A day after celebrating their overtime victory against the Bulls, the Cavs fell to the Boston Celtics, 98-96, at TD Banknorth Garden. The loss effectively canceled the win against the Bulls; with Chicago beating Atlanta yesterday afternoon, they now trail the Cavs by just a half-game in the standings. LeBron sat due to "fatigue", and the Cavs got HOSED on a terrible call with 1.9 seconds left. And sadly, this is no April Fools joke.

THE SUMMARY:

A day after celebrating the Cavs' effort in their overtime victory against the Bulls, we get to wonder about the opportunity that slipped away. In yet another disappointing effort against a bottom-tier team, the Cavs fell to the Boston Celtics, 98-96, at TD Banknorth Garden. The loss effectively canceled the win against the Bulls; with Chicago beating Atlanta yesterday afternoon, they now trail the Cavs by just a half-game in the standings. In other words, we're exactly where we were when the weekend started. (That's not literally true, as Detroit has extended its lead in the conference to 3.5 games; but the Cavs were not going to catch them anyway.)

With LeBron James sitting out for this one (initially his ailment was reported as "bumps and bruises", then changed to "knee tendonitis"), Larry Hughes was the Cavs' leading scorer with 24. Sasha Pavlovic scored 17, and Zydrunas Ilgauskas added 14. Gerald Green paced the Celtics with 25 points, and Al Jefferson was right behind him with 24.

We're going to change format this evening. The big pink elephant in the corner of the room – the one that everybody is going to be thinking about until we start discussing it – is the controversial foul called against Anderson Varejao with 1.9 seconds remaining. And that leads us to…

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Let's Get That Pink Elephant Out Of The Way: First, let's describe what happened, before we get to why the refs were wrong the call was so difficult to make. With the game tied 96-96, and with seconds remaining, Boston's Delonte West dribbled toward the lane. A defensive switch led to Varejao guarding West. West reversed his dribble and headed towards the right side of the lane. That in itself is newsworthy; West goes to the right about as often as Dennis Kucinich. West then appeared to slip on the floor, losing the ball. There was no substantial

contact between West and Varejao. At most, West's hand brushed against Andy.

That's not how the crack refereeing staff saw it, however. In their minds, Varejao breathed on West harder than necessary, and so they whistled Andy for a foul. The replays clearly showed the lack of contact. The entire Cavs' team was up in arms over the play. Fox Sports Ohio announcer Fred McLeod burst a couple of blood vessels venting about the call.

In the entire history of the Association, there has yet to be a whistle that was undone; and unfortunately, this time would not be the first. It would be nice if a referee could say "My bad! Keep playing!", but that would be a touch impractical. As such, West stepped to the line, where he dropped both free throws, giving the Celtics their margin of victory.

Make no bones about it: the call was terrible. Had the foul not been called, then the game would have gone into overtime. Seeing as though the Cavs had erased an 11 point deficit in the fourth quarter, they did have the momentum on their side. Even with the game being the second of a back-to-back, and with LeBron out, I would have liked their chances. The call most certainly cost the Cavs the game. Then again…

Should We Even Be Concerned About The Pink Elephant?: I've said all I intend to say about the suckitude of the call that decided the game. The larger issue is "why was the game close enough for a last-second call to matter?" The answer to that one is "because the Cavs sleepwalked for three quarters, and weren't able to overcome it with a fourth-quarter flurry."

Cleveland fell behind almost immediately – Boston rattled off the first nine points of the game, and did not allow Cleveland to take the lead until midway through the fourth quarter. Several times, the Celtics pushed their lead into double digits.

Even in the final minute, the Cavs had their chances to win. An Ilgauskas finger roll gave them a two point lead, at 96-94, with 41 seconds remaining. Boston called a time out, and apparently drew up their "Al Jefferson scores within three seconds" play, because that's exactly what Jefferson did. That still gave Cleveland the ball with 38 seconds, but all they could manage was a missed hook shot by Ilgauskas.

Some will undoubtedly blame the call for the loss. But if you are ever in a position to have one call decide the game, you probably could have won the game much, much earlier.

Maybe He Did Pee In Coach Brown's Cheerios … Or Maybe He's Just Not Ready Yet: Several times recently, I have wondered why Shannon Brown has not gotten much playing time, especially in the wake of a few strong performances several weeks ago. More than once, I suggested a link between Shannon's urinary preferences and Coach Mike Brown's choice of breakfast foods, thinking that only such a connection could explain why Shannon had apparently been re-chained to the end of the bench.

This is barely relevant to the subject, but what does the phrase "piss like a racehorse" mean? Did Secretariat once pull up to water the infield? (If he still won by 20 lengths, then THAT would be impressive.) I would think that this quality would not be desirable in a racehorse. All things

being equal, I'd bet on the horse that could control its urination, as opposed to the one who keeps crossing and uncrossing his legs. And heaven forbid you should ever feed him the oats laced with asparagus! That smell alone could force them to cancel the Kentucky Derby.

Where were we? That's right, Shannon Brown. With LeBron out, Shannon got the start … and played all of eight minutes. "Starter who can't get into double-digit minutes" is one of those signs that you are really having a bad night. Shannon missed his lone shot from the field, committed a cheap foul in what turned into a three-point play for Boston's Jefferson, and otherwise posted a line of zeroes in the score sheet. Especially with LeBron (presumably) returning to action tomorrow night, and with the end of the bench playing rather well (we'll get to that in a moment), it looks like Shannon may be waving a lot of towels for the rest of the season. Too bad, because he does seem to have some game.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

The Bear And The Woods Really Have Moved To This Side Of Town: Cleveland appears to be on a mission to make up for all missed free throws in the final weeks of the season. They made 24 of 25 from the stripe (only an Eric Snow miss blemished the record). Hughes alone made 12 of 12; and when Varejao hits all four of his attempts, you know you're a witness (as opposed to a Nike-endorsed Witness) to history. Cleveland still is last in the league in free throw shooting, and they're still well behind the next-to-last team (that would be Miami, shooting at a .698 clip; before last night's game, Cleveland was at .690), but with the playoffs looming, they picked the right time to start making those freebies.

Blow The Dust Off And Get Out There: The Cavs' fourth quarter comeback was keyed by two of the end-of-the-bench players: Scot Pollard (who scored four points, grabbed four boards, and ended the revolving-door defense that the Cavs' bigs were playing against Boston's front line) and Damon Jones (who scored six points in the fourth quarter). Neither player has seen much action recently (or during the entire season, for that matter). It cannot be an easy adjustment to make, going from playing key minutes most games to being a fixture for all but the Human Victory Cigar moments. Give Pollard and Jones credit for staying ready, for answering when their numbers were called, and for helping the Cavs to almost –
almost
– steal this game.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The final tough stretch of the season unfolds in the next week. The Cavs will be in Minnesota on Tuesday evening, then will have a stretch of three games in four nights against conference foes Miami, Washington, and Detroit.