It's playoff time bay-bee. And by now you should know where to come for your Cavs fix. To John Hnat. Hands down, the best Cavs coverage in existence ... print or internet. John recaps last nights HUGE win, looking at the good, the bad, and giving us the summary. He looks ahead to the playoffs. And quotes Swerbstrodaumus. Sunday, 12:30 ... The Q. It's on.

THE SUMMARY:

Aren't they playing the same game over and over? For the third game in a row, the Cavs won against a depleted, counting-the-ping-pong-balls-for-Greg Oden (whose name may now be spelled "Kevin Durant") opponent. This time, it was Milwaukee wearing the opponent's laundry, as the Cavs dispatched the Bucks, 109-96.

Unlike the previous night's game at Philadelphia, in which the game was relatively close until the Cavs pulled away somewhat in the fourth quarter, this game saw several runs by both teams. The first one was by the Cavs, who jumped out to a 16 point lead (31-15) before most of the Quicken Loans Arena crowd had found their seats. Every Milwaukee missed shot or turnover seemed to lead to a Cleveland fast break – the Cavs had four dunks in the first three minutes or so of the game. Sasha Pavlovic in particular was brilliant during this run, hitting all five of his shots (including three from beyond the arc) for 13 points.

The Cavs then spent the next quarter or so squandering that advantage, as Milwaukee cut the lead to nine points by the end of the first quarter and eventually took the lead, 47-46, in the waning moments of the first half. Cleveland native Earl Boykins, despite being only 5'5", keyed this streak for the Bucks, scoring 13 points and dishing out three assists.

The Cavs clawed their way back to a 54-51 lead at the break, then used a 12-2 run to push the lead back to double digits early in the third quarter. The Bucks refused to go away; and after a three-pointer by the dwarfish Boykins, the Cavs were clinging to a 74-72 lead.

That's when the fun ended for Milwaukee. Cleveland scored the next 13 points to take an 87-72 lead, and maintained that margin the rest of the way. Despite the lead, Coach Mike Brown never felt comfortable enough to put in the Human Victory Cigars (Scot Pollard, Damon Jones, and Ira Newble all drew DNP-CDs).

LeBron James paced the Cavs with 24 points and nine assists. Pavlovic rode that hot first quarter to a total of 21 points on 9-of-14 shooting. Boykins, who technically cannot see over the top of the basketball, led all scorers with 28 points, and fellow Buck/Cleveland native Ruben Patterson added 19.

The victory gave the Cavs a final record of 50-32, matching last season's mark. As you already know, unless you just emerged from your cave, the Bulls lost to New Jersey last night, meaning that the Cavs landed the coveted second seed in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Not A Good Night To Get Stuck In Pre-Game Traffic: The Cavs absolutely lit up the Bucks in the opening minutes of the game. A dunk, another dunk, a three pointer, another three pointer, another dunk, an alley-oop dunk, a tip-in, and a couple more three pointers ... and all

before the halfway point of the first quarter. It was a nice change of pace compared to the Philadelphia game, in which the Cavs fell behind immediately and had to play from behind.

See Ball. Grab Ball.: Before the game, the Fox Sports Ohio crew made the point that Cleveland has the tallest starting lineup in the NBA (averaging 6'9"), while the Bucks have the shortest lineup (averaging 6'2"). Based on these numbers, one might guess that the Cavs would crush the Bucks on the boards.

One would have been very, very correct. The Cavs demolished Milwaukee in rebounding, 53-30. The difference was even more pronounced at the offensive end, where Cleveland grabbed 19 rebounds while Milwaukee managed but four. (Interestingly, all four of those rebounds came in the first quarter. The Bucks did not have a single offensive rebound the rest of the game.) All of those second and third opportunities provided the margin of victory, as the Cavs had 21 second-chance points, while the Bucks had only three.

Post LeBron. Win Games.: When did the Cavs go on the run that would give them the victory? When LeBron started posting up in the paint. LeBron posted up on three of the first four possessions in the fourth quarter. The result? A seven-point Cleveland lead quickly became a 15-point Cleveland lead, as James scored a couple of baskets, and Donyell Marshall got another one by tipping in a LeBron miss.

It's Playoff Time. Look Who Just Showed Up!: Marshall has been a frequent resident of "The Bad" side of this column recently. Despite being six-foot-ten and owning a rather diverse arsenal of post moves, Marshall prefers to spend his time 25 feet from the hoop, where he hopes to get a pass so he can launch yet another three-pointer.

As frequent readers of this space know, I can't stand relying solely on an outside game. The concept is simple: *the closer you are to the hoop, the easier it is to make a basket*. Players who rely too heavily on outside shots drive me nuts. Teams who rely too heavily on outside shots drive me off the deep edge, particularly when they wear "Cleveland" across their chests.

With that background in mind, I was ready to give Donyell another failing grade when his first two shots of the game were a three-pointer and a long two-point jumper (both misses). But a funny thing happened in the second half … he started taking his shots from within the paint. He had three put-backs of missed Cavalier shots, and also had a couple of other layups of his own making. Marshall finished with 14 points on 6-of-10 from the field (and three of those four misses were from three-point range, mind you). If we continue to see this Donyell in the postseason, then the Cavs will be in good shape.

