



Cavaliers 102,



Lakers 87

Cavaliers shine in rout of Kobe, Lakers

TOP PERFORMERS	
CLEVELAND	LOS ANGELES
 <u>M. Williams</u> Points: 28 Reb: 6 Ast: 7 Stl: 1 Blk: 0	 <u>K. Bryant</u> Points: 35 Reb: 9 Ast: 8 Stl: 2 Blk: 0

LOS ANGELES -- The yellow foam hands came flying in from every corner of the lower bowl, sailing onto the court in dozens of frisbee-style arches late in the Cleveland Cavaliers' dominant victory.

LeBron James was more worried than amused by this unusual display of frustration from the Los Angeles Lakers' fans -- and he got a bit more concerned when at least one water bottle followed the foam.

Despite that bit of surreality in response to the officiating of a physical game, the Cavaliers were hands-down better than the defending NBA champions in a 102-87 victory on Friday night.

Mo Williams scored 28 points and James added 26, while Shaquille O'Neal had five dunks among his 11 points in his latest Los Angeles return. The Cavaliers dominated the Lakers with sharp shooting and physical defense, prompting several technical fouls and retaliation hits -- and that was before the crowd lost its holiday spirit by returning their pregame presents.

With Williams leading the way in his third straight impressive road game, the Cavs forced Bryant and the Lakers into their least impressive performance in six weeks.

The loss dropped the Lakers (23-5) back into a tie with Boston atop the overall NBA standings.

If this was an NBA Finals preview of the matchup that many expected to materialize last summer before Orlando crashed the party, the Lakers should be wary. Cleveland's big men -- O'Neal, Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Anderson Varejao -- allowed them to neutralize 7-foot starters Andrew Bynum, who managed just four points, and Pau Gasol, who had 11.

Meanwhile, the Cavs are tough to guard when James' teammates hit their outside shots with Williams' accuracy. James wasn't omnipresent, but played well enough to force Ron Artest to foul out with 5:01 to play.

The Cavaliers made certain nobody will forget about them in the Eastern Conference race, where Boston and Orlando have dominated the discussion leading up to the Celtics' win over the Magic earlier Friday.

"It wasn't about sending a message to them," James said. "It was about sending a message to ourselves and seeing how we match up with the best team in the NBA at this point. It was a good road win for us. I think it ranks up there, just because of the caliber of the team and the caliber of the players they have."

Cleveland, which never trailed in the final 41 minutes, streaked to a 20-point lead in the second quarter during a run that included little help from James, sitting out while Williams sparked the Cavs. James had just two points and four assists in the quarter, which he ended with a half-court shot just after the buzzer.

Los Angeles got within six points in the third before Cleveland roared away again.

Game notes

Cleveland had beaten the Lakers five straight times before losing both matchups last season. ... Fans included Sylvester Stallone, Anna Kournikova, Danny DeVito, Snoop Dogg, Maroon 5 singer Adam Levine and game show host Alex Trebek.