Cleveland's 98-87 victory over New Jersey- their second in four nights over the Nets- was number ten in a row and their record 58th on the season, and for this one they decided to mix a little cat-and-mouse with their basketball. The Cavaliers puttered like a Trabant for much of the night but changed into a GTO whenever the Nets threatened to take control. It was a final spurt in the last few minutes that decided it, and as it had been all night, all season, and for much of the last six seasons, it was LeBron James who played arbitrator.

In the end, on a record-breaking night at the Q, it was three runs that got it done.

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Spurt of the Night, Part I: Like the previous two games against the Hawks and these same New Jersey Nets, the Cavaliers got the drop early. After spotting Jersey a 3-0 lead, Cleveland held the Nets to one

field goal in seven minutes while rolling to a 15-5 advantage. LeBron James provided the highlight of the sequence when he took the ball in the low post and snap-passed behind his head to a driving Anderson Varejao for the lay-up.

See, that's why he gets to do those dumb commercials: LeBron didn't accumulate a spectacular line, at least not by his standards- 22 points on 7-of-14 with 11 rebounds, eight assists, and a steal- but as always, his timing was impeccable. The Cavaliers scored 40 points their three big three runs- which spanned a total 11:28 of game time- and within that span, LBJ had 14 points, five assists, and three rebounds. He hummed along in the right lane of the expressway for much of the night, but he flashed his greatness every time it needed flashed.

Hey, the '86 Celtics didn't need depth either: Wednesday night for the Cavaliers was all about the starters. The quintet of LeBron, Mo, Delonte, Anderson and Z scored 83 of the team's 98 points, dished out 22 of its 25 dimes, and snatched 40 of its 49 rebounds. All five finished with a plus-minus of 14 or better, topped by Anderson's +20. The Brazilian heartthrob had the best night of any non-Akronite on the floor, shooting 6-of-8 and notching his second consecutive double-double with 16 points and 11 rebounds. He burned the Nets for 16 and 11 on Sunday evening as well.

The efforts of LeBron, Anderson and the other starters made up for a non-existent bench. Cleveland's second five combined for 15 points, and none of them had a plus-minus of better than the -2 turned in by the Kinsey Report in less than two minutes of work.

When 24 seconds just isn't enough: Cleveland's sluggish offense spent much of the night in an alternate universe in which it was 1977, they were the North Carolina Tarheels, and they could run the Four Corners to their heart's content. The Cavaliers committed three 24-second violations and ended several other possessions with desperation shots launched just before the buzzer went off. Defense and rebounding weren't a problem: Cleveland held the Nets to 41 percent shooting and pounded them on the glass 49-32. It was sporadic execution on offense that kept New Jersey within striking distance all night long.

Spurt of the Night, Part II: Zydrunas Ilgauskas had 16 points and six rebounds, but his biggest play was on defense, and it ignited the game's second crucial flurry midway through the third quarter. New Jersey had crept to within three when Big Z stoned Yi Jianlian right at the rim on a dunk attempt. LeBron drilled a transition three and powered through two defenders for an old-fashioned three-point play, Delonte stole a pass and fed Anderson for a breakaway dunk, and in the span of barely more than a minute, the lead had been pushed back out to eleven, at 58-47.

The persistence of Mr. West: Delonte has been looking for his shot for quite some time- he's hitting at a chilly 35 percent clip in his last eight games- but despite his shooting woes, and four turnovers, he made winning plays Wednesday night. None were bigger than the pair of three-pointers he hit during the fourth quarter. The first, with 5:56 left, gave the Cavaliers a 77-72 lead after the Nets had come back to tie it at 72. The second, with 3:35 left, gave Cleveland an 84-82 lead. New Jersey had just gone in front for the first time since early in the opening period, but Delonte's dagger put the Cavaliers back in the lead to stay.

That guy looks *really* pissed: Cleveland had begun the fourth period with a 68-62 lead and LeBron on the bench. A couple of buckets pushed the edge out to ten, then, as they had done all night, the Cavaliers let off the gas pedal. A 10-0 Jersey burst tied the score, in the midst of which LBJ was re-inserted in the game. He was not in a pleasant mood, and would put his surliness on display with 5:05 left and his team clinging to a 77-76 lead. Angry because The Vince Carter raked him across the arm on a failed lay-up attempt with no call, LeBron complained loudly and was hit with a technical foul by referee Matt Boland. A little over a minute later, Keyon Dooling hit a three-pointer to give New Jersey the lead, necessitating Delonte's second round of heroics.

Spurt of the Night, Part III: Delonte's go-ahead three touched off the third decisive spurt of the evening. It was 90-84 Cavaliers when Mo Williams, who struggled through his second straight sub-par shooting night (5-of-12), stepped to the forefront. LeBron had the ball at the top of the key, with Mo out to his left. The Nets were on the horns of a dilemma: single-cover the best player on the planet, or double him up and leave uncovered a man shooting nearly 44 percent from three-point range? They abandoned Mo, ran an extra man out on LeBron, and with 57 seconds left, Mo bottomed out the three-pointer to make it 93-84 and put the game on ice.

Just 57? Per the local newspaper, Ben Wallace was surprised at Cleveland's rather paltry franchise record of 57 wins.

"You mean, ever?" Wallace asked, in disbelief Tuesday. "Ever?"

Big Ben *should* be surprised: of the NBA's thirty teams, only eight (the Hawks, Bobcats, Nets, Nuggets, Clippers, Hornets, Grizzlies, Raptors) had as many or fewer high numbers for wins in a season as the Cavaliers before Wednesday (not counting Denver's 65-and 60-win seasons in the ABA.) Still, it could be worse: the Clip Show's record is 49 wins, set way back in 1974-75 when the franchise was in Buffalo. *That's*
futility.

In other news: Orlando topped Boston 84-82 Wednesday night, tying the race for the East's second seed and sending the Magic ahead of the Celtics by a game in the loss column. Both teams now trail the Cavaliers by five games. Cleveland's magic number for clinching the East's top seed now stands at six over Boston, and seven over Orlando.

Next: Friday night at 7:30, when the Minnesota Timberwolves make their annual visit to the Q.