After letting an eleven-point fourth-quarter lead slip away in a welter of turnovers, missed free throws, and circus shots by the 76ers, it seemed as if the Cavaliers had suffered yet another gut-punch in what has become an excruciating last couple of weeks. But the hoop gods were kind, at least on this night, and in one of the more bizarre finishes you'll ever see, the Cavaliers went from 90-89 losers to 91-90 winners, clinching the all-important fourth seed and home-court for the first round of the Eastern Conference Playoffs. Bring on the Wizards!

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Game Recap

For 47 minutes and 59.8 seconds, this game un-spooled like a microcosm of this weird, mercurial, frustrating season. Cleveland spent the bulk of the night more or less in control. After a back-and-forth first

quarter-and-a-half, the Cavaliers took a 29-27 lead at the 7:23 mark of the second period. They maintained the advantage for nearly twenty-seven minutes straight, building it up to as many as twelve early in the fourth quarter. The newly rehabilitated Sasha Pavlovic locked up Andre Iguodala- until he landed on Reggie Evans's foot midway through the third and crumpled to the floor with a left ankle injury, par for the course- the ball movement was crisp and precise, and after a slow start LeBron was his usual spectacular self. Even lousy free-throw shooting (13-of-21) and a plague of turnovers (seventeen in total) didn't look to slow Cleveland's roll.

With eight minutes remaining in the game, the Cavaliers were in cruise control with a 77-66 lead. At this point, with the fourth spot-clinching victory in sight, the team seemingly looked at the scoreboard, shook its collective head, and said, "Uh-uh. This is too easy. We need to make this tough on ourselves." A minute-and-a-half and three Cleveland turnovers later, it was 77-74. LeBron restored some equilibrium with a steal and a coast-to-coast lay-up, but it was short-lived. Back-to-back buckets by Boo Williams (huge fourth quarter) and Andre Miller (huge game) followed, and with 4:47 to play, the score was tied at 80.

To paraphrase the late, great Gib Shanley... it was time to get nervous.

Daniel Gibson put the Cavaliers back on top with a three-pointer, and after a Sixers bucket, Z hit a pair of free throws to make it 85-82. With 1:39 left, Samuel Dalembert converted an offensive rebound into a hoop and a foul, cutting the lead to one. He missed the free throw, but Boobie rimmed out a three, and with 1:06 to play, Thaddeus Young dropped in a hook shot, putting the Sixers up by one- their first lead

since early in the second period- and setting the stage for one of the craziest finishes of this crazy-arsed season.

On the ensuing possession, LeBron found himself at the top of the key, face-guarded by Iguodala, and whipped a bullet pass down low to Z, who dumped it in to flip-flop the Cavaliers into a one-point lead with 44.4 left. Boo Williams pumped in a tough runner to make it 88-87 Sixers. Again, LeBron was tightly guarded by Iguodala, and this time he found Devin Brown on the left wing. Brown put the ball on the floor, rolled to the hoop, and tossed in a floater over Dalembert's outstretched hand. 89-88 Cavaliers. 15 seconds to play.

It looked as if Philadelphia's last opportunity would go up in smoke when Andre Miller dribbled the ball off his foot. But the orange rolled right to Boo Williams- who else- who throw up a fade-away prayer. It found nothing but net with 5.1 left, and now it was 90-89 Sixers. LeBron drove the lane, was bumped with no call, and had his shot blocked. The ball caromed to Devin Brown, whose follow fell off the rim. The crowd roared, confetti flew, Kool & the Gang's "Celebration" kicked on over the PA system, Sixers win, Sixers win... but wait!

Lost in the crowd noise and the chaos, there was a foul called. Samuel Dalembert had undercut Devin Brown on his put-back attempt. The officials huddled at the scorer's table, trying to figure out if the foul had been called with time on the clock. If no, the game was over, and the Cavaliers had a devastating loss. If yes, Devin Brown would shoot free throws.

After several agonizing minutes, the decision came down: yes. The foul had occurred with 0.2 still on the clock. The Sixers, several of whom had bolted to the dressing room, were called back onto the floor. The crowd booed (understandably). Devin Brown, the quiet, blue-collar player who has been one of the few steady performers for this team on this chaotic season, stepped to the line. He hit the first free throw to tie it. Then he hit the second to give Cleveland the lead. Philadelphia's last gasp failed, and the Cavaliers found themselves winners, 91-90, of a game everyone had thought they'd lost just moments earlier.

Just another night at the office, right?

Odds and Ends

How the game was won: The Cavaliers again struggled with Philadelphia's transition game, but they offset that weakness with solid half-court defense; although to be fair, the 76ers are not a very good half-court team. If not for the turnovers and the missed free throws- at one point Cleveland was 4-of-11 from the line, a number that made the Memphis Tigers look like the '86 Celtics- this game would have been salted away a lot earlier than with 0.2 remaining.

LeBron's line: 27 points on 10-of-18 shooting, with four rebounds and five assists. The King poured in 18 second-half points and provided a couple of more plays for the highlight

reels, especially a spectacular dunk late in the first half, in which he split two Philadelphia defenders for a monster jam that had the home crowd oohing and aahing in reverence.

Other heroes: Zydrunas Ilgauskas, wrapping up a terrific season personally, had 22 points and seven rebounds. Before going down with yet another ankle injury, Sasha provided excellent, harassing defense on Andre Iguodala. And Devin Brown shot just 5-of-13, but was massive down the stretch, hitting the go-ahead bucket with 15 seconds left and knocking in the two pressure free throws to win the game. I really like what Devin has brought to this team. He's no All-Star- just a guy who quietly makes winning plays.

Next: Wednesday evening at 7:00, when the Cavaliers finish the regular season by hosting the Detroit Pistons. Then it's Playoff Time.