Well that was sure anticlimactic. The Cavs fell last night in game one of the NBA Finals, 85-76 to the Spurs in a defensive struggle that saw San Antonio hold LeBron almost completely in check. Tim Duncan and Tony Parker both had incredible games for the Spurs, and the Cavs will clearly need to come up with answers for these two if they have any hope of ending the city of Cleveland's 43 year drought without a pro sports title. John Hnat breaks down the game for us in his morning column.

THE SUMMARY:

The scene: An ABC Sports conference room last Saturday night. Two executives are planning the telecasts for the NBA Finals.

EXECUTIVE #1: All right. Who do we have lined up for the Finals this year?

EXECUTIVE #2: San Antonio and …

EXECUTIVE #1: Wait just a minute. What happened to that team that won 60-some games?

EXECUTIVE #2: Dallas? They got bounced in the first round.

EXECUTIVE #1: Really? Hmmm. Okay, what about Phoenix? They score a lot of points, right?

EXECUTIVE #2: Hate to tell you this, but San Antonio knocked them out weeks ago.

EXECUTIVE #1: What about the Lakers? They still have Kobe, right?

EXECUTIVE #2: *Kobe?* He's been playing golf for a month now. The Lakers haven't been the same since they shipped the big guy to Miami.

EXECUTIVE #1: *(Vein in temple starting to bulge.)* Okay, so San Antonio is in. I guess we can deal with that. But surely some high scoring team is going to come out of the East, right? What about

Miami? They have the big guy, and they also have that kid in the cell phone commercials, right?

EXECUTIVE #2: Dwyane Wade? Who do you think has been filling out Kobe's foursome?

EXECUTIVE #1: OK, I give up. Who else is there? Who's gonna provide us with the glamour and the ratings?

EXECUTIVE #2: It's down to Detroit and Cleveland.

EXECUTIVE #1: Oh geez. Can we put some other shows on instead? How about the one where all the people try to sing? That gets a lot of ratings, right?

EXECUTIVE #2: *American Idol*? Sir, that's not our show. Fox runs it.

EXECUTIVE #1:

Last night, Game One of the NBA Finals between the Cavs and Spurs did little to comfort our imaginary executive (not that he'd notice; I killed him off two lines ago). The Spurs prevailed, 85-76, in a defensive struggle at the AT&T Center.

The tone of the game turned midway through the second quarter. The Cavs had scratched their way to a 25-22 lead, with a Larry Hughes jumper providing that margin. The Spurs called a timeout. Fans throughout all of Cleveland took that opportunity to relieve themselves from beer numbers one, two, and seven.

When they came back to the couch, San Antonio had a six-point lead. What happened? A seventy-second flurry of baskets: a layup by Tony Parker; a missed free throw that Parker rebounded and converted into a jumper; a fast-break dunk by Francisco Elson; a free throw to complete the three-point play (Drew Gooden committed the unpardonable sin of being in the same zip code as Elson); and a dunk by Tim Duncan. San Antonio had the lead, one they would not relinquish.

The Cavs kept it within six points for most of the third quarter, but the Spurs' Big Three of Duncan, Parker, and Manu Ginobili eventually proved to be too much. Ginobili buried a three-pointer … followed by a Duncan layup … followed by a drive by Parker … and a minute later, Bowen drilled a three-ball for good measure. Cavs fans returning to the couch after disposing of beers eight and nine were suddenly faced with a 64-49 deficit.

The Spurs extended their lead to as many as 18 points in the fourth quarter before Cleveland made a run. A pair of LeBron James three-pointers (*no, it is not a good sign if I have not had reason to mention him until now*) and a Sasha Pavlovic jumper cut the lead to a dozen (76-64) with five and a half minutes remaining. Cleveland continued to nibble at the lead, and a Daniel Gibson three-pointer with just under two minutes to go cut the Spurs' lead to eight, but they would get no closer.

For the second straight game, Gibson came off the bench to lead the Cavs in scoring, as he posted 16 points. James, who wore an extra-large jersey knowing that it would have to be big enough for him and Bowen, added 14, as did Drew Gooden. Parker scored a game-high 27 points for San Antonio, and Duncan posted what is estimated to be the ten jillionth double-double of his career (24 points, 13 rebounds).

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Don't Doubt The Power Of The Roadkill: He talks to his hand. He continues to grow an inexplicable patch of hair on the back of his head. He has at least one "throw a pillow at the TV" moment per game (often much more). But Drew Gooden can shoot the ball. He was ignored for most of the first half, but

still ended the game with 14 points, most of those helping to keep the Cavs in the game throughout the third quarter.

Gooden can be a very potent weapon in this series: he provides a mid-range game that will bring a reluctant Duncan away from the hoop. His Game One should give Cavs fans hope that they will get some scoring punch from the rest of the team.

Hey, speaking of that…

Need More Boobie: Gibson, coming off his career-high 31 point effort to close out the Pistons last Saturday, had another fine game. 16 points on only nine shots from the floor is very, very impressive; all the more so considering that he displayed the same combination of long-range bombing and drives to the hoop that he used to end Detroit's season.

