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BULLS SCORE SEASON-HIGH 144 POINTS

O BURY MAVERICKS, IMPROVE TO 11-14

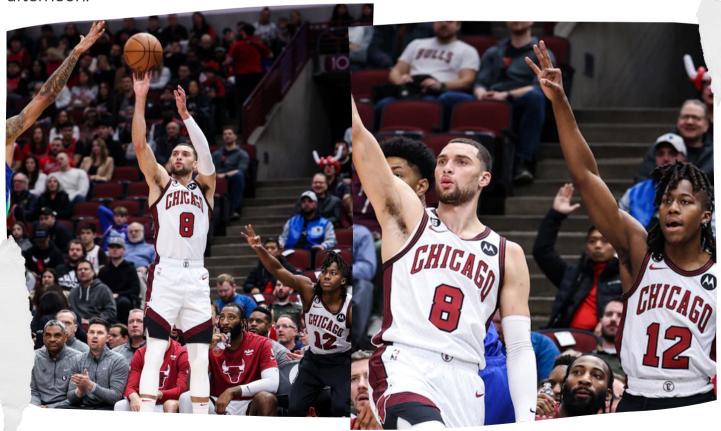
He's known as Luka magic, the Dallas Mavericks' leading scorer, rebounder, passer and Larry Bird imitator Luka Dončić, who is leading the NBA in scoring and is among the leading candidates for league MVP this season.

But he came up with the disappearing act Saturday, and the Bulls everyone had been hoping for magically appeared again in a whopping 144-115 easy victory, the Bulls with a franchise best-ever 82 first-half points and much of Dallas' game after some brief first quarter interest set to that ESPN Friday funnies clown car blooper music.

This is probably what it looks like when a team goes through one of those pregame walkthroughs without opposition. Maybe some of the Mavericks players were trying, and one-time Bull for both Chicago and Windy City Spencer Dinwiddie led the way for a while with 22 first-half points. But it was more like one of those cartoons where the guy yells charge and turns around and there's no one there.

"Clearly, they had a tough game against Milwaukee (Friday night one-point meltdown loss) and then a tough turnaround (arriving in Chicago about 4 a.m. Saturday) and playing as late as they did (second Friday night game on ESPN) and obviously having some integral players (Dončić, Josh Green and Max Kleiber) out," Bulls coach Donovan charitably said of the Mavericks. "For us, I thought offensively we tried to move the ball, generated good shots, found the open man, spaced the floor well... I think there's always things you can take from these games."

A win was the best thing, the Bulls moving to 11-14 and playing in Atlanta late Sunday afternoon.



BULLS SCORE SEASON-HIGH 144 POINTS

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That will be without Alex Caruso, who suffered what Donovan said was a tailbone injury after playing about six minutes Saturday. Caruso didn't travel to Atlanta. "Medical thought it best to keep him back to get some extra treatment; how long (he will be out) I don't know at this point," Donovan said.

Not that he was needed this time with the Mavericks bringing up a player from the G-league and reintroducing Kemba Walker to the NBA for the first time in about a year. The Mavericks didn't appear much into playing, but at least the Bulls did.

Zach LaVine continued to look as good as he has after his 41 points a week ago. Even with the back-to-back Sunday, he indicated he intended to play after sitting out the fourth quarter Saturday and mostly watching after halftime.

LaVine had 16 points, but what stood out was the grace and fluidity of his movements, which we hadn't seen much of coming off the summer knee surgery. He floated and rose to the basket with seeming ease as the Bulls made it look like a clinic, air mailing 19 of 34 threes, recording 33 assists, shooting 64 percent overall with 27 fastbreak points and seven players scoring in double figures led by DeMar DeRozan with 28 and Nikola Vučević with 20.

Patrick Williams made four of five spotup threes and Andre Drummond coming off a week of mostly game inactivity put on a dunking show with four, one backward over his head on a Goran Dragić lob and another few down the lane on the run.



ANDRE DRUMMOND FINISHES A REVERSE ALLEY-OOP IN THE FIRST-HALF VS. DALLAS.

I get the Mavs were in late and without by far their best player. But it was as if they'd never seen the Bulls play. Dragić and Drummond were running that two-man lob without much resistance while Mavs players were leaping all over the place for DeRozan's pump fakes. Hello, you haven't seen that? One time with DeRozan driving down the lane, JaVale McGee literally had his back turned to DeRozan, so teammate Christian Wood pushed McGee into DeRozan.

