SWEEEEEP! The Cavs kicked the wounded Wizards to the curb last night in D.C., winning game 4 by a 97-90 count for a clean sweep of the series. And as John notes in his excellent morning column, instead of Batman, it was Robin (Larry Hughes) and Alfred the Butler (Zydrunas Ilgauskas) doing the damage, as the two sidekicks combined for 18 points in the final minutes.

THE SUMMARY:

That was quick. With their 97-90 victory over the Washington Wizards last night at the Verizon Center, the Cavs swept the first round playoff series in four games, joining Chicago and Detroit in the second round.

The Wizards were without Caron Butler and Gilbert Arenas for the entire series, so the Cavs' victory has all the glory of, say, the Empire blowing up Princess Leia's home planet. But injuries are Washington's problem, not ours (for once; the words "staph infection" are still enough to make even the stoutest Cleveland sports fan whimper like a puppy).

The game was quite close throughout, as neither team ever had a double-digit lead (the Wizards pushed their margin to nine points on a couple of occasions; the Cavs' seven point margin of victory represented their largest advantage of the game). The lead changed hands … well, I stopped counting when I ran out of toes, that's how often the two teams traded the lead.

Amazingly, LeBron James did not score a single point in the final six minutes of the game. Instead of Batman, it was Robin (Larry Hughes) and Alfred the Butler (Zydrunas Ilgauskas) doing the damage, as the two sidekicks combined for 18 points in the final minutes. Hughes kept the Cavs in the lead with a series of running jumpers.

In the final minute, it was Z's turn. He made a layup with just under a minute remaining to give the Cavs a 91-88 lead. Jamison had designs of tying the game with a three pointer, but settled for dribbling the ball off his foot and out of bounds instead. On the next possession, LeBron saw Ilgauskas all by himself on the left baseline. He lasered the ball to Z, who pulled up for the jumper. *Swish*. Ballgame. Thanks for coming, Wizards fans, and remember that great seats for the 2007-08 season are on sale now!

LeBron and Jamison led their respective teams with 31 points apiece. Ilgauskas had 20 points and 19 rebounds, and Hughes added 19 points of his own. Darius Songaila scored 16 points in only 19 minutes of action for the Wizards, and Antonio Daniels had 13 points and a dozen assists.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

What A Difference A Year Makes: Here are the total statistics for Ilgauskas in last season's first round series against the Wizards and this season's:

- 2006: 21-49 (42.8%) shooting, 59 points, 37 rebounds, 6 games
- 2007: 30-50 (60.0%) shooting, 76 points, 44 rebounds, 4 games

Last night may have been his best game of the playoffs this season – hell, in his *career* – with his 20 points and 19 rebounds. Washington had absolutely no answer for him the entire series … and if he keeps playing like this, neither New Jersey nor Toronto will, either.

Lather, Rinse, Rebound, Repeat: If Martians had landed on Earth in time to take in this series … then you need to get out more. Martians don't exist; and if they did, and if they somehow made their way to our planet, they'd be captured and quarantined faster than you can say "Area 51". Either that, or they'd be destroying our major cities and exterminating the human race! (Such is my understanding based on multiple viewings of *Independence Day*.)

Anyway, the point is that even a novice observer would have noticed that the guys in the "Cleveland" uniforms tended to end up with the ball after missed shots. For the fourth straight game, Cleveland handily outrebounded Washington, this time by a count of 46-35. Z had 19 boards, as we saw earlier; LeBron also made it to double digits, with 11; and Drew Gooden had eight.

Lather, Rinse, Free Throw, Repeat: Another consistent theme through this series (and a rather unexpected one): the Cavs keep hitting their free throws. They went to the line 31 times last night, and hit 28 of them (or just over 90%). LeBron was the only Cavalier to miss a freebie last night (he made 14 of 17); everybody else who stepped to the line made theirs. Most notably, Hughes made all eight of his attempts. (The broadcasters noted that Larry has struggled with his grip ever since breaking his finger last season, but that he seems to have finally found a technique that works in the Brave New World of his claw-hand.)

Earlier in the season, the Cavs would have made maybe 20 of those 31 freebies, and they would have lost the game. They're doing much better now … and sonofagun, they've won four playoff games in a row. You do the math.

Hit That Pellet Bar Again, DeShawn!: The psychological concept of *variable reinforcement*

explains a lot of behaviors. Gambling. Playing the lottery. A rat in a cage repeatedly hitting a bar in the belief that a food pellet will appear. The basic notion is that if the reward is presented intermittently and unpredictably, then the animal will repeat the behavior much more than if the reward can be obtained predictably.

This concept is also the only one that explains the play of Washington's DeShawn Stevenson. In game 1 of the series, he made 2 of 4 three pointers (though he shot a rim-bending 3-of-12 overall). Thus emboldened, he went on to reprise his 3-of-12 shooting in game 2 (this time missing all four of his attempts from beyond the arc), and followed that up with a 3-of-14 performance in game 3 and a 0-of-8 nightmare last night. That's 9-of-46 (19.6%) for the series. I call upon the Cavs to do the right thing, and vote at least a half a share of the playoff money to DeShawn.

