The injury-riddled Minnesota Timberwolves look to get their record above .500 against the struggling Phoenix Suns who have suffered their first major injury of the season.

The Phoenix Suns have lost 4 straight games, just after winning 4 straight which was just after losing 7 straight. Talk about an up-and-down team.

But the Suns are missing their best player, Goran Dragic, who leads the team in points, assists and steals while he recovers from a bruised bum after a hard fall against the Knicks and they are a paltry 2-12 on the road this season, including their last 6 in a row.

The Suns could sure use a steady hand against the Wolves , just in case the game is close at the end. Let's hope Dragic feels better.

Injuries

While the Phoenix Suns have had little to celebrate this season beyond good health, the Minnesota Timberwolves have to be wondering what it's like to field their best players all in the same game.

The Wolves have played 26 games so far, and only three players have taken the court in each: Luke Ridnour, Alexey Shved and Dante Cunningham. Only Ridnour is a regular starter.

The latest injury, just as Kevin Love and Ricky Rubio are rounding back to form, comes to their center position. Nikola Pekovic has battled an illness and is probable for tonight's game. Chase Budinger, Malcolm Lee and Brandon Roy (really? I am shocked!) are out indefinitely.

But the Wolves are pretty healthy at this time and should give the Suns a really hard time on their home court.

Offense...meh

The Wolves share the ball much the same way as the Suns, with only two guys averaging more than 15 points per game (Love and Pekovic). Both teams struggle to score. The Wolves rank only 23nd in offense (102.7 points per 100 possessions) while the Suns hover at 14th.

Surely, with Rubio and Love rounding into form, their offense will improve in time. But right now, it's hit and miss as they and their teammates figure each other out.

Defense first, for the Wolves anyway

Rick Adelman built an offense-oriented reputation after years with Sacramento and Houston, but this Wolves team hangs their hats on defense.

While the Suns languish at the bottom of the league on defense (26th overall), the Wolves are feasting. They rank 5th in the league, giving up just 101.6 points per 100 possessions.

Yet where the Suns are at their worst on defense (30th in 3-point % allowed), the Timberwolves are at their worst on offense (30th in 3-point % converted). This carries over to overall field goal percentage: Suns allow 29th-worst field goal percentage while the Wolves only rank 25th in field-goal conversions.

This game could be ugly, and low-scoring.

Explosions

The Suns are only 2-12 on the road, so don't get your hopes up against a good (and improving) Wolves team.

But the surest way to lose is to allow Kevin Love to go off on a 30-point, 20-rebound game as he is wont to do. Love is only shooting 35% this season while recovering from a broken hand, and had more turnovers than field goals in the 87-84 loss to Houston in their last game. But playing the Suns just might wake him up.

Andre Kirilenko has always been a Suns killer, it seems. Dating back to his Utah days, he was a pest on both ends of the court. Let's hope Michael Beasley can contain him. (sad chuckle)

Another Suns killer is Dante Cunningham, who quite possibly has made every single shot he's ever taken against the Suns as a Trailblazer and Rocket in previous seasons. The dude hits mid-range shots like nobody's business against the purple and gold.

Finally, I have this inclination that second-year player Derrick Williams will have a great game tonight. He's been in and out of their lineup, but will likely want to show up well against the only team from Arizona, where he starred in college.

Former Wolves growling back to prove themselves?

On the Suns side, is there a chance that Michael Beasley and Wesley Johnson will dominate this game to show their former employers up?

(chuckle, snigger, chuckle)

They probably won't get the chance, since the two players combine for about 12 minutes a game these days. In fact, if Johnson sees the floor you might as well turn off the TV since that would signal a blowout in the wrong direction.

There is a small, teeny-tiny chance that Beasley will decide to engage himself and make a few shots while giving up fewer points than he scores. If that happens, hold your breath and sit perfectly still lest you break the spell. And hope Alvin Gentry knows when to pull the plug before it's too late.

Nay, the former T-wolf most likely to make his former fans a tiny bit wistful is Sebastian Telfair . He is a much better player than the one who donned a Minny jersey because he stays within himself and plays to his own strengths these days: on-ball defense and off-the-dribble shooting. Alvin Gentry loves Bassy and trusts him implicitly. And if Dragic is still hurt, Telfair will get about 43 minutes of playing time to show off.

But you really have to temper expectations with Bassy. Even the Suns, who love what Bassy brings, would never classify him as a starting NBA point guard. He's a great backup, but gets exposed in big minutes.

Notes

- The Suns have won 10 of 11 against the Timberwolves, including the last 6 in Minnesota
- The Wolves have lost 6 games this season after leading in the 4th quarter
- The Suns have won 6 games this season after being down 10+ points in the second or third quarter
- The Suns are making only 25% of their 3-pointers in their 4-game losing streak
- The Suns are 0-6 on the second night of back-to-backs this season, losing on average by double-digits

Takeaways

If the Suns beat the T-wolves, then we can rest easy and bask in the glow of a great game.

If the T-wolves beat the Suns, then the Suns are one game closer to getting another first-round pick next spring.

No matter what happens, Suns fans win.

I finish off the preview with a breakdown of Wolves stats and a few links.

	FG	3PT	FT	Rebounds	M
G	M	M	A		Pct
Kevin Love	15	34.9	5.9	16.7	
Nikola Pekovic	24	32.0	6.2	12.5	
Andrei Kirilenko	22	35.1	4.8	9.6	
Chase Budinger	6	23.3	4.0	8.3	
Luke Ridnour	26	30.9	4.4	9.8	
J.J. Barea	21	23.4	4.0	9.4	
Alexey Shved	26	27.6	3.8	9.4	
Derrick Williams	22	17.5	2.8	6.8	
Dante Cunningham	26	22.5	3.4	6.9	
Brandon Roy	5	24.2	2.2	7.0	
Malcolm Lee	16	18.0	1.8	4.8	
Ricky Rubio	5	18.2	1.0	4.2	
Greg Stiemsma	23	11.0	1.0	2.7	
Lou Amundson	11	8.5	0.5	1.4	

Suns vs Timberwolves coverage

Canis Hoopus

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Phoenix Suns failing in late-game execution without Goran Dragic

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