The wages of sin are death, and the manifold sins of the Cavaliers were instrumental as their hopes for a third straight victory over the Celtics died hard Sunday in Boston, 117-113. Down by as many as 22 points in the second half Cleveland mounted a furious comeback and took the lead in the final minutes. But ultimately the Cavaliers bled out, victims of self-inflicted wounds. The clincher for top overall seed in the NBA Playoffs is going to have to wait a couple of more days- or until the Lake Show loses, which they may very well have done against San Antonio on Sunday.

No "D" in "Cavaliers:" Much like the meeting between these teams last February in Boston, the Celtics got off to a fast start offensively. Unlike that previous game, in which they scored 31 points in the first quarter and 57 in the final three, hey stayed hot well after the first twelve minutes. Boston ripped off 33, 31 and 34 points 35-of-64 and shot 54.6 percent in opening up a 98-81 lead after three periods. Ninth in the league in turnovers committed going into the game, the Celtics didn't commit their first miscue until the 5:15 mark of the second quarter and had just five in the first three stanzas.

Leading the way for Boston was Ray Allen. Mr. Shuttlesworth was on fire from the opening seconds, ripping home 33 points and drilling 6-of-9 from three-point range. His long-range dagger gave the Celtics a 112-108 lead with 47.9 seconds left and, finally, put the Cavaliers a hole they couldn't extract themselves from. Boston also took advantage of laggard Cleveland transition defense to the tune of 21 fast-break points, a high number for a normally slow-paced outfit. For most of the afternoon the Cavaliers offered minimal resistance to Boston's offense, and although they picked it up greatly in the fourth quarter, it wasn't enough to get the win. The Celtics are in a senescent state, but you still need to play more than one quarter of basketball to beat them- and the Cavaliers did not.

"Line" of the Night: Boston went 31-of-38 from the free-throw line (81.6 percent.) Cleveland went 26-of-40 (65 percent.) The margin at the end of the game? Four points. There you have it. Honestly, it's starting to get ridiculous. There's no reason this team should be this bad at the free-throw line.

LeBron's Line: 42 points on 14-of-31 from the field, 0-of-9 from three-point range and 14-of-22 from the line with 9 assists, 7 rebounds, a blocked shot and a steal. After Boston built its lead to 22 at 94-72 with 2:11 left in the third quarter, LeBron poured in 25 points down the stretch, powering a 32-9 run that shot Cleveland into a 104-103 lead late in the fourth. But in the end it was the inability to hit free throws or three-pointers that doomed his team to defeat. LeBron hit just 4-of-7 from the line and missed all four of his three-point attempts in the fourth, and every errant one was crucial.

That's Kind of Weird: Mo Williams hit all six of his attempts from the field, including 3-of-3 from three-point range- yet he didn't play at all in the fourth quarter as the Cavaliers made their rally. To be sure, his scoring outburst didn't exactly keep his team afloat in the first three periods, but it was a surprise not to see him at all in the final moments, when the Cavaliers were struggling from the free-throw line.

Wasted Firepower: Other than the free throw horror-show the Cavaliers were pretty damned good offensively. They shot 51.3 percent from the field, hit a passable 7-of-17 from downtown and had 20 assists to just 11 turnovers. Even with LeBron dominating the basketball down the stretch, six Cavaliers tallied in double-figures. Those numbers, plus the overall number of 113 points, should have delivered a victory. But when you play zero defense for three quarters and dick around at the free-throw line for four, well…

Three Blind Mice: The officiating on Sunday was, to put it mildly, horrible- for both sides. The referees weren't interested in assessments, either. They meted out six technical fouls, four for Cleveland and two for Boston, and Mike Brown was tossed out of the game late in the third period.

He's Missed: Regardless of the soothing words coming out of the team, Anderson Varejao's status is starting to be a concern. The energetic Brazilian missed his fourth consecutive game with that mysterious hamstring thing- unfortunate because he missed the game, especially

unfortunate because he missed a game against the Celtics, a team he has bedeviled this season. Look, we can talk about rest and precautionary measures all we want. I get that. But simply as a fan, I want to see Anderson in uniform and on the court- soon. It would make for some peace of mind.

 Next: Tuesday night at 7:00, when the Cavaliers host possible first-round opponent Toronto at the Q.