Another day, another dramatic Cavs victory. While it wasn't quite as dramatic as Friday night's game against Golden State, the Cavs needed all 48 minutes to down the Utah Jazz, 102-97. LeBron James came within one assist of a triple-double, and Mo Williams added 25 points as the Cavs won their third straight game. The Cavs now lead the Eastern Conference with their 34-8 record. John Hnat provides the recap of last night's thrilling victory.

THE SUMMARY:

Is it too late to petition the NBA to have the Cavs play the rest of the season on the road? Beca use they sure are providing some entertaining games on their trip away from Cleveland.

More importantly, they are winning those games.

For the second straight night, the Cavs played a tight contest that came down to the last minute.

For the second straight night, they pulled out the victory.

While it may not have been quite as dramatic as their win over Golden State the night before, the Cavs' 102-97 win at Utah last night was another nail-biter that showed just how resilient this team is.

Early on, it seemed like the Cavs might run away with the game, as they grabbed a 12-point lead in the first quarter. Utah fought back, taking a small lead (49-47) into the locker room at the intermission. While the Cavs did regain the lead in the third quarter, they could not shake the pesky Jazz. Hey, good for us as fans - all those blowout wins get boring after a while.

(
Who are we kidding?

No they don't.

Maybe they will a decade from now, if the Cavs win ten straight NBA titles and make us forget that we ever thought there was some sort of Cleveland curse.

But not until then.
)

The victory improved the Cavs' mark to 34-8, tying them with the Lakers for the best record in all the land. (At least, all of the land covered by the NBA.) Their divisional lead over Detroit now stands at a full ten games. They hold a slim advantage over Boston for the lead in the Eastern Conference.

Lest we forget, they are doing this with two-fifths of their starting lineup in street clothes.

Their powers are beyond your comprehension
.

LeBron James, who always seems to show up to play against the Jazz, just missed a triple-double, as he posted 33 points, 14 rebounds, and nine assists. Mo Williams had another big game, scoring 25 points.

For Utah, Paul Millsap led the way with 24 points and 15 rebounds, and Deron Williams added 17 points and a game-high 16 assists.

It's the NBA. Where 3-1 West Coast trips happen.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Free Spot, Bingo Card: LeBron. I've run out of superlatives to describe his play. Really, we should be building statues to the ping-pong ball that landed him in Cleveland.

Five Year/$52 Million Spot, Bingo Card: Anderson Varejao took eight shots last night. He made seven.

And most of them were jumpers.

He has developed a very reliable turnaround jumper, and a rather reliable face-up jumper.

The Boobie Meter: The favorite feature of male and alternatively-lifestyled female readers everywhere, the Boobie Meter comes down to a single play from last night's game.

Look at the boxscore from last night's game, and the line for Cavs guard Daniel "Boobie" Gibson does not stick out:

one point, 0 of 5 from the field, a -11 in the plus-minus ledger.

But Gibson had one exquisite play.

In the second quarter, he drove hard to the rim, drawing a double-team.

He kicked the ball out to Varejao at the free throw line, and Varejao drained the open jumper.

(
Note the clever tie-in with the previous item.
)

Based on that play alone - not to mention that I am tired of searching for pictures of emaciated, boobless starlets like Nicole Richie - I am rating Gibson's game a
Demi Moore
.

(Looks like this particular picture was taken before Demi ran up her account at the House of Silicone, but you get the idea.)

Month!: The strong play of the Cavs' Mo Williams continues. He sank five more three-pointers last night (he has become particularly deadly from the corners) and scored 25 points overall.

One defining sequence:

in the second quarter, with the game tied at 36-36, Utah's Kyle Korver attempted a layup.

Mo blocked the shot, then drilled a three-pointer on the Cavs' subsequent possession.

For about the tenth time this season after a Cavs' win, we can say it:

without Mo, they probably don't win this game.

Play Of The Night: The man-child known as J.J Hickson continues to tease with his displays of athletic ability. In the first quarter, James missed a jumper. Hickson soared high, rebounded the ball, and dunked it, all in one motion.

Uncle Austin: It's been a little while since we've taken a look at Austin Carr's relationship with the English language. Part of the reason why: repetition. At this point, many of AC's catch phrases are ... well, catch phrases.

We know that he'll yell "get that weak stuff out of here, young man!" after a big block, or that some long three-pointer will be from "deep in the (
fill in name of arena
)".

So when AC drops a phrase like "the L-Train with the steal, out on the break, throws the hammer down", it isn't noticed except by those fans playing the Austin Carr Drinking Game.

(And after that sentence, they had a blood-alcohol level somewhere between "completely blitzed" and "John Daly".)

But AC gave us a true gem last night. After Utah's Mehmet Okur missed what would have been a game-tying three-pointer with about 20 seconds remaining in the game, an excited Austin blurted, "he's been shooting that shot well all evening ... actually, not all evening, in the first quarter, but after that he's been missing them".

Nice flip-flop within the same breath, AC!

(And AC did not go far enough:

Okur had a terrible game from the opening tip, as he made only one of the nine shots he attempted.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

Stop Me If We've Seen This Before: Cavs leading by 10 at the end of the first quarter. LeBron takes a breather.

