Four more games, four more wins. But it wasn't quite as easy as it sounds. Despite dealing with a couple of significant injuries (Mo Williams went down for four to six weeks with a sprained shoulder, and then Delonte West broke his ring finger a couple of days later), the Cavs continued to win. A 108-100 win over Toronto, a 93-87 victory against the Lakers, a 100-99 nailbiter over the rapidly improving Thunder, and another one-point win (92-91) at Miami last night. They may not be dominating the regular season quite as much as they did last year, but they're getting to the pay window, and that's what matters. John Hnat talks about the exhilirating week of Cavaliers basketball in his weekly Tuesday piece for us.

THE SUMMARY:

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After those four wins (which extended the Cavs' current winning streak to five games overall), the Cavs find themselves with a league-best 35-11 record. They are pulling away from the second-place Celtics, and now hold a four-game advantage in the Eastern Conference race.

And seven of their next eight games are at home.

It's too early to declare that the race is over. But it may not be nearly as close as we all thought back in November.

THE GOOD:

Where "It's Great To Be A Fan" Happens: From a pure basketball fan perspective, this past week may have been the most fun week of the regular season.

In three consecutive games, we saw LeBron go up against Kobe Bryant (I don't care if you break
all ten
of his fingers, Kobe is still the toughest SOB in the game), Kevin Durant (the next superstar in the making), and Dwyane Wade (perhaps the best at going
mano-a-mano
with Bron).

Rich Swerbinsky, the patriarch of this site, puts out a semi-regular daily commentary (I will let you know that you can find it here , even though I am taking the very real risk of being a suck-up). His comments about King James this morning ... well, I can't say it any better, so I'll let him have the floor:

Do not take for granted how lucky we are as Clevelanders to be able to watch LeBron do what he does 3-4 nights a week. It's like having young kids. Everyone who has older kids tells you to cherish every moment with them, because you will miss it so badly when they're grown. When LeBron is done playing basketball here in Cleveland, be it in six months, or in sixteen years, you will wish that you had watched less "American Idol" and "Are You Smarter Than a Fourth Grader", and more of one of the greatest athletes in the history of the world, performing in the peak of his career, with the word "Cleveland" written on

the front of his jersey.

I think it's technically a *fifth* grader; other than that, every word is 100% true. Every once in a while, remember to enjoy the ride.

Especially when we get to see almost all of the *other* great players in the Association, all in one week.

Do You Get Me, Sweetheart?: Hey, they beat the Lakers, so it seems appropriate to quote one of Jack Nicholson's best lines . But the reason I'm quoting Jack here: those of you who still do not understand why Danny Ferry traded for Shaquille O'Neal this offseason should finally be getting the light bulb over your heads.

As I've written more times than I care to count, Shaq is not here because the Cavs needed his help to beat the Sixers in December. And he is definitely not going to be moved as a large expiring contract at the trade deadline, as some delusional fans still seem to believe.

He is here to get the Cavs over the hump in the big games.

The playoff-type games, when the pace slows to a crawl, and you need a post scoring presence to get you points when the outside shots aren't dropping.

We saw a few examples of what Shaq can do this week. He had 16 points against Toronto, 13 against the Lakers, a season-high 22 against Not Seattle, and 19 more against the Heat.

In those games, he shot a ridiculous 33-of-42 from the field.

Especially in the latter two games, he was a critically important scoring option in the second half; the Cavs consistently ran the offense through him, and he delivered.

Don't hold Shaq up to the standard of the in-his-prime Shaq. He is not that player anymore. He is not going to score 30 points and grab 15 rebounds.

But look at what he
does
do:

he can still score from the post; he still commands enough defensive attention to open other players for shots; and he still is the Great Wall of Cleveland on defense.

Those things happen to be just what this team needs.

It's Not 2006 All Over Again: As fans, we can have very short memories. We've gotten so used to having Williams and West in the rotation over the past season and a half, we forget that for about five seasons prior to their arrival, the Cavs' backcourt was a Mess (capital M).

