Add “tanking for the top spot in the Draft Lottery” to the long list of things the Cavaliers didn’t do well this season.

Cleveland continued its unlikely (and untimely) late quasi-surge by coming from behind to defeat the Pistons, 110-101, in Auburn Hills Monday night. It was the third victory in five games for the Cavaliers, who are a not-too-terrible 10-18 since their NBA-record 26-game losing streak this past winter. However, the late run is playing havoc with Cleveland’s chances at getting the largest number of ping-pong balls in the Lottery- something which seemed inevitable just a few weeks ago.

This team truly can’t lose for winning.

Monday didn’t start off looking as if this would be Cleveland’s night, though. Detroit came out smoking, hitting nine of their first ten attempts from the field on the way to a 68.4 percent first quarter percentage. With Rodney Stuckey’s eight points and five assists the harbinger of a big night for the ex-Eastern Washington Eagle, the Pistons motored to a 33-23 lead at the end of one.

The second quarter was a completely different story for both teams. While the defense forced Detroit to miss its first six shots of the period, the bench scoring of Daniel Gibson, Christian Eyenga and Luke Harangody got the Cavaliers going offensively. The result was twelve unanswered points and a 35-33 Cleveland lead three minutes into the second quarter- and the battle was on. Neither team led by more than five for the next eighteen minutes.

In a game this close one play can make the difference- and with 3:31 left in the third and Cleveland leading by two the Cavaliers got that play. It was a five-point play, to be exact, as Gibson knocked down a three-pointer, was fouled by Rip Hamilton, hit the free throw and then hit a second free throw when the disgruntled Hamilton was slapped with a technical foul. That lucrative sequence kick-started a 12-1 run that gave Cleveland an 86-73 lead. The Pistons wouldn't get closer than six the rest of the way.

Cleveland's offense has been hot lately- the Cavaliers have now breached a hundred six times in the last nine outings- and once again things clicked on that end, as Cleveland shot 46.4 percent, went to the free throw line 34 times and dished out 28 assists to just six turnovers. Six Cavaliers scored double figures, led by J.J. Hickson's 20 points and 11 rebounds. Alonzo Gee shot 6-of-8 and finished with 16; Ramon Sessions had 17 with nine assists; Gibson hit four three-pointers on the way to 17 points, and Christian Eyenga skied and soared to 13 points in 22 energetic minutes.

Ryan Hollins contributed 12 points of his own on a perfect 5-of-5 from the field, but his best action came away from the basketball. With 5:47 left and the Cavaliers cruising with an eleven-point lead, Hollins threw a hard pick at Charlie Villanueva and got tangled up with the mercurial, bald-headed Pistons forward. Both players were ejected after the ensuing fracas , but Villanueva wasn't done. He made a run at the Cleveland bench- dragging Rodney Stuckey and at least two assistant coaches in his wake- and exited the floor in the direction of the Cavaliers locker room, spoiling for a fight. Order was soon restored, however, and we were mercifully spared from seeing a sad, pathetic parody of Malice in the Palace, featuring two of the fakest bad guys in the Association.

Aside from the Laimbeer-like styling of Villanova and the Zeke-like play of Stuckey (29 points, 14 assists and perhaps a sentence of eternal hellfire and damnation for Yours Truly for mentioning Rodney Stuckey and Isiah in the same sentence) the 29-52 Pistons were just the faintest incarnation of the teams that once terrorized the league. Detroit's slide into NBA irrelevance has been swift, relentless and total. And the cavalry doesn't look to be coming over the hill anytime soon, although Greg Monroe (10 points, 10 rebounds) is a player.

Race for the Ping-Pong Balls: Minnesota moved into the catbird seat, probably to stay, with its fourteenth consecutive loss, an overtime heartbreaker in Phoenix. The Wolves are now 17-64, a game behind the Cavaliers in the overall standings. Cleveland's once-comfortable deficit has melted under an onslaught of Minnesota defeats.

Next: Wednesday night at 8:00, when this season comes to a close at the Q against the Washington Wizards.