The whole series had come down to one game. One game in Boston to decide who would move on to face the Detroit Pistons in the Eastern Finals. In the 2004 film Miracle, Kurt Russell's Herb Brooks states that "Great moments are born from great opportunity." That's exactly what the Cavs had: an opportunity to steal a series from a team with far more firepower. Unfortunately it was not to be. Nick Allburn recaps the game that ended the Cavaliers '07-'08 season.

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Quarterly Analysis

First Quarter

The remnants of pregame pyrotechnics made TD Banknorth Arena look more like the site of a bonfire than an NBA arena, but as the smoke cleared Boston sprinted to a 12-4 lead. The Cavaliers looked sluggish; they were having trouble getting anything established inside, and they weren't able to keep Boston off of the offensive boards.

Although the Cavs shot a gut-wrenching 27.8 percent in the first quarter, they were able to weather the early storm by holding the Celtics to just 38.1 percent shooting. LeBron James was finally able to free himself a bit to drive inside and get to the free throw line, and at quarter's end the Cavaliers trailed by just five, 18-13.

Second Quarter

Sloppy turnovers and a sharp shooting Paul Pierce bothered the Cavaliers early in the second quarter, and Boston opened a nine-point lead. The Cavs valiantly battled back, but whether it was officiating or lucky bounces (a certain Paul Pierce three comes to mind), everything was going Boston's way early in the second. With 6:05 to play in the half, the Celtics had increased their lead to 12, 35-23.

Mike Brown went to a smaller lineup for the last few minutes of the half and the Cavs experienced some success. With that small lineup, the Cavaliers were able to slow Boston's momentum and cut into the Celtics' lead. At the half, the Cavs trailed by 10, 50-40.

Frankly, the Cavs were lucky to be down just 10 at the break; Boston was beating them on the offensive glass (5 to 4), in turnovers (4 to 8), shooting percentage (47.1 to 38.9 percent), free throw attempts (14/20 to 11/15), and 3-point shooting (4/8 to 1/6). Other than LeBron James (23 points), no Cleveland player had more than four points, and Paul Pierce led all scorers with 26 points. In spite of the Celtics seemingly receiving every break in the first half, the Cavaliers were still very much alive, trailing by only 10.

Third Quarter

The Cavs came out of the locker room determined to whittle away at the Boston lead, but instead of chipping away at the lead, they almost eradicated it by way of a 9-2 run. During half time, Mike Brown apparently remembered that the Cavs have a 7' 3" Lithuanian center who is a pretty solid scorer, because the Cavaliers were made a concerted effort to get Zydrunas Ilgauskas the basketball in the third quarter.

Boston answered, but the Cavs stayed hot, and with a tad under 6:00

left in the period the Celtics led by just three. Just as the Cavs had no answer for Paul Pierce (33 points midway through the third), the Celtics had no answer for LeBron James (30 points).

The Celtics made a push, but the Cavs hung on, and by the end of the quarter the deficit was five points (73-68). On the road, the Cavaliers had to like their chances; down just five points with the best fourth quarter player in basketball on their side.

Fourth Quarter

The teams traded points as the quarter began, and three minutes in, the score was 77-72, Boston. Watching this game, you had to appreciate how evenly-matched the two teams were. Each time one team scored a crucial basket, the other answered to kill that momentum.

With 3:07 to play, the Cavs found themselves down three points. Boston got a bucket from PJ Brown, and Cleveland got a pair of free throws from Zydrunas Ilgauskas after he was fouled high and hard by PJ Brown (a Flagrant I, in my opinion).

The Cavs were close, and King James got them closer. James picked Paul Pierce's pocket, and exploded down the floor for a thunderous dunk, cutting the Boston lead to slimmest of margins. With just 2:20 remaining, the table was set for a fantastic finish.

After the teams traded misses, PJ Brown drained an impressive 20-footer to restore Boston's 3-point lead. Delonte West missed a wide open three for the Cavaliers, and although Boston gathered the rebound, Zydrunas Ilgauskas was able to tie up James Posey to force a jump ball. The Cavs had to like their odds with that matchup, but Paul Pierce was able to grab the loose ball and call a quick timeout.

Boston had possession with 58.1 to play. Paul Pierce dribbled the shot

clock away and passed off to Kevin Garnett, who missed a long jump shot. The Cavs pushed the ball down the floor, but instead of taking an open three-pointer in rhythm, LeBron James drove inside for a short, off balance jump shot. James' jumper didn't fall, and although LeBron drew a great deal of contact the refs kept their whistles in their pockets.

The Cavaliers were forced to foul to extend the game, and Boston took care of business at the charity stripe. Sasha Pavlovic drained a clutch three, but it wasn't enough. Final: Boston 97, Cleveland 92.

