Jared Dudley got off to a slow start this season. He couldn't hit the broad side of a barn from deep or anywhere else on the court really, and he also wasn't having much of an impact in any other area of the game. Many were ready for him to be benched, and some wanted to be rid of him entirely.

However, after a brief nine-game stretch coming off the bench, Dudley is back in the starting five and is absolutely killing it. Dudley's return to form did begin when he was replaced by Shannon Brown in the starting line-up, as he shot .508 from the field and .538 from deep as a sub, but I think that had more to do with his shot finally falling than anything else. Once the shot started to fall, the rest of his game quickly followed.

However, even with Dudley's improved play from the bench, the Suns were still losing. In fact, they had lost five games in a row by the time Gentry finally decided starting Michael Beasley was not the right move for the team, and it was Dudley who got the call to replace him.

The losing streak continued with Dudley back in the starting five and ultimately reached seven games, but the first of those final two losses was against the Los Angeles Clippers (one of the best teams in the West) and Dudley only played 18 minutes, while the second was against the lowly Orlando Magic but without Suns' starting point guard Goran Dragic. Even in those two losses, Dudley was certainly not the problem.

The Suns broke the losing streak against the mighty Memphis Grizzlies, and for my money, Dudley was the player of the game in that one, even with Dragic scoring the game-winning layup. Dudley followed up that performance with back-to-back 20-point games, and the Suns are now riding a three-game win streak. In the last five games (since he rejoined the starting line-up), Dudley is shooting .555 from the field and .435 from deep. So it appears as if the hot shooting as a sub had more to do with him just rediscovering his stroke and reverting to his

career averages and less to do with him coming off the bench.

Here's a table of Dudley's stat-lines in the last five games.

Opponent	MIN	+/-	PTS	FG
LAC	18:17	+3	8	3-4
ORL	37:56	+5	15	6-1
MEM	43:18	+11	15	7-1
UTA	43:04	+26	22	9-1
SAC	36:51	+18	20	5-1

Dudley is the only Sun to record a positive in +/- in all five of those games, and led the team in +/- in three of them. Using +/- as a stand-alone stat isn't the best way to prove a point, but when you combine it with the rest of his stats and what you've seen from him on the court recently, it's pretty obvious that he is balling right now. Some might even say he's killing it.

As Dudley's minutes increased (and conversely, Michael Beasley's decreased), the Suns started to win. He has led the team in minutes played over the last four games, and with good reason. Atrocious wing play was one of if not the biggest problem for the Suns, and since Dudley has returned to the starting line-up and begun playing the majority of the wing minutes, that position has been stabilized and the Suns have played much better.

Not only has he been knocking down jumpers (and providing much more reliable floor spacing than Beasley did), but he's been stuffing the box score as well. He's hauling down five boards per game over the last five, and has racked up 18 assists to just seven turnovers. He's also recorded nine steals during that span.

He's impacting the game on and off the ball, making plays for himself and others and, most importantly, he's showcasing the hustle that earned him the JunkYard Dog moniker.

Some might suggest that it's been a return to playing at the small forward position that has

revitalized Dudley, and while I think there is some validity to that claim (specifically defensively), I don't believe that is the main reason. I just think it finally clicked for him. I maintained throughout his struggles that he would snap out of it at some point. This isn't the first time he has gotten off to a slow start. The truth was he was just too good of a player not to bounce back closer to his career averages. And that is exactly what has happened. Shots started to fall, and it has snowballed from there.

Even in the spite of this terrific play, some will never be convinced of Dudley's viability as a starter in the NBA. However, that doesn't change the fact that he is indeed a starting-caliber player. He'll never be a star or a team's leader in any category (except maybe 3-point percentage), but his efficiency, energy and overall effectiveness despite his limitations make him the perfect complementary starter on a talented team. Jared Dudley having to start is not the problem for the Phoenix Suns , nor is his status as a starter an indictment on the team's talent. Shannon Brown on the other hand...