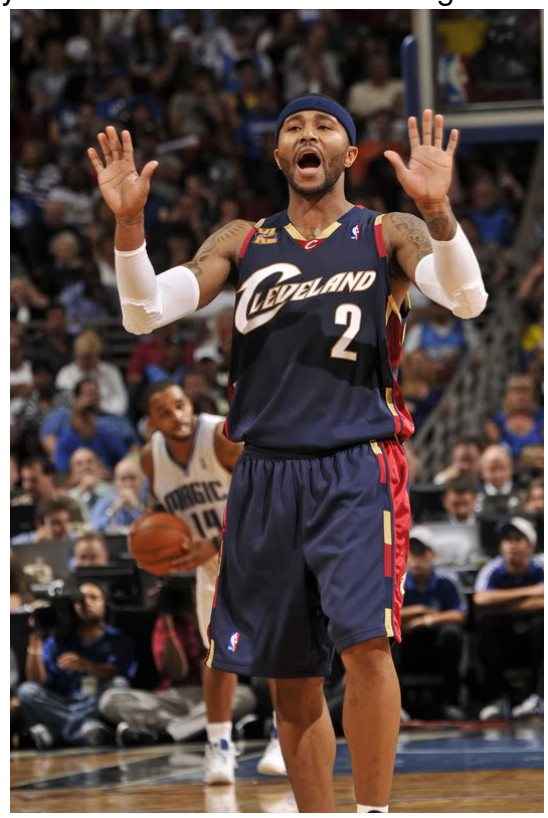
Yes, the Orlando Magic was not at full strength for Wednesday night's meeting with the Cavaliers in Confederated Products Arena, as they were missing Rashard Lewis and Ryan Anderson. Yes, they were on the second night of a back-to-back and on their third game in four nights. And no, we shouldn't let those facts diminish our delight over Cleveland's decisive 102-93 victory over the Magic, in a game that wasn't nearly as close as the final score might indicate. And Jesse Lamovsky tells us why in his latest.



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And no, we shouldn't let those facts diminish our delight over Cleveland's decisive 102-93 victory over the Magic, in a game that wasn't nearly as close as the final score might indicate. Looking fit and fresh from four days off, the Cavaliers dominated right from the opening tip, never trailing after the 8:36 mark of the first quarter and leading by double digits for most of the final three periods of play as they shook free of a six-game losing streak in the Magic Kingdom.

It was a much-needed and cathartic victory over a club that has had Cleveland's

number in recent years. And don't look now, but the Cavaliers have now won five of their last six and finally look to be rounding into form as this season gets underway.

Next Time, Think Before You Hit "Send:" Dewey Howard was recently relieved of $15,000 for criticizing NBA officials on his official site, and the way things started for him on Wednesday it looked as if those remarks were as unhelpful to him on the court as they were to his bankroll. The smirking sensation was whistled for a pair of ticky-tack fouls on Shaquille O'Neal in the first 2:18 of the opening quarter and had to take a seat for the remainder of the period. Dewey also suffered the added indignantly of being repeatedly "clowned" by Austin Carr, who mimicked the superstar's complaints in a whiny, child-like voice.

The Cavaliers were quick to take advantage. They used Dewey's absence as a springboard to 35 first-quarter points, much of them gleaned from drives by Mo Williams, LeBron James and Anderson Varejao through a paint temporarily cleared of Orlando's number-one eraser. Cleveland shot 65 percent in the first quarter, out-rebounded the Magic 10-5 and most significantly, held an 18-8 advantage in points in the paint.

Where Was This Last May? It might be understating it to say that Maurice Williams had a tough go of it against Orlando in last season's Eastern Conference Final. The Cavaliers guard had a busted face, a busted shot and a busted game in Cleveland's loss to the Magic. Those tough times were but a distant memory on Wednesday night. Using and abusing Jameer Nelson and Jason Williams, the Artist Formerly Known as White Chocolate, Mo knocked down his first nine shots on an array of dazzling drives and pinpoint jumpers. His hot hand was the catalyst for an exceptional first half of basketball by the Cavaliers who outscored the Magic 31-23 in the second period and walked off with a 66-51 halftime lead.