Earning Another Million Dollars Or So: Anderson Varejao: nine points, 12 rebounds, constant hustle. Resigning this guy is going to be one of the major stories/dramas of this offseason. It's a nice problem to have.

In Other News, A Snail Darter Was Spotted Outside The Arena: Eric Snow drove to the hoop for a layup, was fouled, and hit the resultant free throw for a three-point play. I'm telling you, it really happened! I saw it with my own eyes! (Granted, the three-point plat has an asterisk next to it – he bricked the original free throw attempt, but received a second chance courtesy of a Bucks lane violation.)

Sequence Of The Game: (*This is what "Play Of The Game"s want to be when they grow up.*) Late in the first quarter, with the Cavs already leading 28-15, Milwaukee's Charlie Bell drove from the left side for an apparent layup.
Oh no you don't
, said Pavlovic, who went up high to block the shot off the glass. The rebound came to Larry Hughes, who started the break in the other direction. Pavlovic sprinted down the court to the opposite corner, received the ball, and hit a three-pointer. You could almost see him thinking, *damn, I'm gonna get some tonight*
, as he jogged back on defense.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Hey, This Lead Looks Like An Easy Chair: That must explain why Cleveland kept sitting on its leads all night … and consequently, why they kept losing them. They blew two separate double-digit leads …

…TO the Bucks, who had absolutely nothing to play for other than pride …

…AND who dressed only nine players, with several of their stars (Michael Redd, Andrew Bogut, Charlie Villanueva, Brian Skinner) injured …

…AND had one of those nine players (Jared Reiner) leave in the first quarter with an injury …

…AND were forced to give extended minutes to guys with names like “Damir Markota” and “Ersan Ilyasova” …

…WHILE playing in a game that they had to win in order to get the much-desired second seed in the conference …

…AND on Fan Appreciation Night, when maybe (just maybe) they’ll play with a little extra effort to support the people who have cheered them all season.

Sure, I’m glad that the third time they extended the lead to double digits, they kept it there. But against better opponents, you’re lucky to get one opportunity, let alone three.

Cherry-Picked Stat Of The Night: Last night's entry in the "statistics that put the damned lies to shame" category: the crack research team at Fox Sports Ohio compiled the number of games in which teams have held opponents to 97 points or less. Not 100. Not 95. No, it was 97. Of course, the Cavs did very well in this category, ranking second behind (I think; I'm going by memory on this one) San Antonio.

Not coincidentally, 97 points represents the mode on the distribution of Cavs' opponents' scores this season. The opposition scored exactly 97 points six times this year. By comparison, opponents scored exactly 96 points three times, and exactly 98 points three times. In other words, the FSO stat cherry-picked the number 97 for the simple reason that it made the Cavs look like defensive stoppers, whereas another, equally plausible number (such as 96 or 98) would not have made them look *quite* as good. (The Cavs were still one of the top defensive teams in the league; it's not like a different number would have made them look like dogs.)

FSO is hardly the only (or worst) statistical offender out there; the media constantly spits up examples of how a player/team skims over one or more statistical line(s) in the sand, in order to "prove" just how good said player/team is. The effort seems particularly forced when that line in the sand is completely arbitrary (such as "97 points or less").

Speaking Of FSO...: During one of their updates on the Bulls-Nets game, they showed a "highlight" of New Jersey's Bostjan Nachbar faking a three pointer, then driving to the hoop for a dunk. One minor issue: Nachbar stepped out of bounds on the play, so the basket was waved off. Oooops...

Feast Or Famine: And lately, it's been all famine. The Cavs' free throw shooting, that is. 17 of 26 from the line, or 65%, is not getting the job done. LeBron was the worst offender, missing half of his 10 attempts (remember when he seemed to have gotten past his free throw woes?). Guys, you have to get it together, or else you'll lose a critical game that you were meant to win.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

It's time for the playoffs! And it's time for the Washington Wizards, who are conveniently without star players Gilbert Arenas and Caron Butler. (Although as the close game against the Wizards a couple of weeks ago demonstrated, it is no time for the Cavs to think that they will coast into the next round.) Game 1 of the series will tip off at Quicken Loans Arena this Sunday at 12:30 PM.

Now is as good a time as any to share a prediction that Swerb made to me in an e-mail back in December:

Mark this down. Cavs win 49-50 games, pissing people off for not improving over last year. They then go on to smoke their 1st rd opponent, win in the second round, and go into the 7th game of the East finals vs Det or Chi tied 3-3.

50 wins ... check.

Fans upset over lack of apparent improvement ... check.

Smoke-able first round opponent ... check.

Potential matchup against Detroit or Chicago in the conference finals ... check.

Looks like Swerb put 1.21 jiggawatts in the flux capacitor and traveled ahead to June 2007 before he wrote that message, no?