It's Cavs season! And despite the fact the end result was disappointing, it was an exciting start last night to what should be a fun season for the wine and gold. The Cavs shot out of the gates to an 11 point halftime lead, led by 7 at the half, and then were held to 35 second half points en route to a 90-85 loss to the defending champs out in Beantown. Our uber-talented Cavs columnist, John "The Anti-Branson" Hnat gives us The Good, The Bad, & The Summary from last night's game.

THE SUMMARY:

Time for some deep breaths. Close your eyes, and picture a calm blue ocean ... calm blue ocean ... calm blue ocean ... wait, if you closed your eyes when I said to, then you can't read these words.

Anyway, let's not put too much importance into last night's 90-85 loss to the Celtics in the season opener at TD Banknorth ("Does Anybody Have Any Money Left To Invest? Please?") Garden last night. Yes, it was a winnable game; yes, it is not fun to start the season with a loss; but when you are opening the season against the defending league champions, in their house, an L is much more likely than a W.

It certainly wasn't all bad. The Cavs led by as many as 11 points in the first quarter, and carried a seven point lead (50-43) into the locker room at the intermission. The second half ... was a different story. The Celtics erased that deficit about ten seconds after they took off their warm-ups, and the Cavs were forced to play catch-up the rest of the way. They never let Boston run away with it, and cut the lead to three points on a Mo Williams three-point bomb with 1:18 to play. After the two teams traded some missed shots, the Cavs had the ball, still down by three, with 15 seconds to play. LeBron James drove to the basket and was fouled, but missed his first free throw. He did make the second to cut the lead to two, but any hopes of a last-second comeback were dashed when Boston avoided the Cavs' attempts to foul on the entry pass, and found a wide-open Leon Powe under the hoop for a dunk with five seconds left.

James led the Cavs with 22 points (anybody care to guess how many times we'll be able to write "James led the Cavs ..." this season? The early over-under is 70) and six assists. Zydrunas Ilgauskas had the quietest 15 point game I believe I've ever seen, and Williams posted a dozen points in his Cavs debut. Paul Pierce was one of five Celtics to score in double figures, leading everyone with 27 points.

It's the NBA. Where (*insert image of a Monta Ellis jersey and a crumpled moped)* "Damn, we just wasted $60 million" happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Six More Plays, And ESPN Has Their Daily Top Ten: Jame s is nothing if not a human highlight reel, and he provided no fewer than four "wow" plays last night:

1. Midway through the first quarter, Z found LeBron with a nice pass, which James deftly laid in the hoop;
2. In the waning moments of the second quarter, Delonte West threw one of those "no other human being on the planet could get to this ball" alley-oop passes that James grabbed and threw down;
3. With the Celtics slowly pulling away at 80-74 in the fourth quarter, Williams missed a three-point shot; James grabbed the rebound with one huge swipe of his right arm, and laid the ball back in to cut the Boston lead to four;
4. With just over two minutes to go, James had another huge alley-oop dunk (this time on a pass from Williams).

He didn't play his best game (we'll get to that shortly), but when he was on, he was *on*.

Not That They Always Needed Him: Much has been made of the Cavs being 0-(whatever number of losses they had last season; I think it was 7, but am too lazy to look it up this moment) when James did not play. And when Coach Mike Brown opened the second quarter with a lineup that included Sasha Pavlovic, Wally Szczerbiak, and Lorenzen Wright, I was

concerned. (Had Coach Mike Brown opened the second quarter with a lineup that included Sasha Pavlovic, I would have been concerned. Even if the other four were Chamberlain, Jordan, Malone, and Stockton.)

Without any further comment, I will point out the following facts. The Cavs were ahead by six points when James took a seat on the bench. They had *increased* their lead to 11 when he returned with five and a half minutes remaining in the quarter.

Maybe This One Should Be In The Top Ten Too: Not from a "pure athletic ability" point of view, but rather from a "no @#$%@#$ing way" one: Wally Szczerbiak, defending Paul Pierce, caught Pierce from behind, stealing the ball, and leading to a James dunk at the other end. Wally makes that play about as often as we see Halley's Comet; it may not be a once in a lifetime event, but it sure doesn't happen very often.

