The Chicago Bulls and some old friends rolled into Cleveland to face the Cavaliers Thursday night. Fan (un)favorite Larry Hughes was back, as were Shannon Brown and Cedric Simmons as well as a very dapper Drew Gooden, who was in street clothes due to an abdominal strain. The Cavs led this one 85-77 going into the fourth quarter but let it all slip away. Nick tells us about it.

The Chicago Bulls and some old friends rolled into Cleveland to face the Cavaliers Thursday night. Fan (un)favorite Larry Hughes was back, as were Shannon Brown and Cedric Simmons as well as a very dapper Drew Gooden, who was in street clothes due to an abdominal strain. Gooden's replacement, Ben Wallace, was back in the starting lineup following some lingering back problems.

The remainder of the season will essentially be a tune up for the Cavaliers, who are pretty well cemented in the Eastern Conference's number four seed. It will be important for Mike Brown to find a rotation that he's comfortable with, as well as keep starting power forward Ben Wallace from re-aggravating his back injury.

Game Recap

First Quarter

Ben Wallace's presence was felt immediately, as he contributed an early layup and an impressive block of Joakim Noah on a Chicago fast break. The Cavaliers were making a concerted effort to feed Zydrunas Ilgauskas against the undersized Chicago frontcourt, and Z had some early success with a few buckets and some trips to the charity stripe.

Luol Deng had eight of the Bulls' first 13 points, including a pair of jumpers. Deng has developed into a quality secondary option for the Bulls, and is always a tough defensive match up for the Cavs.

LeBron started to assert himself in the last third of the quarter, making a three, banking home a layup with a foul (he would miss the ensuing free throw), and returning to the free throw line on the next possession, making one of two shots. Oh, and he made another three ball two possessions later. Not enough for you? James hit a beautiful fade away jumper on the Cavs' final possession of the quarter, and that he scored the Cavaliers' last nine points. But you're right, Marv Albert, he probably shouldn't win the MVP Award...

Second Quarter

Larry Hughes had a put back dunk and then stared down the crowd, who with a chorus of boos informed Larry that they didn't miss him, either. Unfortunately for the fans at The Q, Mr. "I Heart Strippers" had a nice game.

The Cavaliers opened up an 13 point lead with 1:04 to play in the

quarter, riding the momentum of a LeBron James three and a thunderous Ben Wallace dunk. After a strong second quarter the Cavaliers carried a 10 point lead into the break.

Third Quarter

Larry Hughes made three early baskets, much to the chagrin of the home crowd. But the Cavs kept rolling offensively, leading 68-56 with seven and a half minutes left. The Cavaliers' problem wasn't scoring, it was slowing down the Chicago Bulls, who opened the quarter making six of their first eight shots.

The home team continued to pour it on, building a 17 point lead with 4:08 to play following a LeBron James jumper. A Larry Hughes three drew the ire of the home crowd and cut the Cleveland lead to 14. Larry Hughes was like a blind man reading in the third quarter, as he hit another jump shot pushing his third quarter point total to 15.

It was just another day at the office for King James, who had 32 point after only three quarters of play. Unfortunately the Bulls finished the quarter with a 16-7 surge, whittling the Cavalier lead down to eight, 85-77, and setting up a fourth quarter to forget.

Fourth Quarter

LeBron James was riding the pine as the fourth quarter commenced, but Wally Szczerbiak did his best to pick up the slack, making a pair of early jump shots. The Cavaliers were simply unable to put the Bulls away, and six unanswered Chicago points shrunk the Cleveland lead to 89-85 with 9:20 to play. Whether it was Ben Gordon, Larry Hughes, or Andres Nocioni, every time the Cavs had a chance to deliver a knockout blow the Bulls got themselves off the ropes with a clutch shot.

A pair of Ben Gordon free throws evened the score at 96 apiece with just under 4 minutes to play. An Anderson Varejao put back gave the Cavaliers a two point lead. The Cavs' next possession was awfully strange; it included two Wally Szczerbiak offensive rebounds (of his own shots, no less), and a botched dunk by Ben Wallace (rejected by the rim).

The Cavs turned the ball over on their next possession, and the Bulls capitalized as Delonte West committed the cardinal sin of fouling a jump shooter, and even worse, fouling on a three. Ben Gordon was that jump shooter, and he drained all three of his free throws, giving the Bulls a 99-98 lead with 1:42 to go. Both teams followed with lousy possessions, the Cavaliers were forced to throw up a long three as the shot clock expired (LeBron air mailed it) and Ben Gordon was whistled for an offensive foul (off arm) on Delonte West.

With 43.2 seconds to play, the Bulls had the basketball. The Bulls burned the shot clock and Ben Gordon missed a jump shot coming off a curl, giving the Cavaliers possession with 24.9 remaining. The Cavs went small, with Varejao, James, Szczerbiak, West, and Gibson. LeBron dribbled the clock down to about 12 seconds, made his move, and missed a runner in the lane with 8 seconds to go. The Cavs were

forced to foul Ben Gordon, who nailed his free throws, pushing the Chicago lead to three points.

