

Playoff woes abound for reigning Eastern Conference champion Cavaliers



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The NBA Playoffs have been quite entertaining thus far for both hardcore and casual fans alike, with only one series ending in a four-game sweep. The victor of this matchup was the city's very own New Orleans Pelicans.

It seems as if almost every team has something spurring its excitement. There is one organization, however, that has been drastically underperforming: the Cleveland Cav-

aliers. Aside from the amusing antics of Lance Stephenson in his never-ending quest to get under LeBron James' skin and J.R. Smith's crazy buzzer-beating shot from beyond half court in game four, the Cavs-Pacers series has been hard to watch.

The Cavs' fall from grace was immediately evident after their 98-80 game one loss, which snapped LeBron's record of 21 consecutive first-round wins. Following three incredibly close matches, the series is now tied 2-2.

James appears to be the only Cavalier who received notice that the playoffs have started; the three-time champion is averaging an insane 32.5 points, 11.8 rebounds, and 8 assists per game. The team's next-highest scorer is Kevin Love with a measly 12 points per game, and 32-year-old J.R. Smith is the only other player in double digits. The Cavs are last among all playoff teams in offensive rating and 15th in assist-to-turnover ratio.

The Cavs came into the playoffs as Vegas favorites to win the Eastern Conference, a feat which LeBron James' teams have accomplished the past seven years in a row. The Cavs dropping to fourth seed was not of much concern, considering it had ended first in the conference only once since James' return. In addition, it would be facing the Indiana Pacers, a team that typically receives little media attention.

Despite these lofty expectations, the Cavs' failures seem somewhat unsurprising considering its rather poor coach-

ing and weak roster. After a series of unexpected and seemingly arbitrary midseason trades, the Cavs wound up with a team that was more different to its former one than it was alike. The team lost superstar point guard Kyrie Irving after he requested a trade back in July, and after a brief and unsuccessful stint with the Celtics' Isaiah Thomas, it had little starpower to fill the resulting void.

The mediocrity of the Cavs' roster has provoked comparisons to the notoriously under-equipped team LeBron dragged to the 2007 Finals in his first stretch with the franchise, which was swept 4-0 by the Spurs. Still, claims about just how bad that early squad was seem to be at least slightly exaggerated.

The Cavs' abysmal performance in these playoffs has also brought into question one of the boldest narratives surrounding the superhuman talent of LeBron James: can he take any team to the Finals? Furthermore, it has shifted the discussion from whether or not he will leave Cleveland in his free agency this summer to precisely to what team he will bring his talents.

Even so, NBA franchise cities may want to hold out on making any more billboards to seduce James for now. If there is anything recent history tells us about the Cavaliers, it is that the team thrives as the underdogs.



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