Despite being up two-games-to-one in their first-round Playoff series with Chicago, the outlook wasn't exactly "rosy" for the Cavaliers. The upstart Bulls had outplayed Cleveland the previous two games, shredding their vaunted defense, outhustling and outmuscling the favorites. Cleveland not only had to win Game Four to maintain essential control of the series- they had to assert themselves on both ends of the floor and shut down a Chicago team gaining confidence by the game.

Consider the Cavaliers asserted. Led by a triple-double masterpiece by LeBron James, some big contributions from the supporting cast and a redoubled effort on defense, Cleveland exploded Sunday for a 121-98 rout of the Bulls in the United Center. The Cavaliers now led the best-of-seven series three-games-to-one and can wrap it up Tuesday night at Quicken Loans Arena. And after their best performance of the series thus far, it's Cleveland that should be feeling the confidence of a team in the driver's seat.

LeBron's Line: 37 points on 11-of-17 from the field, 6-of-9 from three-point range and 9-of-10 from the line with 12 rebounds, 11 assists, 2 steals and a blocked shot in 36 minutes. It was LeBron's fifth postseason triple-double. Although he didn't start out aggressively on the offensive end- he settled for long jumpers early and didn't score his first field goal until the 1:36 mark of the first period- LeBron made up for it with twenty second-half points and lock-down defense on Luol Deng, who had mystified the Cavaliers in the first three games.

LeBron also provided an array of his patented “hero” shots- none more heroic than the one he took at the third-period buzzer. Taking an outlet pass as time wound down in the quarter, LeBron took about two dribbles across half-court, pulled up from around 45 feet out- and found nothing but cord. The long bomb gave the Cavaliers a 99-78 lead with one period to play and for all intents and purposes put the game on ice.

What’s remarkable about LeBron’s half-court shots are not simply that he makes a fair number of them- it’s *how* he shoots them. Unlike most mortals, LeBron is strong enough to basically use his regular shooting motion even on attempts from 35 feet out or further. Instead of heaving the ball from his chest, LeBron can pull up and shoot a forty-footer the same way he shoots a fifteen-footer. There are not many more striking examples of the man’s physical gifts than that.

Better Get Out on Him: Chicago’s defensive strategy, like that of just about every other team in the NBA, is to concede the jump shot to LeBron James in order to keep him out of the lane. That strategy, to say the least, has not worked thus far. After his 6-of-9 performance Sunday LeBron is now 12-of-22 from behind the three-point line (54.5 percent) in the four games played so far. The entire Cavaliers team fired away with gusto on Sunday, hitting 12-of-25 from downtown and shooting a blistering 53.2 percent from the field overall.

From Oh No to Oh Yeah: Cleveland struggled mightily from the free-throw line in the Game Three loss and at the outset it appeared those struggles would continue throughout Game Four. The Cavaliers were just 5-of-13 from the line to start Sunday’s game. But they found their range, knocking down 20 of their last 21 attempts from the stripe and finishing 25-of-34 (73.5 percent.) Not too shabby considering how they started.

The Run That Got it Done: For roughly the first quarter-and-a-half it looked as if Game Four would be a 48-minute dogfight. With 6:05 to play in the half Kirk Hinrich drilled a three-pointer from the corner to give the Bulls a 39-35 lead. At this point Chicago’s big guns were all firing true- Derrick Rose had 10 points, Deng had 10, Hinrich was coming on with 8, and Joakim Noah was sweeping the boards with a vengeance (the wild-haired ex-Florida Gator would finish the day with 20 caroms.)

Then, for the first time since Game One, Cleveland turned the clamps defensively- and exploded offensively. The Cavaliers outscored the Bulls 27-13 in the final 5:53 of the half and went into the halftime locker room with a 62-52 lead. Having scored 38 points in the second quarter, the Cavaliers scored 37 more in the third. All told, in the span of a quarter-and-a-half of

game action, Cleveland outscored Chicago 64-39 to take a 21-point lead into the fourth period.

