The Cavaliers welcomed the New Orleans Hornets to The Q on Wednesday and the marquee match up did not disappoint, as the game had a distinct playoff feel to it, particularly in the second half. Ultimately the Cavs would come up a point short, but they can hold their heads high with the knowledge that they gave the Western Conference's number one team all that they could handle, and that they hung tough in a game which offered multiple opportunities for a complete collapse.

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Game Recap

First Quarter

The Cavaliers sprinted out to an early 10-4 lead fueled by a pair of Zydrunas Ilgauskas field goals, but the Hornets fought back with a couple of Tyson Chandler baskets. Chandler finished 5-7 for 13 points,

and the Cavaliers frequently lost track of him around the hoop while focusing their defensive efforts on stopping the slashing Chris Paul.

LeBron James wasn't very assertive early, clearly in distribution mode in the first quarter. New Orleans power forward David West had eight points in what was a very evenly matched first quarter.

Second Quarter

After trailing early in the second quarter, a 7-0 run gave the Cavaliers a 36-34 lead with 7:00 remaining. But New Orleans answered right back, regaining the lead and pushing it to a 48-40 Hornets advantage.

The Cavaliers really struggled defensively in the second stanza, allowing 31 points. New Orleans' outside shooting began to heat up, and the Cavs would be unable to shut down that phase of the Hornets' game for the remainder of the contest.

Every time the Cavaliers made a run to whittle the New Orleans advantage down to one possession, the Hornets would make a big shot to reopen their lead. So it was at the end of the second, when Jannero Pargo hit a three-pointer with a few seconds remaining to give the Hornets a 56-50 lead at the break. Pargo was a perfect three of three from downtown in the first half, and Chris Paul posted a staggering 11 assists.

Third Quarter

The Hornets began the third quarter mired in a shooting drought, scoring only three points in the first 4:30 of the third. Unfortunately the Cavaliers were unable to take advantage, scoring only five points over the same period. When LeBron James hit a deep three to cut the New Orleans lead to 66-64, the Hornets answered right back with a Peja Stojakovic three in what would become a theme for the evening.

LeBron James closed out a strong quarter for the Wine & Gold with an emphatic jam that tied the game at 71 going into the fourth. The Cavaliers managed to play a strong third quarter, even if their scoring total (21) was a little low. Mike Brown obviously hammered home the team's defensive mantra during halftime, because the Cavs limited the visiting Hornets to just 17 points for the quarter.

Fourth Quarter

The Cavaliers continued to dominate in the paint, as they had all game long. Meanwhile the Hornets continued to hit open jump shots, particularly threes, which they shot at an alarming 50-percent clip as a team. Peja Stojakovic had a great night from beyond the arc, hitting six of nine three balls and scoring 11 points in the fourth quarter.

With 2:46 remaining the Cavaliers trailed 94-91. An Ilgauskas jumper cut the lead to one, then Paul nailed a fall away jump shot and the lead was once again three. Several possessions later Ilgauskas missed a

jumper, but Anderson Varejao snatched an impressive offensive rebound which lead to a pair of a free throws for LeBron James, reducing the lead to one. On the other end, James blocked David West, but Tyson Chandler came up with a clutch put back dunk.

So the scenario was this: 47.4 seconds remaining, a 98-95 New Orleans lead, and the Cavaliers had the basketball. LeBron James missed, but Ilgauskas followed with a tip-in, prompting Austin Carr to inform us for at least the 241st time this year that Z is "the best tip drill man in the league (*ha ha!)*."
The Cavaliers produced a stop on the other end as Jannero Pargo missed what would have been a game-ending three, LeBron James took the basketball across the timeline, and the Cavs called their final timeout with 12.4 seconds remaining.

When play resumed, James took the inbound pass and immediately slashed to the rim for a left-handed layup with 7.7 seconds remaining. New Orleans called a timeout to advance the ball.

The question on everyone's mind: had James left too much time on the clock? The answer: yes. Chris Paul took the inbound pass, slashed into the lane, and found David West for an open 17-footer. The result: nothing but nylon, 99-98 Hornets.

