Game seven commences this afternoon at 3:30 PM, and Swerb makes the case that Larry Hughes could be the difference maker despite missing the last four games due to the passing of his younger brother Justin. Swerb lays out his argument to why Hughes should not only play, but get significant minutes in todays do or die scenario.

After missing the last four games of the series to mourn the passing of his younger brother Justin, Cavs shooting guard Larry Hughes is expected to return to action in today's decisive game seven contest at Detroit.

Hughes practiced yesterday and declared himself ready to return. Coach Mike Brown was not ready to do the same, telling the Plain Dealer's Mary Schmitt Boyer "It'll be a game time decision. I'm still exploring thoughts in my mind and talking to our assistant coaches."

It's my opinion that not only should Hughes play, but that he should start, and get close to his normal minutes. Let me lay out my case.

Flip Murray has been terrible at both ends, especially as of late. Neither he or Larry can shoot, but Hughes is a far better defender and rebounder. While the Cavs team defense has been superb, even in the absence of Hughes, the Pistons continue to try and expose Damon Jones and Flip Murray every time they're on the court, and for good reason: both are miserable defenders. Hughes held Rip Hamilton to a 1-7 performance from the floor in game two before his leave of absence. Hamilton has averaged 21 points per game in the four games since, despite the fact Detroit as a team hasn't gone for more than 84 as a team in any of those contests.

The Cavs need to keep this game in the eighties to have a realistic chance to shock the Pistons at home for the second straight time. They need to come up with yet another herculean effort on the defensive end, and that's going to be tougher than ever in Auburn Hills in game seven, with momentum back in the Bad Boys corner. We've been able to hold Chauncey Billups in check, and that's partialy because of Eric Snow, and partially because of who's been guarding his backcourt mate. Rip has taken 75 shots to Chauncey's 49 over the last four games.

Hughes is also a great rebounder for a guard, and let's not forget that it was Hamilton's back to back offensive rebounds inside of the final 40 seconds in game six that helped milk the clock and seal the Pistons 84-82 win. The Pistons are a much better rebounding team at home, and the Cavs need to hold their own on the glass to get it done today. If the Cavs win today, it will be in a very close game, and we all saw how important every last rebound was on Friday night.

The way I look at it, it's hard to expect much of anything offensively from Flip or Larry today. And that's fine. We've gotten nothing offensively from the shooting guard position so far and been okay. But Larry is clearly better at the defensive end, and I don't think missing four games affects Larry's defensive prowess like it may his jumper. If anything, having him on the floor and contributing could provide the emotional lift this team will need today, in a game that is sure to have it's share of emotional ups and downs. Defense is so much effort, so much passion, and it wouldn't surprise me to see increased levels in both areas from Hughes today in the wake of what he's been through, and the magnitude of this contest.

Due to the fact he's missed the last four games, and the Cavs won three of them and could have easily won the fourth ... it's easy to forget about Hughes. It's easy to say "let's stay with what got us here". It's easy to forget that Hughes still leads the team in steals and is second in scoring in the playoffs despite being gone for the last ten days.

The Cavs will need every last minute edge to emerge victorious today, and it's my take that Larry can provide some of those on the defensive end, on the glass, and emotionally.