Defensively the Cavaliers found success by putting a blanket over Derrick Rose's two main scoring partners. Luol Deng hit just one of his last ten attempts from the field; Hinrich went a chilly 3-of-13 and didn't score in the second half. Rose was his usual solid self, scoring 21 points, but he shot only 9-of-20 and, without help from his friends, was helpless to turn the tide back in favor of the Bulls. You're not going to stop Derrick Rose. But if you turn him into the only scoring option you will beat Chicago- and that's exactly what the Cavaliers did Sunday afternoon.

Nice Stat: After shooting an even 50 percent in their Game Three win the Bulls crashed back to earth Sunday, hitting on just 37.4 percent of their attempts. Only a 26-of-32 free-throw shooting performance and 17 offensive rebounds kept the score from being more lopsided than it already was.

Couple Shots of Jamison: LeBron got a lot of help from his friends on Sunday- especially Antawn Jamison. For some strange reason the Bulls elected to guard Jamison with the smaller Luol Deng- and the ex-Tarheel devastated the ex-Blue Devil along the baseline, especially in the third quarter. Jamison tallied 12 points in the period as Cleveland built its ten-point halftime lead to as many as 24. He would finish with 24 on 9-of-16 shooting to go along with 7 rebounds and a whopping +33.

Nice Offense: All told, five Cavaliers scored in double figures- LeBron with 37, Jamison with 24, Mo Williams with 19 on 6-of-10 shooting , Anthony Parker with 12 and J.J. Hickson with 10. Cleveland shot over 50 percent for the game, handed out 21 assists and took care of the ball with only 11 turnovers. The spacing and ball movement were very, very good. Cleveland simply has more weapons than Chicago and if the Cavaliers continue to use them the way they did on Sunday, The Bulls are going to be gone fishin' after Tuesday night.

Back by Popular Demand: The people (including LeBron James himself) have spoken. While Zydrunas Ilgauskas logged only three minutes of mop-up duty, young J.J. Hickson saw his first extended action of the series Sunday with 17 minutes. And, as can be with J.J., the performance brought mixed reviews. Aggressive to the hoop on offense, J.J. hit 3-of-4 from the field, knocked down all four of his free-throw attempts and finished with 10 points. He also played extremely soft off the backboards, contributing to Chicago's 49-41 rebound edge- including 17-5 on the offensive boards. It may be springtime but there was a November flavor to

J.J.'s performance- the athleticism, the leaping ability; and the utter
in
ability to box out. Still, he should get more time, especially against Chicago backup pivot Brad Miller. J.J. can go right around the big lug from Purdue any time he wants to.

Unsolved Mystery: We might need to resurrect Robert Stack on his one. Anderson Varejao has vanished like Judge Crater; in the last three games of this series the Brazilian has notched a total of 13 points and 14 rebounds- in the last two games he has five shot attempts- and has been utterly shown up by his Chicago *doppelganger* Joakim Noah. The athletic Chicago frontcourt has reduced Varejao to a spectator. Other than his spectacular Game One he's had little to no impact on this series.

The Big Bystander: Shaquille O'Neal is probably glad to be leaving Chicago. The Diesel finished a two-game stretch of frustration with 6 points, 7 rebounds and 5 fouls in just 17 minutes. Of course, his problems began in Game Two at the Q. In the last three games Shaq is 7-of-19 from the field and has more than twice the number of personal fouls (15) as made shots. He also has made six consecutive free-throw attempts, which means he's due for a miss.

Really, Shaq isn't going to be a major positive factor for this club until the prospective series with Orlando. He doesn't help against Chicago and he probably won't help against Boston. The foul trouble might be a blessing in disguise; it keeps Shaq fresh for down the road and forces Mike Brown to employ smaller lineups that work better against teams like the Bulls anyway.

Fun Stat: The 121 points scored Sunday represent the second-highest single-game total in franchise postseason history. The club record for points scored in a Playoff game is 122 in Game Seven of the 1992 Eastern Conference Semifinals against Boston- AKA Larry Bird's Last Game.

Next: Tuesday night at the Q, when the Cavaliers will have an opportunity to put the Bulls out to pasture.