Larry Hughes, Eric Snow, Jeff McInnis, Dajuan Wagner, Sasha Pavlovic ... none of them could consistently give the Cavs any production.

(Some of them actually were very consistent in
not
giving the Cavs any production, but we won't go there.)

The list of "things the Cavs need to fix" looked something like this:

1. Get more production from the guards.
2. Get more production from the guards.
3. Get more production from the guards.

...

100. Get more production from the guards.

101. A few more exploding scoreboards would be nice.

So when Mo and Delonte went down with injuries in consecutive games last week, my first thought was *great, we're right back to 2006*. No scoring from the guards, and LeBron having to shoulder even more of the scoring load. Which

means that much more of the LeBron And Four Guys Waiting For A Bus offense, the one where James dribbles for exactly 23.9 seconds and then launches a jumper.

It's only been a couple of games (and hopefully it won't be much more than that, as West should be back to action soon), but thankfully it hasn't been that bad. A big (actually, small) reason why: Daniel Gibson. The Cavs' backup "point guard" (the quotes are appropriate here; he has had all of one assist in roughly 75 minutes of action the past two games) came up big in the Oklahoma City and Miami games.

In both contests, he scored in double digits (13 against the Thunder, 15 against the Heat), and hit huge three-pointers in the waning moments.

The first rule of the Cavs is still: *as Mo goes, so go the Cavs*. Mo's absence over the next month is going to continue to hurt, and probably will result in a loss or three that would not have happened had his shoulder stayed where it should have.

But Gibson is doing exactly what we would hope he could do:

bridge the gap until Williams and West can get back out there.

Don't Think About Pink Elephants While Reading This Section: With Delonte West being away from the media eye this season, we don't yet have a clear-cut leader in the critically important category of best interview of the year.

But LeBron's post-Lakers game interview is one of the contenders.

I'll take a few liberties with the exact words, but the message is right on:

"We can't focus too much on beating the Lakers. Sure, we beat the Lakers twice this season, and that's a great accomplishment, but we don't want to get too excited about beating the Lakers. Again. Did I mention that we beat them on Christmas too?

In their own house?

When all their fans were throwing those sissy foam fingers on the floor?

That was sweet!

But it doesn't mean much, because even if you beat the Lakers twice in the regular season, which we did, we still might run into them in the Finals.

When we would have to beat them four times.

Which will be tough, but we've already beat them twice this season, so it's not like it's impossible."

While the actual words were a bit different (*I was too busy focusing on Craig Sager and his latest suit from the "Suburban Pimp" collection to pay close attention*
), the number of times LeBron mentioned beating the Lakers, while claiming that beating the Lakers wasn't that meaningful, was comical.

THE BAD:

Not What You Thought: There's an important statistic in which the Cavs have been out-numbering their opponents a lot recently. They had more of these than their opponents in all four games this week.

No, it's not rebounds. (The Cavs did have an impressive streak of out-rebounding their opposition, but that streak ended last night in Miami.) It's turnovers. The Cavs out-turnovered (?) their opponents in all four games this week.

Unfortunately, golf rules apply here, in that
more
is
worse
, so this is a Bad Thing.

I don't take the turnover numbers as a sign that the Cavs are flawed, or that it cannot be corrected. I think much of the problem is focus. In *Office Space* terms: it's not that they're

lazy; it's that they just don't care.

Last season, the Cavs were trying to prove they were an elite team.

They played hard every night, absolutely destroying a fair number of their opponents.

This season ... it's not quite the same. Maybe it's the realization that going hard during the regular season may have left them a bit drained come playoff time.

Maybe it's the addition of O'Neal, who has a sixth sense for when the bright lights are on, and turns his game up accordingly.

Whatever the reason, the turnovers are likely a symptom, not a cause.

When the games are bigger, the Cavs tend to take care of the ball better.

(Their lowest turnover total of the week came against the Lakers.)