READER CONTEST: The first person to send a picture of DeShawn Stevenson's face super-imposed on a rat's body will win … something. I'm not sure exactly what the prize will be. It may be something worthwhile, like a T-shirt or a liquid refreshment at the next TheClevelandFan.com gathering. It may be little more than my undying gratitude (which is a nice way of saying "nothing"). But at least you'll have that going for you. Which is nice.

The Sound Of One Of Ira Newble's Hands Clapping: Once again, Newble received some playing time; and once again, if you sneezed, you probably missed it. He replaced Gooden for the final 23 seconds of the third quarter, as Coach Mike Brown wanted to make sure that Gooden did not pick up his fourth foul. Keen Cavs observers (i.e., those who read this column) will note that Newble more than *tripled* his playing time from the previous game (seven seconds). At that rate, he'll be up to 146.8 minutes per game by Game Five of the second round!

Incidentally, it may be time to revive a contest from earlier in the season, when Newble, Scot Pollard, and Dwayne Jones all battled to be the last Cavalier to score a point. We can pretty safely assume that Shannon Brown, Dwayne Jones, and David Wesley have about as much chance of being activated for a game as you or I do. That makes it a three-horse race between Newble, Pollard, and Damon Jones. Newble at least has the advantage of playing time; the other guys have apparently had their warm-ups Super Glued to the bench, as they did not get even a second of run during the entire series.

You Can Go Home Again: After three games of watching the national network broadcasts, I went with the Fox Sports Ohio group for Game 4. (I make it sound like I had a choice, when in fact they were the only network televising the game.) And in what I take as a "thank you" for me returning as a viewer, the FSO folks gave us an announcing team of Fred McLeod, Austin Carr, AND Scott Williams. First, it's the Browns getting two of the top five talents in the draft, and now this!

With three strong contenders, I'm having a tough time determining my favorite line of the broadcast. I've counted and recounted the votes, and we still have a tie:

1. Early in the second quarter, Daniel Gibson drained a three-pointer to cut an 32-24 Washington lead to 32-27. Washington took a time out. In the return to the broadcast, McLeod observed that "the Cavs have cut the lead from eight points to five, thanks in part to Daniel Gibson." Uh, Fred, they cut the lead thanks *entirely* to Daniel Gibson.
2. During the third quarter, Carr (obviously impressed by the level of intensity by both teams) pointed out that "this is a playoff type game." Why, yes, A.C., it is. Glad to have you with us tonight. (In other news, they played the game with a "basketball type ball.")

I've strayed enough. I am staying with the local broadcasts the rest of the way. (Unless the national broadcast is a TNT one with Steve Kerr.) (Or unless the national broadcast is in high definition.) (Or unless I am too lazy to change the channel – a definite possibility.)

(Aside to Mitch Cyrus : either congratulations to you for getting the announcers to repeat one of your posts on air, or be warned that someone has grabbed your DawgsOfWar moniker.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

One Step Up, Two Steps Back: If you've ever played a team sport, you have probably faced the dilemma of having your team win despite you doing everything short of point shaving. Maybe you've played softball, and had your team win even though you went 0-for-5 and said *ole!* to every ball hit in your direction. Or if football was your sport, your team won although you dropped several passes and had an inopportune penalty or two. (*I have just described Dennis Northcutt's career. Except for the winning part, that is.*)

It is this zone where Sasha Pavlovic finds himself this morning. The line for Pavlovic for the game: 0-4 shooting, 0-2 from three point range, one rebound, three assists, three fouls, two turnovers, 14 minutes played, and one major callous on his ass from sitting on the bench for most of the second half. His outside shot isn't falling (except for the last minute of Game Three … at least he picked a good time to hit that one), and his drives to the hoop result in:

1. An offensive foul;
2. A traveling violation; or
3. A blocked shot (Sasha may be forced to change his last name to " Chievous "; at the least, he'll need to wear at least one pointless Band-Aid every game).

Sasha has taken some major steps forward this season; a temporary (we hope) slide is not only predictable, but perhaps inevitable. Hopefully he can do a memory dump of the past week and a half, and start the second round anew.

And Beyonce Hogs The Covers, Too: Pointing out anything negative about the Cavs' performance is silly on one level – they did just sweep the series, after all. As always-quotable reader Thomas Oktavec (who really goes under the name "Tom Oktavec", but has requested that I change his name so that he not show up in Google searches) says, it is like complaining about Scarlett Johannson snoring after the threesome you just had with her and Beyonce.

With that as a backdrop: Washington turned the ball over all of 35 times the entire series. That's very low, especially for a team that is without two of its major ball-handlers. They deserve props for taking care of the ball … but Cleveland could stand to step up the pressure a bit on defense, in order to create more fast break opportunities. Granted, Coach Brown will never endorse a defensive strategy based on gambling (*he* would *never* touch the pellet bar) … but trying to generate some more easy baskets is not a bad thing.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Round Two against the Nets winner of the New Jersey – Toronto series, which New Jersey currently leads three games to one. Game Five of that series will take place tomorrow night north of the border. Should that series go the full seven games, it will not end until Sunday, which means that the Cavs could have more than a full week to rest and prepare for the next step.