So, this is what a loss feels like. Through a combination of dominating their postseason opponents and the layoffs while waiting for each successive round rounds to begin, the Cavs hadn't lost a game in over a month. Even their last loss (April 15th against the Sixers) didn't feel too bad, as it was a "meaningless" game that had no effects on playoff seeding. This loss to the Magic, reminiscent of the Browns' 2003 playoff loss to the Steelers (the highest of highs, and ultimately, the lowest of lows), feels like a sucker punch to the collective gut of the fan base. Yeah, this one hurt.

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The game began with so much promise. Well-rested and clearly excited to be back in action, Cleveland burst out of the gate and outpaced Orlando 33-19 in the opening quarter. An impressive Mo Williams buzzer-beater from beyond half court even helped the Cavs increase their lead to 15 at the half.

But the second quarter was where things began to turn. Although the Cavs outscored the Magic 30-29 in the second stanza, their defensive intensity began to wane and the Magic started making shots. The Cavs would allow an unnacceptable 89 points over the final three quarters.

Although scoring proved an arduous task during the second half, it wasn't scoring that lost the game for the Cavs; it was letting their guard down on defense. The Cavs yielded a league-best 91.4 points per game during the regular season. When this club scores 106 points, they should win.

Orlando is a dangerous team, and they can definitely shoot the rock, but allowing over 55-percent (45 percent from deep) shooting to any squad just won't get it done. Despite their struggles down the stretch, the Cavs actually shot well from the field (48.9 percent), although they struggled from beyond the arc (8-of-25, 32 percent). Defense is what got the Cavs this far, and defense is what they're going to need if they're going to fight their way back. Mike Brown is not a happy camper right now.

Final: Orlando 107, Cleveland 106

Box score

Quick Hits

It's good to be the King. LeBron James did everything in his power to earn the Cavs a win. But even 49 points (postseason career-high on just 30 shots), 6 rebounds, 8 assists, 3 blocks, and a pair of steals weren't enough. This was the first time in these playoffs when it felt like James was truly carrying the Cavs. The only two players besides James who shot 50-percent or higher were Anderson Varejao and Joe Smith. Unfortunately that duo only attempted 12 shots, combined. What a waste of a great performance.

About those open dunks. Entering this series, I thought that if the Cavs could just contain Dwight Howard and keep him from totally dictating what went on in the paint, they'd win easily. Howard got just about anything he wanted in game one.

Here's the biggest thing the Cavs need to have drilled into their heads defensively:

NO OPEN DUNKS FOR HOWARD! If Howard's getting those easy dunks, the Cavs aren't doing their jobs right. Instead of giving up dunks, you have to foul this guy hard and make him earn those points at the charity stripe, where he shoots under 60-percent.

In fact, you could argue that the Cavs should aim to increase Howard's free throw attempts, and that his free throw attempts might be a good indicator of whether or not the Cavs are executing the defensive game plan. Howard only took two free throws in game one. That's about 10 fewer than I'd like to see.

Team defense needs to improve. The Cavs' defensive energy really decreased after the first quarter, and it showed. Rotations got sloppy, and the Orlando made Cleveland pay. But a big part of the problem was that the Cavs never seemed to figure out how to adjust their team defense to Dwight Howard. Hopefully as the series continues, they can make the proper adjustments.

Howard is such a challenge for the Cavs because they naturally match him up with Zydrunas Ilgauskas, who isn't exactly known for his man-to-man defensive prowess. When there's too much space between Ilgauskas and the defenders off to his sides, Howard can spin off of him and score an easy layup or dunk. The trick for the Cavs will be to have help for Ilgauskas in the vicinity, but not to bring it immediately so that one of Orlando's shooters isn't freed up too soon. Whether or not the Cavs can achieve that balance may in fact decide the series.

Let's get physical. The Cavs need to bang with Howard down low a little more. Kendrick Perkins did so with some success in the Boston/Orlando series. Unfortunately, the Cavs don't really have any physical low post defenders except Ben Wallace and to a lesser degree, LeBron James.

