It wasn't easy. It sure as hell wasn't pretty. But it was a win. And we'll take it right now. The Cavs defeated the Bucks 104-99 last night in 2OT at the Quicken Loans Arena, just the second win in the last ten games for the wine and gold. Devin Brown, that's right, Devin Brown was absolutely huge for the good guys last night. John Hnat recaps the win, Austin Carr as an announcer, a potential rigt between LeBron and Sasha, and a prison escape in New Jersey in his column for us this morning.

THE SUMMARY:

Was it a pretty win? No.

Was it an easy win? No.

Was it a win? Yes. And these days, that's plenty for the Wine and Gold.

The Cavs defeated the Milwaukee Bucks, 104-99, in double overtime last night at

the Quicken Loans Arena. The victory - just the second in the last ten games for Cleveland - raised their record to 11-14, putting them six and a half games behind Detroit in the Central Division.

As you would expect from a double-overtime game, this one was close the whole way. Cleveland briefly opened a ten point lead in the third quarter, the only double-digit advantage that either team would enjoy. The lead changed 20 times, and the teams were tied on 28 occasions.

The Cavs had a chance to ice the game with 11 seconds remaining in regulation, as they had a 84-83 lead with Daniel Gibson stepping to the free throw line for two shots. Uncharacteristically, he missed the first freebie, That paved the way for Milwaukee's Mo Williams to tie the game with a pair of free throws moments later.

In the first overtime, it was Milwaukee's turn to take the lead in the closing seconds, as an are-you-kidding-me hook shot by the Bucks' Desmond Mason gave them a 93-91 edge with 40 seconds to go. On the Cavs' next possession, the usually reliable Zydrunas Ilgauskas missed a jumper. Somehow, Devin Brown emerged with the ball, and laid it back into the hoop, sending the game into a second overtime. The Cavs then put the game away in the second extra session, outscoring the Bucks 11-6 behind a trio of Ilgauskas jumpers.

Not surprisingly, LeBron James led all scorers with 31 points (he also added eight rebounds and five assists). Ilgauskas posted yet another double-double, scoring 24 points and grabbing 11 boards. Milwaukee was paced by Michael Redd's 22 points and Williams's 18.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Department Of Unexpected Sentences: Devin Brown won the game last night for the Cavs. That's right - Devin Brown. The forgotten man, the guy who did not even get off the bench in the past couple games. With 11 points, nine rebounds, six assists, and a huge boost of energy, Brown was the difference between winning and losing last night.

We already mentioned his key play of the game, but let's cover it in more detail. It came in the first overtime, with the Cavs trailing by two points in the final minute. Brown dribbled the ball towards the hoop in a north-south fashion (*just nod your head for now; we'll discuss it in more detail later*
), drawing the defenders to him, and leaving Ilgauskas wide open on the left wing. Brown found him with a pass, setting up the game-tying shot. After Ilgauskas missed the shot, Brown grabbed the rebound and put the ball in the hoop. (He appeared to be fouled on the play, but apparently NBA referees now allow you to gang-bang a guy without getting whistled.)

For good measure, he grabbed two more offensive rebounds and forced a turnover in the second overtime, giving the Cavs the extra possessions they needed to win.

Ignore The Seven-Foot-Three Guy At Your Own Peril: Time and again, the Bucks left Ilgauskas open on the wing. Time and again, he made them pay. 11-of-22 from the floor, with most of those baskets coming from the 15-18 foot range.

Can we officially anoint Z as the Cav Who Needs LeBron The Most? Consider Z's statistics from this season:

- 19 games with LeBron: 142-292 (51.0%) shooting, 15.7 points per game

- 6 games without LeBron: 17-47 (36.2%), 9.0 points per game

I'd call that a trend.

No, Sir, I Won't Dribble The Ball Off My Foot: With a little over a minute remaining in the third quarter, Anderson Varejao lost the ball to the Bucks' Yi Jianlian.

Why do I mention this play? Because it was the Cavs' only turnover in the second half or the two overtimes. That's right - 34 minutes of basketball, and the Cavs gave the ball away but once. That is a Good Thing.

