Team Scouted: Miami Heat

Opponent: Detroit Pistons

Location: American Airlines Arena – Miami, FL

Date: 12/3/13

STARTERS & MATCHUPS

PG Mario Chalmers Brandon Jennings

SG James Jones Kentavious Caldwell-Pope

SF Shane Battier (cross-match) Greg Monroe (guarded Lebron)

PF Lebron James (cross-match) Josh Smith (guarded Battier)

C Chris Bosh Andre Drummond

The Miami Heat brought their 10-0 winning streak into their game vs the Pistons. They were missing Dwyane Wade in this game and also were missing energy too. The Heat led at 2-0 and then never again. The game was double-digits for the next 3+ quarters. Miami got as close as 3 in the 4th, nothing more. But Detroit's 107-97 win was about more than just the Heat sleep-walking on a Tuesday night in December. Mo Cheeks and his big frontline wrote a mini-blueprint at how to take down the champs.

1. Shrink the floor. Spo likes to use this phrase a lot during an NBA season. Well, Detroit took a page right out of Miami's playbook. The Heat played a lot of their offense below the free-throw line in this game, which allowed Detroit to use their long frontline to disrupt passing lanes and kick-out angles. When the Heat were up high beyond the 3-pt line, the Pistons overloaded that side of the floor. Miami had 19 turnovers on the night (11 in 1st half) and three crucial ones in the final few minutes. The Pistons also didn't fear switching on Lebron pick-n-rolls. Drummond got iso'd numerous times and still kept James out of lane.

2. Keep Miami perimeter. The Heat were partly to blame for this (as was the injury to Wade) but there was a definite focused effort to keep Miami from driving the lane. When the Heat did get inside it was either a long button-hook drive from the top/wing or a sneaky play on the baseline. Very few frontal assaults on the Detroit basket.

3. Transition D. Miami got very few run-outs on this night. The majority of them came in that final Miami run in the first half of the 4th quarter. Once Detroit settled back in on offense, that was it. Monroe and Drummond were impressive all night in both getting back and also getting downcourt after Heat misses.

4. Attack Ray Allen. The Pistons have the perfect player to expose Ray Allen on defense - Rodney Stuckey. The Pistons' 6th man went at him as soon as he entered the game in the 1st quarter. He had 4 straight points, with Detroit already holding a 20-10 lead. In the 4th quarter, with the Heat coming alive, the Piston offense was pretty much Rodney with a live dribble at the top of the key against Allen. It forced Lebron to switch onto Stuckey, free-ing up a lot of other guys on the floor. Defensively, they also made Ray a driver. He was forced to create off dribble tonight...not a good look for him.

The Pistons showed that playing a big lineup against Miami doesn't automatically mean getting killed on fastbreak run-outs. They kept the Heat out of transition most of the night. Even when Detroit turned the ball over, they got back and set on defense. In today's NBA, Miami's space-n-stretch offense, combined with their blitzing defense, means championships...despite a lack of rebounding. The Pistons, meanwhile, play a lineup straight out of the 1990s-2000s...one that does rebound. They showed that 'old school ball' can beat the Heat.

*Scouting Note: Chris Bosh did not have one post-up in this game, even when Lebron was out of the game. This could have loosened up the Pistons defense inside and also given them a different look.*

SCOUTING REPORT

1st quarter

Heat Offense: Miami started the game looking very predictable. They took a page out of Indiana's playbook, with their "4 man" at the elbow and PG running off him. They ran this set 4 out of the first 5 possessions. Lebron on the left elbow, in a horns set as Chalmers used him as screener to drive toward the baseline. On the final one, Rio set a backscreen for Lebron to go into the post (no basket). They scored only one time with this set (a Chalmers J curling off LBJ to the top). This playcalling played right into the big Pistons front line and didn't see Miami swing the ball much. In fact, Miami didn't run this again until towards the end of the 3rd quarter (4:45 mark, following TO). On that play they got a three-pointer from Ray Allen on the weakside.