Quick Hits

We can''t repel firepower of that magnitude! Although the Cavaliers dominated the painted area from start to finish, the Hornets controlled the non-painted area, particularly beyond the three-point line, where they were 11-22 as a team. It's not that the Cavs were lazy with their perimeter defense, it's that they were frequently double-teaming Chris Paul to stop his dribble penetration.

The Cavs were able to slow down Paul, who scored 15 points on an inefficient 5-17 from the floor. But the Hornets haven't risen to the top of the Western Conference by being a one-dimensional team, and they've got some pretty good shooters. Thus, Chris Paul dished out a mind-bottling 20 assists and the Hornets won.

Big man, big night: Zydrunas Ilgauskas had a field day against the Hornets, scoring a season high 29 points on 13-19 shooting, grabbing 15 rebounds, and blocking a pair of shots. Z's jumper is as dialed in as it's ever been, and that's great news for the Cavs as they tune up for the playoffs. While we're talking Ilgauskas, this guy gets hosed by the refs on both ends of the floor, and it's probably just because he looks really awkward and lurchy regardless of what he's doing. Z frequently can't buy a call when he's being roughed up in the paint, and he often is whistled for fouls on clean defensive blocks. Such is life for the Lanky Lithuanian.

And the best point guard in the NBA is... Christopher Emmanuel Paul. Paul has set the league on fire this season, scoring over 21 points per game, doling out more than 11 assists, turning the ball over at a relatively low rate, and shooting 49.7-percent, a jaw-dropping statistic for a point guard. Deron Williams is a pretty good player, but the Utah Jazz must be kicking themselves for passing on Paul in the 2005 Draft. Paul plays very under control, with a basketball IQ far beyond his years. His ability to bait the Cavaliers into double-teaming him and then find an open teammate is why the Hornets won the game.

SWAT team: The tap back is a vastly underrated move for big men on the offensive boards. Anderson Varejao seems to have gotten the hang of it. AV had two tap backs in the first quarter alone. Tapping back is a great move because in all likelihood the ball ends up in the hands of your outside shooters, who are either trolling the three point line or retreating to play defense.

"Wham with the right hand!" Big ups to beloved Cavs' radio broadcaster Joe Tait, who called his 3000th game for the Cavaliers on Wednesday. Tait has been calling Cavs games since their inaugural season in 1970, with the exceptions of the ‘80-‘81 and ‘81-‘82 seasons, when he was fired by the infinitely brainless then-owner Ted Stepien for making negative comments about Stepien's ownership. Tait

was honored at halftime with a rousing ovation. Congratulations, Joe, and keep up the great work.

DiGiorno Pizza® Austin Carr Quote of the Game: [referring to Joe Tait] ""He has a photogenic memory; he remembers everything!"

No sugar tonight: The Cavs played a pretty good game. They shot 50-percent from the floor, they did a decent job controlling the ball (13 turnovers), they crushed the Hornets on the boards (48-33), and they dominated the paint. But the Hornets got some clutch play and made tons of threes, and once in awhile that happens. Very rarely will you see the Cavaliers shoot such a high percentage and lose.

Costly miscues: In the third quarter Joe Smith missed a pair of seemingly innocent free throws, which is very out of character considering that Smith is a career 79.3-percent shooter from the line. Those two freebies could have provided the Cavaliers with their margin of victory.

I can"t help but root for David West: When West was preparing for the NBA Draft in 2003, he was coming off of a stellar college career at Xavier during which he was named the National Player of the Year in 2003. Even so, scouts told him he had to either gain or lose 40 pounds to have a shot at making it in the NBA. In spite of his fantastic collegiate success, West wasn't drafted until the 18th pick.

It's safe to say that West has silenced his critics, increasing his scoring and rebounding numbers in each of his five seasons and earning his way onto the All-Star Team this season. West was one of my favorite collegiate players, and I'm thrilled to see him succeeding in the face of adversity at the pro level.

The Cleveland Cavaliers will return: Saturday, when they travel to the rape, murder, and high school dropout capital of the United States to face their arch-nemesis, the Detroit Pistons. The tip from The Palace of Auburn Hills will come at 7:30, as the

Cavs will look to follow up last Wednesday's 89-73 thumping of the Pistons with another victory.