

Phoenix Suns to change lineup again: Beasley out. Who's in?

Written by
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How is it that the [Suns](#) keep digging these holes, time after time? For the 16th time in only 20 games, the Suns found themselves in a double-digit deficit.

"It's always the same story," [Goran Dragic](#) said after the game.

How does this happen? How does a team good enough to fight back from 15-points down play poorly enough to put themselves in that situation almost every single time?

Head coach [Alvin Gentry](#) doesn't have the answer. "I don't know. If I had the answer it would never happen again."

Gentry's first answer was to change the starting lineup three weeks ago, by benching his veterans and most-professional personalities [Luis Scola](#) and [Jared Dudley](#) in favor of [Markieff Morris](#) and [Shannon Brown](#)

. That did not work. The Suns are still creating big holes with their starting unit.

When asked about the rough patches that keep happening whether he's playing with the other starters or not, Scola replied, "I don't know. It's been happening quite often. I can't say I'm surprised."

Scola has been saying this since game two of the season. Every post game, saying the Suns cannot be successful pulling back out of those deficits.

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"We are going to lose the majority of the games we put ourselves in that situation," he said last night, quite possibly by only moving his mouth while playing back a recording from a prior postgame interview.

And for the 12th time in those 16, they couldn't climb back out. Yet when you watch the team in those ruts, you don't see panic or anger or frustration. You see a team just waiting until the tide turns. Sometimes, the same unit eventually turns the tide. Sometimes, its only after massive substitutions.

Asked if the team, collectively, feels they can come back from any deficit, Scola responded, "I don't think nobody thinks that way, but we're definitely playing that way."

Despite benching Scola and Dudley, nothing has changed. The urgency is still missing from a starting unit that continues to allow big deficits. And the second unit is still the sparkplug that restarts a sputtering engine. So, those two were not the problem.

Are Markieff Morris and/or Shannon Brown the problem? Nope. These guys were part of that uber-effective second unit and have provided energy on the starting unit since being elevated. And neither is a go-to player that can make or break momentum.

Nay, that's up to the starting point guard (Goran Dragic), small forward ([Michael Beasley](#)) and center ([Marcin Gortat](#)).

Arguably, the three most talented players on the team are the very players that have participated in all 16 double-digit deficits in their first 20 games of playing together.

With Alvin Gentry promising yet another starting-lineup change (otherwise known as a "shell game"), let's take a closer look at the three candidates for benching.

Goran Dragic

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We all love Gogi's effort and his basketball skills. No one this team can get their own shot like Dragic can, and no one can create shots for others like he can. But that doesn't make him a #1 option. Goran has never run a team full-time from the starting gate, and he is going through a painful learning curve.

"We are still a work in progress," Gentry replied, when asked about Dragic's command of the team. "He's trying hard to do everything we ask him to do. He has good moments and he struggles some, but so does everybody else."

I don't believe it's a confidence thing with Goran anymore. The problem now seems to be experience, and learning how to make his own job easier by getting the other guys engaged. When asked about the team's struggles and overall lack of energy at certain times, Dragic clearly takes on the responsibility to put the team on his shoulders and carry them.

"They get the lead by 15 points," he said, regarding these games, "We battle back to the game but in the end we don't have enough strength to finish those games."

'Energy' came up several times in the short interview. You can tell that Goran is trying to facilitate first, rather than hog the ball. He runs the offense, makes nice passes and hopes the team will make their jumpers and layups. Deficits happen when those guys miss those shots, over and over and way too often. Clanking bunny after clanking bunny.

And you can tell when Goran decides it's time to take over. He fights for steals and fast-break layups. He puts his head down and drives to the basket, rather than passing the ball to an open man who's been missing all night. Throwing up dagger threes.

But he can't put out this much effort for too long a period of time.

"When you're down so many points and you're battling," he said. "Your energy is going away and you don't have enough to finish. We missed a lot of layups."

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He was referring to the team's energy after a big comeback, but he was also talking about himself. Earlier this season, he said he was close to vomiting right there on the court after one of his furious offense/defense firestorms.

"I felt great," he said about the start of the game. "But then when you're trying to come back the energy goes away really quick."

He said his legs were tired in those last few minutes, but that it was no excuse. It was his job to make that layup after creating the open shot for himself. He just missed it.

Do you bench Dragic or play him fewer minutes? No. He's got to learn, no matter how painful it is. And he's got to figure out how to control a game without becoming the whirling dervish.

Dragic is a starter from here on out.

That brings us down to two guys - and these happen to be the two guys with the worst plus/minus on the team and the two guys who have regressed the most from last season.

