Unless something unexpected happens, LeBron James will be back on the court on Friday, when the Cleveland Cavaliers travel to Philadelphia to play the 76ers.

(Philadelphia won't be on a back-to-back, but they played last night and will play again tonight . . . while the Cavs will have had three full days off leading into the game.)

LeBron has sat out the last two games . . . Saturday in Milwaukee and Monday night at home against San Antonio . . . with a cornucopia of banged-up parts, including a left quad bruise, a right ankle injury and a little back soreness.

Thankfully, nothing serious though.

With the three-day break in-between the San Antonio game and Friday's game in Philly, it was a convenient time to give LeBron some rest. He could pretty much shut himself down for an entire week, while missing just two (nondescript) games.

So, the LeBron-less Cavs got a shot to show what they could do.

But before we get to that, here are a few statistics we dug up regarding life without LeBron.

#1.) Prior to this season, the Cavaliers have been LeBron-less 20 times.

- 2003-2004: 2-1
- 2004-2005: 1-1
- 2005-2006: 3-0
- 2006-2007: 3-1
- 2007-2008: 0-7
- 2008-2009: 0-1

#2.) It's been a long time since the LeBron-less Cavs have got to *really* play. In both of the past two years, LeBron has sat out the final games of the regular season to rest.

The last time the Cavs played a truly meaningful game without LeBron came on January 31st of 2008. It was against the Seattle Supersonics, which are now the Oklahoma City Thunder . . . and only ONE player from that game's active roster is still with the Cavs: Daniel Gibson.

Anderson Varejao and (if you care) Sasha Pavlovic were also injured for that game.
The Cavs dropped it 101-95. The starters were: Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Larry Hughes, Drew Gooden, Devin Brown and Ira Newble. So obviously, we haven't seen almost all the current team play LeBron-less.

#3.) Although it's purely circumstance, the Cavs are ridiculously streaky without LeBron. After starting out 2-2 in LeBron's first season and a half, the Cavs launched a 7-0 LeBron-less run that covered parts of three seasons.

Immediately after that, they dropped nine straight LeBron-less games over parts of the next three seasons.

Now, if you want to count Saturday's annoying 92-85 loss in Milwaukee . . . annoying mostly because poor-shooting rookie Brandon Jennings lit the Cavs up with five three-pointers, and was flashing "gooseneck" signs . . . that would be a 0-10 stretch across parts of *four* seasons.

But fortunately, the Cavs killed that run on Monday, beating the Spurs 97-95. It was their first LeBron-less win since March 13th 2007. And hopefully . . . if the Cavs are as streaky without LeBron as they have been since 2005 . . . it's also the beginning of a new, *winning* LeBron-less streak.

Overall, the Cavs are now 10-12 without LeBron.

Here are some observations from these last two LeBron-less games.

#1.) LeBron has averaged 20.1 shot attempts a game this season (and Shaq has averaged 8.7 attempts). Here are a few players whose field goal attempts (FGA) rose significantly from normal with LeBron (and Shaq) out.

M. Williams (Avg. FGA 12.8): @Mil. **3-of-17**; @S.A. **7-of-16**; Total: 10-of-33 (30.3%)

West (Avg. FGA 7.0): @Mil. **11-of-18**; @S.A. **5-of-13**; Total: 16-of-31 (51.6%)

Jamison (Cle Avg. FGA 14.3): @Mil. **11-of-18**; @S.A. **6-of-12***; Total: 17-of-30 (56.7%)

J. Williams (Avg. FGA 3.6): @Mil. **3-of-5**; @S.A. **6-of-11**; Total: 9-of-16 (56.3%)

Hickson (Avg. FGA 5.7): @Mil. **0-of-2**; @S.A. **5-of-12;** Total: 5-of-14 (35.7%)

*Jamison left the game just four minutes into the third quarter after feeling his knee stiffen up. He had an MRI on Tuesday, which didn't show anything serious. He's day-to-day, and could play Friday.

#2.) As a team, the Cavs shot 44.2% against Milwaukee and 47.4% against San Antonio. Neither of those numbers reached the Cavs' season average of 48.8%. Interestingly enough, their defense did . . . and then some.

The Cavs gave up just 40.5% shooting to Milwaukee . . . and allowed 41.7% to San Antonio. On the season, the Cavs' opponents are averaging 43.8% shooting.

#3.) The Cavs lost the rebounding battle in both games, which may not be surprising considering they were without Shaq, Z and LeBron. But it actually wasn't by much in either game. The Bucks edged them 46 to 45, and the Spurs only had them 44 to 42.

