The Cavs have been toying with the dregs of the league this year, and last night was another one of those nights. The Wolves, owners of a lofty 4-20 record entering the game, pestered the Cavs for most of the game, staying within single digits well into the fourth quarter. Then - BAM - a 14-3 run by the Cavs over a four-minute stretch turned a 68-60 game into an 82-63 runaway, en route to a 93-70 victory at the Target Center. A quarter that started with the Cavs leading by seven ended with a sighting of The Tarence Kinsey Brigade (now featuring Whole Lotta Jawad). John recaps the win.

THE SUMMARY:

Years ago, my aunt and uncle had a cat. It was a cranky old thing, not really good for much. Aside from sleeping, eating, and hissing, it had no apparent purpose in life.

Anyway, one day this cat was taking a snooze outside on the stoop. More accurately, he was *trying* to take a nap - a group of small birds (sparrows, perhaps) on a nearby telephone wire took turns flying down and pecking him on the head. He was getting visibly agitated, but kept still, and pretended to go back to sleep.

As the next bird flew towards him, this cat leapt and caught the bird in midair. A flash of a furious paw decapitated the little bird on the spot. And the rest of the birds flew away.

Turn that story into a basketball game, and you have last night's matchup between the Cavs and the Minnesota Timberwolves. The Wolves, owners of a lofty 4-20 record entering the game, pestered the Cavs for most of the game, staying within single digits well into the fourth quarter. Then - BAM - a 14-3 run by the Cavs over a four-minute stretch turned a 68-60 game into an 82-63 runaway, en route to a 93-70 victory at the Target Center (which, with its two-toned floor, really should be sponsored by the Thompson's Water Seal folks). A quarter that started with the Cavs leading by seven ended with a sighting of **The Tarence Kinsey Brigade**
(now featuring
Whole Lotta Jawad
).

LeBron James, playing one of his best games of the season (more on that in a moment), led everybody with 32 points. Delonte West backed him with a season-high 21 points, and Anderson Varejao, starting his third consecutive game at center as Zydrunas Ilgauskas continues to recover from a sprained ankle, put up a 13 point/11 rebound double-double. Minnesota's Al Jefferson had 20 points and 11 boards, both highs for the Wolves.

It's the NBA. Where "Coach, you should rent rather than buy" happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

This Just In: That #23, He's Pretty Good: It wasn't James's best game *statistically* - the triple-double threat had "only" six rebounds and three assists to go along with his 32 points - but his dominance in this game was unquestionable. He shot 14 of 20 from the field, and I honestly cannot recall the six that he missed (one was a half-court heave at the end of the first half that almost went in).

Brother Red Can Play A Bit Too: West's 21 points were both a season high and a Cavaliers career high (but not an overall career best; he scored 31 a couple of years ago while with the Celtics). Just like James, West was efficient in his shooting, making 9 of the 16 shots he attempted.

A modest proposal: Delonte should be fined if he does not take *at least* 15 shots per night. He is too good of a shooter to not be one of the focal points of the offense. One of his weaknesses is that he is too selfless - passing up shots that he probably should take. (Twice last night, Delonte passed when he had easy layups - one resulted in an ill-advised alley-oop attempt off the backboard to LeBron, and the other ended in a traveling violation.)

Coach Brown Is Smiling Ear To Ear: The 70 points scored by Minnesota last night represented a new low for a Cavs opponent this season, and was the fourth time in the past seven games that the Cavs held their opposition to less than 75 points. Name your statistic, and it will show how much the Cavs put the clamps on the Wolves: 41% shooting from the field, a frigid 7% (1 of 14) from three-point range, a paltry 11 assists for the entire game. The Cavs may not always bring it on offense, particularly with two key players on the shelf; but you're not going to lose too many games when you hold the other guys to 70. (Unless you're Mike Fratello, in which case you curse the run-and-gun style you just saw.)

