Sunday marked the Cavaliers' first clash with division rival Chicago during the 2007-2008 season, but more importantly, it was the first time the two clubs played following their blockbuster trade which occurred a little more than a week ago. Drew & Larry were back at The Q in enemy colors for a nationally televised Sunday afternoon game and the Cavs rode a big fourth quarter to a 95-86 win over da Bulls.

Sunday marked the Cavaliers' first clash with division rival Chicago during the 2007-2008 season, but more importantly, it was the first time the two clubs played following their blockbuster trade which occurred a little more than a week ago. Returning to The Q were Shannon Brown, Drew Gooden, Cedric Simmons, and of course, the wildly unpopular Larry Hughes.

It's somewhat ridiculous that two divisional foes had not yet met this season, and will now have two games in the next five days (with a third game in early April). Then again, the very concept of divisional play in the NBA is beyond laughable at this stage in the league's development, but that's a tangent I won't address here.

At any rate, the Bulls arrived in the Forest City losers of two straight, and four of their last five. The Cavaliers, a ho-hum 2-2 since the trade, needed a win to match the Orlando Magic's victory last night. The Magic, who entered Sunday with a four game advantage on the Cavs in the race for the Eastern Conference''s number three seed, are heating up, having won for of their last five contests.

In what has undoubtedly become the theme for this season, Mike Brown's club was once again facing adversity, as center Zydrunas Ilgauskas was scratched off of the lineup card with a strained back. Ilgauskas joined teammates Daniel "I refuse to call you Boobie" Gibson and Sasha Pavlovic riding the pine, and thus the Cavaliers were without three of their best players and a pair of starters (Pavlovic, Z).

Quarter By Quarter

First Quarter

The Bulls jumped out to an early lead and Larry Hughes looked motivated, a sight rarely seen during Hughes' tenure in Cleveland. In spite of an early deficit, the Cavs stormed back, led (shockingly) by LeBron James. King James laughed in the face of several double teams, starting a perfect five of five from the floor.

Coming off the bench, Wally Szczerbiak made a long two late in the quarter, and seems to be getting comfortable in his new duds. LeBron had a terrific no-look pass to Wally on a run out that Szczerbiak converted for a layup. The Cavaliers shot remarkably well in the first quarter, 62.5 percent (10-16), whereas the Bulls did some serious bricklaying at 30 percent (6-20). In spite of that vast differential, the Cavs were only able to build a seven-point lead against visiting Chicago, who hung tough in the first quarter and for most of the afternoon.

Second Quarter

LeBron James received a significant breather for the first few minutes of the second quarter, but unfortunately nobody else could hit a shot for the Cavs. While the Bulls did little to keep themselves in the game, the Cavs left the door wide open by scoring only seven points during the first six minutes of the second quarter. Chicago eventually tied the game at 31 points apiece.

When LeBron James reentered the game, he ended up taking some ill-advised jumpers because the rest of the team was simply unable to score. The Cavaliers shot an atrocious 30 percent (6-20) during the second quarter, and while the Bulls were not much better at 38.9 percent (7-18), Chicago was able to trim Cleveland's lead down to three points by the end of the first half.

Third Quarter

Yet again, the Cavaliers displayed their inability to put the Bulls away with another lackadaisical quarter during which the Bulls actually took a late lead. A Larry Hughes alley-oop to forward Tyrus Thomas gave Chicago a three point advantage, and the Cavaliers were in desperate need of a wakeup call.

Fourth Quarter

An 18-3 Chicago run from the late third quarter into the fourth quarter culminated in Larry Hughes' second three pointer of the game, and with LeBron James inexplicably on the bench, the Cavaliers found themselves behind by nine.

But the Cavs would fight back, and a Ben Gordon charge absorbed by a clutch Ben Wallace helped the Cavs maintain their momentum with less than eight minutes to play. On Chicago's ensuing possession, Wallace made another key defensive play, swiping the ball away from Ben Gordon in the lane.

