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Nets Edging Closer to Wrong Side of History

By **HOWARD BECK**

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — After 60 losses, there is not much dignity left for [the Nets](#) to lose. But Terrence Williams is trying to protect whatever shreds that remain.

With 13.9 seconds left in a 24-point defeat Tuesday night, Williams launched himself toward the Atlanta Hawks' Maurice Evans and smacked him to the floor. It prevented a dunk and some added humiliation, but not the loss.

The Hawks ran off with a 108-84 victory, and the Nets (7-60) continued hurtling toward infamy.

"A player and a team I think should only take so much," Williams explained afterward, with a sentiment that seemed overdue by several months.

Moments before Evans flew toward the basket, two other Hawks — Mario West and Jeff Teague — had soared in for showy dunks. Williams said he had seen enough.

"It's not really a dunk show," he said.

Williams conceded that the Nets had probably not fouled hard enough, often enough, this season. "Probably like three," he said.

That helps explain how the Nets ended up here, on the precipice of history. The Nets have 15 games left and need three victories to avoid tying the worst record by an [N.B.A.](#) team — 9-73 by the 1972-73 [Philadelphia 76ers](#).

The Nets are five losses away from the franchise record, 65, set by the 1989-90 team.

At this rate, they might need a major surge just to tie the second-worst mark in league history — 11-71 by the 1992-93 [Dallas Mavericks](#) and the 1997-98 [Denver Nuggets](#).

The schedule provides a little assistance. The Nets play nine of their final 15 games at home, for

whatever comfort the half-empty Izod Center might provide. (The team announced a crowd of 11,128 on Tuesday.) Nine of their remaining opponents have losing records.

Circumstances could make the stretch run difficult. Four of the Nets' last five opponents — Milwaukee, Chicago, Charlotte and Miami — could be fighting for playoff position in the final week. Then again, the Nets have already beaten the [Bulls](#) and the [Bobcats](#) (twice), so perhaps there is some hope.

They were handicapped from the start Tuesday night. Point guard Devin Harris missed the game because of an upper respiratory infection. Another starter, Yi Jianlian, was out because of a sprained left ankle.

Brook Lopez scored a team-high 21 points for the Nets. Josh Boone had a career-high 20 rebounds.

The Hawks were also missing a starter, the All-Star guard Joe Johnson, but they hardly seemed to miss him. Jamal Crawford, the former Knick, scored 25 points off the bench and buried the Nets with a wave of fadeaways and 3-pointers.

The Nets tied the score for the final time at 29-29 in the second quarter. Atlanta closed the half on a 26-10 run, with Crawford scoring 13 points — including a pull-up 3-pointer at the buzzer for a 16-point lead.

CAVALIERS 113, PISTONS 101 LeBron James had 29 points, 12 rebounds and 12 assists in his fourth triple-double of the season, lifting visiting Cleveland to a victory over Detroit. Cleveland has won 10 of its last 11 games, improving to an N.B.A.-best 53-15. **(AP)**

PACERS 99, BOBCATS 94 Danny Granger scored 26 points to help host Indiana beat Charlotte, denying the Bobcats what would have been a franchise-record seventh straight victory.

Troy Murphy had 16 points and 13 rebounds, and Mike Dunleavy added 15 points for Indiana. **(AP) SPURS 88, HEAT 76** Manu Ginobili scored 22 points, George Hill had 16 and San Antonio wasted most of a 25-point lead before winning in Miami. [Richard Jefferson](#) added 15 points and [Tim Duncan](#) had 12 points and 11 rebounds for the Spurs, who have won eight of their last nine. **(AP) GRIZZLIES 104, BULLS 97** O. J. Mayo scored 24 points, going 4 of 5 from 3-point range, and host Memphis sent Chicago to its eighth straight loss. Mike Conley had 19 points for Memphis, while Zach Randolph added 18 points and 12 rebounds. **(AP) NUGGETS 97, WIZARDS 87** J. R. Smith scored 13 of his 17 points in the fourth quarter, helping host Denver pull away from Washington. [Carmelo Anthony](#) led the Nuggets with 29 points and 12 rebounds. Nene added 16 points for Denver, which sent Washington to its ninth

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consecutive defeat. The game marked the return of Nuggets Coach [George Karl](#), who was on the bench after missing four games over the past week for cancer treatments. **(AP)**