Isn't He Supposed To Be A Choker?: Last season, in the spirit of We've Gotta Find Something Wrong With His Game, the ankle-biting brigade took LeBron to task for not hitting enough clutch shots in the final moments of games. LeBron responded with enough regular season game-winners (as well as his otherworldly performance in the playoffs, especially Game Five against Detroit) to silence those critics. Last night, he put the Cavs in position to win again. With 30 seconds remaining in regulation, and the Cavs trailing by a point, LeBron drilled a jumper from the top of the key to give the Cavs the lead. The play was ever more impressive because just moments prior, James had taken a pretty good shot to the *lower abdominal wall* (yes, I watched the World Wrestling Federation when I was a kid) that left him doubled over.

Just The Facts, Ma'am: Sasha Pavlovic took but three shots. The Cavs won.

I leave you to draw your own conclusions.

One other observation: other Cavs, particularly LeBron, seemed to go out of their way to ignore Sasha on offense. On one fast break, LeBron was driving through the middle of the court, with a wide-open Sasha on his left. LeBron completely ignored Pavlovic and went for his own shot. We know that James has superior court vision; he *knew* that Sasha was there. Enough said; I don't like to draw sweeping conclusions from one play, anyway.

Hey, That's Not Supposed To Happen!: Several times recently, we have lamented the Cavs' poor performance to start the third quarter. By my count, they have been outscored by *thirty-teen jillion points* during the third quarters of games this season. (I have made enough math errors along the way to worry about salvaging what is left of my reputation as a statistician.)

So when the Cavs re-entered the arena floor at the start of the third quarter, clinging to a two-point lead, I wondered how long it would take for them to be down by ten. (*If you were watching the game too, you were thinking the exact same thing. Admit it.*) Instead, they quickly went *up* by ten. I do not know if it was because of a fire-and-brimstone halftime speech by Coach Mike Brown, or if the ball boys spiked the players' water bottles with Red Bull, or what; but the Cavs came out with passion and drive in the early minutes of the second half. Alas...

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Nice While It Lasted: The second-half surge did not last long. After falling behind by ten, the Bucks regrouped and rattled off the next 13 points, as Cleveland went about five minutes without scoring a single point. Losing the lead so quickly is frustrating enough; it was positively rip-your-hair-out because of the way in which the Cavs lost it. After playing with defensive intensity and getting several close shots on offense, the Cavs took their feet off the gas pedal. Suddenly, they were not hustling on defense ... and suddenly, they were settling for outside shot after outside shot, instead of working the ball into the post.

And I have now built up to the segue to the next point I would like to make: when Cavs' announcer Austin Carr has a point to make, he makes it. Repeatedly. Large sections of his brain are dedicated to the task. He probably would not be able to remember his wedding anniversary at such a moment. (*Not that it represents much of a departure from the norm for him. Austin strikes me as a guy who has had to run to One Of Those Annoying Jewelry Stores Who Advertise Incessantly more than once because he forgot his wedding date.*
)

Last night, Austin was determined to use the phrase "east-west" as many times as possible. Remember "Word A Day" toilet paper? The idea was that this most delicate of products would have a word printed on each square, allowing you to build your vocabulary while indisposed. The product's maker suggested learning one word a day in this manner, and then using the word several times during the day, to reinforce what you had just learned. I suspect Austin must have taken an *east-west* crap earlier yesterday, because he dropped the phrase at every opportunity. As he used it, he meant that the Cavs were swinging the ball around the perimeter, and not pushing towards the hoop. And he was exactly right: the Cavs did become an
east-west
team after building their lead ... and they watched their lead disappear because of it.

He Has Now Been In This Space So Many Times, He Is Getting His Mail Sent Here: Larry Hughes shot 3-for-11 (27.2%) from the field last night, finishing with six points. Amazingly, both figures are well within his usual range of performance: take away his game-of-the-season against Indiana last week, and he is ... averaging about nine points per game on 29% shooting.

