The 2008 NBA Playoffs get underway today with the Cavaliers/Wizards series providing the first helping of what should be a feast of exciting games throughout the league over the next two months. The Cavaliers and Wizards are matched up for the third straight year - in the first round no less - with the Cavaliers winning the two previous playoff series'. We went to our panel of writers for their thoughts on how this series would play out, and got an array of different answers.

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Last year, the Wizards came in depleted because of injuries and the Cavaliers swept them quickly and easily in four games.

This year it looks like these two teams are ready to throw haymakers at one another once again, and we are in for many exciting finishes to the games like in 2006. Both teams are practically even from a talent standpoint, where the Cavaliers clearly have the better star player but the Wizards may have the better overall team.

Here is the game schedule for the series:

Game 1: Wizards @ Cavaliers Sat 4/19 12:30 pm
Game 2: Wizards @ Cavaliers Mon 4/21 7:00 pm
Game 3: Cavaliers @ Wizards Thurs 4/24 8:00 pm
Game 4: Cavaliers @ Wizards Sun 4/27 1:00 pm
Game 5: Wizards @ Cavaliers Wed 4/30 TBD
Game 6: Cavaliers @ Wizards Fri 5/2 TBD
Game 7: Wizards @ Cavaliers Sun 5/4 TBD

Will the legend of LeBron James continue with yet another dominating and memorable playoff

series? Will the inconsistency of the Cavaliers catch up with them, or is all the Wizards "talk" from the past week enough to get this team to finally focus? Can the Cavaliers flip the switch in time?

TheClevelandFan.com panel opines and make their predictions:

Erik Cassano: This is likely a case of the Cavs facing the wrong team at the wrong time. Unlike last year, the Wizards look like they're going to head into this series with a full deck of players, and they're going to be highly motivated to win this series after two years of getting pushed around by the Cavs in the playoffs.

On paper, the Cavs have the deeper, more talented team, and of course LeBron is the ultimate trump card. But playoff games -- and NBA games in general -- are usually won and lost in the fourth quarter. To that end, the Cavs have been terrible at closing out games since the trade. They just can't seem to get out of their own way, falling victim to a seemingly endless string of unforced turnovers, poor defense, cold shooting and missed free throws.

Combined with the fact that LeBron, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Ben Wallace and Daniel Gibson have been recovering from varying degrees of injuries, it's hard to tell just what kind of performance you're going to get out of a team that was essentially rebuilt less than two months ago. Losing Sasha Pavlovic to an ankle sprain doesn't help matters either, since he's a long, athletic swingman who can provide some supplementary scoring and take his turn guarding Caron Butler.

In short: The Wizards are gaining momentum, the Cavs are doing their best to just tread water and the law of averages says that sooner or later the Wizards will probably get one over on the Cavs. This looks like as good a year as any for that to occur.

I don't mean to be a party pooper, but I see the Wizards winning most of the fourth quarter battles in this series and advancing.

Wizards in 6

John Hnat: Yes, I know -- they've been a sputtering .500 team since the Big Trade. But this team is built for the playoffs.

In April and May, they can play active defense for three quarters, then turn it over to some guy named LeBron in the fourth.

It's a style that takes too much energy to play four games in five nights in December ... but in the spring, when you have 2-3 days between games, it's golden.

One other comment. Everybody who has ever (ever) questioned LeBron James's ability has ended up looking like a fool. DeShawn Stevenson questioned LeBron James's ability. You do the math.

Cavs in 5

Jesse Lamovsky: Had they just kept their collective yap shut and left well enough alone, the Wizards might have been able to catch the Cavaliers flat, uninspired, and a little overconfident. Now? Not a chance. Thanks to the loquaciousness of Agent Zero and DeShawn Stevenson, the Wizards have given a good hard tug on the King's ermine robes- and they're going to pay the price for their insolence. With an inspired LeBron and their brand of ugly-ball that is so effective this time of year, look for the Cavaliers to move on and face Boston in round two.

Cavs in 6

Rich Swerbinsky: What Jesse said.

Cavs in 6

Brian McPeek: This has been a strange, odd and disappointing season for the Cavs despite the continued brilliance of the Chosen One. When it gets right down to it, I can't suddenly see the clouds clearing and the sun shining down on a championship parade.

