He's baaack. After a well deserved hiatus, our guy John Hnat returns for another year of "The Good, The Bad, & The Summary" after Cavs games. We have a lot of new readers this year, and you will learn to love John's witty and insightful look at Cavs games ... which just makes you realize how bad Branson Wright really is. You'll get no better Cavs coverage anywhere this season, as we hit you with the left/right combo of Hnat and Amico all season. Let's just hope the Cavs start playing a little better ...

THE SUMMARY:

We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto.

The Cavs' 2006-07 was magical. Especially in the playoffs, they played inspired defense and had just enough offense (led by some guy wearing #23) to emerge from the Eastern Conference for the franchise's first-ever NBA Finals appearance.

It's not 2006-07 anymore. It's now 2007-08, and this Cavs team looks

like it just got run over by a tornado.

Continuing to sleepwalk in the same way that they did in the preseason, the Cavs were steamrolled by the Dallas Mavericks, 92-74, last night at Quicken Loans Arena. The outcome was never in doubt: Dallas marched to a 29-15 lead after the first quarter, and a 54-34 advantage at halftime, and then simply held serve in the second half. Cleveland never got any closer than 15 points in the second half. And as soon as they did (which came with a little over a minute to go in the third quarter, when LeBron James hit a pair of free throws to cut the lead to 72-57), Dallas went on a 14-4 run that turned many of the fans into empty seats.

Put it this way: LeBron was held scoreless for the entire first half, and did not tally his first field goal until 6:36 of the third quarter. Knowing that, what outcome would you have expected? Exactly.

LeBron finished with 10 points, which is about as low as it gets for him. Zydrunas Ilgauskas led the Cavs ... wait a minute, he didn't "lead" the Cavs, he merely "scored more than any of his teammates" ... with 17 points and 18 rebounds. Drew Gooden also notched a double-double with a dozen points and 10 boards. Jason Terry wasted no time to send fellow Texan Manu Ginobili that the Sixth Man Award is going to be a shootout this season, as he came off the bench to score 24 points (including 6-of-8 from beyond the arc). Jerry Stackhouse added 17, Dirk Nowitzki 15, and Devin Harris 13 for the Mavericks.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

You know this section isn't going to be very long, don't you?

Department Of Meaningless Firsts: All those who picked Daniel Gibson in the pool for "first Cavs blocked shot of the season," raise your hands. (He swatted a layup attempt by Dallas's Harris in the opening minute of the game.) And if you really were in a pool for "first Cavs blocked shot of the season," please seek professional help. Now.

The World Is A Vampire: Ilgauskas, as you may have seen, is now sporting a shaved head. "But he always had short hair!," you protest. No, before he had a close-cropped Male Pattern Baldness horseshoe; now he has a truly shaved dome. Anyway, in a reverse-Samson sort of way, the lack of hair seems to have given him powers, as he had a very strong night for the Cavs. He made eight of his 14 shots, pulled down 18 rebounds (including 11 at the defensive end, so not ALL of them were of the "tip in his own missed shot" variety), was deadly accurate with his 20 foot jumper, and attempted none of those 12-foot hook shots that caused many Cavs fans to pull out their own hair in disgust.

Ilgausakas's solid performance may disprove a pet theory of fellow site writer J.P. McIntyre . Over the summer, we had several exchanges - more than would be healthy, really - about whether careers go downhill after one shaves one's head. J.P.'s position is that they do, with numerous pop culture references like Britney Spears, Val Kilmer, and Smashing Pumpkins frontman Billy Corgan supporting him (although he had to add the Black Man Exception after realizing that Michael Jordan taking a razor to his head didn't exactly set him back). I'm less sold on that theory; I believe other circumstances (such as K-Fed, binge eating, and Jim my Chamberlin turning his arms into skid marks) explain those particular falls from grace. One game into the season, Z is supporting my side of the discussion; here's hoping he can keep it up.

Line Of The Night: Jeff Van Gundy, on the impending arrival of Sasha Pavlovic: "Can you fly directly from Serbia to Cleveland?" (For the record, according to a couple of quick searches on Expedia, the answer is "no." Looks like you need at least two stops between there and here.) Later, after a shot of Pavlovic in street clothes sitting behind the Cavs' bench, followed by a sideline interview in which Pavlovic provided amazing detail about his travel itinerary (I half expected him to name the in-flight movies), Van Gundy wondered whether Pavlovic would have been available had Cavs' owner Dan Gilbert sent him the team jet. There's a gaping void of color commentary with Steve Kerr stepping away from the mike, and Van Gundy showed that he might be the guy

to fill that void.

