The Cavs went eye-to-eye with the Orlando Magic last night ... and sometime in the second half, they blinked. The Magic put the game away with a 20-2 streak in the fourth quarter, winning by a final score of 99-88. The loss dropped the Cavs' record to 35-9, knocked them out of the top spot in the Eastern Conference, and left them just a half-game ahead of the Magic. John Hnat recaps last night's loss.

THE SUMMARY:

Well, that sucked.

Sure, we could try to sugarcoat it, but why? The Cavs were outclassed last night, losing to the Orlando Magic, 99-88, at Amway Arena. The final score was purely a moral victory:

the Cavs were down 99-74 with a few minutes remaining, but rattled off the last 14 points of the game.

(Somewhere out there is a guy who took the Magic minus 12, and boy is he ticked this morning.)

Really, the less said about this game, the better. We'll just point out that the Cavs no longer have the best record in the Eastern Conference (Boston does, at 38-9; the Cavs are now 35-9).

But they do still have a ten game lead over Detroit in the Central Division.

So they've got that going for them.

Which is nice.

The Cavs actually played a good first half. They led by as many as ten points, and were still clinging to a lead at the intermission. But Orlando stormed into the lead by outscoring Cleveland 24-16 in the third quarter, and then a 20-2 run to start the fourth quarter ensured that the flight back to Cleveland would not be a happy one.

LeBron James led all scorers with 23 points, although it took him 27 shots to get there. The bench showed up to play, as Wally Expiring Contract had 14 points, and resident man-child J.J. Hickson added 13.

The Magic were led by their big four of Dwight Howard (22 points and 18 rebounds), Rashard Lewis (19), Hedo Turkoglu (19), and Jameer Nelson (18).

It's the NBA. Where "file it and forget it" happens.

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Sentences I Never Thought I'd Write: In the first quarter, Sasha Pavlovic drove into the lane, then kicked the ball out to Ben Wallace, who drained a 15-foot jumper from the baseline.

Yes, it was only one play. But did you ever think those words would appear in the same sentence? Really?

Maybe He Really Likes The Cleveland Winters: Wally Szczerbiak is known as "Wally Expiring Contract" in this space because (a) he has an expiring contract, which gets mentioned all the time, especially with the NBA trade deadline approaching; and (b) it's a lot easier to spell. Underlying those trade rumors is the assumption that Wally's best days are behind him, and that there are other players who can help the Cavs more.

While that may be true, Wally had what may have been his best half of basketball in a Cavs uniform last night. He scored 14 points in the first half, making all five of the shots he attempted (including three from beyond the arc). The play that defined his effort: he scrambled after a jump ball, grabbed the ball, then posted/bulldozed his way into the lane for a jumper.

Note that Wally's father attended the game last night. If Wally plays like that in front of his dad, then Pops will have front-row seats at The Q for the rest of the season.

(I am assuming that he left the arena at the half, because Wally missed the one shot he attempted the rest of the game.)

Estimated Date Of Arrival In The Starting Lineup: 2009-10: Hickson continues to show that he will deserve playing time even after Zydrunas Ilgauskas returns to active duty (which may happen as soon as tonight against the Clippers).

The story is not just that he scored 13 points and pulled down seven boards; it is that he scored in a variety of ways (including a couple of medium-range jumpers), played about as much defense against Howard as any other Cavalier, and even blocked one of Howard's shots.

Most rookies, unaccustomed to the long NBA season, hit the wall at the halfway point of the season.

Hickson is actually getting stronger.

Okay, Now I'm Reaching: The Cavs had only six turnovers last night. (This is rather like pointing out that while the meal you had last night was terrible, at least it didn't give you food poisoning.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

The Disturbing Trend Continues: It has not been as pronounced this season, but the Cavs still have their lapses in the third quarter. Last night, their one-point halftime lead became a seven-point deficit by the end of the quarter.

They scored only 16 points in the frame, largely because they settled for jump shot after jump shot.

Unfortunately, both LeBron and Mo Williams, who have been so hot lately, both had an off night (James was 10 for 27 from the field; Williams, 4 for 15).

The Other Disturbing Trend Continues: Orlando, which is not a good rebounding team, had a sizable advantage over the Cavs in the rebounding department, 48-39.

I'm Schizophrenic, And So Am I: Third quarter, Orlando leading 71-64. LeBron steals a pass and drives to the other end.

The Magic's Nelson, being the one person between LeBron and the hoop, does the only thing he can:

wraps James in a giant bear-hug.

James took a step, breaking free of the bear-hug, and laid the ball in.

The referees' call? Fouled in the act of shooting. But they did not allow the continuation basket! Instead, LeBron went to the line for two free throws.

