The Cavs couldn't eek out a win on King James' 24th birthday, falling in Miami by a count of 104-95. The Cavs were down 16 at the half, fought back to erase the lead, but just couldn't sustain the momentum as the Heat went on a fourth quarter run to put the Cavs away. The loss ended the Cavs' winning streak at 6, and dropped their record on the season to 26-5. John Hnat gives us The Good, The Bad, & The Summary on the loss.

THE SUMMARY:

Phil Jackson (he of the nine NBA titles) once said that the toughest part of winning a game after being down by a large margin wasn't cutting the lead. Instead, he wrote, the hardest part was maintaining the intensity once the lead had been erased. Basically, teams shoot their wad getting back into the game, and have nothing left once they have made the game close.

The Cavs proved Jackson's point to a T last night. Trailing by 16 points to Miami at halftime (50-34), they cut the lead to just one point midway through the fourth quarter, and had multiple opportunities to take the lead. But that's when (*pick your cliché to indicate that their luck ran out; I will suggest "the clock struck midnight"*
), as Miami went on a 16-3 run to put the game away, eventually winning 104-95. The loss ended Cleveland's winning streak at 6, and dropped their record on the season to 26-5. (Raise your hands, all of you who thought we would ever write

that
sentence.)

LeBron James led all scorers with 38 points, and Delonte West made it to 20 points yet again. The Heat featured five players in double digits. One of them is the one you'd expect - Dwyane Wade. The other? Rookie Mario Chalmers, who drilled all but one of his seven attempts from long distance. If he keeps playing like that, next year's entire NBA draft class will be caught with weed at the NBA's rookie orientation program.

It's the NBA. Where "okay, we'll settle for 77-5" happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Resilience: Although it was ultimately unsuccessful, the Cavs did mount a very impressive comeback in the second half. Going from a 16 point deficit to trailing by only one point, and cutting that margin in basically the space of one quarter, deserves some praise.

Happy Birthday: He didn't ultimately get what he wanted for his birthday, but James celebrated his 24th in fine style, with his 38 points (on 12 of 24 shooting from the

floor) and seven assists. At some point, you run out of adjectives to describe LeBron's play; we run the risk of taking his greatness for granted.

Fifteen Shots: As I've said before, West should get at least 15 shots per game. He took 16 last night, made eight of them, and finished with 20 points. He also did a respectable job of defending Wade (who shot only 7 of 23 from the field). Delonte may not have prototypical two-guard size, but that's his position.

Uncle Austin: One of the few good points about the Cavs trailing for most of the game: we get the usual Austin Carr arbitrary cutoff. AC was in rare form, emphasizing time and again that the Cavs "had to cut the lead to ten" by halftime, and later that "if they can get the lead down to single digits by the end of the [third] quarter, they'll be in good shape".

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Does This Mean We All Owe Taco Bell A Chalupa?: For the first time in 17 games, the Cavs surrendered more than 100 points to an opponent. (The last time that happened was on November 25th against the Knicks, when a meaningless late-game flurry by New York made the final score 119-101.) The Cavs just could not keep pace with the Heat's ball movement (Miami was an especially blistering 11 of 18 from three-point range, and almost all of those shots were uncontested).

Speaking Of Ball Movement...: ... the Cavs' was so restricted, you would think the entire team was in tighty whities. Only 17 of the Cavs' 33 field goals resulted from assists (in the first half, they registered a mere *five* helpers; Wade himself had more than that in the first half). No ball movement, no offense.

Things No Man Should See: And I thought Sam Cassell was the worst thing I'd ever seen on a basketball court. In the opening minutes of the game, Ben Wallace received the ball in the post, and actually tried to dribble it into the lane for a shot. The resultant heave was, well, a heave. I don't know if Coach Mike Brown has promised the Fro one play early in every game, but that has been a trend of the Cavs in the past couple of weeks. Some would say it is one play too many.

Okay, It's Time To Talk About It: The Cavs' big men have long been thought to be one of their strengths. The combination of Zydrunas Ilgauskas's length and deft shooting touch, Wallace's defensive intensity, and Varejao's hustle is formidable. Alas, it's not showing on the court, at least not in the rebound statistics. Once again, the Cavs were handily out-rebounded by their opponent (57-37). Once

again, they surrendered several second-chance baskets. As much as anything, this area is the one difference between the dominant Cavs of a couple weeks ago and the team that has been squeaking by the past few games. (Does anybody else remember the press conference from Coach Mike Brown's first season, when he repeated time and again that "we did not *box out* "? He could easily break out that recording, as it once again applies.)

