It's funny how the feelings all come rushing back.

Even after about six weeks of drama-free basketball there were butterflies before the game and nervous energy right from the opening tip. Is there anything to this line of thought that the Cavs will be rusty? Will Shaquille O'Neal blend back in or will there be some rough spots for the Cavs as they welcome back their big man? Is Antawn Jamison ready for his first playoff run that actually has the chance to end in a ring ceremony? Was Mo Williams' performance last postseason an anomaly or a harbinger of things to come?

The build-up was almost unbearable.

And that was just for the fans.

When the Cavaliers took the court at 'The Q' to begin their march toward 16 wins and an NBA title it was immediately obvious that they weren't amongst those with doubts. The Cavs jumped all over Chicago early dominating the paint and the boards and answered all those questions in the first half of play when they built a 55-41 halftime lead.

After the intermission, generally a dangerous time for Cleveland, the Cavs again exerted their will, took whatever they wanted from the Bulls, and raced to a 22-point lead just moments into the period on their way to a convincing 96-83 win in Game 1 of their first playoff game.

There were no signs of rust. There was again that curious lapse in focus and intensity while the Bulls whittled that 22-point lead down to just seven at a couple different points in the 4th quarter. But once again, facing a challenge of sorts from Chicago, the Cavs again took command of the ballgame down the stretch to walk out of 'The Q' with a 1-0 series lead.

The Cavaliers showed tremendous depth and balance as far as scoring the basketball. LeBron James was only modestly super-human Saturday as he poured in 24 points to go along with six

rebounds and five assists. O'Neal showed that he wasn't passing the time during rehab running only back and forth to the refrigerator. Shaq looked fit, trim and extremely hungry as he stepped right back into the fray and scored 12 points, grabbed five rebounds, dished out four assists and blocked three shots in an efficient 25 minutes of play. Maybe most amusing of all was the way Shaq abused Joakim Noah at will. If Shaq wasn't going through Noah on his way to dunks and layups he was going around him for dunks, layups and baby hooks. At one point Noah tried asserting himself physically against the much bigger and more physical O'Neal. Shaq felt Noah bodying him and when Noah tried to lean excessively on O'Neal the Cavs' big man expertly spun away from the contact for a dunk that left Noah falling through the space that Shaq had previously occupied.

Jamison also scored 15 points for the Cavaliers on a neat 7/14 from the floor. It wouldn't be a typical Cavaliers game if Jamison didn't also reach double figures in rebounds and he got there with 10 boards.

Williams came through in a game where the Cavs really needed his floor game to shine. With the Bulls switching on pick and rolls whenever James had the ball, Williams had the basketball in his hands for much of the time he was on the floor. Mo took advantage by scoring 19 points on 8/14 from the floor including 3/7 from the three-point line. Mo also penetrated when the opportunity presented itself and his drives and kicks helped him dish out 10 assists.

The other catalyst for the Cavaliers was Anderson Varejao. AV was his normal, annoying presence on both ends of the court and he came off the bench for eight points, 15 rebounds and no friends made in 32 minutes.

For the Bulls Derrick Rose was a one man wrecking crew. Rose put up 28 shots and hit 13 of them for a game high 28 points. Rose also had 10 assists to go with his points and he'd have had 25 helpers if the Bulls had any other viable scoring option to put on the floor with him. Luol Deng scored 12 points and Noah 10 for Chicago but it took the two of them a combined 24 shots to get there.

Takeaways

- Match ups definitely figure into the equation but you can tell who has Head Coach Mike Brown's trust come playoff time. J.J. Hickson, a starter for the better part of the regular season, got only one minute of court time and that didn't come until the last minute of the game. Despite his continued improvement Hickson just isn't a guy Brown is going to be terribly comfortable with during this playoff run. Brown had a full complement of big men at his disposal to overwhelm the Bulls smaller front court and he used Shaq, Varejao and Zydrunas Ilgauskas (who played only nine minutes himself) to take advantage of the Cavs' size and strength advantages.

- The Cavs are going to have to figure out a way to at least wear Rose down during the course of this series. The 6'3" Bulls PG is clearly the only offensive weapon the Bulls can

employ against Cleveland and, while it is solid strategy to guard him straight up and without help and let him get his while denying others theirs, at some point you have to take his drives to the basket away. Rose will get more calls in Chicago than he got Saturday in Cleveland if he's allowed to penetrate at will and the kid is a stone-cold scorer. I'd bet that while Brown is enjoying this win with a cold beer he's also trying to figure out a way to make Rose's life a bit more difficult.

- Look at the value of having a forward or two that can score the ball. One of the issues with Varejao starting and playing significant minutes in years past was that he was actually counted on to be part of the offense. Flash forward a year with Varejao's offensive game being replaced by Jamison or even Jamario Moon and you see a world of difference in the options the Cavs have opposite of James. Shaq obviously helps there too as a pure low post dominator when he's on the court, but when you have James, Williams, Shaq, Jamison and Moon spreading the floor and able to create offense you just shouldn't have dead possessions. And speaking of dead possessions, the Bulls inability to put a scorer down low with Rose at the point will be the cause of death listed on their autopsy in another week or so.

They Got Next

It's Game 2 on Monday night at 'The Q'. The tip is set for approximately 8pm on TNT.