McGee used to be a favorite target for Shaquille O'Neal and the TNT Shaqtin-A-Fool segment, but McGee developed into a reliable backup big man. A game like Saturday could set him back. Maybe even now to DeAndre Jordan territory.

Mavs coach Jason Kidd seemed to warn everybody this was coming, and the NBA could lump it with two days of whining about the scheduling of drawing the late Friday game starting at 9 p.m. Dallas time to accommodate ESPN. And then flying to Chicago. It made it worse when the Mavericks missed a mystifying six straight free throws at the close Friday to lose by a point, and also heading for their fourth game in six days and third back to back set in two weeks.

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"We wish this was baseball at spring training so we could have a split squad and send half the squad up to Chicago," Kidd said Friday. "They've got to look at this because this isn't right. I understand TV comes first; they pay the bills. But we could have played [the Bucks] at 7 or 7:30. We've got a doubleheader. Somebody thought it was a great idea. So that's why we're playing it."

The Mavericks listed Dončić out with a quadricep strain. I generally don't question injuries since I feel good. And maybe Dončić is hurt. But it seems awfully suspicious with Kidd being so critical and perhaps making his point in what was to be Dončić's only appearance in Chicago this season.

Sure, the fans want to see the home team win. But they also deserve a chance to see the game's elite, and Dončić is part of that. It's what separated people like Michael Jordan from the rest, especially now. He believed in an obligation to NBA fans and the game, especially on the road and especially the one time he was in that arena that season. It's another reason why he wins the greatest debate. It's not only about achievements; it's also about commitment and attitude.

It's disappointing to hear the complaining coming from Hall of Famer Kidd, who in his career seemed to understand. Kidd played at least 80 games or a complete season 10 times. He wasn't Dončić, but he knew fans wanted to see him play. It often sadly doesn't seem that way anymore in some places in the NBA.

C'mon, they're not even carrying their own bags!

I am pleased that we don't see that among the Bulls. Heck, even I was wondering during DeRozan's mini-slump during the Western Conference trip if he needed some rest. DeRozan never cares to, and neither does LaVine, who has been fighting through not only his recovery but the team's apparent preference he not play both of back to backs. What a renaissance man. He actually likes to play basketball.

DEMAR
DEROZAN
LED THE
WAY WITH
28 POINTS
ON 9-OF-13
SHOOTING
AGAINST
DALLAS.



BULLS SCORE SEASON-HIGH 144 POINTS TO BURY MAVERICKS, IMPROVE TO 11-14

And the Bulls Saturday played it about as well as they could.

"We scored 144 points and it was spread around," Donovan pointed out. "The ball finds the open man. Zach and Vooch and DeMar are unselfish players, and it gets other guys involved. We're talking a lot about the ball movement, making the game easier for each other, finding the open man, taking what the defense gives you, recognizing how we're being guarded. Those kinds of things and putting pressure on the basket. "It's not that we've got to lead the league in three-point shots; just that there are opportunities for us to take more threes that are good shots," Donovan emphasized. "I'm not saying we want to launch them up, but there are opportunities for us to take more and I thought we did a good job recognizing and taking the ones we should take tonight."

The Bulls made it pretty clear from the start with a 24-6 lead about halfway through the first quarter. Dinwiddie tried to fight them off like one of those war heroes taking on waves of opponents coming over the hill. He had 15 first quarter points and helped the Mavs get within 40-30 after one quarter.

"I thought we got off to a really good start," said Donovan. "I thought we played really good on both ends. We didn't have to run a lot of half court offense because we got stops and steals and were able to get out in transition the first six minutes. I was a little disappointed we were up about 15 and started subbing and they cut it down to seven or eight. There was a lapse there, but we course corrected and got it back up there." Because then it was dunks and layups that made it look more like an AAU game or the first three quarters on an NBA All-Star game. Dinwiddie seemed to realize everyone else had checked out. He attempted two more field goals in the second quarter as the Bulls got ahead by 31 and 82-53 at halftime.

This one was so bad for the Mavs it probably smelled like a Mark Cuban t-shirt. Into the second half, Donovan on the bench was even knitting his fingers behind his head and rocking back in his seat. We all wish we could have seen some of that Luka magic—heck, the Mavs web site even calls itself that—but the Bulls with what they've been going through the last month at least deserved one against Claude Rains.



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