Hey there, Cleveland. I know you're about to skip right over this story in order to placate your masochistic fascination with the Browns' latest FAIL. I get it. But if you're so interested in what an elite draft pick like RG3 *would have done* for Cleveland, might as well at least enjoy what Kyrie Irving *is doing* right now.

In a game on the road… against the top team in the Western Conference… a team with a 14-game home winning streak… the Cleveland Cavaliers (15-23) inexplicably pulled out a tight, tooth-and-nail victory, 96-90, over the Oklahoma City Thunder (31-9). Yeah. I don't get it, either.

In the midst of watching your seventh consecutive hour of college hoops tournaments and/or cursing Mike Holmgren's name in a string of expletive-filled bellows towards the light of the full moon, you may have entirely missed out on the young Cavaliers' signature win of the 2011-2012 season. Thus, upon seeing the final score, you likely would have made the following, immediate assumption:

"Oh man, Kyrie must have gone OFF!"

Well, Irving was certainly the difference down the stretch for the upteenth time, but overall, he actually only shot 4-of-12 in the game for a fairly pedestrian 9 points.

“Ok then,” you respond, jumping to the next logical conclusion. “So I guess Jamison must have scored 40 or something stupid.”

Nope. Actually, Antawn was mostly a brick factory all night, too, hitting on just 9-of-25 shots (1-6 from three). He still wound up with another solid line—21 points, 8 boards, 3 assists—but nothin’ crazy.

“Hmmm.” Now you’re clearly confused. “We beat the Thunder… with Kyrie and Jamison shooting 13-for-37?”

Yes. In fact, the Cavs shot just 42% from the field as a team, while OKC hit on 49% of their shots for the night.

“Huh.” You take a longer pause now to try and work out this riddle. “Oh, I got it! Which one of them was hurt?”

Which one of whom?

“Durant or Westbrook? One of them clearly didn’t suit up. Maybe neither of them.”

Nope, sorry. Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook both played about 35 minutes each, and they played well, too. Durant: 9-of-18, 23 pts, 8 rbs, 8 asts. Westbrook: 8-of-17, 19 pts, 4 asts.

“Really? …Gee whiz.”

Now you’re getting warmer. Alonzo Gee had a very solid night as the Cavs’ starting small forward, chipping in with 12 points, 8 boards, and some pretty solid D on Mr. Durant.

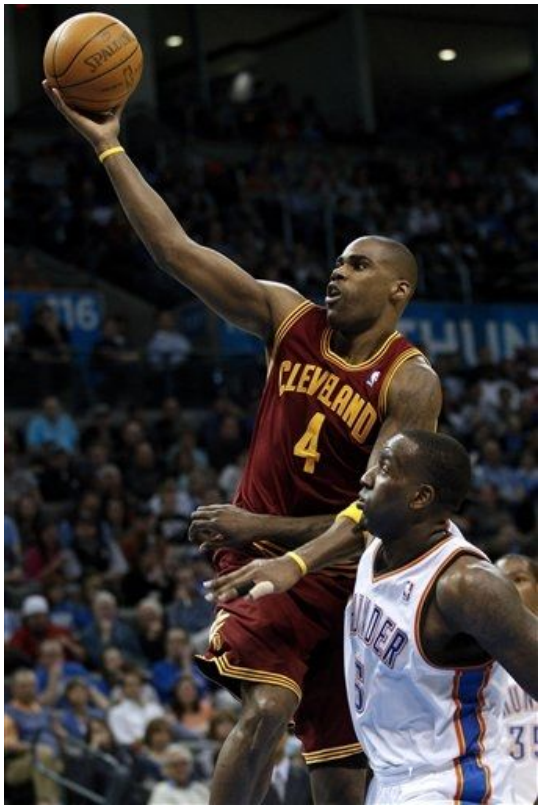
“Oh, I see," you say. "It was a night where a couple of the lesser guys stepped up. Hey, you know who was due? I’m gonna go out on a limb here. Did Omri Casspi finally score 15 or more for the first time this season?”

Hahahahahaha, F%#k no! Just because we beat the Thunder doesn’t mean we’ve entered some sort of fantastical bizzaroland where cats and dogs are living together. Omri was 1-for-6 with 3 points and 4 rebounds.

“Okay then, I give up. And I really want to read about how pissed I feel about RG3, so just give me the quick wrap-up.”

Fair enough. Basically, the first 36 minutes was a back-and-forth, bucket-for-bucket battle, and it carried on that way into the fourth quarter. As has been the pattern for some time now, Jamison handled a good chunk of the offensive load in the early going-- scoring 11 first half points to help keep Cleveland on the doorstep, trailing 51-49—while Irving was more of a facilitator (7 of his 12 assists came in the first half).

Halfway through the fourth quarter, though, neither team had led by more than 5 points in the entire game, and it became clear that Irving Time—and a potentially mind-blowing road upset--were quickly approaching.



Even though Cleveland had hung tight in large part by forcing turnovers (17 total, including 6 by Durant alone) and out-battling the Thunder on the glass (51-40 for the game), coach Byron Scott elected to go with a very small, theoretically paint-deficient lineup in the final minutes, just as he had in the win at Denver earlier this week. With Irving, Boobie Gibson, Parker, and Gee joined by Jamison essentially playing the center position, Cleveland found a spark in the last two minutes. And not surprisingly, Kyrie was at the center of it.

Trailing 85-84, Irving went into whirling dervish mode and connected on back-to-back drives to the hoop, giving the Cavs an 88-85 edge. Then, after Durant missed his third straight jumper of the quarter, Irving found a cutting Jamison for another lay-up, stretching the Cleveland lead to 5 at 90-85. A clump of foul shots extended that to a game-high 94-85 advantage before Durant put down a couple meaningless dunks in the final seconds to make it a 96-90 final, as the OKC faithful looked on in disbelief. The inevitable Thunder comeback just never came.

Other game balls tonight go to Parker (14 points on 6-of-8 shooting) and Ryan Hollins, who scored 11 points and grabbed 6 boards (4 offensive) in just 20 minutes. Tristan Thompson only added 5 points, but had a couple blocks and 8 rebounds. He was the #4 overall pick in last year's draft, of course, which is apparently what the Cleveland Browns are content with this year.