While the madness of March swirled around them, the Cavaliers came into the Q for Saturday's matinee with the Hawks and added a taste of May and a flavor of November to the mix. In beating Atlanta by the deceptively close score of 102-96, Cleveland gave the Hawks- a possible second-round opponent- a hint of what might lay in store for them a couple of months down the road. Jesse Lamovsky recaps the Cavs Saturday afternoon victory over the Hawks.

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In beating Atlanta by the deceptively close score of 102-96, Cleveland gave the Hawks- a possible second-round opponent- a hint of what might lay in store for them a couple of months down the road. Atlanta came into town fat and happy, on a seven-game winning streak and in control of the fourth seed and home-court in the first round. They weren't prepared for the playoff intensity that the Cavaliers displayed right from the tip. Quicker, livelier, and infinitely more aggressive, Cleveland jumped out to a 21-9 first-quarter lead and was never seriously threatened by a Hawks team that lost its poise and composure against an opponent that- pardon the cliché- simply wanted it more at the beginning.

The Cavaliers also rediscovered the early-season formula for domination: bury a team early with motion on offense and activity on defense, and cruise from there. As it turned out, they almost cruised themselves into an alley fight, but despite some slipshod late execution and the persistence of our old buddy Ronald "Flip" Murray, Cleveland hung on to win its eighth straight and improve to 56-13, 32-1 at the Q.

Good Start: The Cavaliers parried for about six minutes with their unsuspecting guests before applying the body slam. Leading 11-9 midway through the first period, Cleveland ripped off a 12-0 run to make it 23-9. The Hawks missed all four of their shots from the field and committed five turnovers during the three-and-a-half-minute spurt. The Cavaliers led 27-13 at the end of one, holding Atlanta to 6-of-18 shooting and forcing seven turnovers for the period, and their domination of the game's opening quarter would prove decisive.

Play of the Day I: LeBron suffered a rare case of nervousness on his way to the rack late in the first quarter, when he shied away from contact with Al Horford and had his lay-up attempt altered. The shot slid partway off the rim, and Anderson Varejao was hit for goaltending on the follow. Perhaps LeBron was mindful of Horford's decapitation of T.J. Ford last season, and it did appear that, intentionally or not, Horford had a bead on his shoulder-and-neck area. But it was all good. On Atlanta's next possession, LeBron stole a pass in the lane, streaked coast-to-coast, and broke through a feeble Josh Smith foul to get the lay-in and harm.

No Letup: After taking that 14-point lead at the end of one, the Cavaliers opened the second quarter with a 13-3 run to expand their bulge to a game-high 24, at 40-16. Featured prominently in this surge was Daniel Gibson, who sprang for five points on two quick jumpers, one of which he parlayed into a three-point play.

Play of the Day II: Late in the first period, with Cleveland "nursing" a 25-11 lead, Joe Smith took a feed on the baseline, froze Flip Murray with a spin move, and took it in for an easy lay-up. It was a move reminiscent of the days

when Joe, Keith Booth, and Exree Hipp ruled the roost in College Park. Of course, Flip isn't exactly the reincarnation of Walt Frazier when it comes to perimeter defense; still, it was a sweet little move for Joe, who had a sweet little game with eight points on 4-of-5 shooting to go with solid defense.

LeBron's Line: My personal triple-double streak was broken, but LeBron didn't need to put up gargantuan numbers on a day his team dominated from the get-go. LBJ had 22 on 9-of-21 shooting to go with seven rebounds, five assists, and three steals. Eschewing the lane-driving and post moves that characterized his effort against Portland, the *wunderkind* settled for jumpers on the offense and saved the sweat for D, where he invaded passing lanes, altered shots, and frustrated Joe Johnson until the game was well out of reach. Johnson finished with 24 points, but he was hampered by foul trouble early and didn't get going until the matter was all but decided.

They're Melting: Atlanta was a frustrated basketball club on Saturday afternoon, and eventually that frustration boiled over in a flurry of technical fouls. Hawks coach Mike Woodson picked up his team's first technical midway through the second period. Atlanta got three more in a three-and-a-half minute stretch early in the third quarter; the first on Mike Bibby, the second on Josh Smith, and finally a third on Woodson, who was ejected. His old Kansas City Kings teammate Larry Drew finished out the game as the bench coach. Woodson may have been sending a message to his team. Atlanta clearly wasn't ready to play, at least not at the level the Cavaliers were bringing.

Look Who Got His Shot Back: Mo Williams, that's who. LeBron's partner in crime shot a rim-bending 4-of-15 Thursday against the Blazers, but was back in form on Saturday. Mo tickled the twine for a team-high 24 points on 8-of-14 shooting, including 3-of-4 from three-point range. Six of his points came early in the fourth period, with LeBron on the bench and the Hawks making a late push to get back into the game.

Wild Prediction: If the Cavaliers and Hawks meet in the Playoffs, Zaza

Pachulia's swarthy Georgian grill will become the most hated image in Cleveland by Game Three. The guy is a feisty, grabby pest- that said with a certain respect for what he gives the Hawks- and you know he's going to slam LeBron to the deck at some point if these teams meet again.

Bronze This Stat: The Cavaliers led by double-digits for all but eight minutes and thirty-three seconds. Cleveland took a 19-9 lead with 4:10 left in the first quarter, and Atlanta didn't get back within single figures until there were 43 seconds remaining in the game.

Jackson was Maxin': Darnell Jackson has seen a recent up-tick in his minutes, and if he keeps performing the way he did on Saturday, he'll keep seeing the floor. In seventeen physical minutes, the big man from Kansas body-banged for four points, eight rebounds, several nifty back-taps, and a couple of pleasingly hard fouls around the rim. The Cavaliers sure could use a guy who wants to get nasty down low, and on Saturday at least, Darnell was that guy.

Play of the Day III: Even with his activity in the paint, Jackson's best highlight came away from the hoop. With 8:49 to play and the Hawks on a 13-7 run to start the fourth period, the rookie from Kansas took a pass from Mo Williams and knocked in an 18-footer to bump Cleveland's lead back to 13 at 89-76.

Here's to 10,000 More: Congratulations are in order to Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who scored his 10,000th career point on a free throw early in the first period.

Uh, game isn't over yet, fellas: With 3:07 to play Delonte West drilled a three-pointer to make the score 100-84. In the next two-and-a-half minutes, Flip Murray personally outscored the Cavaliers 12-2 in a one-man show abetted by untimely fouls and turnovers forced by Atlanta's full-court pressure. Murray had a chance to bring the Hawks to

within three with 15 seconds left, but he missed a three-point attempt and the Cavaliers ran out the clock. Flip's trigger finger was itchy all afternoon: despite playing only 22 minutes, he took a Hawks-high sixteen shots and scored 22 points, more than half of those in the frenetic final three minutes.

Next: Sunday evening at 6:00, when the Cavaliers head to East Rutherford to take on the Nets, who really are going to move into a spanking new building in Brooklyn, at least before Earth is swallowed up by the Sun, if not in 2010.