Play Of The Night, Part I: With the game tied at 12 apiece, LeBron drove to the hoop from the left side, came to a jump stop (*note: if I were a Wolves fan, I would have said he traveled; because I am a Cavs fan, it was a legitimate* move), then snaked the ball under the hoop for a reverse layup. As Cavs fans, we are simply *used* to these heroics from Bron; he pulls off plays like that every night, it seems.

Play Of The Night, Part II: In fact, he often pulls off more than one of those plays per game. With the Cavs clinging to a 61-56 lead in the third quarter, a Cavs steal led to a fast break. West dished to his left, where a blue blur resembling James caught

the ball, rose high into the air, and dunked the ball powerfully through the hoop.

Play Of The Night, Part III: The next play worth mentioning: a huge block by J.J. Hickson on Jefferson as Jefferson tried to power the ball to the hoop. Unfortunately, Jefferson ended up getting the ball back and scored, so it was more of a moral victory than anything else.

Play Of The Night, Part IV: We really do need some more original titles. Call this one **The Backbreaker**, as West denied an entry pass, outraced two Wolves to the ball, laid it in ... and got the foul for the three-point play. Just like that, the Cavs were up by 13, and the game was effectively over.

In Other News, A Snowball Fight Broke Out In Hell Today: No, I am not going to become a believer. I've been teased and burned too many times before. But Sasha Pavlovic is playing some of the smarter basketball of his career. (Granted, that is like saying "Pauly Shore has never been funnier", but stay with me here.)

Late in the first quarter, Sasha drove to the hoop along the left baseline. In past years, he would have gone into **Unfrozen Caveman Shooting Guard** mode. ("Your man-to-man defenses frighten and confuse me, for I am but a simple caveman. But there is one thing I do know, and it is getting my shot pasted back into my face.") The fast break would have started in the other direction, and about five seconds later Austin Carr would be grumbling about a "four point swing". But not this season. No, this is a craftier Sasha. He dished to a cutting Varejao for the layup and foul. I don't believe he has Got It, but he is showing signs of Getting It, and it's only fair that he gets some love.

Hey, They Need *Something* To Cheer For: The Minnesota fans deserve props for cheering former hometown hero Wally Szczerbiak when he entered the game in the first quarter, and again for giving LeBron a standing ovation when he exited the game for good in the fourth quarter. Maybe it's the juxtaposition against the Philadelphia crowd the Cavs saw last week, but seeing fans respond to good basketball, regardless of the laundry that produced it, is refreshing.

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Things We Should Never See: Two minutes into the game, Wallace took a 15 foot jumper from the baseline. No, it was not one of those "one second left on the shot clock" deals - he took it as though he had carefully considered all other options, and decided that a jumper was a good idea. There is exactly one time when that would be a good idea: never.

Not The Kind Of Nostalgia We Wanted: One of the Cavs' Achilles heels (
wait, shouldn't there be only one? But I digress
) in recent seasons has been their free throw shooting. They've been much better this season, but not last night: 9 of 14 (64%), with a particularly shaky first-half performance of 4 of 8. Those lost points did not make any difference last night. That will not always be the case.

Also Known As A Good Night For Chris Paul: During their recent 11-game winning streak (and during the eight-game winning streak that came before it), the Cavs were moving the ball very well on offense, and routinely piling up assist totals in the 20s and 30s. Last night, they had but 16 assists on their 40 field goals. Not terrible,

but not exactly what has made them great this season.

That Pounding Sound Is The Blood Inside The Little Veins In My Forehead: Cavs leading in the second quarter, 26-23. Szczerbiak has the ball near midcourt, and is trying like hell to pass it to Mo Williams. He looks at Williams ... looks again ... fakes a pass ... looks again ... by this time, the entire English-speaking world knows that he is going to try to pass the ball to Mo. So what did he do? *He tried to pass the ball to Mo*. The Wolves' Kevin Ollie easily stole the ball and drove to the other end for a layup. If you're going to telegraph the pass that much - to the point where Samuel Morse would have represented the code for the word "steal" as "S-Z-C-Z ... ah, hell with it, this is taking too long" - then at least put some zip into the pass.

