J.J. Hickson isn't Carlos Boozer and there's a chance he never will be. But that's OK with the Cavaliers. For now, all they need Hickson to be is himself. As anyone who witnessed the Cavs' 107-103 thriller of a win over Utah and Boozer on Saturday can attest, Hickson is coming along pretty well. Sam Amico was at The Q last night covering this one for us last night, and checks in this morning with his account of the win, the fourth in a row for the wine and gold.

CLEVELAND - J.J. Hickson isn't Carlos Boozer and there's a chance he never will be. But that's OK with the Cavaliers. For now, all they need Hickson to be is himself.

As anyone who witnessed the Cavs' 107-103 thriller of a win over Utah and Boozer on Saturday can attest, Hickson is coming along pretty well.

Is he the next Boozer? Maybe not if you're basing it on playing style or rebounding ability. But on the plus side, Hickson is a much better natural athlete than Boozer. Cavs coach Mike Brown even once referred to Hickson as the best leaper on the team.

(I was so surprised, I half-jokingly asked Brown if he thought Hickson was a better leaper than LeBron James, and Brown smiled widely and quickly corrected himself. "OK, well, J.J's the second-best leaper," Brown said.)

Either way, Hickson is proving to be a pretty doggone valuable unexpected addition. For one, Hickson has been playing with fearless energy. He's also starting to look comfortable while taking the court alongside guys like James, Mo Williams and Zydrunas Ilgauskas, veterans who have all been there before.

Mostly, he is starting to find his way on a made-over team with championship dreams, a that has finally gotten into a groove.

Hickson has started four straight games, and the Cavs have won them all. Obviously, that's not the result of Hickson alone, but his role shouldn't be underestimated, either. Like Shaquille O'Neal and veteran newcomers Jamario Moon and Anthony Parker, Hickson is giving the Cavs a whole new wrinkle -- not to mention a needed set of fresh young legs in the frontcourt.

On Saturday, Hickson went head-to-head with Boozer, and through the first three quarters, played perhaps the most despised man in Cavaliers history to a stalemate. That changed late in the game, when Boozer used his usual tricks to nearly pull off the upset for the undermanned Jazz. But up until then, you'd have a hard time determining which player was the veteran All-Star and which was the second-year guy who is still learning on the fly.

Hickson scored 20 points, breaking his career-high of 18 set two nights earlier in Miami. Meanwhile, Boozer scored 25 and grabbed a game-high 12 rebounds, showing Hickson what will happen if Hickson ever decides to start boxing out. That's opposed to just trying to out-jump everyone when the ball comes off the rim, as the 20-year old Cavs forward often does today.

But that should come in time. At least, that's the hope for Brown and the Cavs.

As Brown said, Hickson still makes mistakes, "but he's playing hard, so you can live with those." Especially if Hickson continues to manage double-figures in scoring without ever being the focus of a half-court set.

"I don't think I called a play for J.J. and I don't know if I will," Brown said. "He's filling his role. He's playing off others."

And the others haven't been too bad themselves lately, as the Cavs have now won seven of eight and improved to 7-3.

While LeBron saved their rear-ends again by scoring five points in the final 33 seconds Saturday (enabling the Cavs to overcome a 101-100 deficit), you also have to be particularly impressed with how Mo Williams has suddenly re-discovered the magic that led to his first All-Star appearance last season.

Williams (21 points, six assists) has scored 20 or more points in each of the previous three games, and seems to have suddenly said to heck with trying to figure out his role on this new-look team. Instead, he's just playing it cool and playing his game, and he's been doing it quite well, thank you very much.

You might even say Williams has been the biggest reason the Cavs look like true championship contenders once again. He's just been that good.

Of course, it doesn't hurt that Parker (14 points, 5-for-7 shooting) and Moon (11 points, 3-for-3 on threes) are growing more comfortable with each game.

Basically, the Cavs insisted they weren't panicked about their 0-2 start, and they are proving now that we should have believed them. They are just a half-game behind Boston (8-3), and trail Eastern Conference-leading Atlanta (7-2) by one.

Not bad when you consider how everyone outside the organization was lambasting the trade for Shaq and promising the Cavs' demise just two days into the season.

But with LeBron (21 points, nine assists, six rebounds) still being LeBron ... and everyone else starting to come together around him ... and Hickson looking like the Cavs finally have their power forward of the future ... well, they are starting to look like the team we hoped they would be. And the team they say they can be.

SHAQ NOTE

As you know, O'Neal sat out Saturday's game with what team officials said was a "strained shoulder." My guess is it was merely a sore shoulder, and most of all, an excuse to get Shaq some rest. And that's a good thing.

Don't be surprised if he sits out Tuesday's home game against Golden State, too. Honestly, the Cavs shouldn't need him against the dysfunctional Warriors -- especially when you consider the break-neck pace at which the Warriors force you to play.

No one associated with the team has indicated this is the plan, but resting Shaq for the sake of preserving him for later in the year is a grand idea.

JAX TO THE MAX

Tuesday's game will also give Cavs fans a glimpse of Warriors swingman Stephen Jackson, who has been at the center of trade rumors since before the start of the season.

Jackson has a strained relationship with wacky Warriors coach Don Nelson, and the Cavs are said to be particularly interested in obtaining him. However, they don't want to give up Ilguaskas, whom the Warriors supposedly would want in return.

Since both the Cavs and Warriors are smart enough not to comment on trade rumors (OK, at least the Cavs are smart enough), it's all speculation at this point.

As an aside, ESPN.com reported late last week that the Warriors "would not be adverse" to taking troubled Cavs guard Delonte West in a deal for Jackson.

Interestingly, Jackson and Mike Brown are tight from their days together with Indiana (Brown was an assistant coach with the Pacers when Jackson played for them). So if Jackson were to come to Cleveland, you wouldn't expect there to be any issues.

But again, it's all just a bunch of meaningless babble right now.

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