Play with fire enough times, and you'll end up in the burn unit. The Cavs discovered this truth the hard way this afternoon, falling to the Washington Wizards (excuse me, the 7-25 Washington Wizards) by a score of 80-77. The loss dropped the Cavs' record to 27-6 and cut their Central Division lead over Detroit to six games. John Hnat gives us The Good, The Bad, & The Summary from today's disappointing loss to our playoff punching bags.

THE SUMMARY:

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The Cavs discovered this truth the hard way this afternoon, falling to the Washington Wizards (excuse me, the *7-25 Washington Wizards*) by a score of 80-77. The loss dropped the Cavs' record to 27-6 and cut their Central Division lead over Detroit to six games.

If this game seemed familiar, it should: on Christmas night in

Cleveland, the Cavs fell behind the Wizards, trailed for most of the contest, and then made it a game with a late fourth-quarter flurry. That formula worked in Cleveland, and it looked like it might result in another Cavs victory: despite trailing by as many as 16 points in the fourth quarter, the Cavs battled back to tie the game in the final minute. (They were helped in no small part by a couple of what-were-you-thinking passes, one by Dominic McGuire and the other by Mike James, that gave the Cavs a couple of extra possessions in the final couple of minutes.)

Cleveland even had the chance to take the lead when Delonte West spotted up for an open three-pointer with about 30 seconds remaining. Alas, West's shot drew iron, and Washington's Antawn Jamison made a basket with 10 ticks left on the clock. On the subsequent play, LeBron James drove for what appeared to be a game-tying layup, but the shot was whistled away by the referees because of a traveling violation. Caron Butler split a pair of free throws; James missed a desperation three-pointer at the buzzer; and then it was time for the post-game spread.

James led everybody with his 30 points and 10 assists, and actually was not that far away from a triple-double as he had six rebounds. (A cynic could point out that he was not that far away from a *quadruple*-double, as he also tallied seven turnovers.) The only other Cavs to make it to double digits were Mo Williams (13 points) and Anderson Varejao (10 points). Jamison paced the Wizards with 26 points and 13 boards.

It's the NBA. Where looking past your opponent happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Next Time, Start The Clock With Six Minutes Remaining: The Cavs sleepwalked through most of the game, but give them credit for fighting their way back and putting themselves in a position to win. A 19-6 run over a six-minute span in the fourth quarter erased the Wizards' lead.

The Boobie Meter: A key part of that comeback was Daniel (Boobie) Gibson, the guard whose colorful nickname continues to be a source of amusement for male and alternatively-lifestyled female readers everywhere. Gibson hit a three-point shot to cut the deficit to eight points. Moments later, he was fouled while attempting another bomb from beyond the arc, and hit all three of the resultant free throws. His overall line wasn't terrific - eight points on 2 of 5 shooting from the field, one rebound, one assist - but here at the GBS, we'll look for any excuse to grade his performance on a curve (!), such as those belonging to Erika Christensen .

The Coach Brown Meter: Had we wanted to link to something really hot , we would start a scale based on Coach Mike Brown's blood pressure. Halfway through the fourth quarter, James was whistled for an offensive foul on a drive to the hoop.

Well, Coach Brown just about crapped his pants.

Displaying a temper rarely seen during his four seasons at the helm of the Cavs, Brown went ballistic, earning himself two quick technical fouls and an ejection. What happened next? That 19-6 run we were just discussing. Those two events may be coincidental, but the Cavs sure did seem to step it up a notch after Brown was told his presence was no longer needed.

I am not a big proponent of coaches/managers getting themselves tossed in order to fire up their teams. Many (most?) fans like those displays, but that's simply because of the level of catharsis gained after watching their favorite team stink up the joint. In rare cases, a coach getting himself tossed can wake up a sleepwalking team, and I suspect there was an element of that in Coach Brown's display.

Either that, or he had early dinner reservations.

Play Of The Day, Part I: The Fox Sports Ohio announcing team has taken to calling LeBron's patented blocked shots from behind "chasedowns". It was chasedown time again this afternoon, as Washington's Mike James (no relation) tried

to lay the ball in before LeBron could get to it. "
Get that weak stuff out of here, young man!
" was LeBron's response.