While LeBron was on the bench chewing his nails (or maybe not; if he is still chewing them, it is not apparent from the game broadcasts), the Cavs gave up an 11-3 run, all but erasing their lead.

Stop Me If We've Seen This Before (Déjà Vu Edition): Cavs leading by eight at the end of the third quarter. LeBron on the bench, getting the other rest that he typically gets during a game.

A 9-1 Jazz run later, the game was tied, and James's rest was over.

Speaking Of Déjà Vu: This is the third year that I have been doing these game summaries for TCF. I believe this is also the third year that I have done the write-up for the Cavs' visit to Utah. And this will be the third year in a row in which I groan about the Utah in-game entertainment.

Their "entertainment experience" consists of the following:

1. Playing a really, *really* annoying sound after almost every basket by the Jazz. I am not sure how to describe this sound, other than to say that if a cowbell and a slot machine could have a kid, that's how it would sound.

That's it. There is no "2" in the list. (*Which begs the question of whether a "list" can consist of only one item.*
Next up:

we'll take a class field trip to the woods, where trees have fallen, and wonder whether they made any sounds.

The answer:

if they did, it sure as hell wasn't anything as annoying as what they play in Utah.
)

Deron Vu?: The Jazz's Williams always gives the Cavs fits. They never seem to have a way to stop his dribble penetration into the lane, or the easy baskets that result from it.

Seeing as though Williams had 16 assists last night, I'd have to say that the Cavs are still searching for that answer.

(To be fair, so is the rest of the league.)

He'll Always Have A Special Place In My Doghouse: Although Sasha Pavlovic had a pretty good game overall (13 points, including 3 of 4 from three-point range; and a game-high plus-minus rating of +22), he still is good for at least one
Unfrozen Caveman Shooting Guard
moment per game.

("Your strange cowbell/slot machine sounds frighten and confuse me, for I am but a simple caveman.

But there is one thing I do know, and that is turnovers.")

We have a few contenders for the title from last night. The three-point attempt that drew nothing but backboard. The pair of missed free throws with the Cavs nursing a three-point lead with just over a minute remaining.

But I'll take the what-were-you-thinking pass he threw in the general direction of LeBron in the second quarter.

Unfortunately for Pavlovic, Utah's Ronnie Brewer was also in that general direction, and he stole the pass for an easy breakaway dunk.

I believe the word
gaah!
was invented for precisely that occasion.

Special BONUS "What I Liked About The Game"!: Having said that about Sasha, I'll give him big praise for a play late in the third quarter.

He had the ball on the baseline, near the three-point line, and drove to the hoop.

The Utah defender set up to take the charge.

That response comes straight from The Book on Sasha Pavlovic.

In fact, that may be the title of the book on Sasha.

But Sasha surprised us all:

he deftly avoided the defender, and found James with a pass for a resounding dunk.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...:

What A Difference A Year Makes: The Cavs hit the halfway point of their season Friday night at Golden State (it figures that Peeker drew the game assignment for perhaps the best game of the season to date).

Reaching a mile marker like that one naturally makes us reflect on what led up to it.

Really, one year ago, could we have really seen where the Cavs would be 41 games into the 2008-09 season?

In 2007-08, the Cavs were 23-18 at the halfway point of the season (and it took a five game

winning streak to get to that record). In 2008-09, they are 33-8, a full ten-game improvement.

In 2007-08, the Cavs had already had a six-game losing streak (not coincidentally occurring when LeBron missed several games with a hand injury) and a couple of two-game losing spells.

In 2008-09, the Cavs have yet to lose consecutive games (in fact, in the eight games following a loss, they have outscored their opponents by an average of 18.5 points per game).

In 2007-08, the Cavs were surrendering about as many points per game as they were scoring. In 2008-09, they are scoring almost 11 more points per game than their opponents.

In 2007-08, the Cavs were failing chemistry, as their starting lineup included the increasingly cancerous (not to mention increasingly sucky) Larry Hughes and the NBA's answer to Simple Jack in Drew Gooden.

They had nobody on the roster who would be confused with a point guard.

Thanks to a couple of shrewd trades by Danny Ferry, the 2008-09 Cavs feature a legitimate backcourt in Williams and Delonte West and a power forward with a brain in Ben Wallace.

In 2007-08, the Cavs were not a legitimate title contender. In 2008-09, they are.

Not sure about you, but I'm much happier that it is a year later.

The End Of An Era?: We may be seeing the end of the **Tarence Kinsey Brigade**, those fun-loving end-of-the-bench players who never see the court until the game is decided and fans start heading for the exits.

For the second night in a row, Kinsey saw action with the outcome of the game still very much up for grabs.

It's too soon to print the death notice for the **TKB**. But if Kinsey gets Real Playing Time even after West and Zydrunas Ilgauskas return from their injuries, then the torch may have to be passed. The **Darnell Jackson Brigade**?

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

No more planes. No more room service. No more chocolates on the pillow.

Well, at least for a couple of nights.

The Cavs return home to face Sacramento Tuesday evening. The home stand will end at exactly one game, as they will then head to Orlando for a showdown against the 33-10 Magic on Thursday night.