Other, more significant factors were 3-point percentage (7-of-22, 31.8% @Mil.; 6-of-14, 42.9% @S.A.) . . . and free throw attempts and percentage (10-of-16, 62.5% @Mil.; 19-of-24, 79.2% @S.A.)

#4.) The plus-minus leaders for the Milwaukee game were Danny Green (+15), Anderson

Varejao (+11), Jamario Moon (+11) and Delonte West (+9). At the other end, there was Jawad Williams (-29) and Mo Williams (-18). That's all pretty dynamic, considering the Cavs only lost by seven.

For the San Antonio game, Andy led with (+10) followed by Jawad (+5). Anthony Parker was on the bottom end (-7).

In the Milwaukee game, the bench played well . . . racking up a +36, despite a -10 from Darnell Jackson, who got a look (possibly just for the hell of it) over Leon Powe. Every one of the starters was in the negative. Overall, they were -71.

It was a similar story against San Antonio. The starters finished -2 overall, while the bench finished +12, with Jamario being the only one in the negative, at -4.

#5.) Delonte West can make things happen . . . on both ends of the court. His game hasn't been dependent on LeBron . . . even when LeBron is playing. So perhaps that's why Delonte seems to be able to effortlessly raise his game from a mere ball-handler on offense to a playmaker.

Mo did not experience the same lift. His game is closely entangled with LeBron's (and this year, Shaq's as well) . . . and he's still working his way back from both his shoulder injury, and the time he was out while recovering from it.

So it's not necessarily a bad thing . . . although it definitely isn't a good thing either. While Mo's job description has been expanded to include being a facilitator for Shaq, LeBron (so he can move off the ball) and now Jamison . . . he's still supposed to be a scorer, or at least a focal part of the offense when LeBron is out (whether that's for the start of a quarter, or for the entire game).

Andy also played well, and has demonstrated some strong chemistry with Delonte on pick-and-rolls. Defensively, LeBron could be out, Shaq could be out . . . hell, Andy could be on the Knicks and *still* play with maximum effort and intensity. He's not always fundamental

perfection, but he's the definition of an X-factor.

Speaking of defense, J.J. played tough against Tim Duncan in the Spurs game. He was playing strong, actively and confidently in over 35 minutes. He didn't shut Duncan down . . . although in the box score, at least, they basically canceled each other out.

And, as Brian Windhorst pointed out, it's worth noting that J.J. is now making an impact without the big guns in the lineup, who would draw double teams and completely free him up. He said :

"If you had somehow been able to show me this game film at the start of the season I would not have believed what I saw from J.J. Hickson. He battled Tim Duncan without fear all night. He looked to make plays for himself when he got the ball. He attacked late in the game like a seasoned veteran. He made clutch free throws. He got a clutch rebound. His growth has been astounding this season.

"Playing well in a game like this wasn't just impressive because it was against Duncan, it was impressive because it came without LeBron and Shaq. Though Hickson's had some good games this year, most of the time it was because he was playing off the guys getting double teams. He earned everything he got in this game, which was 12 points and seven rebounds in a game where the Cavs had to have it.

"With Jamison, Shaq and LeBron not playing, suddenly No. 21 was a core player out there. Didn't think I'd see that day so soon."

And finally, there's Antawn Jamison, who showed just how potent he can be when he's a go-to guy on the offensive end. He scored 30 points in Milwaukee . . . and followed that up with 17 points in less than 22 minutes on Monday, before leaving with some tightness in his knee.

In Milwaukee, he also had 11 rebounds and five steals.

In both games combined, he shot 7-for-10 from beyond the arc.

And in the San Antonio game, he even initiated himself into the Gooseneck club . . . by signaling "Goosey" to the bench after his first three. [Is this guy a perfect fit for this team or what?]

The Milwaukee game - throw that one out. It was a traveling back-to-back, and the Cavs had essentially *no time* to prepare for a game without LeBron. But the San Antonio game showed some grit.

With 6:41 left in the game, the Cavs were down by five, 85=80, when the Spurs brought Duncan back into the game. And that was the focus of an excited text I got from my dad, who was at the game.

He wrote:

"We were optimistic [about a LeBron-less win] at first, since we were home. But as the night went on [it wasn't looking too good]. When they brought in Duncan, we were down five . . . and you figured it would be lights out. 'Game over. Nice try. We almost won without LBJ. More experience for the Cavs, playing lineups we never dreamed we'd ever play. Then D-West sparked us [with a sweet backdoor offensive rebound / tip-in]. I paid particular attention to LBJ. He was standing at the end of the bench by himself . . . clapping his hands and nervously encouraging his teammates. That's unfamiliar territory for him, but [that night] he was like every other fan at The Q, trying to will a win from off the court. Awesome win!"

I'll second that, while anxiously awaiting LeBron's return on Friday.