The San Antonio Spurs came into Cleveland Wednesday night on the second night of a back-to-back, fresh off a lopsided defeat in Memphis and without Tony Parker, their second-leading scorer and leading assist man.

So it's a good thing they were coming into Cleveland. After a mildly shaky start the team with the league's best record had little trouble handling the team with the league's worst record, 109-99. Surprising San Antonio is now the first team to reach fifty wins. Cleveland is now within one game of becoming the first team to reach fifty losses.

The night actually started well enough for the Cavaliers. After trading punches with San Antonio throughout an evenly played first period, Cleveland used an 11-2 run to go up by eight points three-and-a-half minutes into the second. But the Spurs then took control of the proceedings with their own 16-3 spurt, taking the lead for good on a three-pointer by longtime Cavalier-killer Manu Ginobili with 5:26 remaining in the first half.

Gregg Popovich's three-time Champions then put the game away in the third period. After J.J. Hickson's put-back layup pulled the Cavaliers to within seven at the 8:48 mark, San Antonio ripped off a decisive 14-2 run keyed by DeJuan Blair, who banged for seven points and three rebounds during the surge. The Spurs were in complete command from then on, stretching their lead to as many as twenty-five before a garbage-time 17-2 Cavalier run made the final score

respectable.

Usually there are two virtual certainties when San Antonio visits the Q- Tim Duncan will be well below his Hall-of-Fame standards and Manu Ginobili will go off. The former was true, for the most part; the Big Fundamental scored sixteen and dished out six assists but gathered only four rebounds and spent much of the night pleading for calls in his disbelieving manner. Ginobili, on the other hand, didn't have one of his typical spectacular nights, scoring just thirteen. But he grabbed nine boards, handed out six assists and made his usual assortment of hustle plays.

Actually, there's a third virtual certainty when San Antonio visits the Q: Gregg Popovich will eschew the tie and rock the open-collared, businessman-on-Happy Hour look. Sure enough, the pock-marked patriarch kept his tie in the suitcase.

San Antonio didn't need a lot in the way of fireworks from the active two of its Big Three (or Pop wearing a tie, for that matter.) They brought the total team effort Wednesday night. Six Spurs tallied in double figures, with George Hill's 22 leading the way. San Antonio shot 53 percent, out-rebounded the Cavaliers 48-43, passed out 28 assists and went a crisp 15-of-18 from the foul line. Despite that NBA-best 50-11 record, the Spurs don't pass the eye test in terms of pure physical talent. But they play solid defense, play unselfishly and are secure and confident in who they are and what they do. Whether that's good enough to bring a fourth Championship to south Texas remains to be seen.

Cleveland, on the other hand, shot a paltry 39.6 percent and were unable to take advantage of a friendly disparity at the foul line- they made more free throws (21) than the Spurs attempted- or just nine turnovers on the offensive end. Cleveland's guards were overpowered by the San Antonio backcourt of Hill and Ginobili, which combined for 35 points on 13-of-25 shooting. Ramon Sessions and Anthony Parker combined for seventeen on 7-of-24 from the field.

The biggest bright spot for the Cavaliers was the play of rookie Samardo Samuels. Making his first career start due to the injury to Antawn Jamison, Samuels went for 23 points and ten rebounds, both career highs. The 6'9" wide-body from Louisville shot 10-of-18 and grabbed eight offensive rebounds, effectively outplaying Tim Duncan, the man he spent part of the night covering.

Former Spur Alonzo Gee, who started the season in San Antonio, performed well against his former team with eighteen points and seven rebounds. Sessions had a solid line with fourteen points and seven assists, but shot just 6-of-17 and was mistreated defensively by George Hill. J.J. Hickson had twelve points and seven boards but, bothered by Duncan, shot 3-of-10 and fouled out in 29 minutes of play. Christian Eyenga had eleven points, most of them in garbage time.

If there's any good news to be had, it's that Minnesota, the closest pursuer for worst record in the NBA, knocked off the Pistons in Detroit. After Wednesday night's action the Cavaliers are now three games behind the Wolves in the overall standings, including four in the win column. They're three-and-a-half behind Washington, which lost at home to '75 Finals dance partner Golden State and four behind Sacramento, which lost at home to Portland. The race to the bottom is on in earnest. The prize: ping-pong balls, the more the better.

Next: Friday at 7:30, when the Cavaliers make their first trip of the season to Madison Square Garden, home of the new-look Knicks.