

# Kyle Lowry rises above to deliver Raptors win over Cavaliers

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By Israel Fehr

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TORONTO – Kyle Lowry handled the ball close to half court, looking up at the clock every so often as it raced toward zero and slowly edged his way closer to the 3-point line. When the clock hit seven seconds, Lowry jumped into action, looking to beat his defender to a spot where he could get at least a somewhat open look at the basket. Lowry took one powerful dribble, jabbed to create separation, stepped back, and with his foot on the 3-point line released.

It was going to take more than Matthew Dellavedova's outstretched arm to stop this shot from going in. Lowry's stone-cold jumper gave him a career-high 43 points on the night and more importantly, put the Raptors up on the Cleveland Cavaliers 99-97 with 3.8 seconds left.

The crowd roared in delight, but Lowry reacted like it was an everyday occurrence – even though he admitted after the game it was his first game-winning jump shot since his days at Villanova – only showing some emotion when greeted at the bench by his jubilant teammates.

"I had no doubt ... The way he had it going anything he shot would have gone in, or he would have got a great look at it," said DeMar DeRozan. "I feel I have the luxury to say that's my point guard and able to watch him do things like that and make it seem so effortless."

After two timeouts and a nearly botched in-bounds pass, LeBron James tried to respond with a miracle-make of his own, but his rushed three-point attempt resulted in an inauspicious air ball and sealed an unlikely come-from-behind Raptors win on Friday night at the Air Canada Centre.



Lowry's game-winner capped off an incredible fourth-quarter Raptors' rally that was made all the more impressive considering the circumstances the team was under.

DeRozan's 500th career game with the Raptors was one of his worst in recent memory, scoring six points and missing all but one of 11 of his field-goal attempts, the effects of flu-like symptoms taking its toll on his body. Cory Joseph was also not feeling his best.

Not to worry, Lowry was there to pick up the slack for his fellow All-Star and the rest of his team. and of course, came up big when he was needed the most.

"He knew that it was on his back," said head coach Dwane Casey. "He did an excellent job of leading the team and finishing the game out, especially with those guys feeling rough."

The Raptors starters' fell behind early again, a trend that's the only real blemish during this recent run of success, but Toronto went on a run when James sat at the start of the second quarter to get back in the game.

The third quarter was a return to power for the Cavaliers, stretching their lead to 14 at one point, but it wasn't large enough to keep Lowry away, as he scored 15 of his 43 points in the fourth quarter.

"Every timeout, I was telling them 'stay in it, stay in it, stay committed, stay focused, keep grinding,' " said Casey. "This was a grind-it-out game with all the stuff that was going on, the sickness and the foul trouble and all that stuff. Our guys stuck with it, it wasn't pretty. There are going to be nights like that and it's why this team is growing into that kind of team."

That's a team that can compete with the best, even when the conditions are suboptimal. The Cavaliers are rightfully viewed as the class of the Eastern Conference, with every other team in the East a clear step, or even a couple back. Cleveland's road back to the NBA Finals is still considered a foregone conclusion; professional basketball tends to be predictable that way. When James, Kyrie Irving, and Kevin Love are rolling, and the role players are hitting their open, outside shots, they're very tough to beat.

But with Lowry on top of the world, DeRozan better than ever, and an improved supporting cast, Toronto is making a case that it's not as much of a certainty as it was once was.

The last time the Raptors beat a LeBron James-led team more than once in a season was back in 2003-04, James' rookie season with the Cavaliers. With Friday's win they take the season series against Cleveland 2-1, and they'll be thrilled to have the opportunity to increase that number in the playoffs.

If Toronto does run into the Cavs again, they're banking on having a healthy DeMarre Carroll, who is still reportedly weeks away from a return after undergoing arthroscopic surgery on his right knee in January. It was with these matchups in mind that Carroll was brought in as a free agent in the offseason, to match up defensively with an opponent's best perimeter player. James tops that list, and he showed why on Friday, bullying James Johnson and Terrence Ross on his way to 25 points, eight rebounds, and seven assists.

If the Raptors' meeting with the Cavaliers was an Eastern Conference finals preview, Lowry proved he's raring for more. And the Raptors showed they're not going to go down without a fight.

They're likely two series wins from that rematch, assuming both teams maintain their position as the No. 1 and No. 2 seeds in the East. As it stands, Cleveland holds a two-game lead over Toronto for top spot. The Raptors had been steadfast in the leadup that the game against the Cavaliers was nothing more than another game on the schedule, and they continued to hammer that point away even after pulling off such a dramatic victory. Now that takes just as much resolve as Lowry had to nail his unforgettable shot.

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