There are two dozen teams in the NBA that the Cavs can bat around the arena like a cat toying with a rat. The Cavs can toy with those teams and turn up the intensity when they need to in order to escape with a win, regardless of how ugly it may be.

The San Antonio Spurs are not one of those teams.

The Spurs came out Friday and played like a team clawing for their playoff life.

And they are a team clawing for their playoff life.

Currently in the seventh spot in the Western Conference pecking order, San Antonio played hard for 48 minutes to get past the Cavaliers, who played in fits and starts for much of the night, 102-97 in the AT&T Center.

Multiple defensive breakdowns in the final quarter cost the Cavaliers the opportunity to inflict further damage to the psyche of the Spurs, whose loss against Cleveland a month or so ago came with the Cavaliers playing without LeBron James, Shaquille O'Neal, Leon Powe, Zydrunas Ilgauskas and, for the second half, Antawn Jamison.

Matt Bonner drove the lane unimpeded for what might be his only dunk of the year, DeJuan Blair grabbed a couple of offensive rebounds at crucial times and the Cavs inexplicably left Manu Ginobli alone on way too many occasions to get out of Texas with a win.

The Cavs did focus in the last minute or two to make things interesting at the end but all in all the guys in the visitors' locker room would tell you that 48 minutes of focus is something you need to have against a team that has won of the last seven NBA titles.

The loss snapped an eight game Cleveland winning streak but it seems like these bi-weekly losses tend to get the Cavaliers' concentration level back to the level it needs to be. We've seen it time and again form the Wine & Gold. They'll run off seven or eight straight wins and then look sloppy enough to get tagged with a loss. Lather, rinse, repeat.

The Cavs wasted some pretty solid efforts Friday night. James led the Cavaliers with 27 points and nine assists while Jamison used a huge second quarter to drop in 24 points and haul down nine rebounds. J.J. Hickson, who seems to go through growth spurts similar to a teenager in regard to the development of his game, tossed in 20 points and grabbed eight boards for the Cavaliers who "fell" to 57-16 on the season.

Had the bench given Cleveland anything in terms of production the Cavs might have snuck away from the Alamo with a win. But the Cavs could muster only 15 points from the bench on the night with Delonte West leading the group with seven points in 32 minutes.

Ginobli poured in 30 more points against Cleveland to give him a healthy 34 point average in the two games the teams have played this season while Tim Duncan and Richard Jefferson each added 16 points for San Antonio.

Takeaways

- You can see why teams such as the Cavaliers pattern themselves after the Spurs. San Antonio is well-coached and true to their defensive principles. Duncan and Ginobli execute the pick and roll as well as any two teammates in the NBA and their role players are solid fundamentally and execute those roles extremely well. They are getting a little long in the tooth with Duncan closer to the Hall of Fame than to his halcyon days as a dominant All-Star and you can see Head Coach Gregg Popovich chafe when kids like Blair and George Hill make mistakes that all young players make, but the Spurs can still dictate tempo and execute an offense when given that opportunity.

- Some of the Cavs bench woes and lack of Cavalier energy can be traced to the loss of Anderson Varejao late in the second quarter. Varejao left the game with a hamstring issue and did not return. That was one less quick-footed big man to throw at San Antonio and the difference is night and day with Z guarding the pick and roll as opposed to Varejao. At press time there was no word on Varejao's status going forward.

- The ugliness from the free throw stripe jumped and bit the Cavs again Friday night. 15-23 from the line in a game that was close throughout just isn't going to get it done.

- Over a seven minute span in the second quarter that began while LBJ got his normal rest, Jamison showed the form that should benefit the Cavs going forward. Playing a lot of small forward against San Antonio Jamison scored 15 points over that seven minutes and single-handedly kept the game close for Cleveland. Jamison was knocking down shots from beyond the perimeter and then took advantage of that to get some looks nearer the basket. He again struggled from the line (4-7) but you can see him settling in nicely in every other area for the Cavs.

They Got Next

The Cavs come home and play next on Sunday when they face Sacramento at 'The Q'. A sell-out should be in attendance to show Big Z some love in the 3pm tip that will be televised on FSN Ohio.