To watch the Cleveland Cavaliers on a regular basis is an exercise in frustration -- not to mention futility. All you have to do is tune into any game in the past two months, wait until the camera pans to the Cavs' bench, and look at head coach Byron Scott standing with his arms folded and a scowl that could melt half of whatever arena his team is losing in.

The Cavs, who have been guilty of not playing all 48 minutes during a 23-game winless streak, did it on the road again Friday night.

They held leads over the host Memphis Grizzlies at the first-, second-, and third-quarter breaks. But when they opened the fourth quarter with floor play and field-goal shooting as cold as Cleveland in February, the Grizzlies blew past them to a 112-105 victory.

Taking an 84-83 lead into the final quarter, the Cavs watched the Grizzlies run off 13 straight points. (Typical.) They didn't score their first field goal of the quarter until the 7:31 mark when J.J. Hickson sank a nifty little left-handed hook. During that 4:29 stretch, they committed four turnovers and missed four field goal attempts. (Typical.)

Hickson, who has been taken to task by disgruntled Cavalier fans all season even though he's been asked to play way out of position, had his best all-around game of the season. Besides scoring a season-high 31 points and pulling down a season-high 15 rebounds, he also forced the Grizzlies' taller but slower centers to commit a total of 14 personal fouls.

There were other continuing signs of improvement -- a trend that Cavs haters generally have a hard time recognizing. For instance, when was the last time the Cavs scored 32 points in a

quarter (the first) or 59 points in a half (the first)?

For the second consecutive game, the Cavs broke the 100-point barrier on offense. They shot a commendable 47.5% from the field. But their bugaboo all season -- defense -- was again a problem. They allowed Memphis to hit 51.2% from the field on 41 of 80 makes, including 25 of 42 within three feet of the hoop.

Alas, if you have to point your finger at the one obvious reason the Cavaliers have given up more than 100 points so many times this season, you would have to point it at the departure from last year's team of 7-foot-4 Zydrunas Ilgauskas and 7-foot-2 Shaquille O'Neal and the injury to 6-foot-11 substitute center Andy Varejao. For most of their losing streak, the Cavs have been forced to start the 6-foot-9 Hickson in the post with occasional relief from 7-foot Ryan Hollins, who would be at the end of the bench for any other NBA team.

Memphis hit its first 10 field-goal attempts in charging out to a 22-14 lead. But thanks to eight Grizzley turnovers and some fortuitous hustle, the Cavs ripped off 18 of the last 22 points to take a 32-26 lead at the first-quarter buzzer. Then, twice during the second quarter, they held 10-point leads -- another rarity in this 8-42 season. At halftime, Hickson had a Durant-like 21 points and a Love-like eight rebounds.

If you must know, here is how the Cavs blew the game in the final period:

>> Rudy Gay sank the first two points on a pair of foul shots (85-84 Memphis).

>> With Hickson taking a rest, Memphis stretched the lead to 89-84 in the next two minutes.

>> Zach Randolph sank two more free throws with 9:12 remaining to give the Grizzlies a 10-point lead (84-94).

>> Randolph struck again with a jumper at the 4:15 mark to give the Grizzlies a 14-point lead

(92-106).

>> Despite a nice three-pointer by Anthony Parker and some mad scrambling in the final two minutes, the closest the Cavs could come was the seven-point final margin.

Ramon Sessions backed up Hickson's offensive effort with 20 points and 11 assists. Antawn Jamison added 19 points, but he was a highly inefficient 7 of 22 from the field. And Parker scored 18, including a 4-of-5 effort from beyond the three-point line.

Randolph, who matched Hickson's muscle inside, had 29 points for Memphis, which won its seventh game in eight tries. Gay, Mike Conley and Sam Young had 26, 21 and 19 points, respectively.

So the beat goes on. Saturday night, it's back to the Q for a game against the Portland Trail Blazers who, coincidentally, are battling for the eighth playoff position in the NBA's Western Conference. It is better left unsaid that the Cavaliers could break the league's all-time record for consecutive losses if they can't handle the Blazers (who also took it on the chin Friday night).