Absolutely amazing. The Cavaliers are going to the NBA Finals. Yes, that's right. The Cavs. The Finals. Capping a thrilling series, the wine and gold absolutely blew the game wide open in the final stanza behind 19 fourth quarter points from Daniel "Boobie" Gibson and cruised to a 98-82 win to finish off the Pistons, hopefully for good. It was an absolute mob scene before, during, and after this one last night ... and our main man John Hnat is here to help us relive the greatest win in Cavaliers franchise history. Bring on Eva!

THE SUMMARY:

It's time to throw the script out.

The script from the Cleveland-Detroit series, which had the two teams playing a down-to-the-wire, either-team-can-win-it-in-the-final-minute contest for the first five games.

And also the script from the first 37 years of Cavaliers history, which had the

team on local golf courses before the start of the NBA Finals. (In most cases, it was long, *long* before the NBA Finals.)

(*ALERT: The next sentence is necessary only if you have been in a cave for the past twelve hours.)* For the first time in team history, the Cavs have earned a trip to the Finals, beating the Pistons 98-82 at Quicken Loans Arena. The victory, Cleveland's fourth straight over their Motown rivals, gave them a 4-2 win in the best-of-seven series.

Actually, the script was intact for the first three quarters. For the sixth straight game, the Cavs ran a play to Zydrunas Ilgauskas in the post on their initial possession. For the sixth straight game, they may as well have forfeited the ball, as Z missed a running jumper as he moved across the lane. Detroit made a statement by scoring the first six points of the game, but Cleveland answered immediately with six of their own, tying the game. The Cavs finished the first quarter with a 12-2 run (including a couple of baskets from Anderson Varejao and a long-range bomb from Sasha Pavlovic), staking themselves to a 27-21 lead.

The second quarter was the Rip Hamilton Show, as the Pistons' slightly built guard scored ten points in the quarter. Rasheed Wallace added seven points in the frame, as Detroit erased the Cavs' lead, and the two teams were knotted at 48-48 at the intermission.

The third quarter, so often the Cavs' nemesis this series (and this season), actually went quite well. The Pistons held four-point advantages twice during the quarter, but a LeBron James three-point play cut the lead to one point, at 56-55. (That shot, with just over eight minutes remaining in the quarter, was James's first field goal of the game; he would finish a quiet 3-of-11 from the field.)

And then it was Boobie Time. Daniel "Boobie" Gibson, the Cavs' rookie guard, scored 17 of the Cavs' next 20 points. A three-pointer to give the Cavs a 65-63 lead (a lead they would never relinquish, as it turned out) … a pair of free throws after he rebounded a blocked shot … two more three pointers to start the fourth quarter … then (after a James three-point play) another three pointer … then a pair of free throws … and finally a technical free throw. That last free throw gave the Cavs an 82-69 lead.

The free throw was also significant because it signaled the point when the Pistons had lost the game for good. Wallace had picked up his sixth foul, ending his evening. Making really, *really* sure that his evening was ended, he picked up a pair of technical fouls as he left the court. (One can only guess whether the referees have that kind of flexibility.) At that moment, the torch had been passed. The Pistons had finally cracked under the Cavs' relentless pressure. The rout was on.

Gibson added *another* three-pointer and a pair of free throws to stretch the lead to 88-73. A Damon Jones layup … yet *another* basket by Gibson … a couple of free throws by LeBron … a Varejao layup … one last basket by LeBron … and then a final minute or so of dribbling out the clock … and then it was official.

Your 2006-07 Eastern Conference champions, the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Gibson's 31 points (his career high) led the Cavs; James finished just shy of a triple-double, with 20 points, 14 rebounds, and eight assists; and Ilgauskas also earned a double-double, posting 11 points and a dozen boards. Hamilton pretty much carried the Pistons with his 29 points; Chris Webber (13 points) and Wallace (11) were the only other Pistons in double digits.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

The War Was Over. He Called Daniel Gibson "Boobie":

Throughout this season, I have balked at using Gibson's preferred nickname of "Boobie"; I guess I have a mental block for nicknames that reference the female anatomy. (For some reason, I feel like mentioning Jughead, from the Archie comic books, but this piece is being written way too late for an actual *segue*.)

