CLEVELAND -- The Cavaliers looked rusty, exhausted and like they were missing old friend Zydrunas Ilgauskas. Yet it still took a great shot from a great player for the Denver Nuggets to snap the Cavs' 13-game winning streak, 118-116, in overtime on Thursday night.

That's the good news. Or at least the news that we had to get out of the way.

The real story surrounding the Cavs is what becomes of them now. They had all the pieces to win a title before trading Ilgauskas to Washington, receiving talented "stretch" forward Antawn Jamison in return.

They also picked up backup point guard Sebastian Telfair from the L.A. Clippers, but it was the acquisition of Jamison that is expected to put the Cavs over the top.

And look no further than Thursday's game to see how the multi-dimensional Jamison could have helped:

* He could have spent some time defending Carmelo Anthony, the Nuggets' All-Star forward who buried the game-winning shot. That would have given LeBron James a break from having to guard the opposing team's best player for the majority of the night.

* Jamison also would have added some range on a night in which the Cavs were a miserable 7-for-23 from beyond the 3-point arc. That includes just 1-for-9 from James, who was clearly exhausted after played 47 minutes.

* Anyway, Jamison is the type of player who will take some of the offensive load off LeBron. After all, when you talk about Jamison, you're talking about an All-Star-caliber guy who is averaging 20.8 points and 8.8 rebounds on the season.

* Jamison adds skill, depth and a winning personality. He can score two points and be perfectly content, but has the ability to erupt for 30 on a moment's notice. No other player has had this type of potential when it comes to being the ultimate complement to LeBron -- not Delonte West, not Mo Williams, not even Shaquille O'Neal. And all those guys are pretty darn good. Jamison is better.

* On a personal note, I have been a huge fan of Jamison's game for a long time. He possesses a nifty running floater-type shot, which he uses to score in traffic near the basket. At the same time, he can bury 3-pointers and is an underrated passer. He hustles, defends and rebounds, and is team player through and through. If the Cavs had Jamison last season, they never would have lost to Orlando in the Eastern Conference finals. He's just that good.

* Of course, it doesn't hurt that Jamison is one of the nicest people in the NBA, or any league anywhere. When I was the editor of Pro Basketball News, we gave away an annual "Good Guy" award, and Jamison won it practically every season. Before a game last season when the Wizards were in town, I requested an interview with Jamison and he politely declined, saying he had already planned to visit with some friends. A few moments later he tracked me down outside the Cavs locker room. "My friends can wait," he said. "You have a job to do. Go ahead and ask away."

* Actually, I'd root for Attila the Hun if it meant the Cavs would win a championship. But my point about Jamison is that he is respectful of others, even when it means sucking it up himself and

"taking one for the team." It's not often guys with his talent possess such strong leadership skills.

So is Jamison the answer in Cleveland? You can't help but think so. You can't help but think he gives LeBron and the Cavs everything they've lacked the past few seasons, that he is the missing piece to the first title this city has seen in 46 years.

Anyone who watched Thursday's loss can at least be hopeful of that much.

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