Well, the winning streak had to end some time. It's just a shame it had to end in a half-empty Palace at Auburn Hills, and a shame it ended the way it did- at eight games and change. The Cavaliers controlled the game and the Detroit Pistons for nearly three quarters on Wednesday night, but they let it get away, and at what is normally their time, Winning Time- the fourth quarter. Jesse recaps the loss.

Well, the winning streak had to end some time. It's just a shame it had to end in a half-empty Palace at Auburn Hills, and a shame it ended the way it did- at eight games and change. The Cavaliers controlled the game and the Detroit Pistons for nearly three quarters on Wednesday night, leading by as many as 13 and maintaining their scoreboard advantage in unbroken fashion for the final 5:17 of the first quarter, all of the second, and all but 47 seconds of the third.

But they let it get away, and at what is normally their time, Winning Time- the fourth quarter. After a flawless first half taking care of the basketball, the Cavaliers got sloppy in the third quarter, allowing the Pistons to hang around, than were blown off the court in the fourth by a combination of offensive dysfunction and an '85 Villanova-style shooting exhibition by the hometown team. Cleveland finished the night with 13 assists to 14 turnovers and chucked up 22 three-pointers, and Detroit, shooting over 50 percent from the field, walked away with a 96-89 win.

Back to the salt mines, as they say.

It started off well enough: In a harbinger of shots to fall, the Pistons dropped their first five attempts of the night and jumped to an 11-6 lead; then Cleveland's defense took over. Delonte West got things going by staying in front of Allen Iverson's shake-and-bakes, then rejecting his fall-away jumper. Ben Wallace swatted AI a moment later. Anderson Varejao came into the game, knocked in a baseline jumper, and goaded Kwame Brown (who is awful) into an offensive foul. LeBron had a steal and feed to Delonte for a lay-up, AI committed an offensive foul, Daniel Gibson made his one shot for the night, and after about five minutes of fury and a 17-3 run, the Cavaliers led 23-14 and were off and running in a first half that they owned lock, stock, and barrel.

Return of the Third Quarter: Just when you thought it was safe to watch the Cavaliers out of the halftime break, the Third Quarter Blues made their not-so-triumphant return in Auburn Hills. After committing three turnovers in the entire first half, Cleveland committed a fumble-fingered eight in the third quarter, as the lead shriveled from 13 to zero. The Cavaliers still led 68-66 after three, but they had lost the cushion that could have protected them from total disaster when Detroit finally got untracked offensively in the fourth quarter- and oh, did they get untracked.

They were calling the wrong guy "Big Shot:" Fourth quarter, 7:14 remaining, score tied at 76-apiece. Rasheed Wallace takes a pass, raises up from about 25 feet out on the right wing, no hesitation like
Neil McCauley
when he feels the heat coming around the corner, and absolutely BURIES it right in the eye of Anderson Varejao. 79-76, Pistons out in front, for good as it turned out. Twenty-six seconds later, Rasheed, from about 24 feet. Left wing. BURIED
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82-76, Pistons. That was pretty much it.

Even Kelly Tripucka and John Long were out there knocking down jumpers:

For a span of nearly seven minutes in the fourth quarter, the Pistons converted eleven consecutive shots, two of which were Rasheed's aforementioned daggers. Whether it was three's from 'Sheed and Aaron Afflalo, curling floaters in traffic by Allen Iverson, runners by Rodney Stuckey or baseline j's by Jason Maxiell, they found the bottom of the net, and kept finding it, and kept finding it, until it was 95-82 Detroit, there were two-and-a-half minutes left, and the game was essentially over. The Pistons scored 30 points in the fourth quarter and 58 in the second half, a rare case of diminished returns out of Cleveland's defense, which was excellent in the first 24 minutes.

LeBron's Line: 25 points on 8-of-21 shooting (0-of-4 from three) with six boards, six dimes and three turnovers in 39 minutes. He had a tough time finishing, garnering not a single and-one and having a couple of point-blank shots rim out- including a gimme lay-up off a nice cut to the basket on an in-bound play in the third quarter- and threw away a pass to Mo Williams to pretty much put the final nail in the casket containing Cleveland's eight-game winning streak. Not exactly the stuff Game 5's are made of. LeBron also got a bit jumper-happy in the fourth quarter, as did the entire team- probably a side-affect of being on the second night of a back-to-back. It'd be nice to see him spend more time in the post and less time hoisting jump shots as if he isn't a 6'9", 260-pound freight engine, but that's our LeBron.

Good thing he didn't play like this in Game 6: Boobie Gibson went 1-of-7 from the field for two points, missed a couple of wide-open three-point attempts that could have sustained first-half runs, and was abused like the kids in *Radio Flyer* by Detroit's lengthy backcourt, now featuring Allen Iverson. I hate to say it, because I really like Boobie, but the young man can be quite the turnstile out there at times. I'm a little surprised Roker didn't make more use of Sasha Pavlovic, who played only eleven glowering-if-somewhat-effective minutes.

"Bob gets the Spirit Award:" Delonte West and J.J. Hickson were the only Cavaliers on the plus side of the ledger, with Wyah Hanguh checking in at +1 and J.J. - who REALLY needs to learn how to pass out of the post- running up a +4 in six minutes of work.

They probably won't mention this game at the jersey-retirement ceremony: Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who is apparently getting into Sam Perkins' stash these days, buried a three-pointer from deep on the baseline to keep the Cavaliers out in front in the third quarter. Unfortunately, the big fellow finished with a team-worst -16 in 28 minutes, despite a passable line of 13 points and six rebounds.

The Wisdom of Mr. Cavalier: A.C. on Kwame Brown's free-throw prowess- "Nine times out of ten, he's going to make one of two."

The Wisdom of Mr. Cavalier, Vol. II: A.C. after Mo Williams hit a shot to cut the Cavalier deficit all the way to a measly eight with 1:25 remaining; "Big shot!"

Maybe they were counting eyes, not people: Announced attendance at the Palace on Wednesday night was 22,076. There looked to be about half that many actually at the game, and that might be a generous estimate. Apparently Michiganders don't need Rich Rodriguez to inform them that the economy sucks.

Next up: The Atlanta Hawks, scuffling with four losses in five games since a 6-0 start, come to the Q on Saturday night at 7:30. The Cavaliers are still in first place in the Central Division, and with five of the next seven at home- with the two roadies at New York and at Milwaukee- there's no reason the streaking can't begin anew for this basketball team.