It's not always pretty, but LeBron James and Mike Brown have made gutsy playoff wins a Cavaliers' hallmark over the last three years, and Sunday was no different. Facing a reenergized Washington team and a hostile crowd, the Cavs managed to finish off a crucial road win. Now the Cavaliers have a chance to finish the Wizards on Wednesday and wait for the winner of the Celtics/ Hawks match up, which is suddenly in danger of becoming a series. Nick relive today's big win.

After losing game three in blowout fashion, this game had become critical for the Cavaliers. Win and you're up 3-1 with a chance to put the Wizards away at home. Lose and you're looking at a brand new three-game series, and in a series that short, anything can happen.

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Game Recap

First Quarter

Just like in game three, the Wizards came out of the gates with energy and ball pressure, especially on Cleveland point man Delonte West.

Washington sprinted out to a 9-4 lead, fueled by a Caron Butler jump shot, a Brendan Haywood dunk, and an old fashioned three-point play by DeShawn Stevenson. LeBron James hit his first three shots, and three of the Cavaliers' first four shots, reducing the Washington lead to 11-8.

The Wizards were making a concerted effort to exploit Wally Szczerbiak's limited defensive skills. When Caron Butler or Gilbert Arenas would beat Wally Szczerbiak off the dribble another Cleveland defender would be forced to seal off the drive, which would in turn leave another Washington player wide open. Even with the Wizards' early push, the Cavs were able to weather the storm and eventually took a 16-15 lead late in the first quarter. That lead was increased to 18-15 when LeBron executed a spectacular dunk on a run-out, silencing the crowd.

Washington continued to commit dumb fouls; not hard fouls, mind you, but fouls that served no purpose. Case in point, the Wizards fouled Joe Smith on two jump shots late in the quarter, violating one of basketball's cardinal rules.

Washington regained the lead on a late push which included threes by Antonio Daniels and Antawn Jamison, giving the Wizards a 28-24 edge as the quarter closed.

Second Quarter

The Cavs were able to hang tough without LeBron James, whittling the

Washington lead down to 30-29. LeBron returned to see the Cavs with the same four-point deficit that they had at the end of the first quarter (33-29). In spite of James' presence, Caron Butler and Roger Mason both made shots, increasing the lead to eight.

Cleveland got a huge break midway through the quarter when an apparent foul on Darius Songaila by LeBron James, which would have been an early third foul for LeBron, was instead called on Ben Wallace. James dunked the ball on the subsequent possession, as if to remind the Wizards of their ill fortune, and the Washington lead was cut to 39-33.

The Cavaliers were dominating on the offensive boards, and after a pair of offensive rebounds Delonte West brought the Cavs within a point with a trey ball. DeShawn Stevenson took a swing at LeBron James' face on a drive, drawing a Flagrant I foul call from the referees. The hit apparently didn't phase number 23, who drained a three from about eight feet beyond the arc and then was fouled taking a similar three on the next Cleveland possession, a huge mistake by the Wiz. LeBron James was officially inside the heads of the Wizards. When the dust settled it was a 13-0 run for the Cavs, who turned an 8-point deficit into a 44-39 lead.

Daniel Gibson made a huge impact at the end of the quarter, stealing an inbounds pass to set up a LeBron James dunk, and making a three on the Cavs' next possession to increase the Cleveland lead. With 6:30 to go in the half the Cavs trailed by eight, but an 18-point swing gave Cleveland a 10-point advantage at the half (54-44).

Third Quarter

Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Gilbert Arenas traded baskets as the half opened. Neither team was able to gain any ground in the third quarter's early minutes, and with nine minutes to play the Cleveland lead was still 10 points, 61-51. The Cavs continued to win on the offensive boards, and one such rebound translated into a LeBron James three. One-upping himself, James trotted down the floor and made another three on the next possession.

