Yawn. Another LeBron triple double. Another LeBron superhuman fourth quarter effort to will the otherwise overmanned Cavaliers to a win. LBJ went for 37, 12, and 12 and the Cavs rallied from a big early deficit to knock off the Raptors by a 111-108 count yesterday afternoon at The House That Adjustable Rate Mortgages Built. Our guy, The Anti-Branson .... John Hnat took it all in for us and recaps the win.

THE SUMMARY:

It was a game the Cavs had to have. Actually, no it wasn't. If the Cavs would have lost, the season wouldn't have been over. It's kind of difficult to be mathematically eliminated from playoff contention in the NBA by the end of November - especially because the regular season is basically an 82-game march to determine which two teams don't make the playoffs.

But the Cavs would have dug themselves a hole with a loss - a sub-.500 record with a pair of games against the league-leading Celtics and a road trip to play some DEE-TROIT BAS-KET-BALL looming in the next couple of weeks.

Maybe that's why LeBron James decided that the Cavs were not going to lose this game. Rallying from a 12 point deficit in the first quarter, the Cavs - behind yet

another triple-double from the pride of Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary - outlasted the Toronto Raptors, 111-108, at The House That Adjustable-Rate Mortgages Built.

James led the Cavs (who improved their record to 7-6) with 37 points. Daniel Gibson and Damon Jones, both bombing like mad from beyond the three-point arc, finished with 17 points apiece, and Zydrunas Ilgauskas posted 16 points and 15 rebounds. It's not often that you can put up 37 points and not lead all scorers; but that's where James finds himself, as Toronto's Chris Bosh had 41 points. Cavalier expatriate Jason Kapono came off the bench to add 17 for the Raptors, who fell to a record of 6-7 for the young (teenaged, at this point?) season.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Lather, Rinse, Repeat: LeBron's line: 37 points, 12 rebounds (many of them the so-called "man-sized" rebounds in traffic), 12 assists, three steals, and one blocked shot; and he directed traffic out of the Gateway North parking garage after the game.

Last season, it became almost commonplace to dismiss LeBron as an MVP candidate, as though any slug could average 27, 6, and 6 per game. The one knock against James that did hold some water is that he tended to cruise through many of the regular season games.

Now would be a good time to remind you, the reader, of the defining principle of LeBron James's career: *There is nothing that he cannot do. If you criticize him for not doing X, he will start doing X better than you ever thought he could, and make you look like a complete ass.* Tell him that the sun always rises in the east, and damned if LeBron won't figure out a way to have it rise in the west tomorrow. (Not saying that I would bet on him in a battle against astronomy; but I wouldn't bet
against

him either.) LeBron has taken his game to new heights this season. Thirteen games into the 2007-08 season, he already has three triple-doubles; indeed, he is inching ever closer to the
Robertsonian
benchmark of
averaging
a triple-double for a season.

We Mean It: Lather, Rinse, Repeat: One more bit of praise for #23: he hit the biggest shot of the game. The Cavs had a six-point lead with two minutes to go, but Toronto sliced it to a single point, 106-105, in the final minute. (
We'll come back to this later. As you may have guessed, it won't be in the "What I Liked" section.
) James dribbled the ball at the top of the key, guarded by the Raptors' Carlos Delfino. He tried to push the ball to the right side of the lane, but Delfino cut him off. LeBron was still dribbling the ball at the top of the key as the shot clock was about to expire ... dribble ... dribble ... finally, he dribbled to the right, twisted back to the left, and put up an 18-footer.
Swish
. It proved to be the dagger that put Toronto down for good (even though they did have a chance to tie the game, but a wild three-pointer by Anthony Parker missed the mark).

Bombs Away!: Usually, when a team hoists 30 three-point attempts in a game, it's an act of desperation (or "just another game," if you are the Phoenix Suns). The Cavs had 30 attempts ... and it worked out rather well for them, as they made 14 of those shots. (When even Devin Brown is draining shots from downtown, you know that something is in the air.) This sequence of shots from the third quarter was rather typical:

James, three point shot made
James, three point shot made
James, three point shot missed
James, two point shot made
Damon Jones, three point shot made

Sasha Pavlovic, three point shot made

During this sequence, the Cavs erased a seven-point deficit, tying the game at 71-71 (the first time that the Cavs had not been trailing in the game since the opening tip).

The most prolific shooters for the game were Jones (who made 5-of-9 three pointers) and Gibson (who made 4-of-8 from beyond the arc).

Mine, Mine, It's All Mine: One of the Cavs' defining characteristic is that they rebound the heck out of the ball. Getting almost 20 more rebounds than your opponent (47-28) qualifies as "rebounding the heck out of the ball." As mentioned, Ilgauskas had 15 boards, and James had 12; but Pavlovic also had eight, just one away from his career high.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Hey, I See LeBron's Ankles! Let's Bite Them!: LeBron did have a couple of Pavlovician turnovers - a couple of dribbles off his feet at critical points of the game. He also had a *huh?* moment in the first quarter. With the Cavs trailing 23-15, LeBron stole a pass at midcourt and was headed full speed in the other direction. A buzz went through the home crowd as they anticipated the inevitable dunk. James rose to slam the ball ... then switched in mid-air to a layup ... and missed it! You'll see that happen about once every season. (To be fair to LeBron, I think he really *did* direct traffic out of the Gateway North garage after the game, so we're not going to be too hard on him.)