The Cavs had the ball with 3.4 seconds to play, and Coach Brown called a timeout to advance the basketball. On the inbounds pass, LeBron received the ball and was trapped almost immediately. James made a terrific pass to a wide open Daniel Gibson, but Gibson was unable to convert the tying three-pointer, and the Cavs went home 101-98 losers.

Quick Hits

Bring the pain: The Cavs allow far too many old fashioned three-point play opportunities, and a big reason is that they don't foul very hard as a team. Zydrunas Ilgauskas is particularly guilty of soft fouls around the hoop. If you're going to foul a guy, you might as well foul him hard enough that he can't put up a viable shot.

"You don't belong here anymore!" At Monday's Tribe opener a fellow sitting near my group, who had probably been over-enjoying opening day since about nine in the morning, continually screamed that goofy line at Jim Thome. He also incessantly demanded that the Indians demote CC Sabathia to the Mahoning Valley Scrappers. That guy would have had a field day barking at former Cavalier Larry Hughes.

Hughes played one of his best games ever at The Q, going for 25

points on 11 of 17 shooting. But before the "we shouldn't have traded Hughes" bandwagon starts rolling, keep in mind that TNT flashed Hughes' pre and post-trade statistics during the fourth quarter, and they were almost identical. Inefficiency is still Hughes' middle name; he shot 38 percent this season as a Cavalier, and he's shot just 37 percent since being banished to the Windy City.

Where's Wally? Wally Szczerbiak had one of his better games since being traded to Cleveland (10 points, 8 rebounds), but he still looks like the one piece of the big trade that hasn't quite meshed with the rest of the club. Delonte West and Joe Smith have played well, and Ben Wallace has been adequate when healthy, but Szczerbiak frequently looks lost, often short-circuiting the offense with bad shots. Danny Ferry traded for Szczerbiak hoping that he could hit open shots. Regrettably Wally has thus far been unable to do so, shooting just 35 percent from the field (35.4 percent from three) since the trade. If Wally doesn't start hitting shots, and fast, he's going to play his way right out of Mike Brown's rotation.

Speaking of the rotation: Can anyone explain why neither Damon Jones nor Sasha Pavlovic saw any action against the Bulls? The Cavs' depth is now one of their greatest strengths, and with little happening from beyond the arc Jones' marksmanship could have been a real boon for the Cavaliers. Sasha Pavlovic has yet to find a real rhythm since returning from injured reserve, but he's not going to regain his form sitting on the bench. It's a virtual certainty that the Cavs will enter the playoffs as the four seed, so now is the perfect time to get Pavlovic some minutes in the hope that he can find some consistency.

Make the easy ones: Get ready for a rare criticism of LeBron James.

Prepared? Alright then. The Chosen One desperately needs to improve his free throw shooting. It blows me away how any pro basketball player who doesn't play center can shoot under 80 percent from the line, because it's always the same regardless of the venue, there's never a defender, and you can simply practice until you get it right.

James was 10 of 14 from the stripe against Chicago, fairly in line with his 73 percent career average. LeBron gets to the line more than ten times per game, so if he could bump his free throw percentage from the 72 percent he's shot this season to around 80 percent, he'd be scoring about a point more per game without any added effort.

One man show: The Cavs scored just 13 points in the fourth quarter, and it's not hard to figure out why. LeBron James, who leads the NBA in fourth quarter scoring, contributed just one measly point. Now I know that LeBron's back was tightening up from a hit earlier in the game, but it's pretty pathetic that the Cavs are so reliant on James that they can't manage more than 13 points without him (and James only took five shots in the final stanza). Someone needed to step up and take the scoring burden for the Cavaliers, but nobody answered the bell.

The Czar returns: Mike Fratello coached the Cavs for six seasons in the '90s, and he returned to The Q as a commentator for TNT. Fratello often doesn't get enough credit for his time in Cleveland; he only once (1998-99) failed to post a winning season, and made the playoffs four times with some very mediocre teams. It was good to have him back.

Speaking of The Czar of the Telestrator: Fratello told a neat little story about a father getting Joakim Noah's autograph for his son in the lobby of the Bulls' hotel. Marv Albert then made a comment to the effect of, (I can't remember what Albert said exactly) "Hanging out in the hotel lobby again, eh?" Am I the only one who finds it more than mildly humorous that Marv Albert would accuse Fratello of being weird in a hotel, considering what he pulled? Priceless.

TNT's studio: Dammit, Charles Barkley's talking again! How I pity Ernie Johnson, having to tolerate Chuck, and to a lesser degree, Kenny, for hours at a time. The worst are those sophomoric doctored pictures they put on screen from time to time. They were back at it on Thursday, when TNT displayed a hys-terical photo of Kenny Smith, photo-shopped to look like he had chop sticks up his nose. Nice work, gentlemen. Doesn't that kind of stuff stop being funny around age 11?

The Cleveland Cavaliers will return: Saturday, when they play host to the Orlando Magic at 3:00 in downtown Cleveland. Tune in to watch the two most athletic players in the league, LeBron James and Hedo Turkoglu (psych, I really meant Dwight Howard) duke it out in a fairly meaningless game as the curtain begins to drop on the regular season.