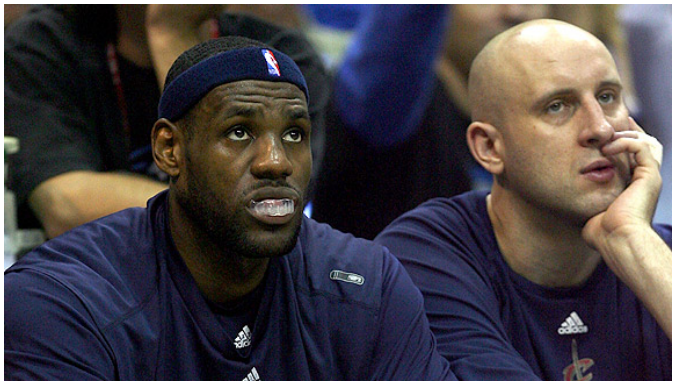
Another week, another couple of wins sandwiched around a loss. The Cavs beat the Pistons 98-88 in their house, came out flat in a 94-87 loss at Charlotte, then returned home and put together perhaps their best overall game of the year in dismantling Dallas by a 111-95 count. Enough recap. Let's get right to this week's business, shall we? Enter John Hnat to give us The Good, The Bad, & The Summary of the last week of Cleveland Cavaliers basketball.



THE SUMMARY:

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A BURST OF REFRESHING HONESTY:

The truth of the matter is, I have been wondering what to do

with this column.

In previous seasons, when I did the GBS after specific games, it was easier to write in a lot of ways. Not in the way that would have me up till one in the morning, leaving maybe five hours of sleep till the next morning and a full day of work. But easier in that it was more *timely* to write about what had happened that evening.

Now ... take that Pistons game from last Wednesday. It's ancient history. Most of you probably can't even remember that the Cavs played the Pistons. (Hey, maybe that's where this column has some value! It reminds you of what you've already forgotten.) Anyway, the point is that a game from six days ago probably isn't on most radar screens today.

And it means that I get a huge writer's block. It's not easy to make that six-day-old game sound interesting - any more than it would be to enliven a week-old stock quote, or gas prices, or anything else that is interesting almost exclusively because of its timeliness.

Then add something else to that mix: I don't have any insider information to provide. I'm not going to give you nuggets that

you can't find anywhere else, about what LeBron had for dinner last night or how Z took Delonte bowling. (By the way, I would *kill* to hook that up. Z and Redz putting on rented shoes and tossing 16 pound objects? The YouTube from that would make everybody forget about Delonte in line at KFC .)

So the only thing I have left - the only reason for you to read these words, instead of (or in addition to) all the other sources of Cavs content, is my writing. My takes. If that doesn't keep you around, I got nuttin'.

This is a long way of saying that starting now, *right now*, the GBS is going to include more of whatever I want to write about. No, I'll never get *too* far afield from the Cavs content. But if you're one of those people who bitch about Peter King when he goes on about whatever triple hazelnut latte he had last week, then this might not be the place for you.

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT I MEAN:

You have to hate it when you have something written, and then events change so that what you wrote before no longer matters.

"Real" sportswriters face this issue all the time. Take a baseball beat writer. Especially in this day of instantaneous news, the typical game summary is written by the sixth inning. Add a couple of paragraphs about how the game ended, get a couple of quotes from the locker room, and then it's time to hit the bars. The single most reviled and feared thing in a press box is the late lead change. It may make for a more exciting game, but it sure doesn't help you when you're trying to meet a deadline.

That's where I found myself Saturday night. Until Saturday's game against Dallas, I had pretty much convinced myself that this year's Cavs were not going to be able to recapture the magic of last year's team. Sure, they will win a lot of games ... and be one of the better teams in the league ... and maybe still win a title.

But the 2008-09 season was *fun*. It was one of only two seasons in the past 40 years in which Cleveland sports fans could watch their team stomp the living daylights (*hey, it is still a word with an S, H, I, and T in it, no?*) out of whoever the schedule-makers threw in their way. It was one of only two seasons in which the team wearing the Cleveland uniforms could lay waste to the rest of the league, and let Cleveland fans, in some cathartic way, give it back to the rest of the country that has dumped on us for so long. (*Even if that dumping is at least somewhat in our minds; but let's hold off on that discussion for today. We've got enough going on as it is.*)

That other team, as you may have guessed, was the 1995 Indians. Think of the parallels between the two teams: young squads, full of stars, absolutely destroying the rest of the league for all of the regular season and most of the playoffs, then getting tripped just short of the brass ring. Two teams that seemed to be poised for even better things in subsequent seasons.

As we know, the 1995 Indians never quite got there. It

didn't help that they lost their biggest star to free agency (yes, Albert Belle was the biggest fish in their pond; others may have gone on to better careers, but Belle was the one who caused the most loss of bladder control among opposing pitchers). Even with that, they had enough talent to win (and they did win - 99 games in the 1996 regular season, followed by another World Series appearance - if a somewhat improbable one - the following year). But they never had that same swagger as in 1995.