Leading 67-54, the Cavs were the victims of some bad officiating. Brendan Haywood drew a foul, but instead of the foul being called on Delonte West as it should have been, it was called on Zydrunas Ilgauskas. That gave Ilgauskas four fouls midway through the third quarter. Just as the Cavs got lucky in the second quarter when LeBron James wasn't called for a foul (it was instead called on Ben Wallace), Washington caught a break when Z was incorrectly hit with his fourth foul, forcing Mike Brown to bench Ilgauskas for the remainder of the third quarter.

Ilgauskas' departure sparked an 11-0 run for the Wizards, who shrank the Cleveland lead to 3 points, 67-64. Daniel Gibson hit a three to increase the lead to six, but Brendan Haywood slammed a dunk home on the other end. Then in a strange course of events, Haywood hung onto the rim and his momentum forced him to partially come down on Daniel Gibson's shoulder. Gibson didn't intentionally undercut Haywood, but intent is irrelevant in the rules, and a technical foul was assessed to Gibson.

The Cavs just couldn't build any momentum; whenever they made something positive happen, Washington answered to negate it. Devin Brown made a jump shot, but so did Caron Butler, and the Cleveland

lead was 72-70. LeBron James converted an old fashioned three-point play, but Antawn Jamison did the same on the ensuing possession.

Then the Cavs made a late charge. Devin Brown was fouled in the act of shooting and made both of his foul shots. The Cavs stopped the Wizards, and after a poorly executed possession which culminated with Daniel Gibson hoisting a three, LeBron James made a Herculean effort and hauled down the offensive rebound. James then threw up an ill-advised three, but fortunately for Cleveland Joe Smith grabbed yet another offensive rebound, drew a foul, and made his shot as third quarter expired. After an officials' review, which is mandatory is a buzzer beater scenario, Smith was awarded the basket and a free throw, which he made. Thus the Cavs completed a five-point swing, making the score 80-73 at the end of the third.

Fourth Quarter

Caron Butler stole a Daniel Gibson pass and was fouled by LeBron James on the ensuing run-out. James drew a foul on the Cavs' possession, but missed both of his free throws. Luckily, Joe Smith grabbed the offensive rebound. The possession didn't result in any points for the Cavs, but it did draw two more Washington fouls, giving them three team fouls with less than one minute gone in the fourth quarter.

A Caron Butler free throw and a DeShawn Stevenson jumper cut the lead back to two, but Delonte West answered with a three for the Cavaliers, who led 83-78. Caron Butler really started to assert himself in the fourth quarter with five early points, and his jump shot brought the Wizards back within three. Delonte West stayed hot, hitting a three a

few possessions later and making the Cleveland lead 88-82.

DeShawn Stevenson drained a three and LeBron James made two free throws, reducing the lead to five. Caron Butler kept to heating up, making a floater to shrink the lead to three. Washington continued to work a high trap on LeBron effectively and the Cavs had difficulty getting anything done on offense. But as he had done previously, Daniel Gibson bailed the Cavs out with a three as the shot clock expired, making the lead 93-87 with about 5:00 to play.

Brendan Haywood found himself open for another dunk, and LeBron James passed off to Delonte West, who unfortunately wasn't looking. The head-scratching turnover led to another basket for Caron Butler, and the lead was once again three. Although the Cavs were having difficulty getting the looks they wanted on offense, Daniel Gibson continued to come up big, hitting a three as the shot clock expired and pushing the lead back out to six.

LeBron James was hit with his fifth foul, forcing him to be awfully cautious on defense and mindful of the possibility of a charge on offense. Caron Butler added another jumper, giving him 11 points in the quarter and reducing the lead to 4.

With 1:10 to play Washington had the basketball and trailed by four. Gilbert Arenas drew a questionable foul on Delonte West with 57.1 seconds to play and made both of his free throws.

On the next possession James missed an ill-advised jump shot from the elbow with the shot clock only half gone. Gilbert Arenas, who had once again struggled for the majority of the game, banked home a 12-foot fader, tying the game.