Joe Smith was crucial to the Cavaliers' comeback, as he finally found his jump shot in the final stanza, knocking down three in a row at one point, and finishing the game with eight points. Within a period of just one minute and nine seconds, LeBron James landed some costly body blows to the Bulls, with a layup, an emphatic dunk, and a long jump shot, forcing a Chicago timeout with 2:01 to play. After another Ben Gordon charge, Wally Szczerbiak would deliver the knockout punch: a trey ball with 1:28 left to play that pushed Cleveland's lead to nine points and essentially ended the game.

Quick Hits

Y No Z? The Cavs' super-consistent center will be sidelined for at least a week due to a strained back. Ilgauskas will be re-evaluated after a week, and there is no finite timetable for his return. The injury leaves the Cavs with little by way of frontcourt scoring, as Anderson Varejao will replace Zydrunas as the starting center. Once again, the Cavs will have to weather the storm of yet another significant injury, but at lest they won't be playing the NBA's crème de la crème for the time being, as four of the Cavs'' next five games are against some pretty lousy opponents; New York, Chicago, Indiana, and New Jersey.

LeBron''s Line: It was just another day at the office for King James, who finished with 37 points (15-29 shooting, 7-8 from the line), 6 boards, 6 dimes, and a steal against 3 turnovers. LeBron's eruption late in the fourth quarter was the Bulls' deathblow, as LeBron broke the 30-point barrier for the fifth time in his last seven tries.

Wally World: Wally Szczerbiak had what was clearly his finest game in Wine and Gold, scoring 17 points on 6-13 shooting, including an impressive 3-5 from downtown. With Daniel Gibson and Sasha Pavlovic sidelined for at least the next several weeks, the Cavaliers desperately need Szczerbiak to act as a complementary scorer to LeBron James, particularly from beyond the arc, where Szczerbiak is shooting over 40 percent this season.

Welcome Back? While the crowd was largely indifferent to the presence of Drew Gooden, they let Larry Hughes know that they were glad he's gone with a chorus of boos that varied in degree throughout Sunday's game. Gooden shot par for the course with 10 points on 4-10 shooting, 10 boards, and 3 turnovers. Hughes had a solid game with 23 points on 8-20 shooting, and also adding 5 rebounds and 4 assists.

Larry Loves Losing: At least that's the only

explanation I can think of after Hughes' ridiculous comments upon his return to Cleveland. Hughes stated that the Cavs' offense "wasn't [his] style.They wanted me to sacrifice things so we could win. In this system, there is more movement and draw and kicks." Imagine that Larry, the Cavs wanted you to sacrifice some personal glory to help the team win. What a bunch of jerks!

Hughes added, "We had 50-plus wins, made the Finals and I learned from it. I was unhappy, though, and wasn't myself. I'd rather enjoy the game than all that." And that, ladies and gentlemen, is Larry Hughes in a nutshell: he doesn't care if the team wins or not, as long as he's happy. Larry, your job is to help your team win basketball games, not enjoy yourself on the court. While I can appreciate that the Cavs' offense didn''t play to your strengths, the team went to the Finals last year. If you aren't willing to trade a few points per game on your stats sheet for a Finals appearance, then I'm glad you're gone. Larry, if you want to have fun all of the time, buy an Xbox, quit the NBA, and burn the bush all day with Ricky

Williams, another guy who would rather have fun than help his team win.

Sophomore Slump: After last year's promising rookie season, most people in and around the Chicago Bulls organization expected big things from LSU product Tyrus Thomas this year. It just hasn't happened.

While Thomas' stats in scoring, rebounds, and assists are all slightly improved, his field goal percentage has dipped almost seven points this season. The obvious answer for Thomas' struggles is that the young, poorly-performing Bulls may be leaning too much on the youngster, but Thomas is only playing 17 minutes per game. Thomas is still an intriguing prospect, and if the Bulls become disenchanted with him, they may end up disposing of a very talented player who they simply failed to develop effectively. Then again, Thomas could simply be another NBA lottery bust; the league's full of them.