Play Of The Day, Part II: With the Cavs trailing by nine in the second quarter, James had the ball outside the three-point arc, with Washington's Butler guarding him. James brought his hands up through Butler's hand check, drawing the foul, and was able to throw the ball in the basket. That move takes a lot of strength when you try it from 15 feet; from 25 feet, you have to be ... LeBron James. (Butler, for his part, mouthed a plain-as-day "that's bull droppings" after the shot went in. And yes, his pronunciation of "droppings" had a "sh" sound to it; but this is a family column, after all. Previous links notwithstanding.)

Cha-Ching!: That sound would be Anderson Varejao's bank account. The potential free-agent-to-be had a decent game - a double-double, with 10 points and 10 rebounds - but he is demonstrating an expanding array of offensive moves. He used a nifty spin move and baby hook to get the Cavs their first two points of the game. A couple of minutes later, he started the same spin move, but then twisted the other way for a turnaround jumper, which he drilled. He gets those moves down, and any ideas of keeping him around at $6 million per season will go out the wndow.

Uncle Austin: English as a second language, thy name is Austin Carr. In the first quarter, Washington pulled away to an eight-point lead, thanks in part to a couple of three-pointers. LeBron trimmed it to two with a pair of treys. After the second one, Austin crowed that "fair play is turnaround". (I think he meant "turnabout is fair play", but nobody gets in Austin's way when he's on a roll.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Without Further Comment, Part I: The Cavs were handily out-rebounded by the Wizards, by a total of 58 to 45.

Without Further Comment, Part II: The rebounding disparity was especially evident at the offensive end, as the Wizards grabbed 19 offensive rebounds while the Cavs managed only nine.

Without Further Comment, Part III: The Cavs shot a brickilicious 61% (14 of 23) from the free throw line.

Heck, even Mo Williams (the second-best free throw shooter in The Association heading into the game) missed a freebie.

Without Further Comment, Part IV: Speaking of brickilicious, the Cavs shot a mere 39% (28 of 71) from the field, including a "hide the women and children!"-level 27% (7 of 26) from long distance.

Okay, I Can't Go That Long Without Further Comment: Especially in the third quarter, when the Cavs managed a mere 11 points, their "offense" consisted of:

- Walk the ball upcourt;
- Dribble away most of the 24 second clock;
- Heave a jumper, preferably from a different zip code;

- Head back downcourt after the Wizards grabbed the rebound.

The injury to Zydrunas Ilgauskas has left the team with no legitimate low-post threat, and opposing teams are starting to take notice.

Let's Hide Here, Under The Basket! They'll Never Find Us Here!: More times than I can count (basically because I never started counting in the first place), Wizards players were left alone under the basket, received passes, and made easy baskets. Those defensive breakdowns may be another side effect of Ilgauskas's injury; Varejao and Ben Wallace are not used to playing alongside each other, and now they're starting together.

To tie a few of themes together, here's the sequence that defined this game. Early in the third quarter, Washington ball. Butler misses a jumper, but Jamison gets the offensive rebound. Jamison hoists another jumper; another miss. But it resulted in ANOTHER offensive rebound, this time to Mike James. And then James found Andray Blatche under the hoop for an easy layup. The Official Dog of GBS had sore ribs after that play. (*In the interests of journalistic integrity, I should point out that I do not actually own a dog. But if I did, he would have had sore ribs.*
)

Now We're Getting Petty: After a LeBron layup in the

third quarter cut the Wizards' lead to 56-50, FSO's Fred MacLeod let loose with one of his pet calls, the "LeBron, right down Euclid" one. Somebody please tell him that:

1. "Right down Euclid" makes absolutely no sense when you are on the road, unless that city also happens to have a major thoroughfare named Euclid Avenue; and
2. Nobody has gone "right down Euclid" in years. If that phrase were truly accurate, then LeBron would *still* be dribbling, on a court narrowed by road construction, and waiting for the light to turn green.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

The New Math: I have previously touted Washington's Jamison as a potential target for the Cavs as the trade deadline approaches. I just want to point out that had the Cavs had Jamison and his 26 points this afternoon (thereby removing it from Washington's total), they would have won **103-54**. Try to argue with that logic!

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

This Wednesday, the Cavs will face Charlotte at Quicken Loans Arena in a classic "look past it" game. Why would they be looking past the Bobcats? Because the (*pause for dramatic effect*
)
Boston Celtics
roll into town this Friday for what hopefully will be a classic showdown between the Eastern Conference's top two powers.