The Reason The Cavs Kept It Close: Without Anderson Varejao, this game could have become a double-digit blowout in the fourth quarter. Andy had four big offensive rebounds, all of them with what seemed like all twelve uniformed Celtics surrounding him, to give the Cavs plenty of extra possessions. (What they *did* with those possessions is quite another matter, but that's not Andy's fault.)

Good Mo: This game was our first chance to see Williams in a Game That Counts, and he showed some of the reasons why he should be a valuable addition. He is the fastest player on the Cavs, and showed it many times by pushing the ball (although it didn't lead to as many transition hoops as we'll hopefully see in the future). He has a smooth shooting stroke (and has plenty of range: he made all three of the team's three pointers. He should add some new dimensions to this team...

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Bad Mo: ... when he is not turning the ball over or saying "ole!" on defense. He also tends to reach on defense, leading to several fouls (he had five last night, and in all candor should have fouled out on a reach-in on Ray Allen in the game's final minute. The play that grated the most? Losing the ball to Rajon Rondo on a showboat-ish dribble between his legs at midcourt. Fortunately, Rondo missed the resultant layup, but that layup attempt never should have been a gleam in Rondo's eye.

Oh, and he had two assists last night. Two. He'll

definitely have to adjust to not having the ball in his hands all of the time.

Channeling His Inner Zach Randolph: Ben Wallace was put on this earth for many reasons. Dribbling the ball is not one of them. With the Cavs up 41-32 in the second quarter, Wallace tried to dribble past Kevin Garnett. About five seconds later, Boston's Rondo scored a layup off a Garnett assist. Do you really need me to connect the dots for you on this one, or can you figure out what happened?

Dept. of The More Things Change: An unfortunate Cavs trait in recent seasons is that they mentally stay in the locker room for the first several minutes of the third quarter. If you were hoping to see that trend change this season ... well, maybe next game. The Cavs led by seven points at the break, but surrendered a 12-2 run to start the third quarter. Maybe the Cavs could just be convinced that the clock reads something like "6:30" when the third quarter begins?

The Hidden Game: Possessions are the lifeblood of an NBA offense. More possessions = good. Pretty basic, no? And whenever you have chances to get extra possessions, you should go for them, yes?

So explain to me why, with 47 seconds left in the second quarter, the Cavs dribbled off approximately 23.8 seconds of the 24 second shot clock, leading to a wild Sasha Pavlovic three-point attempt as the buzzer sounded, and giving Boston the ball with the rest of the quarter. I'm not a coach (*insert requisite joke about not staying at a Holiday Inn Express last night either*), but with 47 seconds to go, that screams "two possessions". Take a time out, advance the ball to halfcourt, and draw up a play that results in a shot within 10-12 seconds. If it all works out as planned, you'll get the ball back with maybe 10 seconds remaining in the quarter (i.e., a SECOND POSSESSION), and have time for one more good shot.

I know that the butterfly that flaps its wings starts the chain of events that leads to the hurricane; we cannot simply say that had the Cavs gotten a second possession, and scored, that the game would have been

that much closer down the stretch. But when you are working so hard to maximize scoring opportunities, it seems curious that a relatively obvious way to get an extra possession wasn't used.

Fifteen Feet: Speaking of ways to score points, the free throw line is a pretty good one. As you know if you have been following the Cavs for more than the past day or two, free throw shooting has been a weakness of LeBron's. So it was again last night: he shot a stomach-turning two of six in the final quarter, including two key misses in the last ten seconds.

Turnovers: The Cavs had 21 of them. Gack. Twenty-one. Nice number for blackjack; not so much for giving the opponent the ball. Hey, that reminds me:

It's Whipping Boy Time!: Three of those turnovers came from GBS favorite son (*heavy sarcasm*) Sasha Pavlovic, including a 30-second flurry in the second quarter when he made a terrible outlet pass, then

followed it up by losing the ball out of bounds.

Pavlovic has a real talent for boneheaded plays, so we are going to recognize him appropriately here at GBS. That's right: he is **Unfrozen Caveman Shooting Guard**. You can just see the thought bubble appearing over his head: "Your defensive schemes frighten and confuse me, for I am but a simple caveman. But there is one thing I *do* know, and it is turnovers..." The out of bounds play was vintage Pavlovic: he put his head down, charged ahead to the left without looking (for all he knew, a huge sinkhole appeared in the Garden floor in the left side of the lane), and fumbled the ball off his leg.

