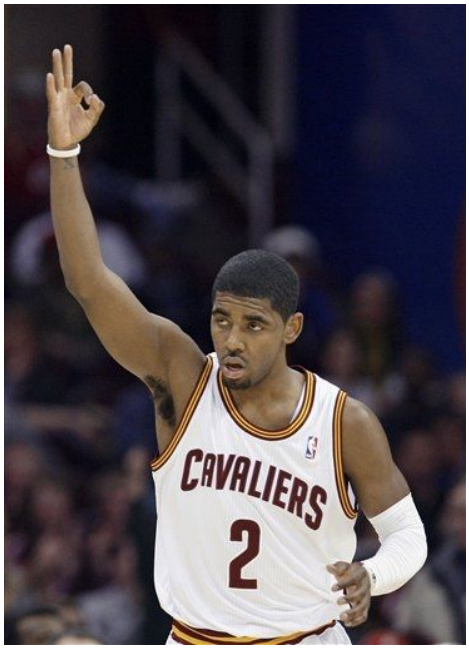
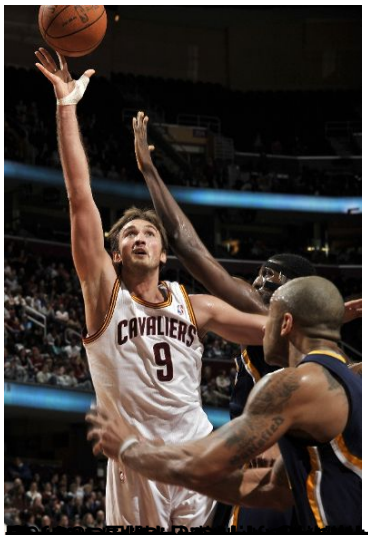


The return of Kyrie Irving was nice, but the absence of Danny Granger was even nicer, as the Cavaliers opportunistically roundhouse-kicked a wobbly-kneed Pacer squad at the Q, 98-87. Indiana (17-12) has now suddenly dropped five straight, while the Cavs (11-16) stopped a two-game skid with their third win over a playoff-bound club this month. Unlike the Mavs and Clippers, though, the Pacers were without their top scorer— a man (Granger) who has traditionally celebrated games against Cleveland like they were extra wishes granted by an overzealous genie (20 PPG against the wine and gold in his career).

In the early going, Kyrie—fresh off a weeklong cobweb-clearing sabbatical—made it swiftly known that his head booboo was all better, scoring 12 points in the first quarter alone on 5-of-6 shooting. But as Cleveland raced out to a 32-20 lead, it wasn't Irving raising the most eyebrows. Nor was it even the miraculous sight of Omri Casspi drilling three straight long-range jumpers. Nope, we're gonna just go ahead and say this night belonged to the big Turk out of… Turkey; your new starting center, Semih Erden!

With Anderson Varejao's broken wrist ruining his chance at an All-Star snubbery showdown with newly elected Eastern Conference reserve Roy Hibbert, the latter was instead ironically outshined by a man who didn't even make his own mother's ballot. Erden, in just his second start since Varejao's injury, showed he was actually capable of running Andy's pick-and-roll a little bit, leading to a bunch of easy, uncontested looks under the basket. He scored seven points in the first quarter—two bunnies and an and-1—and remained relevant all night, tallying 32 minutes, grabbing 8 boards, and shooting 7-of-8 for a career-high 18 points.



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