Welcome to the Cavaliers' fourth run through the NBA playoffs in the LeBron James Era, and welcome to another spring of Cavs playoff roundtables here at TheClevelandFan.com. This year, we're anticipating having to do a number of these - hopefully four, as the Cavs take aim at their second NBA Finals berth in three years. Finishing with the best record in the league at 66-16 should give the Cavs the inside track to do just that. But first things first. And the first thing this year is the Detroit Pistons, once a mighty battleship, now seemingly a decommissioned museum of glories past.

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But don't head for the gift shop just yet. The Pistons' guns are still active, and they are still capable of putting a scare into any Cavs team that would dare sleepwalk into this series.

How will the Cavs fare in the first round against their longtime nemesis? Our writers weigh in.

**Jerry Roche**

**Cavs in 5**

Somehow, some way, Detroit's grizzled old veterans (Rip Hamilton, Rasheed Wallace, Tayshaun Prince, Antonio McDyess) will steal one low-scoring game on their home court before succumbing to the Cavs' youth at the Q in Game 5. That one Detroit victory probably will be a game during which the Cavs sit back and vainly hoist threes instead of challenging the Pistons' relatively soft interior defense.

Immediately after the series ends, Joe Dumars will fire Michael Curry -- a move that is already long, long overdue.

**Mansfield Lucas**

**Cavs in 5**

Here's the skinny the way I see it. Any bona fide contender need concern itself with round one of the playoffs as much as a lion with a fly on it. I know Baron

Davis pulled off a miracle a few years ago, but it was always hard to buy into a soft defensive team anyway.

The Cavs are 66 game winners. Meanwhile the Pistons are under .500 and losers of three straight to close out the season that finally resulted in their fall from contention. This series isn't so much a series as it is a statement; a footnote in history marking the Cavs' rise to the division hegemony. How long ago does it seem now that the Cavs' missed the playoffs in a season ending loss where Tayshaun Prince humbled a very young LeBron James at the end of the game? It feels like Price and Daugherty were playing with him; maybe even Bingo. In the words of Tony Montana, "Well look atchu now." Longer-term, you have to like how Indy and Chicago are put together in the division. The Pistons are in about the same shape as GM.

There's just no logical reason to worry about Detroit. Rip can still play, but Chauncey is gone and Iverson continues to secure his place in history as the most apathetic me-first player bound for Springfield. Raweed is a cartoon. There's little else in place around them. Like all series, it is difficult to predict a sweep. Usually, there is always that one game at home the underdog pulls out. But if this series goes six, it is a setback for the Cavs. A sweep is more likely in my opinion as the Pistons have punked out in every major game against the Cavs this year. Here's predicting five games and hoping for good health and the continued gelling of the rotation. If the outside shooting is consistently on, a sweep is likely.

**Erik Cassano**

**Cavs in 5**

In a way, it's almost good that the Cavs will have to face a battle-tested team like Detroit right out of the gate. It ensures that they won't play half-speed basketball in the first round, setting them up for a second-round jolt against a tougher opponent. That might have happened if they had been forced to face the Hawks

or Heat on the heels of obliterating the Charlotte Bobcats.

Much has been made in Cleveland, Detroit and the national media outlets about the fall of the Pistons. There is no question that this team is the rusting hulk of the defensive juggernaut that won the 2004 NBA title and took the Spurs to seven games in the '05 Finals. But that doesn't mean they're not still capable of landing a few right crosses if you let your guard down.

Chauncey Billups is gone to Denver. The guy who replaced him, Allen Iverson, has been shut down for the year with a bad back and bruised ego. But the Pistons still possess a rock-solid starting lineup of Rip Hamilton, Tayshaun Prince, Rasheed Wallace, Rodney Stuckey and Antonio McDyess. All but Stuckey have been around since the team's Finals days. They're not going to get rattled by the prospect of opening a series in the lion's mouth of Quicken Loans Arena. They're not going to fold if the Cavs put them in a 1-0 hole. In fact, if the Pistons steal one of the first two in Cleveland, it will be the Cavs who have their work cut out for them. The Palace of Auburn Hills is still going to be a tough place to play the role of road team in playoff games, especially if the Pistons and their fans start to believe they can make it a series.

The Pistons' lack of bench depth and lack of inside scoring will probably be their undoing in this series. But if you're looking for a no-fuss, no-muss hurdle to clear to get to Round 2, the Pistons might surprise you. I'll pick the Cavs to hold serve and go up 2-0, split the two games in Detroit and close it out at The Q in Game 5. But chances are, these will be closely-contested games that will require a lot of work on the part of LeBron and Co. to secure wins in the closing minutes. So much the better, if it gets the Cavs conditioned for late-round nailbiters.