You can chalk it up to unreasonable expectations brought about by last year's stunning run to the Finals or you can chalk it up to too many injuries, too many worthless players filling roster spots or too little time to adjust to the deadline day deal that turned over half the squad.

Whatever the reasons, for me it all adds up to the disappointment continuing and the season ending at the hands of the Washington Wizards in seven games. Hopefully this season's disappointment is the impetus behind some selective cutting of dead wood and a new birth this fall for the Wine & Gold.

Even more hopeful is that I'm wrong.

Wizards in 7

Cris Sykes: There are a few things in life I consider to be poor choices. Tugging on Superman's cape is very high on that list.

As is eating yellow snow.

However, both would be much better choices than telling a six foot eight inch, 250 pound locomotive of a man that he is "over-rated".

Very, very bad idea.

This Cavalier team is a pain in the neck to follow, no doubt. They are inconsistent. Both with effort and skill.

Some nights they try to be The Showtime Lakers.

Some nights they are the Riley Knickerbockers.

It is too bad most nights they get caught in the middle.

I do not see that as mattering in this series though.

They go in knowing the only option they have is to slow it down, limit possessions and let Mr. James worry about everything else.

LeBron averages a triple double, I'll go with 28-10-11. Boobie returns to the dead -eye from last year's run. Zydrunderson Verallace handles the post. And at least one game comes down to the one and only, best shooter in the world, Damon Jones hitting a three from the corner to win it.

Bring on the C's.

Cavs in 5

Hiko: To write the Cavaliers off would be the easiest thing to do, as easy as brushing your teeth or losing faith in politicians. And seeing as I'm an eternal pessimist, I'm almost surprised at myself that I am NOT predicting doom for the Cleveland basketball team.

Their chemistry is awful, but their talent is real, and if they can just get in a groove they can beat the Merlins. Several of Washington's players have already helped out by declaring certain Megastars as "overrated" and running their ain't-done-nuthin' gums about how they want the Cavs in the first round. Be careful what ye wish for, players of Gandalf.

So I'm going to depart from reality and predict a Cavaliers upset (yes, for them to win ANY playoff series at this point is an upset).

Cavs in 6

Tony Lastoria: There has been much said about the "over-rated" comments from DeShawn Stevenson firing up LeBron. Also, comments from Gilbert Arenas saying they "want the Cavaliers" providing bulletin board material.

While the talk is clearly stupid and it likely will motivate LeBron, even if he is inspired enough to drop 50 a game in this series it won't be enough for the Cavaliers.

This Cavaliers team has just been too inconsistent this year, and that inconsistency will carry into the playoffs where a much hungrier Wizards team is waiting to take them out. The Cavaliers are banged up and unlike last year there is a cohesiveness that is lacking that ultimately will do them in this series.

The perimeter defense is shaky, and could be the Achilles Heel for the team the entire series.

2007 was a fun playoff ride with the Cavaliers. Unfortunately, the 2008 ride will be a short one as they will blow a tire and get ousted by the Wizards in a deflating Game Seven loss.

However, fear not not Cavaliers fans.

A quick playoff exit may do more good in the long run as it will put some pressure on the organization to make the necessary improvements needed this offseason as they will have all sorts of cap flexibility at their disposal.

Wizards in 7

Nick Allburn: Folks around the league are down on the Cavs right now due to the team's recent struggles. But after three seasons of the Mike Brown/LeBron James- led Cavaliers, the media should have learned at least one thing: this team plays to the level of its competition. That's why the Cavs will rise up to defeat the cream of the crop and lose in head-scratching fashion to the Charlottes of the league.

The Cavs will dial up the intensity now that the postseason has arrived.

Washington has some serious star power with Arenas, Butler, and Jamison, but I'm not convinced that Arenas is all the way back from his knee problems. Arenas hasn't played more than 25 minutes since returning from his injury, and Wizards' coach Eddie Jordan has admitted that Arenas probably will be limited in this series.

The Wizards might have had a chance to catch the Cavaliers napping, having fallen to the Cavs in the playoffs during two consecutive seasons, but Gilbert Arenas and DeShawn Stevenson unwisely elected to flap their gums. It's beyond me why opposing players go out of their way to antagonize LeBron James. I've seen him angry...they wouldn't like him when he's angry.

An angry LeBron is a motivated LeBron.

Bring on the Celtics.

Cavs in 5