Think about this for a moment. How can LeBron be fouled in the act of shooting, but not have his shot count? It is not as though he were fouled, jogged to the hoop, and laid the ball in five seconds after the whistle.

Had the referees awarded the basket (plus the and-one) to LeBron, I would have been content.

Had the referees called the foul on the floor and let the Cavs inbound the ball, I would have been content.

Those are internally consistent positions.

But it takes years of therapy to arrive at the referees' view.

Not That It Mattered: Postscript to the previous note: LeBron then missed both free throw attempts.

And Then The Game Ended: After Orlando pushed the lead to 87-72 in the fourth quarter, Coach Mike Brown called a time out. Surely the Cavs would come out of the breather with a solidly diagrammed and executed offensive play, yes?

Not so much.

A couple of half-hearted passes, then a total "I'm settling for this shot" jump shot by LeBron.

The ball clanged off the rim, and the game may as well have been called at that moment.

The Boobie Meter: A couple of months ago, when I started the Boobie Meter - the ranking of the play of the Cavs' Daniel (Boobie) Gibson, and a feature that has become a favorite of male and alternatively-lifestyled female readers everywhere - I had no idea that I was going to jinx Gibson's career. But the evidence is undeniable - since I started this feature, Gibson's game has gone south. (*Correlation,*

causation; to-may-to, to-mah-to
.)

I may need to put this feature on ice for a while, maybe permanently.

More to the point, I'm tired of digging on sites like EmaciatedCelebrities.com (*no, it doesn't really exist*) (as far as I know) for pictures of Nicole Richie with her collarbones jutting out.

Really, Daniel, is it too much to ask for a performance that allows me to search for, say, a Jessica Biel
?
Apparently so, as Gibson missed all but one shot that he took, and that was a meaningless three-pointer in the final minute.

We have hit rock bottom.

I have no other choice.

Yes, I have to rank Boobie's performance as a
Phil Mickelson
.

And Then To Add Injury To Insult: With the end of the Cavs' bench playing out the string in the final minutes, the Cavs' **Tarence Kinsey** (who is such a favorite of the GBS, his name is printed in bold) badly turned his ankle while trying to change directions. J
ust when he looked like he was going to become something more than the leader of the
Tarence Kinsey Brigade
, he loses a wheel.

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Before You Jump Off The Ledge...: Keep this date in mind. April 24, 2008. Remember it? That was the day the Cavs were thoroughly humiliated in Game Three of their playoff series against the Washington Wizards, 108-72.

This game, incidentally, followed a Game Two in which the Cavs humiliated the Wizards, 116-86.

(A similar sequence occurred in the conference semifinal series against Boston:

the Celtics won Game Two, 89-73; the Cavs then waxed the Quicken Loans Arena floor with the Celtics' hides in Game Three, 108-84.)

The point is that even a game between two very good teams is going to sometimes result in blowouts. Not often - it is much more likely to be a close contest - but it's not a rare occurrence.

So please, do not think that this game means that the Magic are inherently superior to the Cavs.

They're a very good team who happened to have a good night while the Cavs were having a bad one.

It happens.

The data points at either end of the bell curve, when they occur, do not mean that the curve doesn't exist.

Before You Think The League Done Mo Wrong: As you probably know by now, Mo Williams did not get selected to the Eastern Conference team for the All-Star Game.

You might expect GBS, as an unabashed Cavs homer, to complain long and loud about this slight.

You would be wrong

I am actually *glad* that Mo was not selected for the All-Star team, for a number of reasons:

1. *He didn't deserve it*. Go ahead, write me and tell me how wrong I am on this one, but he didn't. He certainly did not put up better numbers than any of the other guards who were picked.
2. *He needs the rest*. Mo has been battling some soreness in his knee lately. I would much, much rather have him rest that knee for a week, than play in an exhibition.
3. *Who cares about the All-Star Game?* Really. It's an exhibition. Can you remember the rosters for last season's All-Star Game?

Neither can I.

But we can remember who won in the playoffs.

That is not an accident.

4. *Maybe Mo will get some motivation from not being picked*: Although last night's game went a long way towards disproving that idea.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

The Cavs return home tonight to face the Los Angeles Clippers at Quicken Loans Arena. (*Note to those readers who are Clippers GM Mike Dunleavy:*

If you leave Marcus Camby behind in Cleveland, that would not be a bad thing.
)

The following week is light, with only three games:

at Detroit on Sunday afternoon; at home against Toronto on Tuesday (
note to those readers who are Toronto GM Bryan Colangelo:

If you leave Chris Bosh behind in Cleveland, that would not be a bad thing; and no, I will not share any of what I have been smoking
); and then at New York next Wednesday (
note to those readers who are Knicks GM Donnie Walsh:

no, the Cavs will not take any of your players back with them

).