They say the first five minutes of each the second and third quarters are the most important parts of an NBA game. Unfortunately for the LeBron James-less Cavaliers, that is turning out to be a cold and dark truth. It's something they discovered again Wednesday, when they were dumped by the host Washington Wizards, 105-86. It was the fifth straight loss for the Cavs, and fourth since James was sidelined with what is being called a sprained index finger on his non-shooting hand. Sam Amico relives the horror.

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For now, just know that the Cavs played this game much like the previous four. They kept it close early, then suddenly and without explanation, appeared to be overmatched. In the blink of an eye, the Cavs go from looking like they might finally have found the secret to playing without James, to looking timid and

unorganized.

Against the Wizards, it happened 13 minutes into the contest, shortly after the second quarter started. They trailed just 22-21 at the end of one - or right before they allowed the Wizards to imitate the Phoenix Suns.

They ran, they cut to the basket, they hit each other with crisp passes, they made perimeter shots. The Cavs, on the other hand, looked helpless. By halftime, they trailed 53-34.

And for the second straight night, they gave up big numbers to an opposing small forward - which just happens to be the same position James plays. This time, it was the Wizards' Caron Butler, who finished with 27 points, seven rebounds and four steals. That followed Tuesday's loss to New Jersey, in which Richard Jefferson scored 36.

Also for the second consecutive night, coach Mike Brown questioned his team's resilience.

"We didn't compete like we are capable of," he said. "There were times that we just didn't put bodies on bodies."

Brown makes a valid point, as the Cavs were out-rebounded by a whopping 45-29 margin. And remember, this was the Wizards - not a big or aggressive team by any means.

Offensively, it was the Cavs' highest point total without James in uniform. But that doesn't mean it was pretty, or even all that effective.

Little-used second-year guard Shannon Brown once again started in place of James, and once again showed potential as a regular NBA scorer, finishing with 13 points. That tied for the team lead with Daniel Gibson and Drew Gooden, while Zydrunas Ilgauskas finished with 12 points and 10 rebounds.

"More than anything, as a team offensively we've really been struggling, "Ilgauskas said. "Our shot selection, our decision-making -- it's just not been good."

As for James' finger, Butler knows what to expect, as he played with a sprained finger of his own a couple years back.

"He'll probably be able to put some tape around it and take some precautions but (opposing players) will be hitting it," Butler told the Akron Beacon Journal. "He has to be careful and make sure it's pretty much healed ... because during the course of a game, it's going to get hit."

And with the way the Cavs have been playing without James, Butler's comments may as well have been describing them too. That's because they too have been taking a lot of hits.