Looks Like A.C. Left Some Bite Marks Himself: It's been a while since we've

put Cavs color commentator Austin Carr under the microscope; let's do that, shall we? Actually, I love A.C., and not just because of fond memories from his playing days. In this time of holidays and family gatherings, it seems especially appropriate to compare A.C. to the lovable old uncle who tells stories and "knows how it is" - you kind of half-listen and smile at him, and appreciate what he says, but not always for the same reasons that he intended.

One of my favorite A.C. traits is his ability to let the result dictate his opinion of the events leading up to it. That trait was out in full force during the Raptors game. Earlier in the game (I cannot remember exactly when), LeBron dribbled ... and dribbled ... and dribbled ... and found a teammate for an easy basket. A.C. loved the play, saying that the defense was forced to commit to LeBron, and to try to guess what he was going to do, and that opened the lane for the pass and easy bucket.

Fast forward to the fourth quarter, with the Cavs leading 84-83. James again dribbled ... and dribbled ... and this time, he dribbled the ball off his foot and right into Delfino's hands. About five seconds later, after a Kapono three-pointer going the other way, the Cavs were now down by a pair. A.C. let LeBron have it for standing around and dribbling the ball, saying that he should dribble "one, two, three times at most." Uh, A.C., wasn't that *exactly the same thing* that LeBron did earlier in the game when you praised him? Oh, never mind ... just pass the mashed potatoes.

Prevent Offense: Take a hundred football fans, and ask them what defensive tactic makes them upset ... er, angry ...I mean pissed ... um, ready to tear their hair out in large clumps while screaming maniacally (*this word cleverly foreshadows later material*) at the TV, it's the prevent defense. It's the bend-but-don't-break, give-the-opponent-some-offense-instead-of-taking-chances approach; one that is designed to not lose games, but almost always results in the lead evaporating.

Basketball has a similar concept: the *prevent offense*. When you have a

seemingly safe lead, and the clock is running out, you can sit on the ball for most of the 24 second shot clock, and eat up time that the opponent desperately needs to mount a comeback. Sounds good in theory. But when you simply dribble the ball away, and do not get any kind of a quality shot, then you've just given the ball to the other side without extending your lead.

That's exactly what the Cavs did, and it almost cost them the game. They led 104-98 with two minutes remaining. They dribbled ... dribbled ... dribbled ... and the possession ended with a desperation Devin Brown three-point attempt, which missed the rim and led to a 24 second violation. Granted, it took 24 seconds off the clock; but any possession that can be described with the words *desperation* or *Devin Brown three-point attempt* cannot be good. Toronto pushed the ball the other way, and Bosh was almost immediately fouled. He hit both free throws to cut the Cleveland lead to four points.

The next possession was more of the same - twenty seconds of dribbling, followed by an out-of-flow, long-range jumper (this time by LeBron) that missed the mark. Toronto grabbed the rebound, and Kapono drilled a three-pointer. Just like that, the Cavs were leading by one with almost a full minute remaining.

I simply do not understand why teams switch to a wear-it-down style of play when they have a lead in the final minutes. If you're leading by ten points with a minute to go, that's one thing - the opponent is going to need to get the ball four or five times in order to erase that difference. But Toronto was only two possessions away from tying the game, and the clock still had two minutes. It was far too soon to try to slow the game down, instead of simply continuing to do the things that had resulted in the lead in the first place.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Just A Still Town Boy On A Saturday Night, Looking For The Sale Of His Life: I understand that television is dependent on having advertisers to foot the bill. (Except if you are PBS, in which case you never show an ad, but then spend three weeks having a glorified garage sale as a pretext for begging.) I also understand that when you have a block of programming - say, 82 basketball games - you will want to seek out certain key advertisers, who will then plaster their ads throughout your block of programming. I get that.

It is in that spirit that I was about to take frequent game advertiser Kia to the woodshed. For the first three weeks of the season, Cavs broadcasts have been littered with those awful KiaMatch.com ads. If the Kia PR machine resumes running that spot, then we'll head back to the woodshed ...

... but I cannot do that today, because Kia debuted a new spot during the Cavs-Raptors game. And this one is *good.* Based on the movie *Flashdance* , and with that movie's anthemic
"Maniac"
(
told you so
) as the background music, the ad features a young, slightly pudgy car salesman dancing around a showroom. All of the signature
Flashdance
moves - the pumping of the feet, the extended somersault leap - they're all there. And just when you realize that "hey, they haven't splashed him with water while he's sitting on a chair with his head held back" - yep, they splash him with water while he's sitting on a chair with his head held back. Very inspired.

After the KiaMatch ads, I resolved to never buy a Kia. After this one, I now want to rush to the nearest showroom and drive one home. I guess that's how you tell if advertising is working. (But don't take my word for it .)

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Somewhere in the NBA offices is a schedule-maker who should be shot. The Cavs travel to Indiana to take on the Pacers tomorrow afternoon. That's right - a 2:30 start on a prime football Sunday. Sunday matinee games are fine once we get into the dark sports months of February and March ... until then, it's time to get out of the way of God Football, and if you must play on a Sunday, then play at night. The Cavs will then return home for a Tuesday night clash with the Celtics.