Although he's basically a designated pick-setter on offense, I think we need to see Wallace on Howard more in game two. Wallace was fairly effective against Howard in his limited minutes, and he craftily induced Wallace's second offensive foul by waiting for Howard to lower his shoulder and falling back, making it appear that Howard was guilty of charging. (He wasn't.)

Also, the Cavs need to run their offense at Dwight Howard early. I know, The odds of successfully surviving an attack on an Imperial Star Destroyer are approximately 3,722 to 1, but if you can get a couple of early fouls on Howard and force him to ride the pine, you totally change what the Magic do on defense. Take

that 275 pound man-child out of the middle, and you can slice and dice the Magic in the paint. The Cavs had several opportunities to pick up early third and fourth fouls on Howard, and they failed to do so. Hopefully they can capitalize as the series progresses.

The Dead Zone. For much of the second half, the Cavs' ball movement ground to a halt and the offense regressed to horrifying shades of yesteryear. That's right, I'm talking about the "watch LeBron" offense.

We've hardly seen it this season, but the Watch LeBron offense has haunted the Cavs in the past. When LeBron plays point guard, takes the air out of the ball, the movement stops, and LeBron stops trusting his teammates, bad things happen. (The Cavs getting tired collectively may have played a role, as well.) In the past, LeBron didn't have any teammates who could make shots. Now that he does, the Watch LeBron offense shouldn't be in this team's repertoire. It can't happen again.

Nope, it's not a new rule. Dwight Howard is apparently unfamiliar with the concept of goaltending, and gave the officials some grief as he was called for goaltending no less than three times. Superman must be under the impression that this is a new rule instituted by David Stern to ensure a LeBron/Kobe Finals. Conspiracy theories, go!

Bench scoring. This has to change. Of the Cavs' 106 points, 101 came from the starters. All five of the bench points were scored by Joe Smith, of whom we should see more in the games to come. Orlando got 28 points from their bench.

And in spite of the bench's overall impotence, we didn't even get a glimpse of Sasha Pavlovic, who can get hot once in awhile? That doesn't make sense to me. Sasha's maddeningly inconsistent, but why wouldn't Mike Brown at least see if he had a shot at catching lightning in a bottle?

Three Amigos. Dwight Howard, Rashard Lewis, and Hedo Turkoglu are Orlando's three top scorers. If all three of those guys aren't clicking, it's tough for the Magic to win. The flip side of that is that if all three are playing well, the Magic become a very tough defensive match up.

Howard obviously had a huge game with 30 points, but in addition to hitting what ultimately proved to be the game-winner, Rashard Lewis killed the Cavs as he got

hot down the stretch. Hedo Turkoglu also found his stroke late in the game after struggling for much of the first half. The fact that Lewis and Turkoglu caught fire late, paired with the Cavs' offensive struggles, is what allowed the Magic to take the lead (for the first time) in the fourth quarter.

In game two, LeBron James needs to be assigned to either Turkoglu or Lewis. Putting LeBron on Rafer Alston early made no sense, and was a waste of LeBron's abilities as a defender. If the Magic beat you, it won't be because of Rafer Alston. It makes more sense to pair LeBron with either Turkoglu or Lewis (more likely Turkoglu) and let him use his skills to take one of them out of the game.

Saving grace. Considering that the Magic outshot the Cavs by about six percent, had more rebounds, threes, and made an equal amount of foul shots, how did the Cavs stay in the game? Turnovers and blocks were the keys. Orlando had 13 turnovers to Cleveland's 5, and the two clubs had 1 and 7 blocks, respectively. Those two categories helped create 10 more shot attempts for the Cavs, and without them, they may have lost by double-digits.

Up next: 5/22, Game 2, Quicken Loans Arena, 8:30

Desperate times call for desperate measures, and If I'm Mike Brown, I'm channeling this speech during pre-game. *"Let's get back into this series...one inch at a time."*