The Cavs had possession with about 28 seconds on the game clock. LeBron James dribbled the shot clock away, and there wasn't a fan in the Verizon Center who didn't think James was taking that last shot. Instead, James dished to Delonte West in the corner, who drained a cold-blooded three ball. After a Washington timeout, Gilbert Arenas tried to match West's big shot with a three of his own, but was off the mark. The Cavs had hung on for a 100-97 win, taking a commanding 3-1 lead in the series.

Quick Hits

It was the little guys. Although the fortunes of the Cavaliers usually rest with LeBron James and to a lesser degree, his sidekick Zydrunas Ilgauskas, the Cavs won this game on the shooting of their small, youthful guards. Daniel Gibson and Delonte West shot a solid 11-for-22 combined, but more importantly, the tandem was 9-for-15 from downtown. As a team, the Cavs out-shot the Wizards 13-of-28 to 7-of-19 from three-point land.

West's game-winning three was obviously the play of the game, but West and Gibson hit several key three-pointers at crucial

junctures to stave off Washington rallies and swing the momentum back into Cleveland's favor. Last season's playoffs familiarized us with Gibson's penchant for heroics, but this series has been West's first playoff appearance with the Cavaliers and many were anxious to see how he would perform.

Until game four West had little impact on the series, with his best game coming in the Cavs' blowout loss in game three. West came up big in game four; he and Gibson were the only Cavaliers other than James to score in double figures, and when James struggled with his shooting in the fourth quarter, the pair was there to pick up the slack. Game four just added to Daniel Gibson's already impressive playoff credentials, and was hopefully a harbinger of things to come for Delonte West.

Business as usual. LeBron James dropped 37 points, grabbed 12 rebounds, and dished out 7 assists this afternoon. Do you know what's crazy? As fans, we've come to *expect* such performances from King James. There are only a handful of players in the league who are even capable of putting up such ridiculous numbers, and there are only two other guys (Kobe Bryant, Chris Paul) who can post similar stats with any regularity. As Cavs fans, we're truly blessed to be able to watch LeBron play on a regular basis.

Hey Mike, bench Wally. As good as Wally Szczerbiak was in game two, Mike Brown should be taking more heat for giving Devin Brown's minutes to Szczerbiak. The Wizards torched Szczerbiak and his suspect (that's putting it lightly) defense, particularly in the first quarter.

If Szczerbiak isn't shooting lights out (13-of-33 from the field, 3-of-13 from three in the series) and isn't providing a solid secondary scoring option to LeBron James (Wally is averaging only 8.75 points per game in the series), the Cavs can't afford to give him starting minutes. Devin Brown is head-and-shoulders above Szczerbiak on defense, and he gives the Cavs another guy who's at least relatively athletic and can get to the rim. There's no excuse for Mike Brown starting Szczerbiak from this point on, except that he doesn't want to let his pet project (i.e. starting Szczerbiak out of the blue) die. Mike, swallow your pride and bench Wally World.

Blown opportunity. Washington had a golden opportunity to change the whole dynamic of the game when LeBron James was slapped with his third foul in the third quarter. Had they drawn another foul on James, he would have had to sit until at least the start of the fourth. Had the Wizards been able to draw a fifth foul on LeBron in the fourth quarter, he would have been forced to tiptoe around the court for the remainder of the game, and he might even have fouled out.

We saw how handicapped the Cavs were without Ilgauskas playing extended minutes in the second half, just imagine how different the game would have been if foul trouble had dogged James, as well.

Keeping their cool. Mike Brown and the Cavaliers deserve a great deal of credit for keeping their cool against a hot-headed Washington team that has been trying to provoke them all series long. While the Wizards have let their emotions occasionally throw them off their game (e.g. Brendan Haywood fouling out of game one), the Cavs have done their best to let the scoreboard do the talking for them.

