What started out as a celebration at Quicken Loans Arena Saturday night turned into a grim battle for survival, as the Cavaliers built a 24-point lead but had to hang on for dear life against the spirited Knicks. Despite a terrifying fourth period Cleveland held the lead throughout- by the hardest- and pulled out its eleventh consecutive win, 113-106. It's been a weekend of upsets in the NBA- the Magic blowing a 21-point lead at home to the Wizards, the Lake Show falling at home to the Nuggets sans Carmelo Anthony- and for much of the harrowing final period it looked as if the Cavaliers would be the latest victim. But LeBron James made sure that wouldn't be the case.

**LeBron's Line:** 31 points on 12-of-15 from the field, 4-of-6 from downtown and 3-of-3 from the line with 5 assists, 4 steals and 3 rebounds.

No wait, my mistake- that's LeBron's line *for the first 14:21*. For the night he finished with 47 points on 17-of-31 from the field, 6-of-12 from three-point country and 7-of-7 from the line with 8 assists, 8 rebounds and 5 steals in 44 minutes. Eventually his ridiculous shooting began to interfere with Cleveland's offensive flow, as ball and people movement disappeared in favor of watching him dribble, dribble, dribble and fire... the dreaded "LeIso." But at the end of the night, LeBron's greatness was enough to carry his team home.

**Like RBX- Presenter, Inventor, Tormenter:** For most of the first period LeBron was content to orchestrate the Cavaliers offense, which he did beautifully. The reigning (and future) MVP racked up five assists in the first 6:40, repeatedly finding his big men Shaquille O'Neal and J.J. Hickson for easy buckets in the paint. As the period wound down LeBron set about *being* the offense, and he was devastating. The best thing to come out of Akron since vulcanized rubber scored 14 points in the final two minutes of the period, and his buzzer-beating bomb from Bratenahl staked the Cavaliers to a 44-24 lead at the end of one.

With LeBron too hot to touch, Mike Brown decided to leave him in the game to start the second period. The great man rewarded his coach's intuition; he poured in eight more points in the first two-and-a-half minutes of the stanza. In a span of five-and-a-half minutes bridging the first and second period, LeBron scored 24 points- all of Cleveland's scoring in that stretch. He knocked in ten consecutive attempts from the field during his first-half barrage, including four in a row from beyond the three-point arc. Fueled by their superstar the Cavaliers built a 24-point second-quarter lead and were way out in front, 74-54, at halftime. LeBron's 35 first-half points are a new Cavalier record.

We've seen LeBron James play a lot of great basketball since that night in Sacramento back in October of 2003. But we're never seen him play the way he has in the last several weeks. It's been said before on this site- by Peeker and Papa Cass, and by me and others. It deserves to be said often: Cleveland fans- enjoy watching this man play the game. Soak it up and savor it. We'll never see his like again.

**General Lee:** The only Knick to show up early was David Lee, and he wasn't there at all when his team made its big push late. Playing in obvious pain, wincing every time he ran down the floor, the big man from Florida scored 18 first-half points on the way to 20 on 10-of-14 shooting with 8 rebounds. Mike D'Antoni sat Lee in favor of Jordan Hill for the end of the third quarter and the entirety of the fourth, perhaps because of Lee's health issues, perhaps because the lineup with Hill in the pivot was paying dividends. A post player with legitimate skills is one of the most entertaining breeds in basketball and David Lee is that player. He can shoot, board and pass and would succeed in every system, not just D'Antoni's seven seconds-or-less. He'd look awfully good running the high post in Wine & Gold, that's for sure.

**Fun Stat:** Cleveland's 74 first-half points were a season high, surpassing the 68 scored in the first half against Dallas at the Q on November 28th. The Cavaliers shot 66 percent and hit 8-of-12 three-pointers in the opening half on Saturday. But Nate Robinson provided an ominous portend for the second half when he buried a three-pointer before the horn to make it

74-54 at the break. It was Lil' Nate's first bucket of the night. It most assuredly would not be his last.

**Gotham-Sized Comeback:** After looking dead for all of the first half and much of the third quarter, the Knicks suddenly came to life in a way that thrust the sellout crowd at the Q- along with the Cavaliers themselves- into a near-panic. Trailing 86-63 with just over four minutes to play in the third period, New York buried 15-of-20 shots and outscored the Cavaliers 41-21 in the span of a little over a quarter's worth of time. The biggest pyrotechnics came courtesy of the smallest man in the NBA, Nate Robinson (26 points, 6 assists, 5-of-7 from downtown). The bantam-sized bomber scored 14 consecutive Knick points at the end of the third period and the beginning of the fourth and even stuffed a Shaquille O'Neal shot attempt, sending the huge man sprawling on the floor.

**Meltdown in Rock ‘n Roll Town:** Cleveland's breakdown was comprehensive: while the offense seized up into a series of LeBron dribble-and-hoist vignettes the defense gave up one wide-open shot after another. The Cavaliers were playing tight, scared even, and their guests were gaining on them one possession at a time. The lead just kept getting smaller and smaller until it was barely there at all. New York cut it to within one score at 107-104 and had an opportunity to tie the game with 3:10 to play, but Chris Duhon's three-point attempt was off-line. Fortunately it was Duhon taking that shot and not Nate Robinson.

**LeBron Carries It Home:** With the Cavaliers clinging to a 109-106 lead, LeBron saved an errant Anderson Varejao alley-oop pass, curled out to the perimeter and buried a twenty-footer to put Cleveland up by five. Next, his suffocating defense forced Al Harrington into a wild shot which hit nothing but backboard. Finally, LeBron whittled down the shot clock and then ripped home a long jumper to make it 113-106 with 58.6 seconds left. That's the way it ended- thankfully.

**Other Heroes:** It was a night dominated by LeBron James, but several Cleveland supporting players provided ample support to the man wearing #23. Shaquille O'Neal made a major impact during Cleveland's big first quarter and finished with 19 points, although he collected only one rebound. J.J. Hickson scored eight of the first twelve Cavalier points before fading to a 10-point finish. Anthony Parker went 4-of-6 from the field, including a pair of banked-in jumpers, and finished with 11 points. Daniel Gibson scored only 6 points but dished out a season-high 7 assists, Anderson Varejao yanked down 7 rebounds off the bench, and Jawad Williams was efficient with 5 points and 5 assists.

**Kind Schedule:** Saturday's game was Cleveland's third straight against a team playing the second night of a back-to-back.

**Fun Stat II:** Since December 21st the Cavaliers have lost a total of three games by a total margin of six points. Their only defeats are by three to Charlotte, by two to Denver and by one to Utah.

**Fun Stat III:** Since the beginning of the 2008-09 season the Cavaliers are 107-27. That's *eighty* games over .500.

**Next:** Tuesday at 7:00 PM when the Cavaliers welcome New Jersey to the Q. The Nets won't be on the second night of a back-to-back, but they *will* be 4-46 going into Tuesday's action. Still, seeing what nearly happened Saturday, Cleveland can't afford to assume anything.