The 2008-09 Cavs were the good student who overachieves their way into straight As. They studied for every quiz, diligently completed every book report, and brought the teacher a shiny apple.
This year's team is more like the 150 IQ kid who stares out the window during class, gets into trouble for not paying attention, rarely cracks open the book ... and then aces the final.

THE GOOD AND THE BAD, ALL IN ONE PACKAGE:

J.J. Hickson. I've written about him plenty this season. But we need to talk about him some more.

I've been as hard as anybody on Hickson, but I believe in fairness. And in fairness, J.J. had a couple of strong games this week:

11 points and 14 rebounds against L.A., and then a nine-and-nine effort versus Oklahoma City.

That said, he still looks like a power forward trapped in the headlights far too often. A play from the Raptors game showed everything that is wrong with J.J.

(
And the Cavs' late-game offense as well, but let's not digress.
)

Toronto's Macro Belinelli had just drained a three-pointer to cut the Cavs' lead to 93-88.

West brought the ball upcourt, dribbling to the left-hand side of the three-point line.

Hickson was stationed at the top of the arc. And he wanted *nothing* to do with the ball. He hunched his shoulders, almost as if he were hoping that by making himself smaller, Delonte would not see him, and would not be tempted to pass him the ball.

Remember tenth grade English class, when the class discussion would be on a book like
Ethan Frome
, and the only thing you knew about
Ethan Frome
was that you hadn't opened the book?

When the teacher would ask some question about the book, hoping for volunteers, and being met by a classroom full of stone silence?

And you would slouch down in your seat, as much as possible, hoping that you wouldn't be called on, and that if you were, your best response would be something comical like "Ethan Frome?

Wasn't he a defenseman for the Flyers?"

THAT was J.J. Hickson on this play.

(*No, I don't know why I keep drawing analogies to high school. I will stop now.*)

Because he is a genuinely good guy, and knew on some level that I had to kill a few hundred

words writing about *something*, Delonte passed the ball to Hickson. And J.J. ... *had absolutely no clue of what to do with it*
.

(As with everything else in life, we can explain this moment with a
Simpsons
reference
:

"A town with money is like a mule with a spinning wheel.

He has no idea how he got it, and darned if he knows what to do with it."

After holding the ball for a few seconds, he passed the ball back to West, who had to hoist a 27-footer.

Missed shot, Toronto rebound, fast break in the other direction, lead down to three points, time out, I resemble Danny Ferry a bit more after tearing out a patch of my own hair.

In the "roam around the court and crash the offensive boards for easy second-chance points" role, Hickson is decent. He does hustle. He does crash the glass. He looks like he is giving an honest effort on defense.

What I am saying is:

he does have value.

And we do have to remember that he would be only a college junior right now, so he should continue to develop.

I would not just give him up in a deadline trade (although if he is the necessary pot-sweetener to make a deal for a true "stretch four," I will drive him to the airport).

I'm just concerned that his shortcomings are ones that can't be fixed, even if you lock him in a basement all offseason and force him to watch game films with tweezers keeping his eyes open.

UNUSUAL STAT LINE OF THE SEASON:

1-of-2 shooting from the field. 0-of-2 from the line. Two points. Four rebounds. And a -16

plus/minus in 19 minutes of playing time.

Yes, that was Anderson Varejao's line against Oklahoma City. The only way it could have been more un-Varejao-ish is if he would have attempted a few three-pointers.

WHAT LIES AHEAD:

It's Guaranteed Win Streak Week. The Cavs will face the 9-36 Minnesota Timberwolves at Quicken Loans Arena tomorrow night, then travel to Indiana to face the 15-29 Pacers on Friday, and will cap off the week by facing the 20-23 Clippers at home on Sunday.

Really, if we aren't talking about the Cavs' eight-game winning streak the next time we meet, I'll be shocked.

Even with Mo and Delonte on the shelf, I'll be shocked.

Hell, even if LeBron ... no, I'm not going to tempt fate just to make that point.