LeBron James deserves extra credit for keeping his emotions in check, whether it was controlling the temptation to razz a crowd (you know he wanted to) that booed him liberally at every opportunity, or refraining from getting into a shoving match with DeShawn Stevenson, after Stevenson took an obvious swipe at his mug in the second quarter. James knows that the fate of the Cavs rests on his shoulders and that he can't risk ejection. It's an awful lot of maturity to see from a 23-year old, but it's another area in which LeBron has once again exceeded expectations.

Sidenote: DeShawn Stevenson should have been ejected when he whacked LeBron in the face during the third quarter. As Jon

Barry stated during ESPN's halftime analysis, Stevenson was clearly taking a free shot at LBJ, and was lucky that he was only given a Flagrant I.

Don't think, just pass. During the series, Anderson Varejao has struggled mightily, shooting just 6-of-18 from the floor. Varejao shot a respectable 46.1 percent during the regular season, but he hasn't even come close to that in the playoffs. AV should be instructed to clean up put-back opportunities around the hoop, rebound, and nothing else. Scoring is not what pays Varejao's bills.

Offensive glass. Just like the three-point line, the offensive boards were another key area that helped carry the Cavs to victory. The Cavaliers beat the Wizards on the offensive glass, snagging 18 offensive rebounds to Washington's 6. As a result, the Cavs had eight more field goal attempts than the Wizards. For the entire series, Cleveland bested Washington in offensive rebounding, 54 to 32.

Overall, the Cavs out-rebounded the Wizards 51 to 31 today, and the front court of Ilgauskas, James, Smith, Varejao, and Wallace is cleaning the glass like Windex.

Zero's no hero. TCF columnist Brian McPeek had it right, the Wizards appear to be a more cohesive and effective team when Gilbert Arenas is not on the floor. Arenas is a great player when healthy, but he's clearly not 100 percent, and he's forcing some bad shots. Arenas just doesn't fit into Washington's offense right now. He still has value getting a few minutes a game spotting up and shooting threes, but he shouldn't be playing 32 minutes like he did today.

"Because he's my butler!" Although he's had a hard time finding a rhythm so far in the series, Caron Butler turned in a nice game today. Butler scored 11 of Washington's 24 fourth quarter points, and he was the biggest reason why Washington almost completed a comeback victory. Butler's stats jumped this season with Gilbert Arenas injured for all but a few games. It's amazing to think that Washington acquired Butler (and Chucky Atkins) from the LA Lakers from the small price of a useless center, Kwame Brown.

White out, blacked out. It would be cool if fans would stop copying the "white out" concept. By way of background, the "white out" (during which, ideally, all fans where white) was originally employed in 1987 by the NHL's now defunct Winnipeg Jets (now the Phoenix Coyotes), who dubbed it the "Winnipeg White Out." The Jets used the "white out" to counter the "sea of red" enacted by fans of the Calgary Flames, who they

played in the 1987 NHL playoffs.

Penn State football has used the "white out" recently (if you're an OSU fan, you've seen it on television a couple of times), and there's even been a legal battle with the Phoenix Coyotes, who own a trademark for the term, over whether or not Penn State can use it. In other words, Penn State stole the idea, the Miami Heat stole the idea again during the 2006 NBA playoffs, and now Washington's trying to get on board. Get your own tradition, guys, the "white out" is extremely played out.

Also, it's at least mildly humorous how the Washington fans boo LeBron at every opportunity. Um, you realize that all he did was *respond* to DeShawn Stevenson's dumb comments, right? They're acting like LeBron was a suspect in a murder investigation or something. My bad, that was Ray Lewis.

Reggie Jackson probably said it best, "They don't boo nobodies." It's good to see LeBron taking the high road and ignoring the crowd.

The Cleveland Cavaliers will return... Wednesday night, at a time yet to be determined (likely 8:00). Up 3-1, the Cavs will

look to cast an *avada kedavra* curse on the Wizards, thus sending them home for summer vacation for the third straight year.