LeBron James continued the monster start to his season last night, dropping 40, 10, and 9 on Carlos Loozer and the Jazz in a 99-94 win at The Q. Sam checks in with us this morning to recap the win, hit on Larry Hughes missing a month with a bruise, and to analyze King James' heroics at both ends of the floor for the Cavaliers this season.

Nowadays, when Larry Hughes isn't injured, it's news.

The latest on the Cavaliers guard: A left knee injury that will require four weeks of treatment. After that, he'll be able to start playing basketball again. In other words, no one is sure how long Hughes will actually be out -- at least a month, maybe two or more.

Unfortunately for the Cavs, this has been the norm for Hughes since signing a large free-agent contract three years ago. He plays a few games, gets injured, sits a few more, then plays for a few. And the beat goes on, as Hughes had already missed three of the first nine games this year with knee trouble. It seems as if he spends more time in a doctor's office than on the court.

Of course, Hughes hadn't exactly been reminding anyone of Magic Johnson when healthy -- it was more like TNT broadcaster Ernie Johnson. In six games this season, Hughes is averaging 6.8 points per game and making the rim cringe with fear by shooting 29 percent from the field. Against Denver, he was ejected for arguing with an official in the first quarter, long before he had a chance to get hurt.

There's a reason one opposing team's scout referred to Hughes as "fragile, physically and mentally."

That may sound harsh, but how else do you explain what's happened to Hughes? Or more accurately, what has happened to the poor Cavs since he joined them.

And that may be the real question for the Cavs -- what can they possibly do next? One thing's for sure, trading Hughes isn't much of an option. Not when you consider the size and length of his contract (three years, around $38 million). No NBA general manager is that much of a sucker.

So, what next for the Cavs?

"We'll just have to strap it on and get it done," said coach Mike Brown.

Added Cavs star LeBron James, "It's disappointing, but there's nothing we can do about it."

James is right. There really isn't much the Cavs can do. There have been whispers about signing 5-foot-5 Cleveland native Earl Boykins or some other free agent -- but that's just media speculation at this point.

More likely, the Cavs will have to rely on guys who are already on the roster. Players like Sasha Pavlovic and offseason acquisition Devin Brown will be counted on to produce points and handle the ball on a more regular basis. Veterans Damon Jones and Ira Newble also become factors. Daniel Gibson will

have to perform more like a veteran than a second-year guard. And Eric Snow's return from knee surgery has suddenly become more important.

No matter who does what, the bottom line is that since Hughes arrived in Cleveland, he's been hurt more than he's helped. And anymore, the Cavs seem to be the ones who are taking the brunt of the pain.

TEAM EFFORT

As for the Cavs' actual game against Utah, a 99-94 win Friday at Quicken Loans Arena ...

Yes, James continued his best Michael Jordan impersonation by compiling monstrous numbers, finishing with 40 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists.

Yes, James scored 34 of those points in the second half.

And yes, he came up with the defensive play of the game by slapping the ball away from Jazz forward Carlos Boozer to preserve the victory.

But the Cavs really got this one done with all-around team defense. That included holding usual Cavs killer Deron Williams to 4-of-17 shooting and just four assists. That was a lot different than last week's game in Salt Lake City, when Williams seemingly did whatever he wanted with the ball, including hitting the game-winner on a driving layup.

"He missed some shots he normally makes, but our guys made it tough for him too," Mike Brown said. "We got a lot of weakside defensive help

on him, and that's really the only way to slow him down."

LeBRON'S 'D'

One of James' goals this season is to become a member of the league's all-defensive team. He is clearly making great strides in that area, becoming more than just a guy who steps in passing lanes and taking swipes at the ball. This year, James has improved when it comes to blocking shots and holding his position.

"And he's not done growing yet," Brown said. "Sometimes, he can be out of position and still come up with big (defensive) plays."

Offensively, James has been his usual self, even better.

In fact, James has now put together back-to-back games with at least 39 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists. The last player to do that? None other than Jordan himself (April 9-13, 1989).

Utah coach Jerry Sloan said no one man can guard James, so the Jazz just try to get as many defenders around him as possible. "First of all, it's important to know that you're not gonna stop the guy," Sloan said. "He does what he does every night. People prepare to play him every night, and he still gets it done. Other guys can take a night off and you're not going to miss them. That's not the case when you're a player like him. With a player like him, you just try to make him work."

QUICK SHOTS

* At one point in the third quarter against Utah, James was surrounded by four players who were either drafted late in the second round, or not drafted at all. They were: Dwayne Jones, Damon Jones, Ira Newble and Devin Brown. Yes, the 6-6 Newble was playing power forward.

* Hats off to Boozer, the most despised opposing player in Cleveland. He finished with 26 points and 11 rebounds for his ninth double-double in 10 games.

* Meanwhile, Cavs center Zydrunas Ilgauskus posted his posted his seventh double-double of the year (17 points, 12 rebounds), and blocked a whopping six shots. Get your All-Star ballots ready, Cavs fans.

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