As they've done for most of this season and much of the last four decades, Boston and Los Angeles continued to swap paint at the top of the overall standings as the league moved into the All-Star Break. The Lakers led the race at this time last week, but while they slipped up in Salt Lake, the Celtics moved back in front with a couple of gut-check road victories. Meanwhile, the Cavaliers more or less ran in place, while the ailing Magic dribbled oil all over the floor of Amway Arena. Jesse breaks down the race for homecourt advantage as we emerge from the All-Star break.

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Yet as static as the standings have been, the situation at the top is still very much in flux. Secure with rosters that won their conference championships last season, the C's and Lake Show probably won't be major players at the Feb. 19 trade deadline. The Cavaliers, with Wally's Famous Expiring Contract burning a hole in their pockets, should be. Orlando doesn't want Stephon Marbury and will likely just suck it up with Anthony Johnson and Tyronne Lue running the offense, literally and figuratively.

As of now, it's still a four-team race, with four games separating the front-running Celtics from the fourth-place Magic. The events of the upcoming week- off the court as well as on- will go a long way toward determining to what degree that number will shrink as the regular season winds down.

1.) Boston: 44-11: --

Streak: Won 2

Last 10: 8-2

Last Week: 2-0

Last Game: Thursday, Feb. 12: Won @ Dallas 99-92

Thursday, Feb. 19: @ Utah

Sunday, Feb. 22: @ Phoenix

The Celtics showed their championship mettle last week, breaking open a close game in the fourth quarter at New Orleans and storming back from a 15-point third-quarter deficit to beat the Mavericks in the Metroplex. They'll continue their Western swing with four more games, including back-to-back tilts against the Suns and Nuggets.

2.) Los Angeles: 42-10: 0.5

Streak: Lost 1

Last 10: 8-2

Last Week: 1-1

Last Game: Wednesday, Feb. 11: Lost @ Utah 113-109

Tuesday, Feb. 17: Atlanta

Wednesday, Feb. 18: @ Golden State

Friday, Feb. 20: New Orleans

Sunday, Feb. 22: @ Minnesota

After winning seven consecutive road games, the Lake Show finally faltered in Utah. But they're still in great shape, with big leads in both the Pacific Division and the race for home-court advantage in the West (six-and-a-half games over the Spurs and Nuggets.) Best of all, the enigmatic Lamar Odom has continued to produce: the ex-Rhode Island Ram followed up his 17-rebound performance against Cleveland with 18 boards against Oklahoma City and 19 in the loss to the Jazz. With a wealth of scorers, L.A. needs only inside toughness from Odom, and he's given them just that.

3.) Cleveland: 40-11: 2

Streak: Won 1

Last 10: 7-3

Last Week: 1-1

Last Game: Wednesday, Feb. 11: Beat Phoenix 109-92

Wednesday, Feb. 18: @ Toronto

Friday, Feb. 20: @ Milwaukee

Sunday, Feb. 22: Detroit

The Cavaliers suffered their first two-game losing streak of the season last week with that bizarre ending in Conseco Fieldhouse, but they bounced back to thump the Suns and go into the break with forty wins, just five fewer than they had all last season. Health is a major concern right now, especially on the perimeter, but Delonte West should be back some time in the next two weeks, which will help matters- the Cavaliers are allowing eight fewer points per game with the man I like to call "the poor man's Dennis Johnson " in the lineup. It doesn't look as if that deal for Amare Stoudamire is going to go through, but one thing is for sure- this roster will be different at the end of the week, whether in large or small ways.

4.) Orlando: 38-13: 4

Streak: Lost 1

Last 10: 5-5

Last Week: 0-1

Last Game: Wednesday, Feb. 11: Lost to Denver 82-73

Tuesday, Feb. 17: Charlotte

Wednesday, Feb. 18: @ New Orleans

Friday, Feb. 20: @ Charlotte

Sunday, Feb. 22: Miami

The Magic took a hard kick in the teeth last week when they found out that Jameer Nelson will likely be out for the entire season, including playoffs, with his shoulder injury. Orlando put up a season-low 73 points against the Nuggets, shooting 30 percent and committing 24 turnovers and got a combined nine points, four turnovers and one assist from Anthony Johnson and Tyronne Lue, Jameer's understudies. Not good. The Magic are now six games behind Boston in the win column, and the question is how long they'll stay in
this
column without their quarterback.

Power Ranking for the Week of Feb. 16

1. Los Angeles
2. Boston
3. Cleveland
4. Orlando

Player of the Week- Paul Pierce, Boston: The pouty-faced, lumpy-bodied assassin put together back-to-back 30-point performances in the road wins over the Hornets and Mavericks. He took over in the fourth quarter at Dallas, scoring 18 points, including the basket with just over a minute left that put the C's in the lead for good. KG is the emotional leader and the middle linebacker on defense, Ray Allen the canny sniper, but when it comes time to take the big shots, Paul Pierce is the man. I don't like his team and I don't like his face, but I respect him.

Individual Performance of the Week- Mo Williams, Cleveland: Mo was simply unconscious in Wednesday night's victory over Phoenix. He poured in a career-high 44, hitting 18-of-26 from the field and 7-of-9 from three-point range. Runners, floaters, long bombs, out-and-out circus shots- they were all going in. Oddly enough for a normally superb free-throw shooter, Mo hit only one of three from the stripe. Better he miss them in a game like Wednesday's than say, Game Seven of the Finals.

By the way, I think the CavFanatic-ordained nickname for Mo's trademark floater- the "Mo-Flow"- is extremely stupid, and I refuse to use it. So there.

Spoiler of the Week: New Orleans- Losers of the six of their last eight, the Hornets will try to restore their sting against the Magic on Wednesday and at Staples Center against the Lakers on Friday. New Orleans beat L.A. in SoCal on January 6 with David West (40 points, 11 rebounds) owning Pau Gasol (10 points, 8 rebounds, 5 assists.) West has been sub-par since coming back from a back injury in late January, shooting barely 40 percent in the last seven games. He'll need to be better for the Hornets to play spoiler and, more importantly, put some juice back into their flagging Southwest Division prospects.

Game to Watch: Detroit @ Cleveland- The Cavaliers' magic number to clinch their first Central Division title since 1976 currently stands at 19, and they'll have a chance to lop two more games off that total when they face the reeling Pistons at the Q next Sunday.

I know everyone is looking for bigger things this year, and they should be- but it'll be nice to win the division. Throughout their history, the Cavaliers have been constantly blocked off from the top of the Central by the Bulls and Pistons. They've had two 57-win teams, a 54-win team, and two 50-win teams, with nary a division titlist among them. To break through and establish this franchise as the preeminent in the Central- something it has never been- is a milestone in itself. We've always been the hunters. Now, finally, we are the hunted.