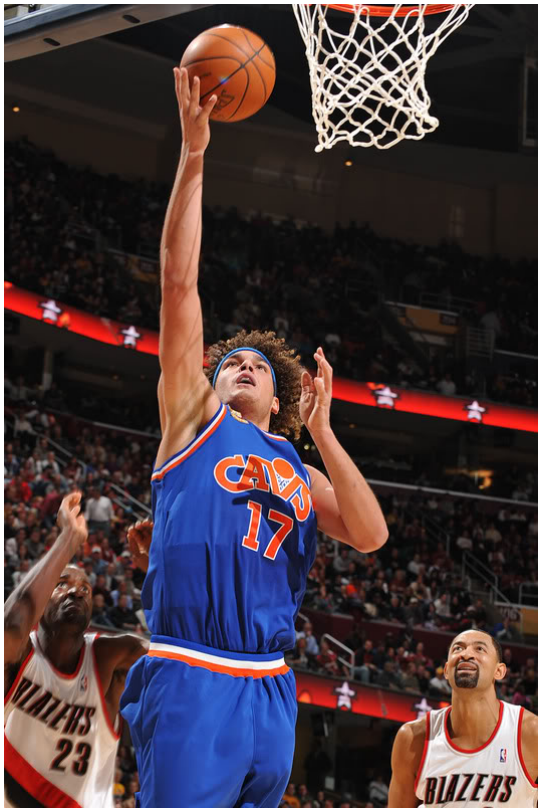
The Cavalier's recent two-game losing streak was characterized by lapses- offensive, defensive and mental. Friday's 104-99 victory at the Q over the shorthanded Portland Trail Blazers wasn't a work of basketball art either. The Cavaliers committed untimely turnovers, slumbered through a disastrous second period, and let 100 year-old Juwan Howard make like he was a Fab Five freshman. But thanks to LeBron James, Shaquille O'Neal and a massive effort by Anderson Varejao, they had just enough to crawl to the finish line ahead of the visitors from Rip City.



Cleveland's recent two-game losing streak was characterized by lapses- offensive, defensive and mental. A Cavalier offense that degenerated into LeBron and the Four Statues, a defense burned by dribble penetration and pick-and-roll and 41 combined turnovers were the main culprits in the ugly losses to Memphis and Houston on a 0-2 road trip.

Friday's 104-99 victory at the Q over the shorthanded Portland Trail Blazers wasn't a work of basketball art either. The Cavaliers committed untimely turnovers, slumbered through a disastrous second period, and let ancient Juwan Howard make like he was a Fab Five freshman. But thanks to LeBron James, Shaquille O'Neal and a massive effort by Anderson Varejao, they had just enough to crawl to the finish line ahead of the visitors from Rip City. Now it's back on the road again- hopefully, with better effort and better execution this time.

It Started Out Well Enough: The Cavaliers came out ripping cord and jumped to an early lead over Portland, which was without Greg Oden, Rudy Fernandez and Travis Outlaw. Hitting 11 of their first 17 shots from the field, Cleveland built a 25-17 lead late in the first period. Even what has become the typical spate of turnovers (six in the first period, including three on consecutive possessions) couldn't slow their roll.

But Then: The roof caved in on the Cavaliers, with a couple of old pros doing the majority of the damage. 36-year old Juwan Howard entered the game at the beginning of the second period with Cleveland leading 26-23 and personally surged the Blazers into the lead. The elderly ex-Michigan Wolverine personally outscored the Cavaliers 13-8 in the first five-and-a-half minutes of the period, and his three-point play staked Portland to a 38-34 lead.

Then it was Andre Miller's turn to continue the job Howard had started. The 33-year old ex-Cavalier ripped off seven quick points, including two three-point baskets, as Portland's lead swelled to 52-42 late in the half. Between them, Howard and Miller outscored the Cavaliers 25-19 in the period as the Blazers ran out to a 54-45 halftime lead. Portland shot 67 percent in the second quarter; Cleveland countered with a lukewarm 42 percent and played disjointed, one-on-five basketball, with just two assists for the stanza.

Shaq Daddy to the Rescue: Cleveland's trouble continued early in the second half. Spurred by seven points from LaMarcus Aldridge, Portland stayed hot and maintained a 64-54 lead at the 7:40 mark of the third.

