Northeast Ohio is still digging itself out from the Storm of 2008, and the Cavaliers spent much of Tuesday night doing the same thing against the visiting Portland Trail Blazers. Cleveland trailed for much of the game, not taking its first lead until nine seconds remained in the third quarter, but managed to hang on for one of the season's less artistic victories, 88-80, thanks in large part to LeBron's seventh triple-double of the season.

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Game Recap

Maybe it was the fact that this was the third game in five nights, maybe the arrival of the Blazers- who haven't won in Cleveland since 2002-03- didn't serve to inspire, but for whatever reason, the Cavaliers came out Monday night in a drowsy, fugue state, and Portland took advantage

early. The Blazers jumped out to a 12-2 lead in the first five minutes, and the Wine & Gold started out 1-of-10 from the field and at one point went over four minutes without scoring. At the end of a dismal first quarter, it was 25-14 in favor of the Trail Blazers.

Cleveland's offensive output improved in the second quarter, but having gained the lead, Portland now tenaciously protected it. Whenever the Cavaliers cut into the deficit- to five in the first quarter, to three in the second- the Blazers would put together a run that bought them some breathing space. The Rip City representatives led by 13 at one point early in the second quarter and continually kept the Cavaliers at arm's length throughout the first half, largely due to the play of LeMarcus Aldridge, who went 8-of-11 from the field in the half. Portland led by ten at the 2:25 mark of the second quarter, but a Cleveland run, highlighted by a couple of money threes from Devin Brown and Delonte West, along with a LeBron James run-out dunk, cut it to 43-39 at intermission.

The bulk of the third quarter was much of the same, with each Cavalier spurt offset by a Portland counter-attack. Cleveland cut it to two early in the quarter and was within 48-45 at the nine-minute mark, but the Blazers built the lead back up to eight. It was 61-55 in favor of Portland when the Cavaliers finally made a run to overtake the visitors. Cleveland outscored the Blazers 7-0 in the final two-and-a-half minutes of the third, and when Anderson Varejao converted a three-point play with nine seconds remaining in the period, the Cavaliers had the lead, 62-61. After nearly 36 minutes of game action, it was Cleveland's first lead.

The Cavaliers wouldn't trail for the remainder of the night, but the stubborn Blazers made things tough for most of the fourth period.

Twice, Portland tied the score in the fourth on Travis Outlaw jumpers, before Cleveland finally took the lead for good on a pair of Wally Szczerbiak free throws with 8:55 remaining. From there, it was Cleveland's turn to hold the game at arm's length. The Blazers were still within one at 75-74 with less than five minutes remaining when the Cavaliers finally put together the surge that put the game away. As usual, the catalyst was LeBron James. A patented James heat-check three made it 78-74. With the Cavaliers leading 81-77 with under two minutes left, LeBron penetrated, and with several Portland defenders following him like the Pied Piper, dumped it off to Andy for a dunk that made it 83-77. After a Blazers turnover, LeBron again drove into the teeth of the defense, again drew a crowd, and again passed it off, this time to Wally World, who knocked in a jump shot that gave the Cavaliers an 85-77 lead and essentially iced the game.

Odds and Ends

How the game was won: After playing some questionable defense for the last several games, the Cavaliers tightened it up on that end of the floor. After the big first quarter, Portland scored 18, 19, and 18 points in each of the remaining stanzas. LaMarcus Aldridge was held to just 3-of-8 shooting in the second half, and Brandon Roy went 5-of-13 for the game. Overall, the Cavaliers held the Blazers to just under 40 percent shooting for the night, including 6-of-21 from three-point range. Cleveland also took good care of the basketball, committing nine turnovers. The Cavaliers had problems giving up second-chance points all night- Portland pulled down 15 offensive rebounds, yet another sign that Zydrunas Ilgauskas is

missed- but managed to offset this problem with solid defense and mistake-free basketball on the offensive end.

LeBron's line: 24 points on 7-of-18 from the floor, with 11 assists and 10 rebounds. The King didn't think he played all that well; like Ice Cube, however, he &^$#%^ around and got a triple-double. LeBron made only one three-pointer on the night, but as usual, it came at a time when his team absolutely had to have it. And while his offensive game on the whole was a little off, LeBron's court vision and unselfishness ultimately won the day for his team.

Other heroes: Joe Smith continues to play outstanding basketball. Smitty came off the bench to score 18 points- second only to LeBron's 24 among the Cavaliers- including a perfect 8-of-8 from the stripe. Andy followed his brilliant effort against Indiana with 16 points and nine boards. The Wild Thing went an impressive 7-of-11 from the field, and even buried a jump shot that helped the Cavaliers maintain their lead in the fourth quarter. It looks as if Andy is most or all of the way back from his injury, which is great news. When he's on, he's probably the second-best player, in terms of impact, on this entire team. The sterling efforts from Smitty and Varejao offset a dismal night from Ben Wallace, who went 0-of-4 from the field- including a missed wide-open dunk- and didn't play the second half thanks to back spasms.

Next: Tonight at 7:30, when the Cavaliers venture to the Meadowlands to take on the New Jersey Nets.