After last night, I will call Gibson "Boobie" as many times as he wishes. I will rename my children *Boobie* if it means more games like last night. Gibson was perfect from long range (hitting all five of the shots he took from behind the arc), and once again was a killer from the line, making 12 of 15 free throw attempts. He also grabbed six rebounds and played some stellar defense on Hamilton and Chauncey Billups. (Coach Mike Brown put Gibson on Hamilton, who had spent the first half kicking Sasha Pavlovic in the face and taking his lunch money; after the switch, Hamilton's scoring went way down.) Boobie (*we're getting more comfortable typing it*) won this game for the Cavs, and once again gives us reason to believe that he will emerge as LeBron's running mate.

It's A Skinned Cat, But It's Not Quite The Same As The One We Saw After Game Five: LeBron had almost as much impact on Game Six as he did on Game Five; it just was not as visible or (perhaps) as memorable. He shot the ball only 11 times (one-third of his Game Five total), choosing instead to set up his teammates and to concentrate on defense. For much of the game, LeBron was assigned to Billups. The result? Billups scored only nine points and had only one assist.

Speaking Of Defense, And Of Chauncey: Props to Coach Brown for confusing Billups the entire series. He kept sending big men beyond the arc to double-team Chauncey, who did not seem to have an answer for the strategy. The Pistons' "Mr. Big Shot" was reduced to a pop gun throughout the set, and that has much to do with why the series ended with the result that it did.

And It Didn't Even Cost Us Any Karma: In Game Four , I described the direct relationship between arguing with my wife (soon to be ex-wife) on the phone and watching the Cavs' lead expand. Nothing else I have written has spurred so much reader reaction; I now have groups of you offering to pay my cell phone bill if I can just keep her on the phone for the entire game.

It would be logical for some of you to wonder whether I was speaking to her during last night's fourth quarter. I can assure

you that we did not speak during the game, and that the karma is intact for the upcoming San Antonio series. (Those of you who were at the Strongsville Target around noon yesterday, when we happened to bump into each other by chance, know that we filled our quota of bickering long before the opening tip.) You had better believe that we will be chatting around 9:05 PM this coming Thursday.

I Speak For All Non-Pistons Fans When I Say This: Seeing Wallace blow his stack makes my heart sing. (
note clever tie-in to "Wild Thing" Varejao, as Andy was probably 99.5% of the reason why Rasheed was so frustrated
)

Because They Won, This Item Strikes Me As Amusing: Prior to the game, the Cavs held a fan fest in the plaza between Quicken Loans Arena and Jacobs Field. One of the attractions was a large video screen on which an EA Sports basketball game, simulating a contest between the Cavs and Pistons, was being played. Apparently the Cavs' budget for the party did not include an updated version of the game, as Detroit featured Ben Wallace (who has not been with the team in a year). (The video game version of Drew Gooden looked less like Gooden and more like the offspring of Gooden and Larry Hughes, if you can imagine. Perhaps I should say: if you

want

to imagine.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Come on. The Cavs have just made their first Finals in team history, and you really think I am going to whine about anything?

OK, maybe one thing, and it really doesn't have to do with the team:

0-0, 3rd Quarter, 0 Seconds Remaining: The game was delayed for approximately twenty minutes between the first and second quarters because of a scoreboard malfunction. When play resumed, the scoreboard was still not working: the public address announcer had to

take on the additional duties of announcing the score periodically and counting down the shot clock. By the third quarter, a Cavs' assistant had run to Radio Shack to get the necessary parts the problems had been fixed, and the scoreboard worked flawlessly the rest of the way. However, for the entire scoreboard system to be out of commission for an hour – and for that malfunction to happen during the most important game to date in the arena's history – let's just say that somebody out there is now an ex-employee of the Cleveland Cavaliers organization.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

For the first time in Cavaliers history, what lies ahead is the NBA Finals. Weird thing to read, huh? It's a weird thing to type. But I think I could get used to it. I also think I could get

used to the inevitable constant close-ups of #1 Spurs groupie Eva Longoria.

(*Note to self: need easy way to fill out a couple more column inches without too much work.)*

Here's the Finals schedule:

Game 1: June 7, 9:00 PM, at San Antonio

Game 2: June 10, 9:00 PM, at San Antonio

Game 3: June 12, 9:00 PM, at Cleveland

Game 4: June 14, 9:00 PM, at Cleveland

(if necessary:)

Game 5: June 17, 9:00 PM, at Cleveland

Game 6: June 19, 9:00 PM, at San

Antonio

Game 7: June 21, 9:00 PM, at San Antonio