Heat Defense: Miami started the game with Lebron guarding Josh Smith, which left Battier to check bigman Greg Monroe (Udonis Haslem is out with injury). This forced the Heat to have to suck-in their weakside defenders. Detroit's guards were also very aggressive to start. Caldwell-Pope had the first 5 points and then Brandon Jennings followed him. Drummond did sit at 8:41 mark with 2 fouls (3rd foul at 4:10 in 2nd qtr), but Cheeks inserted Josh Harrelson and they didn't miss a beat.

What did Detroit do? Defensively, the Pistons didn't allow Miami to come off screens going to the middle. Their 'bigs' stepped all the way out and then rotated back. When screen-n-roll went towards the baseline, the Pistons let the ball-handler come off the screen and trusted in their helpside 'big'. With Detroit's frontline, this almost always meant a 6-10+ defender cutting off the driver going to the rim.

Offensively, the Pistons broke the Heat pressure for lay-ups. They didn't kick the ball out or get back into their sets. They looked to attack the rim time and time again. The athleticism and ambidexterity of Drummond was also on foul display. This showed that having a nimble center who can finish going to the rim is huge against Miami, who likes to step-in and draw charges on helpside D.

6:30 - Ray Allen subs-in (for James Jones) and Miami proceeds to run plays where he is their playmaker...either curling off screens or setting screens for Lebron and getting it back. Heat's offensive efficiency does not improve.

3:04 - Norris Cole and Chris Anderson enter the game and bring energy (20-13), but Pistons respond with Stuckey working Allen on the baseline.

2nd quarter

Drummond re-enters the game and immediately dominates the offensive glass. Miami quickly falls behind by 18 (36-18).

7:30 - Heat come out of timeout with fullcourt pressure, but Bosh is late getting back into frontcourt and Drummond dribbles all the way to the bucket to draw a foul.

5:15 - following timeout, Miami goes strictly to Lebron in isolation. No offensive sets here, as James just lowers his head and drives to the rim 3 plays in a row (no-call; and-one; 2 FTs). Josh Smith helped Miami in this stretch by taking a bad jumper and then turning it over in backcourt. Detroit later settles down and runs a 'horns' set of their own, regaining momentum (42-30).

Miami's energy did pick up midway through the 2nd qtr, but their execution did not. A couple of turnovers late really hurt Miami's effort. 54-43 halftime score.

1st half - Miami with 11 TOs and a lot of stagnant 3-ptrs (0-7 to start). Detroit, meanwhile, answered every Heat run and kept them out of transition.

3rd quarter

Heat come out looking for Chris Bosh, as he scores on 2 of the first 4 possessions. (missed jumper; draws foul; dunk diving down middle; made jumper). Battier is still guarding Monroe on defensive end.

11:09 - Drummond sits with 4th foul. Pistons go small with Singler (not Harrelson)...

7:21 - Singler hits back-to-back 3ptrs (66-50). Heat call TO to stop run.

Heat run nice play towards end of 3rd: Lebron at top goes right, around Allen screen. Ray continues across, off Anderson screen up top, to catch lob pass on opposite wing. Heat offense adjusting their offense and working up higher, but Pistons cover it well. They force Ray to drive baseline into help. Detroit made Ray a driver all night. 82-68 end of 3rd.

4th quarter

With Lebron sitting, Heat play their best defense all night. Cole and Anderson help cut the lead to 11 (85-74), though not the patented blitz we expect from Miami.

9:48 - Following timeout, with Lebron still sitting, Heat continue to turn up energy. Cole starts to get inside the lane and create kick-out opportunities.

8:00 - (91-82) Lebron re-enters, but not for Beasley. He replaces Rashard Lewis, giving Miami more offense on the floor. Beasley gets 2 FTs, then James gets dunk on fastbreak....91-88, Detroit timeout. Following TO, Heat go with small backcourt (Chalmers & Cole, just as they did briefly in 2nd qtr) alongside James, Beasley, & Bosh.

Both teams exchange misses back and forth until Jennings hits bail-out three to beat shot clock (94-88). Pistons continue their run by forcing a turnover and getting out on the break.....96-88. One crucial turnover was out of timeout (3:55 mark). Chalmers throws ball through Lebron's legs as he tries to post up on the right wing. Smith and Jennings get subsequent fastbreak buckets to extend lead...100-91.

Final score: 107-97.

*Note: Spo did not elect to 'hack' Drummond at any point in this game, not even trailing down the stretch.*