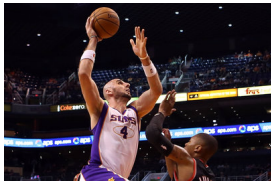


Game Preview: Suns take their winning streak on the road to Portland

Written by

Saturday, 22 December 2012 12:00 -



- Game Time: 7 p.m. PST, 8 p.m. MST, 9 p.m. CST, 10 p.m. EST
- Television: NBA TV

Last Meeting

The last time these two teams met, the [Suns](#) won easily 114-87. This was the first game after [Marcin Gortat](#) spoke out to the Polish media, and the first game with [Shannon Brown](#) and [Markieff Morris](#) in the starting line-up.

Gortat had one of his best games of the season with 22 points and seven rebounds, backing up his words and taking advantage of Portland's rookie center [Meyers Leonard](#) . Brown and Morris also played well in their new roles, combining for 29 points.

Overall, the Suns dominated down low with a 54-24 edge in points in the paint. Along with Gortat and Morris, the Suns also received a big game off the bench from reserve center Jermaine O'Neal, who finished with 17 points, five rebounds and two blocks. Together, Morris, Gortat and O'Neal shot 27-36 from the field.

Rookie of the Year favorite [Damian Lillard](#) had a big game for Portland with 24 points, but nobody else had a standout game for the Blazers and they got nothing off their bench.

Injury Update

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Portland's starting shooting guard [Wesley Matthews](#) returned from injury recently and should be good to go for the Blazers.

Last time these two teams faced off, Portland's starting forward [J.J. Hickson](#) sat out with a shoulder strain. He's healthy this time around, and is riding a six-game double-double streak culminating with a huge 18 points and 18 rebounds line against the [Denver Nuggets](#).

However, Hickson's frontcourt mate [LaMarcus Aldridge](#) is not at full strength. He sat out the Denver game with a sprained ankle, and his status is uncertain for tonight's game. The Suns shut down Aldridge in their last meeting, holding him to 12 points on 5-15 shooting. However, Aldridge is Portland's best big man and it is a huge blow if he is not able to play. The rookie Leonard would likely start in his place if Aldridge can't go, a prospect Gortat has to be salivating over.

Projected Starters

- PG: [Goran Dragic](#) - Damian Lillard
- SG: Shannon Brown - Wesley Matthews
- SF: [Jared Dudley](#) - [Nicolas Batum](#)
- PF: [Luis Scola](#) - J.J. Hickson
- C: Marcin Gortat - LaMarcus Aldridge/Meyers Leonard

Match-ups and Key Performers

Shannon Brown has been on fire for the Suns in the last two games. However, the Suns cannot continue to rely on big games from Brown. He had a two game stretch very similar to this last one, and after it he came crashing back to earth. Somebody else is going to have to step up.

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My hope is that Goran Dragic is the one that does that. Lillard has shown incredible poise for a rookie, but he's still a rookie and Dragic needs to take advantage of this match-up on both ends of the court. The Suns are at their best when the Dragon bares his fangs and is flying around the court making plays.

Jared Dudley is going to have his hands full with Nic Batum as well. Batum was sick in the last meeting, but the Suns won't be so lucky tonight. Dudley is going to have to chase him all over the court and keep him from pulling up for open jumpers off of screens and spot-ups.

The Suns should have the edge in reserves. The Blazers have zero depth beyond the starting five, and their bench includes the likes of [Sasha Pavlovic](#) and [Joel Freeland](#) . Somebody on the bench should have a field day, whether that's Markieff Morris, Bassy Telfair or even [Michael Beasley](#)

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