

Should the Phoenix Suns tank the rest of the season?

Written by

Sunday, 30 December 2012 12:50 -



To follow this year's edition of the 11-20 [Phoenix Suns](#) is to enter a new realm of fandom that has not been tread by Suns fans in more than a decade.

While fans from a dozen other teams have been through big-time losing in recent seasons, many Suns fans are loathe to embrace the idea of a season whose brightest outcome might just be to lose the most games possible.

Fan suggestions to start [Luke Zeller](#) , Wes Johnson, [Diante Garrett](#) and [Michael Beasley](#) ahead of better players is to suggest we simply forfeit every game from here on out in an effort to qualify for the largest chance at the #1 pick in the draft.

As a 30-year Suns fan, that notion brings a wash of bile to my tastebuds. I can't stand the idea, and I don't believe it works.

But I do see the logic for those forward-thinking to next season and the season after, **as long as you don't consider the people involved in the current season** . Getting a high draft pick is a benefit from losing most of your 82 games. How high the draft pick is partly based on luck and partly on ineptitude. There are many bad teams in the league - to "out bad" all of them can be difficult and still "win" the top pick is a crap shoot.

Do you realize that, despite twin losing streaks of 7 and 5 games in the past 16, the Suns are still tied with or better than seven other teams? As bad as the losing has been, the Suns are still "only" in 8th position.

But there's another problem with tanking, in addition to the "fight for futility" and rolling the dice on the lottery.

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The biggest problem is that a "lose on purpose" mentality flies in the face of competition.

Players and coaches alike have no idea how to lose on purpose and keep their self-respect at the same time. Luke Zeller could not reconcile in his own head how he's playing more minutes than, say, [Marcin Gortat](#) other than to admit he's a pawn. A rube. A loser who's only playing because he will help the team lose. [Alvin Gentry](#) could not reconcile with himself by doing such a thing either.

Once you tank, you stank. And once that foul stank gets on you, it never goes away.

As fans, we can sit there and pine for losses because we have the ability to tune out the season, change the channel and come back next year.

The coaches, players (and media, for that matter) don't have that luxury. They must play and coach every second of every day until the end of the season. To do so with a mentality to lose on purpose would be to go against everything in their soul that made them the best players and coaches in the nation.

The only way to accomplish a successful tanking season while players and coaches can sleep at night is for the front office to orchestrate a shift to "development" mode and completely remove the pressure from the coach to win games.

But as long as the coach is surrounded by veterans, he is not going to be able to pass that along to his players with any success. Jermaine O'Neal. [Sebastian Telfair](#) . [Jared Dudley](#) .
Marcin Gortat.

[Luis Scola](#)

[Goran Dragic](#)

. None of those players is interested in losing games in order to improve draft position. None of them is going to play half-speed, or give up their minutes to a worse player. And Alvin Gentry will have no interest in trying to sell them on the concept. He wants to win games. It's in these guys' nature to win basketball games.

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Nay, to take away the need to win games would require a gutting of the roster. That's a huge commitment to lose without guarantee (or even heavy odds) of success. And what message does that send to the remaining players? What message does that send to players from other teams who will be free agents?

This tactic works for a young/fresh front office and coaching staff at the beginning of their contracts, with an owner who has accepted losing for the next few years while the team rebuilds.

Such is not the case for the Suns.

Managing Partner Robert Sarver wants to win games while also controlling the budget. He would have to experience an "awakening" to accept that you cannot win games with journeymen players on middling contracts. You need a superstar. And the best way to get a superstar is to draft in the top 3. They don't come through free agency or trades. They are drafted.

Can Robert Sarver accept that you have to get a lot worse in order to get a lot better?

Fans are proving they need a superstar in order to buy tickets. The Suns are facing an all-time low attendance.

The team is proving they need a star as well, with failure after failure in the final minutes of close games. An 11-20 record, combined with the prospect of being favored in only a handful of the next 35 games, may help Robert reach that understanding.

He would have to relieve Lon Babby of the pressure to win games to keep his job, or the Suns will muddle through this frustrating season winning just enough games to make the draft pick underwhelming.

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In turn, Babby would have to relieve Alvin Gentry of the pressure to win games to keep his job.

None of that is likely to happen with each in the last year of their contract.

And none of that happens if Robert Sarver wants to win as many games as possible this season.