The Most Important Cavalier Not Named LeBron: It may very well be Anderson Varejao. At least from a statistics perspective, Varejao's off-season contract demands were ridiculous, but he's one of the team's most irreplaceable players, and has value to the Cavs beyond what he provides on the stat sheet.

At one point, ABC flashed up a graphic that showed the Cavaliers were 16-9 this season with Varejao, and 17-17 sans Sideshow Bob. While those statistics obviously contain far more variables than simply whether or not AV took the floor (e.g. LeBron James' injury earlier this season), they aren't worthless, either. The Cavaliers seem to respond to Varejao''s infectious energy when he's on the floor, and while he still has room for improvement as a one-on-one defender, his presence and ability to quickly fill the lane to take a charge makes opponents think twice about haphazardly driving into the lane.

Varejao is a terrific rebounder, and his offensive game continues to develop. During the Bulls game, AV executed a beautiful turnaround move in the post against Drew Gooden, and nailed a face up jumper from the free throw line later in the game. In spite of all the turmoil caused by Varejao's holdout during the summer and a large chunk of the season, the Cavs are very fortunate to still have him on the team, and it will be interesting to see how they deal with his imminent unrestricted free agency next season and most importantly, next summer.

Finish Strong: Cavs fans have now been privy to the unique phenomenon of watching Ben Wallace shoot free throws for their team. There's really nothing quite like it. Wallace was three of eight from the charity stripe on Sunday, and while that's only a few percentage points worse than his career average of 41.8 percent, he didn't need to shoot eight free throws against the Bulls.

At least twice, Wallace could have attacked the hoop with more vigor and assured himself of a dunk, banking two points for sure and saving Cavs fans the emotional roller coaster ride of watching him shoot two free throws.

As Wallace and LeBron James (and for that matter, Delonte West) develop more chemistry, Wallace is going to find himself with more and more wide open looks underneath the basket. If the Cavs start running frequent pick-and-rolls with James and Wallace, those open looks will only become more abundant. Wallace needs to, as Mr. Cavalier would put it, “Throw the hammer down,” as frequently as possible, because Ben Wallace at the free throw line is about as reliable as a rear-ended Ford Pinto

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M-V-P: During the last few seasons, NBA fans have developed a propensity for chanting “M-V-P” in succession whenever their best player hits a big shot, goes to the free throw line, brushes his teeth, etc. While there are guys who are deserving of such chatter - Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett, and LeBron James come to mind - the M-V-P chant itself is extremely played out. With the exception of the occasional mock M-V-P chant for, say, someone like Slava Medvedenko, which have a definite comic value, it would be nice to see these cheers curtailed.

AC, You The Man: I unapologetically love Austin Carr. Carr’s happy-go-lucky

demeanor and propensity for mixed metaphors are constantly lampooned by Cavs fans (myself included), mostly out of love. I have nothing but kind words for AC.

A little over a week ago, Carr was honored during halftime of the Pitt/Notre Dame game at South Bend for his recent induction into the Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame. Carr remains Notre Dame's all-time leading scorer, and is widely considered the greatest player in Notre Dame history. During the ceremony, Carr shed Irvin-esque tears

and was overcome with emotion. Admittedly, I was a little touched, myself.

He may not be Bob Costas in the broadcast booth, but Carr, who's known as Mr. Cavalier, has dedicated years to the Cleveland community and to the Cavaliers. Carr is universally regarded as a great guy, and from the stories you hear, there isn''t a soul alive who's met AC and hasn't liked him. I applaud Carr's service to the city of Cleveland, and hope that he

remains a part of the organization for years to come.

The Cleveland Cavaliers Will Return: On Wednesday, when they travel to Madison Square Garden to square off against the New York Knickerbockers at 7:30. For whatever reason, the Knicks have given the Cavs problems over the last couple of years, and LeBron & Friends will be looking to avenge a 108-90 loss to New York back on December 19th.