CLEVELAND -- LeBron James is slumping for the first time this season and the Cavaliers are suffering a little because of it.

James scored 20 points and passed for 13 assists in Tuesday's 105-95 win over New Orleans , but six of those points came in the final 1:36. He also struggled a little, for him, on defense. Also, in Sunday's loss to Orlando, James made just one field goal in the fourth quarter. In last week's loss to Denver, he slipped when receiving the inbounds pass, missing a 3-pointer that would have won the game in overtime.

Now, James on his worst nights is still considerably better than most guys on their best. He obviously put up phenomenal numbers in the Denver game, finishing with a triple-double of 43 points, 15 assists, 12 rebounds. Let there be no doubt, James is the savior of the franchise and without him, the Cavs likely wouldn't get out of the first round of the playoffs. With him, they have the league's best record (44-14) and are the favorites to come out of the Eastern Conference.

It's just that LeBron hasn't been his usual extraordinary self since the loss to the Nuggets. He looks like he's playing on tired legs, and is just 6-for-27 on 3-pointers since the All-Star break.

As you know, the Cavs are 1-3 in those games.

No one would dare ask James about his "struggles," because suggesting as much would likely get you laughed out of the Cavs' locker room. And he would never admit to it anyway -- nor should he. Again, even James isn't great, he is still very, very good.

As he said following the win over the Hornets: "There's 82 games in the regular season. You'll have ups and downs. We've had way more ups than downs. We have the best record in the Eastern Conference and one of the best records in the league. You can go two or three games where you don't win a game. That's not our worry."

And in James' defense, perhaps no one has adjust to the arrival of Antawn Jamison as much as James has. With Jamison and his 20 points per game in the fold, James no longer needs to lead the league in scoring. This is also the first time in James' career in which he has played alongside a power forward with Jamison's ability. It's gonna take some time for the King (and everyone else) to adapt.

The most important thing to remember is that James did come up big when the Cavs needed him most Tuesday, that he often saves his best performances for the best games, like Thursday's in Boston.

More worrisome than James is the overall team defense. It just hasn't been as good for the past month, and acclimating Jamison and newcomer Leon Powe (activated from an injury Tuesday) won't make things any easier. But if the Cavs are talking title, they'll need to pick it up at the end of the court, and soon.

"We're definitely not where we want to be [defensively] right now," Cavs coach Mike Brown said. "We gotta fight through whatever it is we're going through, and get this thing figured out."

For the Cavs, that all begins and ends with James. The good news is, he's the best the NBA has to offer, even when he's not his typical self.