Speaking of Ollie ... this guy is still in the league? It seemed like only yesterday when former GM Jim Paxson rewarded the career journeyman with a five-year contract. (Seems appropriate to talk about it now, what with Christmas being a week away.) The excellent Basketball Reference site displays the uniform number

and colors of every team each player plays for during his career; Ollie's page looks like a disaster involving all 64 crayons in the big Crayola box.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

The Boobie Meter: With Cavs' guard Daniel (Boobie) Gibson still unable to play because of a sprained big toe, it is time to consider whether **The Boobie Meter**, the new feature that rates Gibson's play on a scale of female celebrity chest sizes, is worth keeping. How can we do that? Simple: democracy. (GBS emphasizes once again that it gets no joy from finding and linking to pictures of well-endowed women, and that it is providing them solely as a public service to male and alternatively-lifestyled female readers.) So you gotta let GBS know:

should it stay

or

should it go

?

All Things Must Pass: This next item has nothing to do with basketball, so skip ahead (or stop reading entirely, as there isn't much more basketball in the rest of this column, period) if you wish.

Last weekend, my kids (ages six and five) and I cleaned out our home. As all of you parents out there can appreciate, your home becomes cluttered with toys over time -- especially toys that long ago lost your kids' interest and have been sitting at the bottom of the toy bin. We went through all of the toys, keeping the ones that they still play with, and pitching the ones that were broken or had pieces missing.

Somewhere in there, we found all of my son's Thomas the Tank Engine toys. "Toys" does not do it justice - we

were staring at dozens of those little trains and a huge collection of track. Add a few Barbies and a checkout counter, and we'd have the makings of a toy store. My son looked at all of the Thomas toys, and said:

I don't want them anymore. They're for babies.

Understand this: a couple of years ago, my son *live d*
for Thomas. Every trip to Target required a detour down the aisle that contained all of the Thomas toys (accompanied by any amount of begging for one more train). Every time I let him watch a DVD, he selected one of his Thomas movies. He had Thomas shirts, Thomas pajamas, Thomas slippers, Thomas underwear, Thomas video games, a Thomas backpack, even a Thomas shaving kit. (*Even pre-schoolers have to worry about five o'clock shadow.*
) I once examined the family budget, and it broke

down like this:

- 20%: Housing expenses, including utilities
- 15%: Food, groceries, other life necessities
- 10%: Car payment and related expenses
- 55%: Thomas-related items

But then a funny thing happened. He continued growing up. Three years old became four, then five, then six. Preschool became pre-K, then became kindergarten. Thomas gave way to Pokemon and Bakugon and Power Rangers. (*Incidentally, if you have any clue as to what Pokemon and Bakugon are, please let me know. I have no idea.*
)

Growing up is inevitable. I didn't really expect (or think that it would be healthy) that twenty years from now, he would head to work wearing Thomas shoes and carrying his lunch in a Thomas lunch box. Somewhere along the way, he would find new interests and would leave Thomas behind. As parents, we know that the day will come when kids leave a stage behind for good. It may not have a specific mile marker - we cannot pinpoint the exact

moment when they reach a new phase in their lives - but it happens. It's supposed to happen. It is not right if it *doesn't* happen.

But its inevitability does not make it easier to accept. It is a sign that we are all growing older. It tells us that "there's less days in front of the horse than riding in the back of this cart." It is a message that an enjoyable era of our lives has left for good, never to be lived again, kept alive only in our memories.

My son and I reached a compromise: we gave away most of the Thomas toys, but kept some of the trains. They'll sit in a closet, probably never to be played with again. He was ready to leave them behind. I was not.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The road trip continues! Tomorrow night will see what promises to be a tough game against the Nuggets in the Mile High City. The trip concludes with what promises to be a substantially less tough game against the Thunder in Oklahoma City on Sunday evening. And then it's time for some home cooking: six of the following eight games will be at The House That Adjustable Rate Mortgages Built.