It was at this point that the Cavaliers finally woke up, and the two-headed human alarm clock was Shaquille O'Neal and Anderson Varejao. The big men accounted for all of Cleveland's points in a 10-0 run that woke up the crowd and tied the game at 64-apiece with 5:07 left in the third. O'Neal stayed hot, getting a three-point play and hitting two free throws to give the Cavaliers a 69-66 lead. At this point the Daddy left the game for good after being raked across the eyes in a Ric Flair-like maneuver by Joel Przybilla. But he'd done enough to put Cleveland

back in the game. Varejao would then step up and take the Cavaliers home.

Viva Brazil: With the score tied 76-76 at the start of the fourth quarter, Portland hit on a novel defensive strategy: they left Anderson Varejao completely unguarded around the rim. Not being total fools, the Cavaliers took advantage. Two Varejao baskets off gorgeous feeds from Mo Williams, sandwiched around a Zydrunas Ilgauskas jumper, staked Cleveland to an 82-76 lead, and the Cavaliers would maintain the advantage for the duration. Portland continued to not put a man on Varejao and the results were unfavorable to the Blazers. The wild-haired man from South America scored 12 fourth-quarter points, part of a season-high 22. Varejao's heroics were just enough to withstand a final mental breakdown by the Cavaliers just as it appeared they had the game salted away.

Sloppy, Sloppy Stuff: With 19.1 seconds remaining the Cavaliers led 101-94 and seemed to have things taken care of. But they didn't. After LaMarcus Aldridge drilled a three-pointer to cut the deficit to four, Jamario Moon in-bounded the ball off the chest of LeBron James and right to Brandon Roy, who sank a lay-up to make it 101-99 with 12.2 left. Mo Williams hit two free throws to put it away, but the sequence was another example of the all-too-casual attitude this team has recently employed toward taking care of the ball.

LeBron's Line: 33 points on 14-of-24 from the field, 1-of-2 from three-point land and 4-of-6 from the line with seven rebounds, seven assists, two blocked shots and a steal. LBJ hit several critical shots to keep his team in the game early in the third period and wowed the crowd late in the fourth period with a spectacular block on a Brandon Roye drive that should have been called a goal-tend but, fortunately, wasn't.

Mo Better Ball-handling: Mo Williams didn't score a bunch- 14 points on 5-of-11 shooting, including 0-of-5 from downtown- but he jump-started Cleveland's offense with early buckets, racked up ten assists, set up Varejao beautifully in the fourth period, and most importantly, committed only one turnover after committing eight miscues in the losses at Memphis and Houston. As a team Cleveland

committed 14 turnovers on Friday night- not great, but a darned sight better than the error-fests the previous two nights.

Shaq Attack: The big man played one of his best games of the season before his early exit, with 14 points and 11 rebounds in 23 minutes of work. He also hit all four of his free-throw attempts and came up biggest when his team needed it the most. Shaq hasn't been that much of a consistent difference-maker this season, but he certainly was on Friday night. Hopefully that eye is alright.

Man of the Match: That would be Anderson Varejao, who was simply sensational. The Brazilian heartthrob bedeviled the Blazers with 22 points, ten rebounds, two steals and a block, and defensively somewhat contained Aldridge, who so dominated J.J. Hickson that the second-year man from N.C. State was pulled with just a minute gone in the third period, never to return.

Roy is Our Boy: Brandon Roy's career-long shooting problems against the Cavaliers continued on Friday night. Going into the game his .401 percentage against Cleveland was the third-lowest against an opponent, behind only the Wizards and the Sonics/Thunder, and he didn't enhance that percentage on Friday, shooting just 9-of-25. The Blazers got a big boost from their bench early in the night, but they needed their superstar to take them home late, and he was unable to deliver.

We Own These Guys: Friday night's victory was Cleveland's fifth straight over the Trail Blazers, their expansion brethren of 1970-71. Portland hasn't beaten the Cavaliers since January 17, 2007, and hasn't won in Cleveland since February 2, 2003, when LeBron James was a senior at St. Vincent-St. Mary High School.

Next: Sunday night at 7:00, when Cleveland hits the road again to take on the resurgent Oklahoma City Thunder.