**Tony Lastoria**

**Cavs in 5**

Three years ago this was a matchup where the up-and-coming Cavaliers almost beat (should of beat) the Pistons before bowing out in seven games. Two years ago, the Cavaliers smoked them in the Eastern Conference Finals behind "The Game" by LeBron in Game 5 and Boobie Gibson's 3's in Game 6. Last year they did not meet, but this would have been considered a quality matchup in any round.

My how the mighty have fallen.

The Pistons, once the class of the Central Division and holders of five straight Eastern Conference Finals appearances, are a shell of their former selves and in serious decline. If they have any visions of making it six straight Eastern Conference Finals appearances they would have to pull off one of the greatest upsets in NBA history, if not sports history.

The Cavaliers are hungry and clearly the better team in every phase of the game. They are the new Beast of the East. LeBron's leadership and commitment to defense combined with the excellent acquisition of Mo Williams at point guard is what has turned the Cavaliers from a good team into an elite team with the potential to win many championships the next several years.

Their quest for their first championship starts with the Pistons, a team that has always been a thorn in the side of the Cavaliers even back to the late 80s. The Pistons may be in decline, but they have some good players and are a veteran team, so they are certainly capable of stealing a game or two from the Cavaliers. That said, there is just no conceivable way they can beat the Cavaliers in a seven game series unless the unthinkable happens and LeBron or Mo are seriously hurt. Pistons win one game at home, but the Cavaliers win this series easily in five.

**Sam Amico**

## Cavs in 4

The Cavaliers will sweep the Pistons. If not a clean sweep, it won't go more than five games. It sounds simple, straightforward. But when it comes to the Cavs' first-round series, that's all you really need to know. The Pistons just don't match up and they're bound to mail it in.

I know, I know. It's the Pistons. The franchise that seems to reach the conference finals every season. But these aren't really the Pistons. Yes, they still have Richard Hamilton. Yes, they still have Tayshaun Prince. And yes, they still have Rasheed Wallace (sort of). They even have Allen Iverson, who has worn out his welcome and isn't expected to play. Of course, even if he does, will it really matter?

The answer to that is no. The answer to that is no matter how well the Pistons play, these Cavs are just too good and too deep and still have a star by the name of LeBron James. Do you really need more of an explanation?

OK, there could be one sign of trouble. The Pistons have done a decent job of getting the Cavs to play their style this season. Their only hope is to bog down the Cavs, drag things along, and breaking out pro basketball's version of brass knuckles. So don't be surprised if things stay close from time to time. For the Cavs, the series could be a grind.

It won't matter. Whether the pace is slow-it-down or speed-it-up, the Cavs simply are superior. And doesn't it just feel good to say that about your favorite team in the playoffs?

## Jesse Lamovsky

## Cavs in 5

Let's make one thing clear- the Pistons, for all their championship lineage and

household name appeal, are a 39-win team for a reason. They don't have a go-to guy, aren't well-coached, no longer have the steadying presence of Chauncey Billups- or any real point guard, for that matter- and defensively are not what they used to be. Their only real hope in this series, other than catastrophic injuries, is for the Cavaliers to not take them seriously- and there's precious little chance of that happening.

If you want to beat Cleveland , you need to be able to run, you need to be able to score more than 100 points consistently, and/or you need to be dominant in the low post. Detroit has none of this. The Cavaliers are rested, relatively healthy, and peaking at the right time. This thing will be over quickly.

**Brian McPeek**

**Cavs in 5**

Let me brief, because that's what this series will be: Cavs in five games.

This is one of those magical seasons that we Cleveland fans have seen plenty of times before. It's just that they were always happening in Boston or St. Louis or Philadelphia or.... well, you get the idea.

This year is for us.

And it starts today with the Pistons playing the part of the playoff welcome mat. That' how it works in sports: you rise, you rule, you decline. The Cavs have risen and are ready to rule while the Pistons have ruled and are now in decline. That's the circle of life in the NBA. It's time to start taking advantage of it.

The countdown to 16 wins has begun.

**Nick Allburn**

**Cavs in 4**

Unless something goofy happens, this shouldn't be much of a series. The Pistons are a mere shell of the team that battled the Cavs two of the last three years in the playoffs, and that's due to both an aging core and the loss of their leader, Chauncey Billups. Billups was the heart and soul of the Pistons, and although unloading his contract may pay dividends down the road, it's made for a rocky ‘08-'09 campaign.

The Pistons simply don't have the horses to run with the Cavs, and their only chance at making this a series is double-teaming LeBron James, hoping that will turn him into a jump shooter. But if that's the case, James will likely just pass off to his now very capable supporting cast. The days of Eric Snow and Ira Newble are long gone. Detroit is still a decent defensive team, but they don't have enough scoring to hang with the Cavaliers. As Darth Vader once said, "All too easy." Can I pick the Cavs in three?