The Boobie Meter: When you see this feature on the "Didn't Like" side of the ledger, you know that Cavs guard Daniel (Boobie) Gibson did not have a good night. And he didn't. He did finish with nine points, but six of those came on two meaningless, Brook Jacoby -esque three pointers in the game's final minute, the outcome already decided. (Jacoby,

for those who don't know, was a third baseman for the Indians in the 1980s and early 1990s. He hit 120 career home runs, and approximately 120 of them came with the bases empty in the ninth inning of 12-4 games.) When it mattered, Gibson missed several other three-point attempts; otherwise, he added exactly one assist and one rebound in his 25 minutes of action.

Apologies to the male and alternatively-lifestyled female readers of this space who have come to expect more, but Boobie's game last night rates a Nicole Richie from her anorexia days.

Yes, It's Petty: The pluses of playing in Miami: a bona-fide superstar for a teammate, the great weather, the Miami nightlife. The minuses?

Listening to that Heat announcer 41 times a season. The phrase "UUUUUUUdoNNNNNNNISSSSSS HASSSSSlem" is still reverberating in my ears. (Give the guy some credit: he has found a way to emphasize *every* syllable in a word.)

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

An Easy Way To Make Twenty Bucks: Bet somebody that the Heat's Haslem will not be able to go more than ten seconds without removing his mouthguard and chewing on the end of it.

Good Thing He Wasn't Born In June: Much has been made of LeBron celebrating his 24th birthday yesterday. What isn't as well known: his birthday has been a terrible day for the Cavs. Last night was the third time in LeBron's six seasons that the Cavs played on December 30th; they are now 0-3 in those games. (Besides last night, they also fell to Chicago in 2006 and to Indiana in 2003.) In the seasons when they did not play on the 30th, they lost twice on the 29th, and once on the 27th. The Cavs have not won on December 30th

since 1996, when Terrell Brandon and Danny Ferry (!) led them to a victory over Minnesota.

Wow. So *that's* what it feels like to be the Elias Sports Bureau.

In any event, if the Cavs play on Bron's birthday next season, you may want to bet against them. Even if they play Oklahoma City.

It's Amazing What People Will Admit To, To See Their Name In Print: Last

time (*yes, that was a gratuitous link to an earlier column*), I asked you, the wonderful readers of this column, to tell me the most embarrassing song on their iPod. You did not disappoint! C&C Music Factory's "Gonna Make You Sweat (Everybody Dance Now)", Right Said Fred's "I'm Too Sexy", Bobby Sherman's "Make Your Own Kind of Music" ... you crazy readers! I love you! Stay the hell away from my stereo!

But one reader saw this challenge as his personal Everest ... and boy, did he rise to the challenge. Chris Koch (*side note*

to Mr. Koch: your life will never be the same after I am done with this sentence) admitted that he rocks out to Haysi Fantayzee's " John Wayne Is Big Leggy ". In fact, he wants to know if there are other Haysi Fantayzee fans out there! So if your musical tastes include songs about the Duke's sexual habits, feel free to drop me a line, and I will see to it that you and Mr. Koch get in touch with each other. And then I will wash my hands. Twice.

Paging "Hot Plate" Williams: One of the downsides of the NBA, compared to the other major sports, is that we don't get many grossly

out-of-shape players playing hoops. (I suppose the reasons are obvious.) Bartolo Colon may have been a hero on the diamond; Shaun Rogers may be a beast on Sundays; both of them would be gasping for air soon after the opening tip.

But we do get the occasional hefty NBA player. Eddy Curry comes to mind. Baron Davis had to go the Jenny Craig route to slim down. But it's not often that you see a player benched because he is too fat. That is what has happened to Charlotte Bobcats forward Sean May, who has apparently had one too many donuts

for coach Larry Brown's taste. (If you've seen any Bobcats games this season, you know that this move is probably overdue - May was doubled over and grabbing his shorts within a couple minutes of entering the game against the Cavs earlier this season.)

By virtue of his benching, May is now a member of the **Hot Plate Williams All-Stars** . Curry and Davis have to make the squad too, at least among active players. Shaq, for certain - he has his own gravitational pull at this stage of his career. (Seriously, when Steve Nash drives the lane, he lists towards Shaq's side of the floor.) But Davis slimmed down; Shaq is still a

good player, if not the superstar of his younger years; and Curry ... well, he was benched too, but not because he left jelly stains on the ball.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Yes, that big game against the Celtics still awaits a week from Friday. Until then, it should be a relatively easy road for the Cavs, as they face Chicago at home this Friday, then travel to Washington to face the Wizards Sunday afternoon, and then

return home to take on Charlotte a week from tonight.