Stepping on Their Throats: Of course, building a lead over Orlando has never been a problem. Maintaining it has. On Wednesday night, however, the Cavaliers didn't sit on their laurels. Spurred by a pair of Anthony Parker three-point baskets

right out of the break, Cleveland quickly expanded its lead to nineteen early in the third period. The Magic could get no closer than thirteen the rest of the quarter and by the end of three the Cavalier margin was a healthy twenty, at 88-68. There was still twelve minutes to be played, but this game was all but over, as Orlando was unable to mount one of their patented comebacks in the fourth quarter.

Man of the Match: That would be the aforementioned Mo Williams, who dropped in 28 points on 12-of-20 from the field (4-of-5 from downtown) with six assists. 22 of his points came in the decisive first half, when he was simply unstoppable on the drive or from outside. Jason Williams might be seeing Mo in his nightmares for the next few days, as he was absolutely charred by the Mississippi marksman.

LeBron's Line: 36 points on 13-of-23 from the field, 8-of-9 from the line and 2-of-3 from downtown with eight rebounds, four assists and a steal. With Dewey Howard in foul trouble, Mo lighting it up like Vegas and Cleveland in command throughout, LeBron was free to not force things and to pick his spots, which he did ruthlessly. It was a nice, controlled effort from the superstar on Wednesday night.

Other Heroes: LeBron and Mo combined for 64 of Cleveland's 102 points on Wednesday, but that doesn't mean it was simply a two-man game. Jamario Moon played a season-high fifteen minutes and although he didn't score, he played a gritty game defensively and on the boards, coming up with seven rebounds. Anthony Parker had those clutch three-pointers to get the Cavaliers started in the third quarter. And J.J. Hickson got another start and played quite well: he had nine points and six rebounds, played solid team ball, and finished with a game-best +15. It was the best night of the season for the youngster.

The Big Confrontation: In a duel of Supermen past and present, Dewey Howard won the statistical battle- he had 11 points and seven rebounds to Shaq's ten points and four boards- but the Cavalier center won the war. The two quick fouls he drew on Dewey early in the game might have been the ultimate difference, as the Magic center was unable to fully get into the flow for the rest of the night. Two big signs of Dewey's ineffectual evening were shots attempted (three) and blocks

(zero.)

Perimeter Power: One of the keys to Orlando's victory in the Eastern Conference Finals was their massive edge in three-point makes over the course in the series. That wasn't the case on Wednesday. Led by Mo Williams the Cavaliers were in deadeye form from long range, hitting 10-of-14. Meanwhile the Magic shot a putrid 4-of-18 from three-point country. Part of it might have been dead legs on the part of Orlando, part of it obviously was Dewey's problems getting involved and drawing defenders, but the Cavaliers did a nice job of contesting outside shots, something they didn't do last spring. When Dewey Howard is off
and
the long bombs aren't falling, the Magic are in major trouble against just about any opponent.

On the Vince: It's probably too early to make this assessment, and I might look foolish for it down the road... but I'm more comfortable with a Vince Carter Magic team than I was with a Hedo Turkoglu Magic team. The Vince did lead Orlando with 29 points on 11-of-23 shooting, but he only had one assist and often seemed to be a man alone, taking the scoring burden upon himself while his teammates stood and watched. He also got into a verbal spat with Mo Williams in the third quarter, another sign that calmness and composure can be foreign concepts to the former North Carolina star.

On the Victory: I'm of the belief that Cleveland's recent problems with Orlando have been psychological as well as match-up driven. The Magic seem to be in our kitchen a little bit, something that happens when one team dominates another as much as Orlando has dominated Cleveland in the past few seasons. Hopefully this win breaks some of those mental adhesions for the Cavaliers, and reduces the Magic to the dimensions of a normal NBA opponent instead of an impassable obstacle. But I guess we'll see about that.

Schadenfreude, Defined: Mickael Pietrus- zero points. Suck it!

Next: Thursday night at 8:00, the Cavaliers stay in Florida for a match-up with Dwayne Wade and the Miami Heat.