Quick Hits

Just like the old days. It is a little ironic that the more the game progressed, the more it felt like one of the old duels that LeBron James and Paul Pierce used to have prior to the arrival of Ray Allen and Kevin Garnett. James dropped 45 points, and Pierce countered with 41. James and Pierce also covered each other defensively all series , which is probably one of the reasons why the two scorers struggled mightily at different junctures throughout the series.

Where's that tall guy? Zydrunas Ilgauskas is the Cavaliers' second best offensive player, and is usually their second option on offense. Apparently the Cavs lost track of the Lanky Lithuanian, who scored eight points on only eight shots.

The Cavs tried to establish Ilgauskas at the onset of the third quarter, then promptly forgot about him again. Four Cavaliers took as many or more shots than Ilgauskas, which is unacceptable. Ilgauskas is an efficient and consistent scoring option, and the only Cleveland player who should take more shots than Z is LeBron James.

Give credit where it's due. If Mike Brown's detractors needed proof that talk of firing Brown was both ridiculous and premature, this series should be more than sufficient. It's an overly simplistic perspective, but

the Celtics have three All-Stars (Allen, Garnett, Pierce), whereas the Cavs have just one (James). Boston had home court advantage, they are thus far undefeated at TD Banknorth Garden in the playoffs, and they were the best home team during the regular season. Both teams have deep benches, but the Cavs dealt with significant turnover at the trading deadline and key injuries, and were not at full strength for the decisive seventh game (injury to Daniel Gibson).

When you look at things that way, you have to wonder how the Cavs even won a game against Boston, let alone three (and they almost stole games one and seven). To say it plainly, there's no way the Cavs could have had the success that they did if Coach Brown puts them at the large disadvantage that his critics claim. The guy isn't perfect, but he gets results; the worst the Cavs have ever finished a season under Brown is the seventh game of the Eastern Semifinals. In spite of that, many Cavs fans still refuse to cut Mike Brown any slack, and it doesn't make much sense. Maybe some people are just stubborn.

I said he wasn't perfect. Mike Brown made some questionable decisions regarding the rotation in this final game. A largely ineffective Sasha Pavlovic played more than 35 minutes, reserve big men Anderson Varejao (11 minutes) and Joe Smith (16 minutes) were under-utilized, and once again Devon Brown didn't take off his warmups. There must be something goofy going on behind the scenes with Devon Brown, because guys don't go from the starting rotation to zero minutes overnight.

It wasn't the free throws. Much has been made of the fact that home teams are 22-2 in the semifinals of these playoffs. Some have suggested that officials have favored the home teams, and some questionable fouls calls in the Lakers/Yazz (flute) series have been cited as evidence. By contrast, the officiating in the Cavs/Celtics series has been nothing if not consistent.

In Boston, the Cavs and Celtics attempted 32.25 and 28.25 free throws per game, respectively. In Cleveland, the Cavs and Celtics took 25.33 and 21 free throws per game, respectively. The disparity, in favor of the Cavaliers in both instances, is about four attempts per game. This suggests that the Cavaliers averaged more trips to the line because they have a player in LeBron James who draws more fouls than any other player in the series. There appears to be no "home team bias." Whether or not all of the foul calls were correct, they were very uniform in their frequency.

Too much of a good thing. When Boston's pregame fireworks have become so excessive that they're giving Ben Wallace vertigo prior to game two, something's wrong. When Boston's pregame fireworks produce so much residual smoke that it's difficult for fans to see the court on television, something's wrong. If you want a perfect example of the law of diminishing marginal utility in action, this is it. David Stern has alluded to limiting such displays in the future.

The Jerk Store called, and they're running out of Boston Fans. As if the front-runners walking around the country wearing Red Socks hats weren't enough, Cleveland fans had to tolerate even more Boston fans for home games at The Q, and watch them on television for road games. The fans at TD Banknorth Garden jeered LeBron James when he appeared to be injured at least twice during the series, and they chanted "bull-s***" in response to perfectly legitimate foul calls. Good to see that they're keeping things classy up in Beantown.

Someone turn Van Gundy's mic off. Jeff Van Gundy has commentated during a few Cavs games this season, and during that handful of games (this is just off the top of my head, mind you), he's called for the NBA to abolish their foul limit (six per player), claimed that players should carry razor blades to cut themselves (in order to stop the game when advantageous to their team) and has tried (and failed miserably) to quote Jack Nicholson in A Few Good Men. *"Hey Jeff, what's your favorite planet? Mine's the sun!"*

That's a wrap, folks. For Cavaliers fans, it's been a year that has been equal parts fun and frustrating. We had to deal with holdouts, injuries, and a tough playoff loss. By the same token, we no longer have to watch Larry Hughes beat up on the rims at The Q, the Cavs knocked off walking punch line DeShawn Stevenson and the Washington Wizards in the first round, and it looks like the Cavs should be in a good position to upgrade the roster in the off-season. Thanks for reading, and be sure to check out TheClevelandFan for news and notes on the Cavs during the summer!