

New reality: Raptors keep good times rolling with Game 4 win

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TORONTO – Even after losing the first two games of the Eastern Conference finals in embarrassing fashion, there was still a belief the Raptors could take at least one game against the Cleveland Cavaliers at home, if everything broke right.

The Raptors got that [taken care of in Game 3](#), beating Cleveland 99-84 on Saturday, the combination of their All-Star backcourt finding their offensive groove, role players [stepping up](#), and poor shooting by Kyrie Irving and Kevin Love leading to a relatively easy win.

That was supposed to be all they would get. LeBron James and the Cavaliers entered the series 8-0 in the playoffs and weren't expected to drop more than one against Toronto before finishing their methodical march to the finals.

Yet, here were the Raptors, up by 18 points as Game 4 neared halftime on Monday night, in what looked like a repeat of what took place on the same court 48 hours earlier.

Kyle Lowry and DeMar DeRozan picked up where they left off in Game 3. Bismack Biyombo, Cory Joseph, and Patrick Patterson were executing their roles to perfection. James and one teammate – this time Irving instead of J.R. Smith – were the only Cavaliers contributing anything offensively. Love was once again missing wide-open looks.

It couldn't keep going like this. No, it couldn't. And it wouldn't. Reality, or at least the perception of reality, appeared to start setting in. Cleveland came out strong after halftime, cutting the lead to nine entering the fourth quarter after Irving hit jump shots on both sides of Patterson free throws in the final minute of the third.



The fourth started and the Cavaliers couldn't miss. Cleveland took their first lead of the game 84-83 with 8:20 remaining, having scored on eight straight possessions dating back to the first of Irving's two end of third quarter jumpers.

What followed was a frenetic four-minute stretch that featured nine lead changes and saw the score tied three times, as both teams traded baskets. Cleveland scored on 14 straight possessions, going nine minutes without a miss, and the Raptors responded with their best punch.

Suddenly, the Cavaliers' shots stopped falling and Toronto ran away with it. The Raptors outscored Cleveland 9-2 over the final four minutes to take Game 4 105-99 and tie the series 2-2. Lowry scored 35 points and DeRozan had 32, combining for 21 of those points in the fourth.

"We were solid down the stretch, understanding that they scored, we had to come down and get a bucket. And we just executed. We made the right reads. Kyle did a great job trying to screen, and I got some easy looks, then he got going," said DeRozan.

"It's a cake walk for me once he gets going. It opens up everything for me on the floor. Teams try to focus in on him, and he knows when to get me going. He got the ball, he's our point guard, he's our leader of this team, and he knows

how to orchestrate what needs to be done out there."

Jonas Valanciunas, who was [active for Game 4 but did not play](#), has two more days to recover from the ankle injury that has sidelined him since midway through the second round. His presence, specifically his post game, would give Toronto another dimension that would make them even more dangerous.

"We're in it. Someone mentioned that we were in it just to win one game, and I disagreed with them. We're in it to compete for a championship. We're here, and again, that's why we went through the season is to try to go as far as we could," said Raptors head coach Dwane Casey.

"I still say that we're a young up-and-coming team that's got to stay hungry, got to stay humble, and continue to compete with poise, because again, nobody thought we was going to be here. Nobody gives us a snowball's chance in you know what to beat Cleveland, but we've just got to keep on churning, keep on working, keep on grinding to try to continue to win."

With these two wins, the Raptors smashed the perception that they couldn't hang with the Cavaliers to pieces.

The reality is that the Raptors are tied 2-2 with the Cavaliers in the Eastern Conference finals with the series shifting back to Cleveland for Game 5 on Wednesday. The reality is that there will be a Game 6 on Friday night in Toronto.

The reality is that the Cavaliers are still the favourites, but don't tell these Raptors that. The Eastern Conference finals are all even, and that's as real as it gets.

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