What a basketball game. The atmosphere was absolutely electric at The Q for this one last night, and the Cavs came away with a huge 88-82 win that brought them back into this series. LeBron had a big game, full of big shots, and ended with 32, 9, and 9. And Daniel "Boobie" Gibson, relegating Larry Hughes to the bench for most of the second half, had a slew of big shots and clutch defensive plays. John Hnat reviews the thrilling win for us. TUESDAY NIGHT, game four. Let's even this thing up.

THE SUMMARY:

The Cavs took an early lead, lost it in the third quarter, and came up just short to the Detroit Pistons, 79-76, in the latest game of their best-of-seven…

Whoops! Understandable mistake, seeing as though the first two games of this series were near-perfect copies. The Cavs DID take an early lead (for the third straight game, they held the lead at halftime) … and they DID lose that lead in the third quarter (as Detroit yet again turned their game up a notch after the break) … but they rallied to win a thrilling 88-82 game last night at Quicken Loans Arena.

Cleveland took the lead for good on a resounding LeBron James dunk that made the score 70-68 with just over seven minutes remaining. (James was fouled on the play; alas, he missed the free throw.) A minute later, Ilgauskas swished a face-up jumper. Cleveland extended the lead to eight points with 2:33 remaining thanks to a James three-pointer.

Needless to say, the Pistons did not roll over and play dead. Chauncey Billups scored on a layup … then Richard Hamilton hit a pair of free throws … and the home crowd shivered as Detroit now trailed by only four with almost a minute and a half remaining. After a couple of misses by Drew Gooden, the Pistons sliced the lead to two, thanks to a Billups fallaway shot that had Michael Reghi, wherever he was, mumbling about “degree of difficulty.”

A superstar is supposed to make clutch shots in the final moments of games. LeBron did exactly that, hitting a jumper with 16 seconds left to push the lead back to four. On Detroit’s next possession, Tayshaun Prince missed a three-pointer; Gooden claimed the rebound; and the game was effectively over. (Gooden made a pair of free throws to provide the final margin of victory.)

LeBron almost earned a triple-double, as he scored a game-high 32 points, and added nine rebounds and nine assists. Ilgauskas backed up LeBron with 16 points of his own. For Detroit, Rasheed Wallace led the way with 16 points, and Chris Webber added 15 despite being plagued by foul trouble for most of the game.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Guys, You'll Have To Get Yourselves Involved: One of LeBron's good news/bad news traits is that he often does not take many shots in the first quarter, preferring to get his teammates involved in the offense. As the ultimate Unselfish Star, James likes to get the bigs working in the post, and maybe hit the guards on a cut or two, before he starts hoisting his own shots.

Last night, he told that version of LeBron to take a seat. He scored the first two points of the game on a powerful drive capped with a rim-bending dunk. He scored on another dunk moments later (thanks to a Sasha Pavlovic feed on a fast break), and followed it up by getting fouled on another shot attempt. He finished the quarter with seven points (and still managed two assists, so he did help his teammates out as well). Sometimes, even the ultimate Unselfish Star has to look out for himself.

Guys, I Think I'll Keep Shooting, If You Don't Mind: Other than a passive third quarter, when he attempted only one shot and scored a single point, LeBron continued to shoot and shoot often, with good results. He especially had a knack for hitting the big shots – the dunk to give Cleveland the lead for good; the off-balanced fadeaway (a true "what are you doing … nice shot!") that gave the Cavs a 79-73 edge; the three-pointer to extend the lead to eight.

Now that I think about it, the best part of the game is that LeBron left no room for any of his ankle-biting critics to disparage his performance. He carried the team when they needed to be carried, and emerged with the win. It's kind of hard to criticize him for that.

Excellent Coaching Decisions, Part I: Coach Mike Brown has nearly completely shut down the Pistons' backcourt of Rip Hamilton and Chauncey Billups in this series (aside from Hamilton's strong showing in Game One). Last

night, Billups was 4-of-14 from the field en route to 13 points, and Hamilton scored only 7 points on 2-of-8 shooting. Cleveland has done an excellent job of not allowing those guys to hurt them, and to force the Pistons' big men to carry the weight.