I promise to try not to pick on every little flaw of Sasha's throughout the season ("would you believe he said *toe-mah-toe* instead of *toe-may-toe*?"). I'm not saying I will; I'm just saying I will try.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

This Is The Only Time I Will Say This (Until The Next Time): I do not know whether LeBron James will leave Cleveland when his contract expires in 2010. Of course, as a Cavs fan, I hope he stays. (As a *basketball* fan, I also hope he stays: franchise stability and giving all teams a chance to win are Good Things.)

In any event, James may not make his decision for almost two more years; and he has never given any impression that he will leave (unless you count a Yankees cap as a profound statement about one's career aspirations). So that is why I am not going to address columns like this one from New York's Newsday, in which James's departure from Cleveland is described as "inevitable".

It really is simple: the national media is largely

based in New York, and the New York teams suck rocks. The Knicks haven't been relevant since ... Willis Reed? Okay, they had a nice run when Patrick ("Frozen Envelope") Ewing patrolled the middle, but he's been retired for quite some time now. Aside from outrageous contracts and the occasional embarrassing lawsuit, the Knicks have had no bearing on the NBA landscape in many years. The Nets have been more competitive, but are now back in lottery territory, having traded off two of their best three players (with the third likely to follow). So there is definitely an entrenched interest in seeing LeBron play for one of the New York teams; he would make them *re levant*
again.

You get the feeling that if LeBron said:

I sure hate being hungry after a game. When I'm in Cleveland, I miss the old New York Spaghetti

House downtown, but there are a lot of other places to go for a good meal.

... the national/New York media would hear this message:

I ... hate ... Cleveland ... I ... miss ... New York ... a lot.

(Sixers fans could only wish that LeBron had a taste for a Philly cheesesteak instead.)

My suggestion is: ignore the pundits, the media members who are certain that LeBron will leave Cleveland when his contract expires. They were equally as "certain" that he would leave after his rookie contract, and missed badly on that one. Most importantly, let's not allow any worries

about LeBron's future to cloud over our appreciation of his game as long as he is here. It's never a good strategy in life to miss today's sunshine because you are worrying about tomorrow's possible clouds.

Damn You Peter King: As you know, the GBS is not all about the Cavs. Sure, LeBron and friends are the main focus, but we (which sounds official and presumptuous, unlike the more accurate "I") like to touch on other pressing matters in the world today. In these turbulent times, with a Presidential election less than one week ahead, a bear market that has turned most 401k plans into 186k plans, and a serious housing and lending crisis that threatens to cripple the economy, I would like to talk about ... those Cialis ads. Particularly the one that features the couple in identical, his-n-hers claw-footed bathtubs, placed outdoors to face the setting sun.

But SI's Peter King beat me to the punch in pointing

out the absurdity of this image. (Not to mention that he has approximately six zillion more readers than I do.) So I'll have to figure out some other way to fill this space. I know! I'll point out that the "exploding faucet" part of the ad is the least imaginative image ever! Why not just have the couple eating hot dogs while working on a pumping oil derrick?

Really, I shouldn't complain. I have been to a world in which the airwaves are filled with political "but your guy voted to kill babies!" spots, giving way only briefly to the "Saved ... By ... Zee ... Ro" ads (you know, the ones that have made me vow to never buy a Toyota in this or any future life); I have seen things that no man should see. Come (!) to think of it, maybe we need more Cialis ads, stat.

Random Thought While Watching The Blazers-Lakers Game (Second Half Of The TNT

Doubleheader Edition): Pau Gasol is about a half-inch of beard away from starring in one of those Geico caveman commercials.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Tomorrow night brings the Charlotte Cannon Fodder Bobcats to Quicken Loans Arena for the home season opener. Kind of has that nice Homecoming feel to it, doesn't it? Schedule a weaker opponent so that the crowd has the highest possible chance of going home happy. Of course, now that I've said that, we'll see a career night from Jason Richardson or Raymond Felton. (Can you negate a jinx by recognizing in advance that it may be a jinx?)

The road after that gets tougher, with games at New Orleans on Saturday and Dallas on Monday. After that, it will be time for some home cooking, as five of the following six games will be at the Q.