Andy and Sasha AWOL. Eric Snow down for a while with an injury. Boobie manning the starting point guard job. Guys like Devin Brown, Cedric Simmons, and Dwayne Jones are poised to get significant minutes. When the Cavs open the season on Halloween at hone against the Mavericks, the team will have a decidedly different look than the one that went to the NBA Finals last spring. Luckily for us, our guy Sam Amico is here to make sense of it all for us, and breaks down the Cavs roster in this fantastic piece.

The Cavaliers open the 2007-08 season in less than a week, and we all know that two key pieces - **Anderson Varejao** and **Sasha Pavlovic** - are missing. Neither figures to be signed, sealed or delivered for Wednesday's opener against Dallas, either.

Other than those two, the defending Eastern Conference champs appear to be in pretty good shape. Let's take a quick position-by-position look:

-- Center: Zydrunas Ilgauskas, **Dwayne Jones**.

Ilgauskas is still the same slow-footed, reliable giant who does what's asked and rarely complains. He remains the Cavs' biggest low-post threat, and is automatic

on those little baseline jumpers. And don't you just love how he taps the ball around three or four times before finally tipping it in the basket? OK, maybe not. Either way, Big Z may not be an All-Star -- but he's a team player who knows all the veteran tricks and has an ability to take over on occasion.

But this is where the absence of Varejeo may hurt the Cavs most, as Jones is the lone backup (unless you play **Drew Gooden** in the pivot, something coach **Mike Brown**
hopes to avoid). Jones has looked like he could develop into a decent hustle player during the preseason, averaging a whopping 18.8 rebounds per 48 minutes. Still, there's no guarantee he'll make the final cut. If he does, there's no indication of how much he'll actually contribute when the games count for real.

-- Power forward: Gooden, **Donyell Marshall**, **Cedric Simmons**.

Gooden is 6-foot-10, very athletic and has a great attitude. He's widely considered the most likeable guy on the team. That said, he has been wildly inconsistent and often gets yanked quickly by Brown, especially when he's sleepwalking on defense. In Gooden's defense, he spent the early part of his career in Memphis and Orlando playing for a bunch of different coaches. The Cavs are hoping he'll start to feel settled with another camp under Brown. If not, he'll continue to be the player dangled most during trade talks.

Meanwhile, Marshall is 34 and seems to have lost interest in rebounding. He would have trouble defending the water cooler and shoots every time he gets it in the corner, regardless of how many people are guarding him. Basically, he's a standstill shooter whose shot rarely falls anymore. If he's on the floor for more than 20-25 minutes a night, it's likely to mean trouble.

Finally, Simmons is a second-year guy who played little in New Orleans last season after being selected with a lottery pick. He's shown promise in the preseason as another energy-type player and shot-blocker.

-- **Small forward: LeBron James**, **Ira Newble**.

James was predicted to be league MVP in a poll by general managers on nba.com, and he already appears to be in top form. He is leading the Cavs in points, assists and steals in just 23 minutes a game (prior to Thursday's game at Toronto). After earlier insisting the Cavs needed to get Varejao and Pavlovic in camp, he's made it clear he's willing to carry even more of the load if necessary.

Last season, Newble proved to be the ultimate benchwarmer by sitting and sitting and sitting - then making solid contributions when called upon. He can expect more of the same this year.

-- Shooting guard: Larry Hughes, **Devin Brown**, **Shannon Brown**.

Hughes spent the most meaningful part of last season at point guard, something the Cavs hope not to repeat. So far, he's been so-so in his two years in Cleveland. He's always a threat, but he takes too many forced shots and hasn't displayed the explosiveness the Cavs hoped for when giving him a big free-agent deal. On top of that, he's been injury-prone. But the bottom line is he's versatile and the Cavs could do a lot worse.

As for basketball's version of the Cleveland Browns, Devin seems to have a slight edge over Shannon when it comes to playing time (or replacing Pavlovic, as the case may be). Devin won a championship ring with San Antonio in 2005 and averaged 11.6 points per game in New Orleans last season. Though he lacks NBA quickness, he's big and can play everywhere from point guard to small forward in a pinch.

Shannon, on the other hand, is entering his second year - but is more like a rookie in the team's eyes. He's still developing an all-around game, but has displayed

strength, confidence, and the ability to score quickly during the preseason. It may not be long before he consistently provides instant offense off the bench.

-- **Point guard: Daniel Gibson**, **Damon Jones**, **Eric Snow**.

This is obviously Gibson's job to lose. The question is, how much patience will Mike Brown show with a young player who's had as many turnovers as assists in the preseason? Yes, Gibson had some success in the playoffs, but that came primarily as a shooting guard off the bench. The good news is he continues to shoot the ball very well, burying 46 percent of his 3-pointers. In other words, it wouldn't be a shocker if Hughes moved back to the point and Gibson started at shooting guard.

Then there's Jones, a one-trick pony who shoots threes and does little else. No matter, the absence of Pavlovic could leave Brown little choice but to give Jones regular minutes.

Snow, who is out at least another three weeks following knee surgery, is far and away the team's best defender. He could be missed more than most fans think - especially when you consider the top-notch West point guards the Cavs face early (Phoenix's **Steve Nash**, Golden State's **Baron Davis**, Utah's **Deron WIliams**, and Sacramento's
Mike Bibby
).

So, are the Cavs better or worse than the team that made the Finals for the first time in franchise history? It's a good question, and only a few regular-season games will determine how much they really miss Varejao and Pavlovic.

But as the league's GMs indicated, as long as they have James, they'll have a chance.

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