That's what I had been seeing from the Cavs thus far this season. A very good team, one capable of winning a lot of games ... but one that just doesn't have the same kind of attitude as last season. I had been fooled as much as anyone - I thought that adding Shaquille O'Neal, Jamario Moon, and Anthony Parker to last year's 66-win team, while losing little of consequence (the "little" would be "Ben Wallace's rebounding and defense"; the loss of Wally Szczerbiak was of absolutely no consequence, and shedding Sasha Pavlovic was a *positive* development), would mean a repeat of 2008-09 (at least until late May).

On Saturday night, I saw that team again.

It's not just that they were scoring at will, or that they beat a strong Dallas team with little difficulty. It's that they had *fun* doing it. And that they *knew* they were going to do it.

Was it just one game, or a sign of things to come? Maybe the real answer is to stop worrying about what it could mean for the future, and enjoy it for what it is. Life can never be fully enjoyed if it's always being lived in the future.

All right, let's throw out a few bouquets and a couple of raspberries:

THE GOOD:

The First Rule Of The Cavs: I've said it before, and I'll say it again: *as Mo Williams goes, so go the Cavs*. When he plays well, this team is tough to beat. When he is Just Some Guy, the Cavs are back to their 50-ish win ceiling of the 2006-2008 teams.

On Saturday night, Mo had one of his best games as a Cavalier. He has certainly scored more points (his 25 points on the night pales compared to his 40+ point outbursts last year), but he has almost never been as efficient (he scored those 25 points on a mere 12 shots from the field). Of course, the key to his performance was a perfect 7-of-7 from three-point range. The Quicken Loans Arena operators could have saved time by simply playing the entire score of "The Godfather."

When Williams is shooting well, and/or being aggressive with the ball, opposing defenses have a second presence (if you're reading these words, you

know the first one) to concern them. They can't simply key on LeBron James and dare the rest of the team to beat them, because Williams actually *can* beat them.

Speaking Of A Perfect 7-For-7: That was Anderson Varejao's line against the Mavericks. Seven field goals attempted, seven field goals made. Yeah, kind of hard to improve much on that. Anderson truly is at his best in the sixth man role, and while J.J. Hickson had a rough week at the office (16 points in three games *combined*), it still makes the most sense to start him, and to let Andy get his 30-35 minutes from the bench.

The, Well, Maybe Fourth Or Fifth Rule Of The Cavs: Something else I've said before: LeBron may be the face of this team, but Delonte West is its heart. After several games of little to no playing

time, West played 28 minutes against the Mavericks, and responded with a rare feat: a double-double (10 points, 10 assists) from the bench.

West may not yet be ready to return to the starting lineup (although that's where he belongs, once he returns to 100%), but he really makes this team go.

Stat Of The Week: We're just going to continue to discuss the Dallas game, and point out that the Cavs had 33 assists in that contest. *Thirty-freaking-three assists* . Out of a total of 45 field goals. (By contrast, the Cavs had a craptacular 14 helpers in the Charlotte game.)

THE BAD:

Quarterbacks Play On Tuesday Morning Too: At this point in the game, it's piling on for me to castigate Coach Mike Brown for not playing Ilgauskas against the Mavericks, when doing so would have given Z the all-time franchise record for number of games played. Yes, Coach Brown, we understand that the matchups weren't favorable to having the big guy lumbering up and down the court. But if Darnell Jackson and Jawad Williams can get two minutes of run, sp can Z. (Although we can mentally tennis-match this thing by saying that Coach Brown didn't want Z to get the record from a quick garbage-time appearance.)

The one mitigating factor (and one that Coach Brown was certainly aware of): the Cavs' next two games are at home as well. So Cleveland fans will get to see Z break the record at home. Which is the way it should be.

WHAT I WOULD LIKE TO SAY ABOUT ALLEN IVERSON:

As little as possible. (Well, maybe a little more than that. I do have space to fill.)

Really, Allen Iverson has not been relevant since the 2006-07 season, when he was traded to Denver. Yes, he's still a good player; but he's no longer a *great* player. Now, sliding from
great
to
good
is not a sin; it happens to all players after enough turns of the calendar.

The problem for Iverson is, his game requires him to be a ball-centric hog. He's the guy at the YMCA who you love and hate to have on your team. You love to play with him because he's good, and you'll probably get to stay on the court a good long while. You hate to play with him because in an entire afternoon of games, you will get to take maybe four shots.

When he's able to back up that kind of ball-hogging with wins, you tolerate it. When he's no longer able ... that's when he bounces from team to team. That's where Iverson finds himself these days. And that's not a player who should command too much attention, sad to say.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

Another relatively light week. The Phoenix Suns invade The Q tomorrow night. (I like it when a visiting team is said to *invade*, as though it's Hannibal leading elephants across the Alps or whatever.) The brief homestand concludes against Chicago on Friday night, and then the Wine and Gold travel to Milwaukee to face the Bucks on Sunday afternoon. (It's not yet one of those ABC telecasts - those won't come until after NFL season, as the leagues have their gentlemen's agreement not to step on each other's turf - but it'll be good practice, as the Cavs are on the schedule for practically every Sunday

later in the season.)

In terms of the division, this week is pretty important - the Bucks and the Bulls are the next two teams behind the Cavs in the Central Division. A couple of wins there will put some distance between Cleveland and their chasers. It won't be a 30-game cakewalk like last season, but it shouldn't be a race.