits those shots, he really forces defenders to pick their poison. Do you stay in the lane and watch him make those shots? Or do you step out on him, which opens the lane for any number of Cavs who can drive to the hoop?

I won't pretend to know where Z's mind is these days, in the wake of what has happened to him this season. A few weeks ago, he seemed to be walking around in a fog. (Quite understandably.) Fortunately, he seems to have re-focused on the game, and has been having his hottest streak of the season just as we are entering playoff time.

The Return Of Boo … Er, Daniel: For the first time since returning from a toe injury, Daniel Gibson was able to get into the flow of the game, and he responded with some very valuable minutes. His box score is not that impressive – six points, one rebound, one assist, a couple of steals – but this is one of those cases where tiny type on page C4 doesn't tell the whole story.

Gibson was particularly active at the defensive end, which will give Coach Mike Brown no small amount of joy. Several times, when the Pacers worked the ball into the post, Gibson double-teamed the ball, and that led to a couple of turnovers by Indiana. On another occasion,

Gibson came from the weak side to steal an entry pass into the post.

On offense, Gibson ran several fast breaks, and ran them well. He was also the only Cavalier to hit a three-pointer last night, making two of his three attempts from beyond the arc. (For the game, the Cavs were 2-of-13 from three point land.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Introducing The Official Cavs' Camel: They may need one, because they sure do go through some awful shooting droughts during games. Consider these dry spells from last night's game:

- No points scored from 9:48 until 6:17 of the first quarter (during this time, Indiana turned a 6-2 Cavs lead into a 12-6 advantage);
- No points scored from 7:32 of the second quarter (when a Larry Hughes free throw gave them a 38-24 lead) until 5:25 of the quarter (by which time the Pacers had cut the lead to 38-32);
- Only four points scored in the last three minutes of the second quarter, during which time Indiana cut the lead from 12 points to seven;
- No points scored from 11:04 of the fourth quarter until 8:29 (this was the occasion when the Pacers trimmed the Cavs' lead to one point).

No, we can't expect the offense to consistently churn out points. Teams will go through cold spells. The real issue is that during these periods of the game, the Cavs fell into their habit of settling for outside shots; unfortunately, they are not a very good outside shooting team. To make matters worse, long missed shots lead to long rebounds, and that often leads to quick baskets for the opposition.

During these periods, when the offense gets stuck in the mud, it would be great to see the Cavs return to working the ball inside to Z or Gooden, and hopefully get some points from interior baskets.

Department of Redundancy and Repetition: Once again, the Cavs were shredded by a quick point guard. This time, it was Indiana's Jamaal Tinsley who did the honors; he scored 15 points, and more importantly had 12 assists.

Memo To Drew Gooden: You cannot hit a 20+ foot jumper. You just can't. Yes, I know that it's kind of cheesy to rag on you when you had a decent game (he made six of eight shots from the floor); and yes, I know that you once hit a 20 footer to win a game of HORSE. (Actually, I just made that up; it sounded good.) But your shooting percentage drops off a cliff once you go past about 18 feet. Stick to what you can do, OK? Thanks.

Lies, Damned Lies, Fox Sports Ohio: Too often, the sports media misuses statistics to make whatever point they are trying to make. Usually, this comes in the form of "category skimming" statistics, the kinds where they show that player X is in rarefied air because he is only one of three NBA players to average more than 15 points, 5.4 rebounds, 3.6 assists, and one on-camera nose pick per night.

Fox Sports Ohio may have broken new ground last night with their statistic of "Most Assists By Players 6'5" Or Taller". They did this to show that LeBron James is a great passer for a big man. (LeBron was second in this category. Only Houston's Tracy McGrady ranked higher.) Why choose 6'5", you ask? *Because most of the assists leaders in the league are listed as 6'3" or 6'4".* Steve Nash, Deron Williams, Jason Kidd, Baron Davis, Dwyane Wade, Chauncey Billups ... all are in the top 10 in the NBA in assists, and all of them are listed as being 6'3" or 6'4". By arbitrarily restricting their list to only those players who are at least 6'5" (why not 6'6"? why not 6'10"? or why not 6'4", which would have made the results much different?), FSO skewed the statistics to show only that which they wanted to show. Their numbers may have literally been *true*, but they weren't really *accurate*.

Beware, Advertisers, We WILL Check Out Your Site: Early in the game, there was an advertisement for FarmersOnly.com, which purports to be a dating site for single farmers. (I may be presumptuous in saying "single" – perhaps they also cater to the occasional kinky married farmer who wants some group action – but it is an assumption I can live with.)

I can't leave that one alone; that's a setup from The Good, The Bad, and The Summary Gods. So I clicked over to their site. (*Note to those readers who are my wife: I did this purely for research purposes.*) This statement on their home page says it all:

There are basically two groups in America. ***Group one:*** *their lives revolve around four dollar cups of coffee, taxi cabs, blue suits, high heels, conference rooms and getting ahead at all costs in the corporate world. If you fall into this group you're probably on the wrong online dating site.*
Group two:
they enjoy blue skies, wide open spaces, raising animals, appreciating nature and truly understand the meaning of Southern hospitality, even if they don't live in the South. This group makes up America's Heartland. This is not a geographic area, this is a slice of America with good old fashioned traditional values, values that were never lost by the farmer.

The world's a much better place when we divide it into "us" and "them". Right, FarmersOnly.com?

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs will be in New York tonight to face the Knicks, who have lost four in a row (one of those to the Cavs last week), at 7:42 PM. Why 7:42 PM, you ask? Because I live in a world where my wife, who is perpetually running a few minutes late, sets all of our clocks ahead several minutes.

Even better, she sets different clocks ahead different amounts of time. For some reason, the alarm clock in our bedroom is 12 minutes fast, while the clock in her car is "only" five minutes fast. I have asked her about it several times ("asked" is a bit generous; the question usually starts with the words "Why in the hell…"), and she claims that it helps her to stay on time. Apparently, if she thinks it is later than it really is, then she will rush to get ready, and then be on time (or something like that). Only problem is, she knows that the clock is fast, and mentally subtracts those minutes. So she still runs late. And even worse, I am late (unless I remember to do the math on the alarm clock). There's a fine line between the reasons *why* you marry somebody and the reasons
despite which
you marry them...

Not that it matters. Between that little rant and the FarmersOnly.com "research", I'll be sleeping on the couch for at least a week. At least the clock in the family room is accurate.