The Indiana Pacers are not a good basketball team. Going into Wednesday night's game at the Q the Pacers were 18-27, losers of fourteen out of fifteen on the road and were working under their second head coach of the season, Jim O'Brien having been fired last Sunday.

They were still good enough, however, to deal Cleveland its 22nd consecutive loss, 117-112. The Cavaliers made it interesting, taking a slim lead deep into the fourth period, but at the end a combination of clutch Indiana shots and typical Cleveland miscues sent the Cavaliers down to defeat, yet again.

To be honest, I really don't have a problem with the Cavaliers losing a lot of games. They need to, because that's the only chance they have to get high in the draft lottery, and getting high in the draft lottery is the only chance they have to put a competitive squad on the floor before we all keel over and die of old age.

But this loss was frustrating. Better to get blown out than come close only to fall apart at the end.

At the beginning it didn't look as if the Cavaliers would come close. Three-and-a-half minutes in

the Pacers led 12-0 and Cleveland was 0-of-10 from the field. Shooting well and hitting the offensive boards with abandon, Indiana led by as many as seventeen in the first half. But a late 8-2 run by the Cavaliers cut the deficit to five at 59-54 going into halftime, and from there it was game on.

Cleveland hung within striking distance after the break and finally took its first lead with 1:15 to play in the third on a three-point play by Ramon Sessions. Indiana immediately regained the lead on a Tyler Hansbrough jumper and a pattern was set- a Cavalier salvo followed immediately by a Pacer counter-strike. To wit:

- After two free throws by Manny Harris tied the game 89-89 with 11:37 left in the fourth, Indiana ripped off a 6-0 run.

- After a 7-0 Cleveland run gave the Cavaliers a 96-95 lead with 8:46 left, the Pacers responded with a Danny Granger jumper and a Mike Dunleavy three-point play to make it 100-96 Indiana.

- Cleveland jumped back in front 101-100 on a three-pointer by Antawn Jamison with six minutes left; fifteen seconds later Darren Collison put in a lay-up to flip-flop the Pacers into the lead.

- After Christian Eyenga banked in a lay-up to make it 104-102 Cavaliers with 5:04 to play, Granger promptly drilled a three-pointer to put Indiana right back into the lead.

- Cleveland took its largest lead of the night at 108-105 on a Manny Harris floater with 3:32 to play. Indiana quickly ate up that bulge on a pair of Granger free throws and a Dunleavy three-pointer, making it 110-108 Pacers at the 2:53 mark.

- Finally, the killer blow: fifteen seconds after Jamison tied it at 110-110 with a floater at the 1:23 mark, Darren Collison drilled a three-pointer to give Indiana the lead for good with 1:08 left.

The competitive phase of the game ended in all-to-appropriate fashion. With Cleveland trailing 115-112 and twelve seconds left, Ramon Sessions drove and passed to a wide-open J.J. Hickson under the hoop. Hickson let the ball go off his face. Game over; streak… not over.

The losing effort was studded with some excellent individual performances. Ramon Sessions had his best night of the season with 25 points and nine assists, shooting 6-of-10 from the field and 13-of-14 from the foul line. Manny Harris had another solid outing with 19 points and eight rebounds. Jamison shot just 5-of-14 but hit four three-pointers on the way to a 21-point night. And Anthony Parker came off the bench to score 17 on 7-of-11 from the field. Overall the Cavaliers hit 9-of-18 from downtown, 35-of-44 from the free-throw line, dished out 23 assists to 12 turnovers and forced 18 Indiana miscues.

But once again, there were too many breakdowns both defensively and on the backboards. Indiana shot 47.1 percent from the field, hit 9-of-19 from three-point range and pummeled the Cavaliers on the glass, 49-32, including sixteen offensive rebounds. Cleveland simply could not get a stop when they needed one, and as a result they're now 8-41, having not won a game since the week before Christmas.

Like I said, it's frustrating. I just hope this team wins another game before the end of the season. And I don't say that in jest.

Next: Friday night at 8:00 when, like Cleveland native Mark Cohn, the Cavaliers go walking in Memphis against the Grizzlies.