Marcin Gortat

I shake my head at this guy. He pays a lot of lip service but does not deliver. Coming into the season, he wanted to be a go-to guy on offense. His boasts quickly turned into complaints and sulking.

He wanted to add more offense to his game, but for some reason he left his defense and rebounding in Poland. When he mentioned frustration over being asked to always do the dirty work, I did not realize that meant he would sulk and refuse to said dirty work unless he got all the touches he wanted.

Gortat refused to speak to the media after the last two home games, not coincidentally games he was benched in favor of Jermaine O'Neal and Markieff Morris.

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Even last night, after O'Neal got hurt (eye poke), Gortat did not finish out the game. Instead, Gentry played Morris and Scola together. Morris had nine rebounds in the first quarter alone, and 17 for the game to go along with 15 points that included a crowd-raising three from the top of the key during their late rally to tie. Scola hustled to provide 13 points and 9 rebounds of his own.

"Those guys (Morris and Scola) were going good," Gentry said. "High energy. They did a better job, and that's why they played."

While Scola and Morris played well, Gortat once again did not. He made only 1 of 8 shots (nearly all of them at the rim) and pulled down six defensive rebounds (no offensive) in just under 26 minutes of playing time. Gortat hardly played during the comeback.

Dude, if you want to get more touches, then work your butt off like the rest of your teammates! And if you want to be traded, work your butt off to show the rest of the league you're worth acquiring!

Geez.

Will Gortat be benched on Saturday night against the [Clippers](#) ? Probably not. Jermaine O'Neal left the game after only 10 minutes when he was poked in the eye. Who knows how much time O'Neal will miss, and without O'Neal there's no other real option at C than Gortat.

Michael Beasley

This is the easy one, on paper. If you asked a random observer and a lifelong team fan who still remembers Connie Hawkins and Kyle Macy's career stats, both would say that Beasley is the most likely culprit that's sucking the life out of the starting unit.

After another failed game (9 points on 3-12 shooting to go with 0 rebounds in 21 minutes), Beasley knew it as well as the rest of us. He just isn't living up to anyone's expectations, including his own.

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"Of course I'm frustrated," he said last night (notably, ALWAYS willing to talk and be candid to the media despite his struggles).

The next words out of his mouth were heartbreaking to hear, but nothing compared to what Beasley must have been feeling when he said it.

"I visualize myself as...as something...I'm not, I guess," he said quietly. "Not to say I can't be, but as of right now I'm just not playing as well as I want to play, as well as the team needs. I'm frustrated."

I'll say again that Beasley has always been genuine and willing to be hard on himself. My guess is that he's too much in his own head right now. He can't trust his own instincts because they are generally wrong. He realizes that smart basketball players make better plays than he attempts to make. Yet, he doesn't know any other way so he's going through steps. Like a person learning new dance moves. It takes time to make them instinctive.

The writing is on the wall. In ink.

"More than likely," Gentry said when asked about Beasley moving to the bench. "Could possibly be. We just need more production out of that spot."

Final Prediction

Leave Dragic and Gortat alone because there's no better option on the team.

Leave Morris in the starting lineup, with Scola sharing minutes. "Markieff doing a good job," Gentry said, brushing off any notion of changes at PF. "I don't think Scola's minutes are affected very much coming off the bench. I think he's becoming very acceptant of the role that we're giving him and the minutes are there and he's going to play."

That leaves us with one change, and one change only: **Bench Beasley in favor of Jared**

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Dudley.

Dudley started at small forward last spring along with Shannon Brown and Marcin Gortat. He fit in well next to the athletic Brown as the guy who would roam the perimeter and drop dagger threes. It's good smart-guy pairing with the athletic, attacking Brown.

Dudley's shot has returned in a big way, just as many predicted it would. He's now shooting his career norms and would seem a good fit on the starting unit.

The remaining question is what to do with Beasley now?

Certainly, you start out by giving him normal backup minutes, especially with [P.J. Tucker](#) sidelined with a sprained MCL. The Suns won't want to completely write off Beasley at the moment. They will want to see how he responds to a bench role.

With Tucker likely out in the near term, maybe [Diante Garrett](#) gets some shooting guard minutes. Or maybe Dudley and Brown play more than their usual number of minutes.

Either way, I think the Suns are marginally better off with Dudley for Beasley.

But it's still just shifting the deck chairs.

Poll **What should the Suns do?**

- Bench Beasley
- Bench Gortat
- Bench Dragic
- Bench two of them
- Bench all three
- Doesn't matter. This is the Titanic after all.

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