It was a fun night at The Q for the Cavaliers home opener, as the good guys led for the final 44 minutes, and cruised to a 96-79 win against the overmatched Charlotte Bobcats. LeBron was LeBron. Boobie Gibson poured in 25. Mo Williams played a great game. J.J. Hickson got out of the Mike Brown doghouse. And Andy and Big Ben were dominant defensively. Jesse recaps the win.

I, your scrupulous observer of the Cavaliers, went into Thursday night's home opener against the Bobcats looking for several things. I went looking for offense-Cavalier offense. I went looking for something close to 48 minutes of solid basketball, not just 36, or 24. I wanted to see solid shooting from the free-throw line. I wanted to see Ellis Burks in the third row behind the Bobcats bench. (Okay, that wasn't on my wish list, but the old DH was there, taking in the action.) Most of all, I went looking for a Cavalier victory.

Well, I didn't get everything I wanted, but I came close. The Cavaliers won, beating Charlotte 96-79 in a game in which they led for all of the final 44 minutes of action. LeBron, happily, played only thirty minutes, and made them good ones, with 22 points, nine rebounds, nine assists, and his usual variety of spectacular plays. Daniel Gibson, showing off his rapidly expanding offensive game, had a sensational night, pouring in 25 on 10-of-14 with a staggering +32 for his thirty-one minutes on the floor. Ben Wallace, who I've been told is known in Brazil as "The Bear With the Stiff Hair" played with tremendous energy and spring in his step, with ten rebounds and five swats. The Cavaliers out-rebounded

Charlotte 46-34, held the Bobcats to a dismal 33.8 percent shooting, and for the most part dominated on both ends of the floor.

So we had excellent ball movement (23 assists on 35 made baskets) and shooting (48.6 percent), 43 minutes of solid basketball (not 48, but it is October), an Ellis Burks sighting, mediocre free-throw shooting, and a Cavaliers victory. Hey, three out of four ain't bad.

Odds and Ends

I wanna see mo' of Boobie and Mo: The Cavaliers started both the second and fourth quarter with LeBron on the bench and a backcourt of Mo Williams and Boobie Gibson- and the combination played beautifully. The Boobie ‘n Mo tandem increased Cleveland's lead in both periods, and they did it on both ends, with terrific ball movement and shooting on offense, and aggressive, hands-on, scrambling defense. The effectiveness of the second unit was such that at no point in the game was LeBron forced back into the action to stem an onslaught. Coach Brown was able to rest his superstar for long stretches, as Gibson and Williams controlled tempo, and the Bobcats. The two combined for 42 points, nine assists, eight rebounds a steal, and just three turnovers. Not to be corny, but I also really liked Mo's body language- he was demonstrative, smiling, and encouraging his teammates, looking like a guy who is really, really, happy to be playing for a winner.

A J.J. Hickson sighting: After sitting out on opening night in Boston, young J.J. Hickson got his first taste of NBA action, and displayed some ridiculous athleticism and hops. He crammed home his first two professional points late in the first quarter- a facial of Emeka Okafor, no less- and was active around the basket, if a little raw. The kid even broke team tendency by swishing both of his free-throw attempts. This team has long needed a fresh-legged jumping jack that can finish with authority around the rim and isn't named LeBron James, and if the youngster from N.C. State can fill that role with reasonable success, he's going to be a very valuable piece to this team. He's got a long way to go, obviously, but it

was nice to see J.J. out there contributing in non-garbage minutes at this stage of the season.

Oh, those third-quarter blues: Really, it wasn't a bad third quarter- more like a bad five minutes- but it was still enough to turn my hair a Lute Olsen shade of white. The Cavaliers went into halftime with a 50-33 lead, and still led 58-39 with 8:41 left in the third, when they suddenly remembered what quarter it was. Led by a white-hot Jason Richardson, and helped out by a spat of missed shots, turnovers, and lazy defense, the Bobcats ripped off a 16-2 run that sliced Cleveland's lead to 60-55 with 3:38 still to play in the period. Overall for the third period, Charlotte outscored the Cavaliers 26-18. Cleveland has now been outscored 50-31 in the combined third quarters of the season's first two games.

I understand that this team isn't going to play 48 minutes of superb basketball every night. It's an 82-game grind, and you're going to have some letdowns. What I can't understand is why the letdown seems to come at the exact same point in the game, every time out. It's baffling, it's frustrating, it's... hell, I don't know. At some point you just kind of want to throw your hands in the air. If I knew the solution to this problem, I'd be sitting in between Melvin Hunt and Hank Egan, and not in my living room letting years slide off my life in exasperation.

Free throws, damn it, free throws: The Cavaliers shot a clang-a-licious 19-of-29 from the stripe against the Bobcats, including three in a row missed by the normally reliable Daniel Gibson after a foul behind the arc in the fourth quarter. It's amazing that world-class athletes can't consistently perform something regularly done with ease by 260-pound accountants in fifteen-year old Nike Airs and knee braces down at the rec, but it is what it is. This team simply doesn't shoot its free throws very well.

Invisible Z: I don't know if he was bothered by Emeka Okafor, or if the Cavaliers just couldn't find him in the game plan, but Zydrunas Ilgauskas was primarily a spectator on offense Thursday. I didn't see any sign of his patented pick-and-pop game until the opening moments of the fourth quarter. Ideally, the big guy gets

involved right out of the chute, but it just didn't happen- perhaps because Z has a way of stopping all ball movement once he gets the ball in the post. Either way, it'd be nice to get him going, which really hasn't happened so far this year.

Next: @ New Orleans, Saturday, 8:00 PM