With tough games against the Hornets, Pistons, and Magic looming ... Tuesday night's game at Memphis was an important one for the Cavs to win. After a sloppy first half, the Cavaliers got serious, outscoring the Grizzlies 55-43 in the last 24 minutes, building a lead as large as twenty, and coasting home with a solid 102-87 victory, despite Ben Wallace joining Big Z on the sidelines with the flu. Cleveland is now 30-6, the best record in the East, and with Detroit getting knocked off at home by the Bobcats, the Cavaliers now lead the Pistons by eight full games in the Central Division.

Every game on the NBA schedule is a "must-win" of course, but Tuesday night's affair in Memphis loomed a little larger than most for the Cavaliers. With a home date against the tough Hornets (the second night of a back-to-back), a four-game West Coast trip, and road games at Detroit and at Orlando looming in the next three weeks, the Cavaliers needed to handle business against the struggling Grizzlies.

Fortunately, this team has taken care of business in Bachman-Turner Overdrive style just about all season, and Tuesday was no exception. After a sloppy first half, the Cavaliers got serious, outscoring Memphis 55-43 in the last 24 minutes, building a lead as large as twenty, and coasting home with a solid 102-87 victory, despite Ben Wallace joining Big Z on the sidelines with the flu. Cleveland is now 30-6, the best record in the East, and with Detroit getting knocked off at home by the Bobcats, the Cavaliers now lead the Pistons by eight full games in the Central

Division.

Ever onward, ever upward.

Newsflash- LeBron James Can Play: The Chosen One had it all working tonight, posting his second triple-double of the season, with 30 points, 11 rebounds, and 10 assists. As always, his timing was impeccable. The Cavaliers struggled in the first half, committing eight turnovers, allowing the Grizzlies to take 23 free throws, and limping in at halftime with just a 47-44 lead. They needed a spark, and LeBron provided it. In the third quarter, the Akron *wunderkind* poured in 15 points to go along with four rebounds, three assists, and a steal that led to one of his patented breakaway dunks, giving the Cavaliers a 16-point lead late in the period.

And as has become his custom, LeBron mixed in some killer D to go along with his spectacular O. He held Memphis star Rudy Gay to ten points, barely half his season average of 19.1, on 5-of-18 shooting.

He's Not the Only One, Though: As excellent as was #23, he got by with a little help from his friends on Tuesday. With the frontcourt depleted, the guards needed to step up, and they did. Delonte West was on fire, knocking in his first six shot attempts and finishing with 19 points, 6 rebounds, and 4 assists on 7-of-9 from the field and a perfect 3-of-3 from downtown. Mo Williams chipped in with 16 points on 6-of-11 shooting and Daniel Gibson had 11 on 3-of-4 shooting, all from three-point range. The troika combined for 46 points on 16-of-24 shooting and 9-of-12 from downtown. On a night when the Cavaliers missed their two top big men, their smallest men came up very big indeed.

Play of the Night, Part I: The LeBron James chasedown-and-spike has become a nightly staple, and it made its appearance early on Tuesday evening- less than two minutes into the first quarter, to be somewhat exact, when LBJ hawked down

Kyle Lowry and sent his lay-up attempt off the backboard.

Play of the Night, Part II: With time running out in the first quarter, LeBron launched a 94-foot inbound pass to Wally Szczerbiak, who turned and drained a clock-beating baseline jumper to give the Cavaliers a 26-20 lead at the end of one.

Play of the Night, Part III: Midway through the fourth quarter, LBJ put the ball on the floor and had his wrist grabbed as he motored down the lane, turning him all the way around. With his back to the basket, James flipped up a no-look shot that bounced around the rim and in, for an and-one. LeBron being LeBron, he promptly followed up this superhuman feat by going front-rim on the free throw.

Mild Thing: Hampered by foul trouble and locked in a disadvantageous match-up with Marc Gasol, Pau's beefy younger brother, Anderson Varejao just never got it going on Tuesday night. The Brazilian dreamboat struggled to seven points and four rebounds in 29 frustrating minutes, and in the second period was hit with a technical foul, one of two tech's the Cavaliers picked up in the waning minutes of the first half (the other being whistled on LeBron for basket-hanging.)

J.J. was Dyno-Mite: The youngster from N.C. State played 28 minutes on Tuesday night, his second-highest total of the season, and looked very solid out there, scoring nine points, yanking down seven rebounds, and competing very well with Memphis's bulkier post players. He even knocked down a Boozer-esque 18-footer from the elbow in the second half. Hickson seems to look better every night, and although I still fully believe the Cavaliers need to procure another veteran big man for the postseason, it's hard not to be bullish on this young man's future in Wine & Gold.

Be Afraid, Blazer Fan... Be Very Afraid: By now, you're probably familiar with the flap regarding Darius Miles and the Portland Trail Blazers, who are on the hook for the entirety of his $18 million

salary if the former lottery pick plays in two or more games this season. Paying the bill for D-Miles would put the Blazers into luxury-tax hell in the summer of 2009, and they really don't want that, to the point of sending heavy-handed, threatening e-mails to the other 29 clubs, threatening dire consequences should any of those clubs dare sign and suit up Darius for the remainder of the season.

Well, the Grizzlies dared, and it looks like Paul Allen is going to be out a cool $18 million, because, other than a hilariously botched dunk after entering the game, Darius looked pretty good on Tuesday night. The ex-Cavalier poured in 13 points in 14 minutes, and will no doubt be in uniform and on the floor for Memphis's next game, on Friday night against Utah. Needless to say, there will be no crocodile tears shed for the Trail Blazers, at least not from this corner. They're a competitor. Screw them.

Next: Thursday night at 8:00 PM, when the Cavaliers take on the Bulls in the United Center. Then a quick turnaround, a Friday night home showdown with New Orleans, and it's off to the Coast, starting on Monday night in L.A. against the Lake Show. Time to buckle up, kids, it's about to get a little bumpy.