Random Thought, Which I Am Putting Here Simply To Give The "What I Liked" Section Some Filler: If you liked Flip Murray, then you're gonna
love
new Cavs swingman Devin Brown. His appearance, his spotty ball control, his jumper ... they all evoke images of the Flipster. I will let you decide whether that is a good thing.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

You know this section is going to drag on for pages, don't you?

When You're Depressed, Everything Good Comes As A Pleasant Surprise: The Cavs are in the unusual position of being an NBA Championship-caliber team with few expectations. (Just look at the predictions for this season from this site's writers - the consensus seems to be about

45-48 wins and a lot of tee times starting in early May.) It's in that vein that I present the following pre-game text message exchange between yours truly and GBS uber-fan Tom Oktavec:

TO: *Tonight's Final Score:*

Mavs: Hell

Cavs: Snowball

GBS: *I think it will be:*

Mavs: Indians

Cavs: Custer

TO: *Mavs: Russian Winter*

Cavs: Napoleon

GBS: *Mavs: Beer*

Cavs: Swerb's Liver

Alas, the Cavs did everything they could to justify the pessimism. They were inept on offense (although they did get away from the LeBron And Four Guys Waiting For A Bus offense; the new scheme can best be described as "Boobie Gibson And Four Guys Waiting For A Bus"), and matched it with often-porous defense. Admittedly, Dallas is an elite team - Nowitzki is going to hit his share of shots, and Harris is going to make opposing point guards look foolish quite often. But some of the breakdowns defied reason. As mentioned, Terry hit six of eight three-pointers; on most of those, he was completely uncontested. After one or two of those makes, you would think that the Cavs might not cheat off

him as much; but they still kept double-teaming away from Terry, leaving him unguarded at the perimeter.

He Has A Permanent Home Here: Regular readers of this column know that I am not a big fan of Larry Hughes's game. He fancies himself as a long-range bomber, when in fact he's the guy who couldn't win a game of HORSE if he was spotted the first two letters.

Over the summer, Larry Hughes worked with former Cavs star Mark Price on his jump shot. And it paid immediate dividends ... well, maybe it did to Price. I don't know if he was compensated for his time. I do know that Hughes looked as brickilicious as ever, clanging all but two of his 13 shots on his way to seven points. I'm not sure whether he is at fault or the scheme is at fault - any set that positions Hughes as a standard perimeter-bombing shooting guard is not going to work well. Then again, most sets position the shooting guard as a bomber from the perimeter, seeing as though most shooting guards CAN bomb away from the perimeter.

He Doesn't: It's not a good sign when the first two "Shooting Duds" on the NBA web site are Cavaliers, is it? LeBron joined Hughes on that ignominious list last night, thanks to a 2-for-11 night from the floor.

Coach Mike Brown deserves credit for putting James in the post often; he consistently drew double-teams and found open teammates. But he has to have the ball in his hands to be effective, and sometimes he needs the other four guys to clear out and let him go mano-a-five-manos on the other team. Unlike Hughes, LeBron seemed to struggle mainly because of being placed into a different role. Will the Cavs continue to work LeBron into a low-post role? Will they abandon the experiment and revert to "see LeBron drive" as their main offensive play? It's one of the story lines that bears watching in the early going.

He Might: Is it possible for a second-year player to have a sophomore slump when his rookie season was unremarkable? Shannon Brown is trying to answer that question for us. In less than six minutes of action, he missed all five shots he attempted, turned the ball over

twice, and committed a couple of fouls. With the glut of players at shooting guard, soon to be gluttened further when Pavlovic is ready to play, Brown may be playing his way into Human Victory Cigar status. The kid is talented; he just appears to be trying to do too much whenever he is on the court.

Speaking Of Permanent Homes: The Cavs' free-throw shooting landed them here early and often last season (as you may recall, only a late-season surge from the line prevented the team from finishing dead last in the league in free-throw percentage). Looks like that trend is continuing into this season, as the Cavs' 15-of-25 performance from the line caused fans seated behind the basket to scurry for cover. Bear in mind, that was WITHOUT Anderson Varejao, meaning that the Cavs effectively yelled "Bingo!" without using the free space.

Bells That Cannot Be Un-Rung: As much as I liked his commentary throughout the game (as mentioned earlier), Van Gundy singing Janet Jackson's "What Have You Done For Me Lately?" actually made my ears bleed.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Nothing like having the toughest part of the schedule in the first three weeks of the season. After a home game against New York this Friday, the Cavs embark on a six-game West Coast swing that begins in Phoenix on Sunday evening.