After inexplicably giving Indiana all they could handle through the clubs' first three-and-a-half meetings this season, the Cleveland Cavaliers finally crumbled under the weight of their own inferiority in the third quarter of tonight's showdown at the Something-or-Other Corporate Sponsorship Fieldhouse. The final damage: Indy 102, Cle 83.

Coming into this one, the Cavs (19-38) had one win over the Pacers (37-22) and two narrow overtime losses, including just two nights ago—a 104-98 setback at the Q-- in the first tilt of this home-and-home series. And despite the continued absences of Kyrie Irving and Anderson Varejao, it looked like yet another improbably competitive contest was unfolding tonight, as the better-than-terrible shooting of Antawn Jamison and the incomparable overnight icon Lester Hudson had the visiting Wine & Gold up 43-41 at the half.

During the break, however, the Pacers were apparently reminded that a win tonight would clinch them a playoff spot in the East—an achievement, not unlike getting accepted to Youngstown State, that says relatively little about your potential. Still, if you have a gander at the standings, you'll find that Indiana is actually sitting comfortably in the #3 spot in the conference, just 4.5 games behind the all-mighty Heat. Sure, no one at ESPN or TNT has mentioned the Indiana Pacers as a real contender at any point all year (because the mere thought is snooze inducing), but there they are anyway.

And here they were tonight, taking advantage of the Cavs' seemingly nightly third-quarter meltdown by jumping out with a 12-2 run to start the second half. Longtime Cleveland nemesis

Danny Granger led the charge with 9 of his game-high 18 points in the quarter; matched by 9 more from Tyler Hansbrough, who scored 16 for the game off the Pacer bench. All told, Indy rolled to a 34-13 third period, turning a 2-point Cavalier lead into a 19 point deficit heading into the fourth.

Spoiler Alert: there would be nothing resembling a comeback rally tonight. BUT, with two three-pointers in fourth-quarter junk time, the much-maligned Omri Casspi did something he's never done before—he led the Cavs in scoring! Granted, Omri only managed 14 points on 5-of-12 shooting, but with the team hitting just a collective 35% from the field, that was enough to set the bar. Jamison and Donald Sloan chipped in 12 a piece, and Samardo Samuels had himself a 10 and 10 double-double off the pine, playing substantially more minutes than starter Tristan Thompson (3 pts, TWO rebounds).

Meanwhile, the legendary Roy Hobbs of basketball—Lester Hudson—had himself a sure-to-be-temporary setback, winding up just 2-for-6 for the night (7 points) and coughing up 5 turnovers. Even the great ones have their off nights, people.

For the now officially playoff-bound Pacers, George Hill added a solid 15 points and 7 assists, and center Roy Hibbert racked up a 12 and 10 double-double of his own with a couple blocks to boot.

Mercifully, only nine games remain in the 2012 campaign. And presuming the Cavs show enough wisdom to keep Irving and Varejao glued to their La-Z-Boys the rest of the way, a great ping-pong ball fate may await. Until then, all of Cleveland will continue watching every Cavalier game with unbridled excitement and reading every Cavalier recap with extra close attention to deetale.