It was an important game. Not a critical game ... not a must-win game ... not a do-or-die game ... but an important one all the same. A road contest against their largest rival, the one who eliminated them in last year's playoffs. And the one who probably will stand in their way at some point during this year's postseason. And with all of that, the Cavs laid an egg. Playing with an unusual lack of energy, the Cavs were trounced by the Celtics last night, 105-94, at the TD Banknorth Garden. John recaps the loss.

THE SUMMARY:

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Playing with an unusual lack of energy, the Cavs were trounced by the

Celtics last night, 105-94, at the TD Banknorth Garden. With the loss, the Cavs now stand at 48-13 on the season - still the best record in the Eastern Conference, but just barely (the Celtics now sport a 49-14 record).

The Cavs never led (aside from a couple of inconsequential two-point leads in the opening minutes). They kept it close for most of the way - they trailed by only two points at the half (45-43), and stayed with the Celtics through the first half of the third quarter - but then they did the polite thing, and made the sellout Boston crowd happy by rolling over and playing dead.

Mo Williams led the Cavs with 26 points; LeBron James had 21. (Are the walls in the visitors' locker room at the Garden made from Kryptonite? LeBron has had some pretty awful games in Beantown.) Paul Pierce scored 29 points for the Celtics, and Leon Powe (yes, that would be the Leon Powe whose middle name is "Freaking") came off the bench to score 20 points and grab 11 boards.

It's the NBA. Where "I spent the entire day looking forward to *this* ?" happens. (It's also where "the players didn't go all out, so why should the writer?" happens. This game review is gonna be shorter than usual.)

WHAT I LIKED ABOUT THE GAME:

Last Year, This Would Have Been A Twenty Point Loss: If I had to count on one Cavalier to make a shot to save my life, it might just be Williams. I sure as hell would bet on him in a game of HORSE. He made more than half his shots from the field, including four of five from beyond the arc. He is the most accurate perimeter shooter the Cavs have had since ... dare I say Mark Price? (I say that knowing full well that I may draw the wrath of the Milt Palacio Fan Club.)

WHAT I DIDN'T LIKE ABOUT THE GAME:

But It Still Was An Eleven Point Loss: In no particular order, here are the Things That Sucked last night:

- Getting absolutely killed by Boston's big men in the paint. In the first quarter, it was Kendrick Perkins and Glen "Big Baby" Davis doing the damage. Later, it was Powe.

- Speaking of Powe ... giving up 20 and 11 to him? *Leon Freaking Powe*? (Note that we established his middle name earlier in this column.) Giving up 29 points to Paul Pierce is not that big of a deal; Pierce is going to get his. But when

the Leon Powes of the world are shredding you, it's a sign that you need to re-think your defensive philosophy.

- At the other end, the Cavs' big men avoided the paint as though it were an angry ex-girlfriend. With the clap. And open facial sores. (Anderson Varejao did have a couple of nice pick-and-roll plays; aside from that, I'm not sure I saw a yellow jersey near the hoop all night.)

- The corollary to the No Big Guys In The Paint offense is that the Cavs were running their LeBron And Four Guys Waiting For A Bus set, which consists of LeBron dribbling the ball while his four teammates stand around as though ... well, as though they are waiting for a bus. (It's not like you had to dig too deep to get the meaning of that one, folks.)

- Varejao was almost guillotined by Davis while driving to the hoop early in the third quarter (Davis, for his part, was called for a Flagrant Two, which meant that he got the early jump on enjoying the post-game buffet), but it did not give the Cavs any energy at all. I'm not talking about retaliation (though an elbow to Rajon Rondo the next time he drove to the hole would not have disappointed me); I'm talking about seeing *some* increase in energy afterward. (Maybe the Cavs miss Ben Wallace more than we could have guessed.)

- Sasha Pavlovic played.

- But he (and the rest of the Cavs) didn't play any defense. 105 points, 54% shooting from the field, 31 assists on 45 field goals ... that is not exactly what Coach Mike Brown had in mind.

- It's kind of petty to pick on a guy who barely played, but J.J. Hickson is somewhere between "Braylon Edwards" and "Braylon Edwards with oven mitts" on the hands scale. When I see him about to get the ball, I mentally prepare for the inevitable muff, and hope that he can recover the rock and do something with it. (Aside from "muff it again", that is.)

NOT THAT YOU ASKED, BUT...

Department of Just Sayin': Last night's game marked the Cleveland debut (2008-09 edition) of Joe Smith, who was signed by the Cavs earlier in the week. Many Cavs fans have built Smith up into some kind of superstar - a player whose presence

on this team basically guarantees a championship.

Last night, Smith had seven points and five rebounds in approximately 20 minutes of playing time. Not great, not terrible, just a decent contribution off the bench. But to those of you expecting more, take a look at Smith's statistics. This season, he is averaging ... seven points and five rebounds in approximately 20 minutes of playing time. In other words, last night's Joe Smith is who we should expect to see every night.

Department of Excellent Questions: It is always fun to watch a game with a chatty five-year-old girl who has no concept of "bedtime". That was the situation last night, as the Official Daughter of GBS took in the action. (More accurately, she talked nonstop while her father tried to take in the action.) Give her credit - she can recognize many of the Cavs, and is even learning to blurt, "get

that weak stuff outta here!" with every blocked shot.

As much as I couldn't make that stuff up, I *especially* could not make up her reaction to an interview with Delonte West. She watched Delonte answer a couple of questions. Then she asked, "Daddy, what language does he speak?"

You know, honey, I'm really not sure.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

There isn't much time to sit and stew about the loss. Miami rolls into Quicken Loans Arena

tonight to face the Cavs. After that, it's the final West Coast road swing of the season, with stops in Los Angeles (relax, it's to face the Clippers), Phoenix, and Sacramento.