

Goran Dragic: Key to the Suns' Success

Written by

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Goran Dragic was the [Suns](#) ' biggest free agent acquisition this year, and expectations were high for the former Sun who returned to the Valley. Further complicating matters was the fact that he was replacing a franchise legend and the man he backed up for the first two-and-a-half years of his career in [Steve Nash](#) .

Before returning to Phoenix, Dragic took over the starting point guard gig in Houston and exploded in the final two months of the season, almost dragging a depleted [Rockets](#) roster into the playoffs. Dragic put up 18 points and 8.4 assists per game on excellent shooting percentages, and Suns fans believed that was the guy they were going to get in Phoenix.

Through 31 games this year, that hasn't been the case. Well, partly anyway.

Dragic is averaging 14.5 points, 6.5 assists in 32.4 minutes per game while shooting 45 percent from the field, 34.4 percent from downtown and 70.5 percent from the charity stripe. Per 36 that is 16.1 points and 7.2 assists, which isn't too shabby. In fact, according to [NBA Geek](#) , not only is Dragic playing above average for a point guard, his numbers per 48 are almost identical to what he did in Houston last year, and are actually better in a couple statistical categories (turnovers especially).

The problem is, Dragic is coming off of a pretty poor month, particularly by the standards he's established for himself above. Take a look at his November and December splits below.

	November (16 Games)	December (13 Games)
Points Per Game	15.6	12.5
Assists Per Game	6.6	6.3
Rebounds Per Game	2.9	2.7
Steals Per Game	1.9	1.0
Field Goal Attempts	11.3	10.8
Field Goal Percentage	48.1	41.1
3-Point Field Goal Attempts	4.4	3.3
3-Point Field Goal Percentage	39.4	28.9

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Free Throw Attempts	3.9	3.8
Free Throw Percentage	74.6	66.0
Minutes Per Game	31.6	32.3

Dragic's numbers fell across the board despite him actually playing slightly more. He played sick for part of the month I believe and was maybe a little banged up, but that happens to everyone and as a starting point guard he has to be able to play through those games and still help his team win. He didn't do much of that last month. The Sun opened December having lost two games already, and expanded that losing streak to six by losing their first four games of the month. Dragic put it together and led the Suns on a four game winning streak, but then fell off again and the Suns closed 2012 on a six-game losing streak.

The Suns snapped that streak by beating the [76ers](#) in their first game of the new year, and Dragic was terrific with 20 points on 7-13 shooting, six assists with only one turnover and four rebounds. Let's hope that's a sign of things to come this month.

In fact, in his preview for that game against Philadelphia, Kris Habbas dropped a couple nuggets regarding Dragic and his impact on the Suns' success.

That has been part of the theme this season with opposing team's point guards. From a defensive standpoint the team upgraded (at least athletically) at the point guard position with [Goran Dragic](#), but he has struggled to control opposing point guards. On the season he is +2 in points, +9 in assists, +12 in steals, and -12 in turnovers. It has been a dead heat all season for Dragic, but the elite lead guards have been outplaying him consistently.

Ten games this year Dragic has outplayed his counterpart in terms of production and the team is 4-6 overall in those games. When he is not playing at a high level and winning the point guard battle the team has struggled. In games where he is simply playing to a draw the team is 5-5 and in games where he is being outplayed the team is 2-8 so far. Another barometer of the team and how they are playing this season. **When Dragic stirs the drink, it goes down smooth.**

The emphasis above is mine, and I couldn't agree with that point more.

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Delving a bit deeper, Dragic is a completely different player in Phoenix's wins than he is in losses.

	Wins (12)	Losses (19)	
Points Per Game	17.5	12.5	
Assists Per Game	7.4	5.9	
Rebounds Per Game	2.8	3.1	
Steals Per Game	1.5	1.6	
Field Goal Attempts	11.8	10.8	
Field Goal Percentage	50.4	41.3	
3-Point Field Goal Attempts	4.3	3.9	
3-Point Field Goal Percentage	43.1	28.4	
Free Throw Attempts	5.2	3.7	
Free Throw Percentage	74.2	67.1	
Minutes Per Game	33.6	31.6	

That's a pretty big disparity I'd say.

The first thing that jumps out to me is his numbers in the Suns' wins. They look pretty darn close to the numbers he put up as a starter in Houston. Winning stat-lines include 15 points and 10 assists against Detroit, 26-4 against Cleveland, 21-7 against Denver and 21-11 against Charlotte. That's the guy the Suns need. When he shows up, they win more often than not.

In the losses column, the thing that sticks out to me is his shooting percentages. He simply couldn't hit a shot, and it brought down his entire game. When he can't hit a shot, he disappears. Dragic has had five games this season scoring less than 10 points with all five coming in December and four of the five coming in a loss.

Dragic needs to bust out of his December slump (perhaps he already has; we'll see against Utah). I don't really care how he does it, but it has to happen. The Dragon needs to breathe fire again, and for that to happen shots need to fall. Whether it's a matter of getting extra shots up in practice, taking better shots in games or getting to the rack and free throw line more often (four free throws per game for someone with his ability to drive just isn't enough), I don't know.

However, he's not going to shoot well in every game. He needs to be able to shake his struggles off and still help his team win. If he allows his missed shots to completely take him out of the game like he has at times this year, he's never going to be any more than an average

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player and okay starter.

Goran Dragic isn't a superstar, or even an All-Star at this point. But he's the only star the Suns have, and if Phoenix hopes to win games he is going to have to elevate his game and play with more consistency. At least until the front office can get him some more help.