Unseasonably warm weather, St. Patty's hangovers, and March Madness in full swing… sounds like a great time for a Sunday matinee of Cavaliers basketball! What's that? You had no idea they were playing the Hawks today at the Q? Oh, well don't sweat it. Literally any other activity would have been preferable to watching this game, including two hours spent perched over the edge of a toilet bowl in a state of pure self-loathing and regret.

Playing shorthanded and undersized, Atlanta (26-19) took a 7-4 lead three minutes into the first quarter and never relinquished it en route to a 103-87 win—their sixth straight over the Cavs (16-26). Now, the optimists among us might choose to emphasize Kyrie Irving's first ever professional double-double (19 points, 10 assists), Alonzo Gee's career-high-matching 20 points, or Cleveland's bold third quarter comeback, which saw a 19-point Hawk lead trimmed to just six. But since there are no optimists left in this town, we can just move on to the business at hand.

If you've been keeping up with the news in CavalierLand, you know that this was the team's first game since trading away backup point guard Ramon Sessions and professional pine-rider Christian Eyenga to the Lakers for a first round draft pick and a couple of gnarly surfer dudes. Tragically, one of those dudes— the perennially one-dimensional triple-launcher Jason Kapono—was waived by the Cavs before he could even make his grand return to Cleveland. For the newly acquired Luke Walton, however, it was time to get back to doing what he does best—racking up "Coach's Decision" DNPs and shaking off the contact high from his last chat with his papa.

Centers Ryan Hollins and Semih Erden were also DNPs for Byron Scott, who has seemingly reached the end of his rope with his bumbling, butter-fingered 7-footers. In their stead, rookie Tristan Thompson was given his first career start, giving the Cavaliers a small but athletic starting unit to match up with a Hawks line-up missing forward Vladimir Radmanovic, guard Willie Green, and for all but the last 3 minutes, center Jason Collins (who had missed the past 21 games with an injury).

Unfortunately, Atlanta actually seems to have struck gold with their makeshift crew over the past six games, as the new starting backcourt of Jeff Teague and Kirk Hinrich has opened things up for Joe Johnson to excel out of the small forward spot, increasing his PPG from 18 to 25 over that two-week stretch. The pattern continued this afternoon, as Hinrich (14 pts) and Teague (18 pts) complemented a sterling effort from Johnson (28 pts, 5 assts, 4 rbs), while *Mike Tyson's Punchout*
character Zaza Pachulia (9 pts, 12 rbs) dominated Tristan Thompson (7 pts, 6 rbs) in the paint.

Cleveland was already down 31-19 after one quarter, and went into halftime down 59-45, despite three straight buckets by Gee to round out the period. Alonzo—who had 9 boards to go with his 20 points—looks more and more like somebody worth keeping around in the future as a solid bench player. He hustles, has a pretty nice mid-range jumper, and has the strength to battle with bigger guys inside.

Gee was also a key cog in the Cavs' third quarter rally, which revolved (as usual) around a lot of Kyrie driving to the hoop and making things happen—be it setting up bunnies for Gee and Jamison or finishing himself. Much has been made of Irving hitting the dreaded "rookie wall," but it's worth remembering that Scott has kept his minutes in check all season (he's at about 31 minutes per game), and while his field goal percentage has dropped a bit, his overall production has not. Admittedly, tonight's 10 assists were more about the absence of Sessions than anything else (newly acquired backup PG Donald Sloan played exactly one minute off the bench), but nothing about Irving looks particular slow or worn down at the moment. As Scott said, "the kid's only 19." The important thing will be finding someone to spell the kid now that Ramon is in LaLaLand.

Aaaaanyway, the Cavaliers' third quarter rally woke the crowd up a bit and made a game of it, but yet another soggy start to the fourth quarter cut short the drama in a hurry. Three straight Hawk buckets stretched the lead back out to 14 at 82-68, as Cleveland went scoreless until the 9:18 mark. By the time Atlanta's geriatric bench duo of Tracy McGrady and Jerry Stackhouse started sinking jumpers like it was 2001, the game was well out of reach.

Overall, a pretty standard 2012 Cavaliers game-- plenty of energy (they out-rebounded Atlanta 43-41), some bursts of Kyrie superstardom, and a whole bunch of bad shooting. It's hard to overcome the deficiencies of three-point shooting "specialists"—Boobie Gibson and Anthony Parker—that combine to shoot 1-for-7 from beyond the arch and 4-for-16 overall. Then you've got Antawn Jamison—perhaps surprised to see himself still in a Cavs uniform—connecting on just 6 of his 22 attempts (17 pts, 7 rbs). When you get outshot by 12 percentage points as a team (51% to 39%), as the Cavs did, you aren't going to win very often.

Wrapping up, the jury is out on Byron Scott's experiment of handing the center role to the undersized and underage Tristan Thompson. With Anderson Varejao nearing a return (possibly) in the weeks ahead, it could be a moot point, anyway. But the bigger question going forward may be how Scott plans to replace the valuable minutes and production Sessions brought to the table. Will it be Sloan? Manny Harris hit a pair of shots in just 60 seconds of court time. Will he get a realistic look? Is Luke Walton going to threaten Omri Casspi's place as the team's most useless sack of garbage? So many exciting mysteries left to unfold as the Cavs march their way beyond the fringes of the 8th seed and closer to the welcoming embrace of the lottery.