In the spirit of Wanting To Look On The Bright Side, I will say that Hughes ... barely played in the second half and overtimes. Realizing that Brown was a much hotter hand, Coach Brown stayed with Devin during the critical minutes.

Incidentally, now that he has returned to his former self, Hughes is getting absolutely no praise from the announcers for the weightlifting work he did while he was out injured. Apparently there's a direct connection between how many jumpers he hits and how many bench presses he did while on the mend.

Disappearing Drew: Speaking of players whose butts were firmly planted on the bench during crunch time, Drew Gooden had one of his forgettable nights: 2-of-8 from the field, no free throws, four points, five rebounds, and a lot of towel-waving as the Cavs fought back to win the game. As Cavs fans, this is our fourth season of being regular visitors to Planet Gooden, and we now know that in any given month, he will provide:

- One stellar game, where his outside jumper is on fire (*not literally*), and he scores north of 20 points with double-digit rebounds;
- One clunker game, where he barely outscores Dwayne Jones, and spends most of the second half calmly watching the game while in his warm-ups;
- And the rest of his games will hover around 10-15 points and almost the same number of rebounds.

Last night was the clunker game. If there's anything to this once-a-month theory, then Drew should not have another one until mid-January.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Department Of Fair And Accurate Reporting: Many times this season, I have lamented the poor play of the bench I have often using the plus/minus statistic to make the point that, well, the bench has usually played with the same passion and skill that Pamela Anderson puts into her marriages.

I am nothing if not fair (*meaning that I am nothing*) ... so I want to mention that frequent target Ira Newble had a
plus-10
figure for last night's game.

Pressure. Time. And A Big Goddamn Poster: The most frequent question I have heard about last night's game is "John, what does the Cavs' win have to do with a jailbreak in New Jersey?" Not much, I grant you, but that is not going to stop me from talking about it. According to
this story
, two inmates at the Union County Jail in the Garden State escaped thanks to a hole they dug in one of the inmates' cells. They concealed the hole with large posters of bikini-clad women until it was large enough for them to escape.

Unless you have not seen a movie in the past thirteen years, your mind has already raced ahead to *The Shawshank Redemption* , which of course featured the exact same escape by Tim Robbins' character. As you might expect, the Union County prosecutor downplayed any comparisons to the movie. That leads

us to one of the universal truths of life and language (right up there with
it's not you, it's me
means
it's you
, or that
I think we should see other people
means
I already am
): when somebody says "it's not like it sounds," that means it is EXACTLY as it sounds.

Shawshank is undoubtedly one of the great movies of all time, but I am always troubled by how I have to suspend disbelief when watching it. I can buy Tim Robbins' character (Andy Dufresne) being locked up for life, even though he was wealthy and presumably could have bought his way into a lesser sentence (or even O.J.-ed his way into an acquittal). I can buy Morgan Freeman's Ellis Redding as a worldly-wise convict. I can buy Robbins/Dufresne taking twenty years to carve his way through his cell wall with a spork, without ever raising an eyebrow from a guard or the inmate across the way. I can buy Dufresne having the one cell in the whole joint where carving a hole in the wall provided an escape route, instead of being a glorified maid door into the next cell. I can buy the guards never once checking the wall behind the poster, through years of surprise inspections and cell-tossings.

What I cannot buy, however, is Dufresne dressing in the warden's suit and shoes (which he needed to do to go to all of those banks) without looking like me putting on my five-year-old's clothes. Dufresne was tall, long, and athletic. Warden Norton was shorter and pudgier. Yet the warden's clothes fit Dufresne perfectly - no sleeves ending around the elbow, or pant cuffs that would suggest an impending flood. And they apparently shared the same shoe size as well. I can buy the rest of the story ... but that piece always left me shaking my head.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs are headed to New York for a showdown with the Knicks tomorrow night at Madison Square Garden, then return home on Thursday evening to face the Los Angeles Kobes at The Q. It'll be the start of a three-game homestand, with games following on Sunday against Golden State and on Christmas afternoon against Miami.