Well, we don't have the New York Knicks to kick around anymore.

After losing eleven straight to the Cavaliers dating back to early in the 2006-07 season the Knicks finally struck back at their tormentors from Cleveland, scoring a 123-107 victory at Madison Square Garden. It was the third consecutive win overall for New York since its nine-loss-in-ten-game swoon of March. It also got the Knicks back to .500 at 38-38 and, in conjunction with Charlotte's loss to the Wizards, clinched the franchise's first playoff berth since 2003-04.

But this being the Cavaliers, the Knicks couldn't make it easy on themselves. They nearly blew a 22-point second-quarter lead, allowing Cleveland to twice draw within two points during the second half, before pulling away for good in the fourth quarter. In the end it took the scoring of New York's Big Three of Chauncey Billups, Carmelo Anthony and Amare Stoudamire, some uncanny foul shooting by the Knicks and a bunch of Cavalier errors to send this one into the win column for the boys from Gotham.

Billups, the oft-traveled veteran from Colorado, spearheaded New York's initial thrust. Hitting his

first seven attempts from the field, Chauncey scorched the Cavaliers for 17 first-quarter points as the Knicks turned an early six-point deficit into a 61-39 advantage late in the second period. New York bottomed out six of its first eight three-point tries and reaped a crop of Cleveland turnovers- eight in the first period- in jumping out to that huge lead.

But if the Knicks and the crowd at Madison Square Garden thought this was over, Baron Davis had other ideas. The portly point from UCLA struck for twelve points in two minutes, including back-to-back-to-back three-point makes, to lead Cleveland back into contention. An 18-6 run cut the deficit to ten at halftime and the Cavaliers kept running as the third half opened, finally moving to within two at 77-75 midway through the third quarter.

But they couldn't get over the hump. New York managed to stay in front, if only by the hardest. Early in the fourth quarter the Cavaliers were down by just three at 93-90. Then they self-destructed. Cleveland committed five turnovers in a three-minute span, a fumble-fingered stretch that coincided with New York's game-clinching 12-0 run. The Knicks rebuilt their lead to as many as twenty before costing home by sixteen.

Offensively the Cavaliers did quite a bit right- as is to be expected against the porous New Yorkers. Cleveland shot 53.2 percent from the field, hit 9-of-22 from downtown, passed out 21 assists and outscored their hosts 50-34 in the paint. Two Cavaliers scored twenty or more- Davis, who tallied 22 on 8-of-14 overall and 5-of-8 from three to go with six assists, and J.J. Hickson, who added 23 points on 10-of-17 with eight rebounds. Five scored in double-figures. But turnovers and a lack of success at the free-throw line were the killers. Cleveland coughed it up 22 times on the night and shot a subpar 14-of-24 from the stripe.

New York, meanwhile, did just about everything right offensively. The Knicks shot 48.2 percent, hit 10-of-24 from three-point range and were deadly at the foul line, knocking in 31-of-33 (a cool 93.9 percent.) The Big Three combined for 76 points and got solid off-the-bench contributions from Bill Walker and Toney Douglas, who each hit double figures in short minutes. New York's assist-to-turnover ratio was 23-to-10, a figure that will win most games, especially against the likes of Cleveland.

Race for the Ping-Pong Balls: It's starting to heat up, mainly due to the inability of the Minnesota Timberwolves to win a game. Losers of ten in a row, the 17-60 Timberwolves have crept to within a game-and-a-half of the Cavaliers, who still enjoy the worst record in basketball at 15-61.

Next: Tuesday night at 7:00, when the Cavaliers attempt to snap their three-game skid at home against the Charlotte Bobcats.