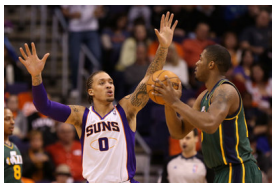

After witnessing a talented player completely fall apart in front of their eyes, the Phoenix Suns and head coach Alvin Gentry have decided to try something different.

For the near future at least, Michael Beasley is now primarily a backup power forward while Jared Dudley slides to the starting small forward spot in his place.

"We are trying to create an advantage for him," Gentry said. "He is a hybrid 3/4. Him being a 4-man sometimes gives us a bit of an advantage in what he can do."

"Where ever we can get him as a mismatch," Jared Dudley said about the move. "Defensively you have to scrap a little more against guys that are bigger than you. The 'four' is more on top, where he has more freedom to drive where the 'three' is more cluttered where you have to beat your man and the big. With a big guarding him, it's just you and him."

The Suns came into the season with two talented-enough power forward candidates in veteran Luis Scola and second-year player Markieff Morris and a dearth of starting talent on the wings. Once Scola was claimed off amnesty waivers, there was "no room at the inn" for Michael Beasley down low.

So the Suns proclaimed Beasley the starter at SF and Jared Dudley the starter at SG. There. All

the spots are filled in nicely. Smiley-face.

But despite showering love and patience on SuperCoolBeas, disaster struck. After years of being so-so on the court in terms of point differential when he's out there vs. when he's not (see below, it's TRUE), Beasley has suddenly become the **worst player in the NBA**. *By a wide margin.* The Suns are +6 per game when he sits, and MINUS 13.5 when he is on the floor. That's a net swing of almost 20 points. PER GAME.

Looks unbelievable right? When you consider that the Suns have dug double-digit deficits 19 of 24 games while recovering from nearly half of them and winning five with the second unit, the story becomes a little more believable.

So, Alvin had to do something. They invested too much money and effort in Beasley just to give up after 23 games.

Now he's going to sit Luis Scola and/or Markieff Morris in favor of Beasley at PF for a while to see if playing PF might work out. But he's also cutting Beasley's time, lessening his potential impact on any one game.

"Whatever the team needs, that's what I'm going to do," Michael Beasley said about the move, coupled with less playing time. "As far as what I think, honestly it doesn't matter. It's about what coach thinks. Whether it be the 3. Whether it be the 4. Coming off the bench. Whatever the team needs me to do, that's what I'll do."

"It's a work in progress," Goran Dragic said. "But I think it's going to be good. Beas can penetrate, he can make passes."

Then the Dragon touched on the biggest concern of Beasley playing the 4-spot. "But on defense everybody has to help each other."

In the last two games, Beasley was a +6 in 18 minutes against the Jazz (the rest of the team's minutes were +9), and a -3 against the Grizzlies in 10 minutes (the rest of the team's minutes were +5).

Less time. Better mismatches. Will it work?

The likelihood is a big huge YES. Frankly, it can't get worse. Beasley has never been this bad. In his prior four years, the worst you can say is that he was average to slightly below average, in terms of net team results.

The first four years

Pat Riley drafted Michael Beasley #2 overall after the Bulls had wavered on SuperCoolBeas before eventually settling on Derrick Rose
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Beasley was clearly a top-2 pick, with a big dropoff to the next tier. Director of Operations for the Memphis Grizzlies John Hollinger (then of ESPN) had Beasley rated as one of the best pro prospects ever. But Beasley already had some red flags and Riley tried hard to trade the pick before ultimately taking Beasley.

Despite being undersized at 6'8" (though many say he's 6'10"), Beasley has played most of his career at the Power Forward spot (see breakdown of years below). Head coaches Pat Riley and Rick Adelman saw that Beasley had a better chance to succeed against bigger, slower guys because Beasley lacked focus and lateral quickness to consistently stay with a wing player.

Kurt Rambis was the only head coach who saw otherwise. Rambis thought that since Beasley liked to shoot jumpers, then he should play a perimeter spot while bigger guys played closer to the basket. They had Al Jefferson and rookie Kevin Love down low. Nice theory, and Beasley actually was kind of effective there, but the team overall stunk and Beasley was clearly not the future.

Then he found a bleeding heart who saw the great potential inside Beasley and got an $18 million, 3-year contract ($15 million guaranteed) to make a fresh start in Phoenix. The first thing Blanks did was call Beasley a small forward, a position he'd only played for one year in the NBA.

When I asked Beasley in training camp if he preferred to be down low vs. on the perimeter, he said without hesitation that he'd rather be on the perimeter. In terms of physical matchups, Beasley profiles as a SF.

But this year so far has been a disaster.

According to 82games.com, Michael Beasley's net on/off points differential and overall effectiveness are:

2008-09:

Beasley played half his team's minutes that season, nearly every one of his seconds at the PF spot. He was offensively effective (PER 19.2) and defensively challenged (19.6 PER against). Scoring-wise, they were about even with him out there. He was perimeter-oriented despite playing PF, taking 70% of his shots outside 10 feet from the hoop.

2009-10:

Beasley again played half of the team's available PF minutes this season as the HEAT made the playoffs. With him on the court (alongside Wade and Jermaine O'Neal), the HEAT had a +2.6 in point differential and Beasley was more efficient than his opponent by a wide margin - an improvement over his rookie season.

But his team played even better with him on the bench (+5.9 points), resulting in a net-negative overall and a dump-off to Minnesota for a couple of future second-round picks to clear space for LeBron and Bosh. Beasley was involved in trade talks by Miami his entire two-year career.

2010-11:

A terrible Minnesota Timberwolves team that won only 17 games versus 65 losses was

actually marginally better with Beasley on the court than off of it (Net: +2.2). Head coach Kurt Rambis had the genius idea to make Beasley a swing forward. He alternated Beasley between PF and SF (mostly SF), something Beasley had never done before. Rookie Kevin Love had a lot to do with that. 80% of Beasley's shots that year were jumpers as he moved further and further from the basket.

Breaking down his time between PF and SF, Beasley was significantly better at PF where he played 24% of the team's available PF minutes that season (net point diff: -1.0) vs. when he played SF for 33% of the available SF minutes (net point diff: -7.7).

2011-12:

New coach Rick Adelman made two major decisions as it pertained to Michael Beasley. First, Beasley was better at PF. Second, Kevin Love was a LOT better than Beasley at PF.

So they moved Beasley into the background. He went from starter to reserve, this time playing only a third of his team's available minutes. He played mostly behind Love at PF, taking 27% of the team's PF minutes with the rest of his time at SF. He was actually worse this season as a PF than at SF, though he played most of his minutes at PF.

The team wasn't too bad with him out there, but they were better when he sat the bench by about 2 points per game. His contract was not picked up, and the former #2 pick became a free agent.