The Cleveland Cavaliers' opener at home against the Boston Celtics in October played out almost like a dream. Tuesday night's rematch played out like an "NBA 2K11" computer simulation.

Was it an unpredictably good game? No. Was it an unpredictably bad game? No. Was it a predictable game? You could say that, and I wouldn't have a problem with it.

The Cavs lost 106-87. And if they ever had any life at all, it was lost in the first quarter.

Cleveland briefly had a nine-point lead (17-8) halfway through the first quarter, but then their offense slipped into a hibernation of uninspiredness. There wasn't one culprit, it was just a general lack of patience and creativity. They went from frustrated to dispirited to zombified within several possessions. And it never reversed.

The Cavs lead slipped to two by the end of the first quarter. In the second, the Celtics went on two extended runs - first a 9-2 stretch, and later an 18-4 burst. By halftime, Boston's lead was 11 (56-45) . . . and they never looked back. For the rest of the game, the best series the Cavs could put together was a brief 8-3 run in the middle of the third. Otherwise, like I said, zombified.

The only Cavs player to have a good game was Anderson Varejao. If the Cavs as a team played at Anderson's speed - and with his fervor - this game may have actually been interesting. Andy finished with 16 points (on 7-of-12 shooting) with 12 rebounds (seven of which were offensive). He also had three assists and two steals.

Daniel Gibson also scored 16 points (on 5-of-6 shooting) with a couple assists and rebounds, but for whatever reason, he seems to vanish on the court a lot. (He shot the ball well, but I thought he played limited minutes because of foul trouble, and while he *was* in foul trouble, but he ended up playing essentially the same amount of minutes, 24, as everyone else.)

Mo Williams, who did not play in the season opener because of injury, was OK. He made some good plays, but the stagnant offense forced him into some bad habits. Specifically, he took some wild long range shots *while* pushing the ball up the court . . . and he got away from trying to get the ball into the paint.

(For what it's worth, I'm OK with the "stop on a dime" Mo pull-ups at the elbow. That's his shot. I'm much less OK with the life-sucking threes (or long-twos) when the team is in transition. He can make them, yes, but they just don't make a lot of sense. The defense is vulnerable at that point (even if Mo isn't leading the break), and a cut straight to the paint must open up a higher-percentage attempt - either in a lay-up or a pass-out - than the long shot on the run. Plus, the Cavs are never in position to grab an offensive rebound in those situations, and the errant shots can often lead to quick run-outs the other way.)

Mo finished with 13 points (on 5-of-12 shooting) with four assists.

For the Celtics, it was a pretty standard game as well. Rajon Rondo had 12 assists and scored a season-high 23 points. His previous high came in the previous Cleveland game. He had 18 in that one. Glen Davis had a double-double with 17 points and 11 rebounds. Shaquille O'Neal

did essentially what he did as a Cav: Six points (on 2-of-5 shooting) with seven rebounds, two assists, a block and a steal. (Delonte West didn't play; he will be out two months with a broken right wrist.)

So, you can look into this game in all sorts of ways . . . like: 'The Cavs were just looking beyond this game, to Thursday's blockbuster return of LeBron James,' or the Cavs weren't utilizing their athleticism against the Celtics, or that the Cavs are still lacking intensity and toughness on defense . . . and all of those things may be true.

But when it comes down to it, this game played out exactly how it would in a simulation. There was no battle . . . no fight . . . from either side. Once the Cavs felt the Celtics' half-court pressure, they became too content to settle for... whatever. The Cavs were porous on defense, but the Celtics jacked up their own easy jumpers instead of exploiting it every time down the court.

The game happened . . . Boston won by 19 . . . a box score was filled with generic stats.

This may sound a little disillusioned, and I apologize for that. It's a stark contrast to the feeling after the season opener, in which the Cavs seemed to impose their will on the game through their energy on both ends of the floor. They looked like they could beat *anybody* on any given night.

Not that anyone expected them to beat everybody. Or even half of their opponents.

And I do understand that the opener was a special, emotional game . . . and that the stars aligned for it. (And oh, how it was worth it . . . regardless of what happens the rest of the season.)

But I remember, before the season, the thing that most excited me about the Cavaliers was the *uncertainty*
. Who is this team? Where are they going? How will they get there? What elements will be in play each night? Who will emerge? What will be lacking? How will they fail? How will they

succeed?

It was inevitable that the Cavs would settle in to some level of expectation . . . but not in the first month of the season. This team should still have an air of mystery. This team's instensity should still exceed their record. There should be no settling yet.

J.J. had *one* point against Boston. When is he going to become a monster and bully his points? When is Mo Williams going to take the reins, and try to outsmart a defense? When is Daniel Gibson going to demand the ball when he's open? When is someone, anyone, going to step up and help Varejao defend our paint? When is the offense as a whole going to get the memo that LeBron is gone . . . so there's nothing to wait around for? Now the offense is what each player makes it, and everyone can and will make an impression on it. When is the defense going to stop playing to the score, be proud, and work together to start building up stops.

Soon, I hope. Because I want this to continue being a team that's fun to watch . . . win or lose. It's all about defying computable expectations, with heart and spirit. And that's what I'd like to see in the Cavs beginning Thursday night against the Heat.