Gibson is the one long-range threat that San Antonio has to take seriously. Donyell Marshall has become a brick machine;

Damon Jones can only wish that he would get enough attempts to be a brick machine. Prior to the game, some commentator compared Gibson to Gilbert Arenas. It's a bit early for the Agent Zero comparisons, but Gibson has earned himself ever more time on the court with his outstanding play.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Department of Perfect Timing: Interest in the Cavs is at an all-time high. People who could not have named three Cavs six months ago ("there's LeBron, and … uh … that big Z guy, and … I'm out") are decked head-to-toe in wine and gold. Tens of thousands of people are heading downtown to watch the games on a set of large TV screens.

In other words, it's the perfect time for the federal government to step in and make asses of themselves. The Nike "We Are All Witnesses" billboard on the side of the Sherwin Williams building – the one across from Quicken Loans Arena – has drawn fire from the feds. Seems that some bureaucrat (one whose salary we pay, incidentally) decided that Nike's ad conflicts with some highway beautification act. (*Just curious – was his name "Rasheed"?)*

Maybe The Feds Have The Right Idea: LeBron picked a fine time to have one of the worst games of his career. It's not all his fault; give San Antonio (and especially Bruce Bowen) props for getting in his face and not allowing him any easy shots. James finished with a very un-Bron-esque 14 points on 4-of-16

shooting.

Just forget about last night and move on, King.

He Waited Eleven Years For *This?*: Zydrunas Ilgauskas has been in the league for 11 years. Undoubtedly, he has dreamed about this game for a long time. It is doubtful that many of those dreams ended with a line of 2 points on 1-of-8 shooting, but that's what the box score says this morning.

On a somewhat related point: For the seventh straight game, Cleveland's first play consisted of tossing the ball into Z in the post, followed

by Z missing a shot. How many times will we see this play until they give up and try something different? Will I have to start writing Buffum esque “fire Mike Brown” messages, designed to make the Google search engine puke?

Just forget about last night and move on, Z.

Can’t Anybody Here *Shoot* This Ball?: 30-of-70 (42.8%) from the field. 2-of-12 from the three point line, until a mini-barrage in the final minutes raised the three-point percentage to 33.3%. Nine assists (
nine

) for the entire game.

Just forget about last night and move on, everybody who attempted a shot.

“Uno! Oh Wait, Time To Go Back Out There Already?”: In the first several games of the Detroit series, the Cavs had a very tough time in the third quarter. They’re back to their old tricks: San Antonio outscored Cleveland 24-14 in the quarter. We are once again left to wonder exactly what the Cavs (and their coaching staff) are doing at halftime. The only solace is that instead of being trounced right from the

start of the second half, the Cavs stayed in it for several minutes before faltering.

Just forget about last night and move on, whoever it is that broke out the deck of cards at the half.

He Now Has The Back Of Tony Parker's Jersey Burned Into His Memory: Poor Larry Hughes. On the best of days, guarding San Antonio's Parker, who probably chases (and catches) squirrels for fun, is a tough assignment. When you have a bad wheel, we move from *tough assignment*

to
nightmare
. Time and again, Parker left Hughes in the dust. You really cannot blame Larry, who is doing the best he can while fighting a very painful injury. But unless the Cavs find a way to slow down Parker (I won't be presumptuous enough to suggest they can *stop* him), this will be a very short series.

Just forget about last night and limp on, Larry.

Hey, Isn't This Usually The Cavs'

Category?: The Spurs crushed the Cavs on the boards, both overall (43-32) and on the offensive glass (13-9). I was actually surprised to see that the disparity in offensive rebounds was only four – it seemed that San Antonio grabbed every shot they missed. The most galling ones were the rebounds of free throw misses *by the* shooter (San Antonio had at least three of these by my count).

Those offensive rebounds gave the Spurs plenty of extra opportunities to kill the Cavs' momentum. Probably the most painful: with just over five minutes to go, and the Cavs having sliced an 18 point deficit to 12, Parker missed a jumper. If Cleveland

rebounds the ball, they have the chance to cut the lead to ten (or even to single digits). Instead, The Big Fundamental grabbed the ball and laid it in. That was 23 seconds of good defense, and about two minutes of momentum, flushed down the drain.

Just forget about last night and move on, all Cavs 6'6" and taller.

On Behalf Of The Segment Of The Viewing Audience Known As "Men":
C'mon, ABC. Only one close-up of Eva Longoria during the entire game? Her man was

the star of the game, and she's one of the most visible actresses on the network that televised the game. (I would propose "Eva-Cam", a split-screen display with the game on one panel and a camera trained on Eva in the other panel, but that seems a bit too close to a judge using the words *no fewer than fifty yards* .)

Just forget about last night and move on, Y chromosomes.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs have to, well, forget about last night and move on. (After all, they lost the first two to Detroit, right?) Game Two at the AT&T Center will take place this Sunday. The series then moves to Cleveland for the next two (three, if necessary) games.