Okay. Let's just pretend that the Cavaliers never stopped in Washington, D.C. on their way down to Orlando for Friday night's game. After watching the Wizards dismantle the Cavs 109-101 it's not that hard to imagine the Cavs not showing up at all. They shot out to a big lead, and then fell asleep, and the Wizards shocked the Cavs for the second time this season. Brian McPeek recaps the loss.

Okay. Let's just pretend that the Cavaliers never stopped in Washington, D.C. on their way down to Orlando for Friday night's game. After watching the Wizards dismantle the Cavs 109-101 it's not ***that*** hard to imagine the Cavs not showing up at all.

What the Cavs lacked in offensive efficiency they more than made up for with a complete lack of defensive intensity all night. And that was against a team that had won a total of 17 basketball games heading into Thursday night's game in the Verizon Center.

The Cavs sprinted out to a big lead against the Zephyrs/Wizards (nee Bullets) but they lacked the defensive pressure that has been a staple for most of the season. The Wizards caught the Cavs halfway through the first quarter and then took a 49-41 lead into halftime.

The Cavs roared back late in the fourth quarter and actually tied the game on a couple different occasions but they couldn't get the big shots to fall or big stops on the defensive end down the stretch when they needed them most.

LeBron James finished with 31 points after a slow start to lead the Cavs. James also grabbed nine rebounds and dished out six assists as the Cavs win streak ended at 13. Mo Williams chipped in 19 points, six rebounds and five assists and Delonte West added 14 points and seven assists.

Washington got 25 and 19 from Caron Butler and Antawn Jamison respectively but Darius Songalia's 17 points and six rebounds were the big difference in the ballgame. Songalia easily outscored the Cavs' bench all by his lonesome.

Takeaways

- In an 82 game season there are just games and teams that are trouble from the tip. Thursday night was one of those games and the Wizards are one of those teams that seem to sneak up and bit the Cavaliers. The Cavaliers have lost two games all season to teams that have no shot at a playoff berth; both of those games this season have been lost to the Wizards.

- This loss was bothersome for a couple of different reasons. First off, the Cavs had gotten help this week with the Lakers losing a couple of ballgames. That had opened up a three game lead for the Cavaliers over the Lake show in the race for home court advantage throughout the playoffs. Well, the Cavaliers just gave one back and have the second game of a back-to-back Friday night in Orlando to deal with San Antonio on deck Sunday afternoon. That three game lead could quickly be back to one game by this time Friday evening. It could b completely gone in a matter of a few days.

Secondly, you could almost tolerate a loss (as distasteful as a loss to the Wizards is at any time) if the Cavs had given LBJ and the boys a night off or drastically reduced their minutes. You could at least rationalize that a greater good was being served if nothing else. Instead, not only did the Cavs get beaten by a bad basketball team and have their lead for HCA reduced by a game, but LBJ and the regulars also were forced into actually playing more minutes than Mike Brown and Cavalier fans would have liked to see them play in order to try and salvage the basketball game.

Not a good night in the nation's capital.

- I realize Gilbert Arenas was playing in only his second game all season, but that cat should have ‘Cipher' on either the front or back of his uniform. Arenas was 3-11 from the floor on the night for his 11 points and the longer he plays the more it seems he scores about the same number of points as shots he attempts on the night. That's not exactly a recipe for success from a team standpoint. The more I watch Arenas play the more I'm convinced he's one of the NBA's more overrated players. The Wizards won despite him Thursday night but you have to wonder how comfortable Washington's front office is having invested a hundred million dollars in a guy who can't stay healthy enough to see action and then dominates the basketball on the rare occasions he's able to go.

- One has to hope that Ben Wallace gets healthy and back into game shape before too long because the Wizards exposed the Cavaliers glaring weakness on Thursday night. The Cavs got absolutely destroyed in the paint. At one point there was a discrepancy of paint points to the tune of 38-16 in favor of the Wizards. This was with Brendan Haywood seeing his first action in ages for Washington and against a guy like Darius Songalia. The Cavaliers have got to find a way

to neutralize teams down low and have ciphers like Arenas attempt more shots from out of the lane.

One can imagine Dwight Howard licking his lips in anticipation of Friday night's game as he drifts off to sleep.

- Clearly the Cavs have to find a way to hold off the Lakers and earn HCA as well as hopefully find some downtime for some of their regulars who are logging big minutes. Those should be items 1A and 1B on their agenda. Item 1C should be in getting Delonte West back into an offensive flow between now and when the playoffs start. West is still a valuable contributor on a nightly basis but his outside game has suffered since he came back from the wrist injury a month or so ago.

With Daniel Gibson hit and mostly miss from the perimeter the Cavaliers need D West to be a viable threat from outside to fully exploit some match up problems they present to other squads and to fully take advantage of the open shots that LBJ and Mo Williams help create.

They Got Next

Choppy waters the next few days for the Wine & Gold.

They get Orlando tomorrow night in the land of Mickey Mouse and $6 bottles of water (8pm, ESPN) and then come back home in time to meet the Spurs at ‘The Q' on Sunday afternoon

(1pm, ABC). Sweeping those two brutal games would be beautiful. But at least splitting them is absolutely critical.