Even more impressively, they eliminated their mistakes from Game Two, In that game, they were so keyed on stopping Billups and Hamilton, they often left other Pistons (especially the ones named "Jason Maxiell") wide open under the hoop. Last night, they continued the tough defense on the Pistons' guards while not allowing any of the easy baskets from other players. They made the adjustment, and that's why we're happy about a Cavaliers' win this morning.

Excellent Coaching Decisions, Part II (The Boobie Edition): In the fourth quarter, Coach Brown eschewed Larry Hughes (who actually had a perfect night shooting – he made both of his attempts from the field and a pair of free throws) in favor of rookie Daniel "Boobie" Gibson. (
Yes, I am calling him "Boobie" now. I am too tired to fight that fight any longer.)

Gibson proved Coach Brown to be a friggin' genius. He hit a pair of three-pointers (including the all-important "get us past 76 points" shot that made the score 77-71). He stole the ball from Prince, who was headed to the hoop for an almost-certain layup, with Cleveland clinging to an 81-76 lead. He then grabbed a critical offensive rebound with just over a minute left.

Burning The Ground … A-One, A-Two … : I admit it, I like the Old Spice commercials with the campy, "try the veal!"-level cover of 80s staple "Hungry Like The Wolf." Even if the cologne (
cologne? I think it's cologne
) comes in a bottle that was ordered straight from Phallics, Inc. Normally, products of that size and shape require no fewer than two D-cell batteries (not included).

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

The Word Is "CAT"; We'll Spot You The "C" And The "A":
Gooden has never been accused of being the league's most cerebral player. All too often, he'll shoot off a string of brain flatulence that hurts the team. Maybe it's missing defensive rotations (like in Game Two, when Detroit's Jason Maxiell camped out in the lane for a string of easy hoops thanks to missed assignments). Maybe it's falling in love with his 18-foot jumper when he is 20 feet away from the hoop. Maybe it's that he saw somebody wearing a fur wrap, and has spent the entire season trying to grow his own.

Last night, it was a string of boneheaded actions in the third quarter, which conveniently occurred just as the Cavs were establishing a lead. After Detroit's Wallace splashed a three pointer to cut the Cleveland lead to 53-48, Gooden turned the ball over at the other end. (*No, we're not to the boneheaded part yet, although we're in the neighborhood.*
) As he jogged back on defense, he jawed with the official about what he perceived as an uncalled foul. (
Getting warmer.
) Distracted by his jaw-flapping, he was nowhere to be found as Wallace (his defensive assignment) drilled another three-ball, cutting the Cleveland lead to two points. (
Warmer still!
) Moments later, he missed a shot, and
again
jawed at the referee. (
We have achieved critical bonehead mass!
) The ref said "enough of this," and whistled Gooden for a technical

foul, leading to another Detroit point.

Drew deserves props for a couple of clutch baskets in the fourth quarter … but brain cramps like his third-quarter sequence made his effect on the game neutral at best.

It's The Imaginary Mailbag!: Alert reader Tim Parina asks: "If you could clone Donyell Marshall, and have the two Donyells square off in a game of HORSE, which one would win?" Technically, Mr. Parina did not ask this question, but creating one for him accomplishes two goals for me:

1. It gives me the opportunity to give props to Mr. Parina, who does NOT work at the HH Gregg store in Mentor, and who did NOT help me with some critical post-separation video purchases. (I say "did NOT" because of TheClevelandFan.com's strict policy against any kind of favoritism or providing advertising within its columns.);
2. It also gives me the opening to say that Marshall has lost all confidence in his game.

Marshall bricked three more three-point attempts last night (which represented all three of the shots that he took). I don't want to say that he is now a resident of Suck, but his mail's going to be forwarded there awfully soon.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT:

Somewhere In Indiana, A Prison Hoops Team Just Became Unbeatable: Former Cavalier Henry James was sentenced to five years in the fun house last week, the result of drug trafficking charges. Not sure what else to say about that one, other than that it is Cautionary Tale #13,846 about the life of ex-professional athletes.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs will attempt to even the series at two games apiece at 8:00 PM tomorrow at The Q. The series shifts back to Detroit for Game Five on Thursday evening. If necessary, games in Cleveland (Saturday) and Detroit (Monday) will finish out the series.