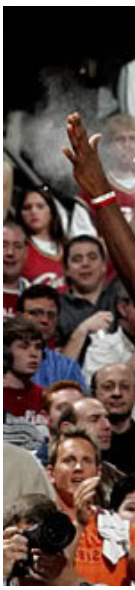
It all starts today, live from The Q. For the second straight season, the Cavaliers will open the playoffs with a best of seven series against the Washington Wizards. In his series preview, Papa Cass gives us five reasons to be confident heading into this playoff series, followed by five reasons we should be wary of things falling apart in true Cleveland fashion. LETS GO CAVS.



Welcome to “Five Reasons,” a feature I plan to write at the outset of every playoff round in which the Cavaliers participate this spring.

It’s a feature written with you, the Cleveland sports fan, in mind. In it, I will give you five reasons to be confident heading into a playoff series, followed by five reasons you should be wary of things falling apart in true Cleveland fashion.

Along with that, I’ll identify an “X” factor that could sway the series one way or the other, followed by an updated “Postseason Fear Factor” grade on a scale of 1 (it’s all good) to 10 (I tee off at 8 a.m. the day after we’re eliminated).

So without further delay, let’s start off, shall we?

(2) Cavaliers vs. (7) Wizards, first round

Season series: Cleveland, 2-1

Five reasons to be confident

1. It’s not quite the Bulls missing Jordan and Pippen, but…

The Wizards scoring attack is mostly declawed without Gilbert Arenas and Caron Butler. And this is a team that relies on scoring to win, not defense.

Not to take anything away from Antawn Jamison, a good scorer in his own right, but the only way he neutralizes the loss of Arenas and Butler is to average 35 points and 20 rebounds a game, and even that might not totally do the job.

The flip side is that a lot of largely-unheralded players like Antonio Daniels will now get to show what they can do, but even on their best nights, they can't replace what Arenas and Butler bring.

2. The Cavs value defense a lot more than they did a year ago.

Even if the Wizards had Arenas and Butler, I still think the Cavs would have a sizeable upper hand. The Cavs have greatly matured as a defensive team since last year, and can now use defense to win games. They aren't a defensive juggernaut by any stretch, but defense is finally something the entire roster believes in as a means to a winning end.

Granted, the effort end of things still needs some work, but even if Washington was coming into this series at full strength, I still wouldn't anticipate a bunch of 114-113 overtime track meets like a year ago.

3. The Wizards can't play defense with any consistency.

Now, there is always the possibility that the absence of Arenas and Butler might force the Wizards to flex defensive muscles they never knew they had, but I doubt it.

Washington is a team built to play like a poor man's Phoenix Suns. They push the game, run at every opportunity and try to win by outscoring their opponents.
Fortunately, the Cavs can play that game, too – and they are discovering that up-tempo basketball and solid defense are not mutually-exclusive concepts.

The Cavs possess the ability to control the game at different tempos. The Wizards can't set the pace unless it's fast because they can't shut a team down at the defensive end.

4. LeBron will play the post, at least sometimes.

What do you do when you are going up against a team that has virtually no inside presence, Etan Thomas the lone possible exception? You beat them up down low.
LeBron James doesn't really like to get the ball in the block and back a big man down, but recently he's been more willing to do it because he knows he can be effective down there.

There will be plenty of opportunities for LeBron to flash his stunning quickness in the open floor, but inside, at 6'-8" and 260 pounds, he could be an unsolvable riddle for the Wizards' finesse frontcourt.

5. A big backcourt.

Larry Hughes and Sasha Pavlovic certainly have their share of faults. Neither shoots with much consistency, neither are terribly strong finishers at the hoop. But one of their main advantages is something you can't teach: Size.

The Wizards, starting bench players in their backcourt, are going to have a hard time keeping

up with the size and athleticism of the 6'-5" Hughes and the 6'-7" Pavlovic.

The jury is still out on which backcourt will have the better offensive series, but when it comes to defense and rebounding, it should be no contest.

Five reasons to be wary

1. The coaching matchup.

Wizards coach Eddie Jordan is one of the top four or five bench bosses in the league. He has a couple years of experience on Mike Brown, and while Brown's in-game coaching tactics sometimes seem detrimental to his team from a motivational standpoint, Jordan seems to be able to get his team to play over their heads.

2. Asleep at the switch.

The Cavs, as we all know, have a long, dreary history of underperforming against bottom-feeding and depleted teams. They're saying all the right things about not looking past the Wizards, but the first couple of games will show the truth.

3. The Cavs are not a jump shooting team, unbeknownst to them.

Hughes and LeBron lead the charge when it comes to short-circuiting possessions with long, lazy jumpers, most of which clang off the rim. Against a Wizards team with a severely-depleted backcourt and soft interior, that's inexcusable. Unfortunately, it's how they operate, so be prepared for noticeable dead spots in the offense which allow the Wizards to get back into games.

4. The refs have developed an anti-flopping club.

Anderson Varejao is going to be a major piece of the Cavs frontcourt in this series. Unlike Zydrunas Ilgauskas, and increasingly, Donyell Marshall, Varejao is a big man who can run in an up-tempo game.

But if he tries too hard to draw charges, he's going to spend a lot of time on the bench in foul trouble. And there is reason to believe that Varejao's reputation as a flopper precedes him. If he ends up on his butt too much, there is a good chance he's going to get tagged with quite a few blocking fouls.

5. The revenge factor.

Arenas and Butler might not be playing, but they'll still be on the bench. And this team is still loaded with players who still have the bitter taste last spring's loss to the Cavs hanging with them.

The Wizards will definitely have an extra helping of motivation coming into this series. The

Cavs had better not underestimate that.

The X-factor: Motivation

The Wizards have last year's defeat as fuel. The Cavs are expected to take care of the Wizards in short order and have the expectations that accompany a high seeding. But they also have that pesky history of giving half-hearted efforts against lesser competition.

In the end, Cleveland's talent and depth should win out over the span of seven games. But even if the Wizards get this series to six or even (gulp!) seven games, it counts as something of a defeat for the Cavs, and there could be a carryover effect to the following series.

Postseason Fear Factor: 3

Prediction: Cavs in five