Exactly like this season, the Cavs were 5-6 after 11 games last year. It wasn't long after their decent .454 start that the wheels fell off and the team began to play historically bad. Social media and sports talk radio have Cavs fans debating on what is best for the team. There are those who feel that the Cavs need to get another high lottery pick and others who believe that the Cavs making the playoffs is what is best. Even though the Cavs are playing much better, it is probably too premature to be printing first round playoff tickets. In other words, it's probably a moot point. What can and should be discussed are real, tangible improvements that the team is making.

One item that the Cavs have drastically improved upon this year is their three point defense. Last year, they gave up an incredible 41.1% shooting against the three point shot. Currently, the Cavs are 12th best in the league. Their opponents are shooting 32.8% from beyond the arc. Usually it does not make sense to boast being a little better than mediocre in a defensive category, but when you go from the absolute worst to respectable, it is something worth praising. Also worth noting is that the Bulls had the best three point defense last year and they gave up 32.6%. Of course this can be chalked up to the poor shooting across the board which may be a result of the lockout. Of the 10 teams the Cavs have played, they range between 30th in three point field goal percentage (Los Angeles Lakers) to 4th (Indiana Pacers). In other words, the improved defense should be not attributed to playing opponents who cannot shoot.

Team rebounding is another area that the Cavs have shown improvement. It is not as drastic as the three point defense, but there is a noticeable improvement nonetheless. Last year, the Cavs averaged 40.3 rebounds per game. In contrast, they are averaging 40.8 during this season. This is not a major difference, but they have jumped from 22nd in the league to 13th.

Total rebounds per game does not tell the whole story. So far this season they are out-rebounding their opponents by 2.1 rebounds per game and their opponents were grabbing 3.2 more rebounds a game last year.

Anderson Varejao has been a major reason for the improved defense and three point defense. His presence was sorely missed for most of the 2010-2011 season. His ability to hedge should not go unnoticed. The other major impact he is having on defense is his ability to guard the pick-and-roll when there is a defensive switch. His ability to defend guards and smaller players is one that every team wishes they had access to. Anderson Varejao is rebounding better than he ever has. Not only is he pulling down the 3rd most rebounds per game in the entire NBA, advanced stats support that it is not a flash in the pan. Per 48 minutes, Varejao is averaging 17.3 RPG which is good enough to be 5th best in the league. The only better players than him are Dwight Howard, DeMarcus Cousins, Enes Kanter and Kevin Love. One must be skeptical of Enes Kanter making this list because of his low minutes per game. The best metric to quantify rebounding is the rebound rate, which is the percentage of missed shots that a player rebounds. It does not come as a surprise that Varejao is 7th best in the league and has a rebound rate of 20.8%. Dwight Howard leads the league with 23.6%.

There are a lot of statistics at our disposal that indicate that the Cavs are a better team this year. Adding two promising rookies and Anderson Varejao to any team will improve it. One of the more telling ways to sense improvement is that the Cavs have already won 5 games by double digits. Last year, they won a single game by more than 10 points. The Cavs are outscoring their opponents by 0.5 points, which is a major improvement from having their opponents win by 9.0 points per game last year. It is still baffling to me that on average, the Cavs were blown out.

These improvements can be a result of there being a small sample size. Only time will tell. Regardless, the Cavs appear to be trending upwards and they have improved across the board. The Cavs have two good rookies, Anderson Varejao is with the team again, Byron Scott's system has been in place for more than a year and the LeBron James hangover seems to have subsided. The Cavs may go .500 this year or they can get another top 5 pick. No matter what happens, we can at least take comfort in knowing that progress is taking place. Regardless of what one may think is best for the team's long-term future, the last thing Cavs fans should want is a situation like the Washington Wizards where the present and future seems bleak.

And last but not least, didthecavswinlastnight.com has officially taken a back seat to didthewizardswinlastnight.com
. It's great to not be the gold standard for futility anymore.

*All statistics from espn.com