

Written by Kathy
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CLEVELAND, Ohio-

Led by head coach J.B. Bickerstaff, the Cleveland Cavaliers ended their regular season with a bang on Sunday evening by defeating the Milwaukee Bucks 133-115 before a sellout crowd at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in downtown Cleveland, a much needed win that strengthened Cleveland's spot

as the Eastern Conference's No. 8 seed heading into the play-in tournament that could lead to a playoffs spot.

Sunday's win closes out the regular season for the Cavs with a 44-38 win-loss record, a comeback win from Friday night's embarrassing loss to the Brooklyn Nets that saw the Cavs lose the chance at hosting the first play-in game. And it was, by all accounts, an indication of what success could lie ahead as Cleveland gets ready for a play-in game without Jarrett Allen, the team's All-Star center who was sidelined indefinitely after breaking his left middle finger in the win over the Toronto Raptors in early March.

Kevin Love made eight three- pointers and scored 32 points and Rookie Evan Mobley added 18 points for the Cavs. Milwaukee

rookie Sandro Mamukelashvili had a season-high 28 points coupled with 13 rebounds.

The Bucks erased a 40-point deficit to 12 in the fourth quarter against Cleveland's reserves with the Cavs ultimately winning by 18 points, a win that was all but assured after All-star point guard Darius Garland, who led the Cavs with 31 points in their loss on Friday against the Nets, and Laue Markanen returned to the floor.

"They just played the game with purpose," said coach Bickerstaff after Sunday's game, adding that "we believe we can beat anybody in this league."

So what exactly is a play-in-tournament in comparison to the NBA playoffs? There are 30 teams in the NBA and the top seeds are guaranteed a playoffs spot. The play-in tournament is a series of winner-take-all games featuring the seven-10 seeds in each conference, the Eastern and Western Conference, and they compete for a spot in the playoffs. It begins Tuesday with seventh-seeded Brooklyn Nets hosting the eighth-seeded Cavs, with the winner claiming the No. 7 spot in the Eastern Conference playoffs.

If Cleveland wins on Tuesday over Brooklyn, it has secured a playoff spot, and if they lose, the Cavaliers will get another bite at the apple and will play an elimination game with the winner of Wednesday's game between Atlanta and Charlotte, the No 9 and No 10 seeds respectively. The process is the same, but with different teams, for the play-in tournament for the NBA's Western Conference teams.

Tuesday's upcoming game against Brooklyn has some fans uneasy since former Cavs player Kyrie Irving and the great Kevin Durant led the Nets to their last victory over Cleveland last Friday, just two days before Cleveland played its last regular season game against Milwaukee. All eyes are on Tuesday night's game.

A comeback kid who has re-energized NBA basketball in Cleveland and has taken his team from a total of just 60 wins in all of the last three regular seasons combined to 44 regular season game wins in 2021-2022, Bickerstaff, one of 13 Black head coaches in the NBA, has been Cleveland's lead coach since March of 2020. He was once the head coach for the Memphis Grizzlies and was Cleveland's assistant and associate coach when he replaced then head coach John Beilein, who resigned in February of 2020. Cleveland was at risk for dropping from the eighth spot to the tenth spot in the Eastern Conference had Sunday's game against Milwaukee been a loser game, injury after injury shattering what was a fifth place standing in the Eastern Conference earlier in the season, and then a seventh place spot after the lost on March 27 to Bucks. But a source said that "eighth place is good enough to get Cleveland in a position to compete for a playoffs spot."

It will be the first time Cleveland fans can look forward to Cleveland likely playing in a playoffs tournament since 2018 when the Cavaliers lost the Finals and LeBron James, then a member of Cleveland's team, packed up and headed to Los Angeles as a free agent, and via a multi million dollar contract. Cleveland has been in the playoffs a total of 22 times in 51 seasons

LeBron James has a history with Clevelanders and Ohioans that dates back to his youth.

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Now an NBA megastar, and a billionaire, James, 37, played basketball for [St. Vincent–St. Mary High School](#) in his hometown on Akron, and was selected by Cleveland with the [first overall pick](#) of the [2003 NBA draft](#).

After failing to win a championship with Cleveland, he left in 2010 to sign as a [free agent](#) with Miami, a move he announced in an [ESPN](#) special titled [The Decision](#), and one of the most controversial free-agent decisions in sports history.

He won his first two NBA championships while playing for the Heat in [2012](#) and [2013](#); in both of these years, he also earned league MVP and Finals MVP. After his fourth season with the Heat in 2014, James opted out of his contract to re-sign with the Cavaliers. In [2016](#), he led the Cavaliers to victory over the [Golden State Warriors](#) in the [NBA Finals](#) by [coming back](#) from a 3–1 deficit, delivering the franchise's first championship and ending [Cleveland's 52-year professional sports title drought](#).

In 2018, James exercised his contract option to leave the Cavaliers and signed with the Lakers, whom he led to win the [2020 championship](#). He is 17-1 against the Cavs, who lost to the Lakers on March 27, 131-120 following James' 38-point triple double. It was James' only visit to his native state of Ohio this season, other than the All-Star Game in February.