Times are tough! Like the economy, over the past couple of years, the Suns roster has been ravaged and their performance has caused many to run screaming in terror. As our politicians face many different options on the table to turn things around, so do our Suns. And like our politicians, we fans cannot seem to come together and agree to a solution to our problems.

In an effort to bridge the gap across the aisle, I will try, by process of elimination, to help think through our options so that we may be able to pare them down to the most likely strategy for future success.

Before we dive head first into the extremely shallow pool of free agents [most likely culminating with a severe head trauma and probably paralysis], I want to first present a few caveats, whatever those are.

When looking at the free agent ["FA"] crops, I only looked at unrestricted players. Restricted guys are tough to pry away from their teams unless it's one of those poison-pill deals (Lin, Asik) where the suitor can back-load a contract for a second-year player who doesn't have a guaranteed contract (ie. second rounder, or free agent). Those don't come often. At all. So let's focus only on unrestricted players.

Additionally, I don't plan on commenting on all of the FA players.

I will only highlight a few, and here is why: It is clear the Suns have a number of role players, and based on the range of thoughts we fans have on those role players, they number several and are from decent to very good role players. It is apparent that we have no #1 or #2 option on this team.

Our best player is Goran Dragic [although I would say Dudley is outplaying him right now] and

he really should be the third best player on a team. While I would love to see him become a #2 guy, realistically I have my doubts he will become that. Certainly I have no delusions that Goran will ever be a #1.

That said, the purpose of this exercise is to determine if free agency is a method that will yield players who can help turn this franchise around. I will look at the next three years of FA crop to see if it is possible to be a player in the FA market over multiple years in order to accomplish our goals - to find that #1 and/or #2 guy.

Granted, there are other methods you can use in combination with FA to accomplish this, but let's keep it simple and not complicate this thought process with too many variables. So, I will look only at FA that are #1 or #2 players [and are not at the ends of their careers], as anyone else only adds to the role players we already have, and more importantly those role players are replaceable parts that in the end only matter after you know who your main cogs are.

For example, Manu is nice, but not an answer. Neither is Kevin Martin , Al Jefferson , David West or Stephen Jackson . Sure, if we acquire a #1 and #2, and are able to get one of these guys I would do it, but let's focus on the task at hand.

2013 Unrestricted Free Agents

Chris Paul : I give it a 99.9999999% chance that he will die from a lightening strike before he signs in Phoenix. "So you are saying there is a chance!" Move along.

Dwight Howard : He is a weird guy, so it is possible he could decide to come here. I would give it a **5% chance**, just because Dwight is a little off. Nevertheless, I believe Howard to be a very good #2, and an average #1 option [I might even be overvaluing his contributions]. Of course, looking at the Suns currently, Howard looks like a #1 with a bullet, but in reality, he has proven he cannot carry a team. In fact, he may be proving that he cannot even contribute to a talent laden roster enough to get them in the playoffs. What will it cost? Max money.

Josh Smith : I think he will sign were the money is, so I will give it a 50% chance, not knowing what his market might be and whether Sarver is going to play in that market. I know a lot of you love Smith, but truth be told, Josh Smith is what he is. The days of believing that he has huge upside are over. He has proven himself to be a 16/8 guy that will defend well part of the time. I see him as a great #3, an okay #2 and a crappy #1 guy. What would you pay for that?

Andrew Bynum : The obligatory "if" statement - if healthy, Bynum is a #1 guy in my view. He has a post game and demands doubles. Is he a #1 on the level of James, Durant, or other past greats? Probably not. But in today's game, he is a top 10 player [not talent, but player] when he is healthy. But there is your problem. Bynum is following in Greg Oden's footsteps. I am not sure he will be playing in a year or ever again. But, we do have the trainers to get him right. The question is, do we want to max this guy out when we wouldn't max out Amare? I give it a 20% likelihood he ever gets healthy for a long stretch, and a 30% likelihood he would be willing to sign here, but a 1% chance of Sarver actually doing this.

Paul Millsap : One thing I don't like is when a player who has been given plenty of opportunity, actually has downward trending production. Despite Millsap killing us and looking good doing it, he has not improved while in the league and is probably as good as he will ever be. I think he is a #3 guy at best, but really more a #4. Plus, he will command some change. I am not convinced to spend more than $6-8M on a guy like him.

J.J. Hickson: Going after a FA that is having close to a career year in a contract year is scary. Doing so for a guy that is not producing much more than Gortat is even more daunting. Hickson is an undersized whatever he is, or an oversized whatever he isn't. Regardless, JJ hasn't shown steady improvement, doesn't possess any great skill set and is probably a solid #4. Yes, he is probably slightly better than Scola [mostly because of age] or any of our other PF, but so what. He gets us nowhere if we focus on him first.

A look at the 2014 Crop

The big boys here are [in no real order] Dirk, Kobe, Pierce, Granger, Iggy, Pau, and to a lesser extent, Deng, Ellis, Mayo, Bogut and I will include Gortat.

So here we go: old, old jerk, old, injured but possible #2-3 guy, #2-3 but interesting, old, then the lesser players are guys I don't think, for one reason or another, are in the #2 category.

How About 2015?

This crop has some gems [I said some]: Rondo, Melo, Aldridge, Amare, Marc Gasol , Chandler, Deandre Jordan, Gay, Parsons, Asik. However, being three years away, I am not sure how relevant they are to a plan that would be seeking a #1 or #2 guy for a turnaround now. Certainly if we drafted well, traded well, or got lucky and signed a guy like Bynum and he stayed healthy, this crop might yield a real gem as our #2 or #3 guy. Do we have that kind of patience? Also, most of these younger guys, if still viable #1 or #2 options, will re-sign with their current clubs by then.

Conclusion:

In looking at the crop of free agents, it is clear to me that hinging our success on finding a franchise or even a go-to player through these means is a long shot at best. The only guy that seems worth going after is Andrew Bynum, and by worth I mean not worth it. If he was healthy, it is a no-brainer. But how many of you believe that will happen? Exactly!

The rest of the crop are either players that are not going to significantly impact the team if they are all we acquire, or are guys that are too unlikely to sign here. Looking down the road, the picture doesn't get any better. While a Granger or Iggy might be a nice grab, it still really depends upon our ability to acquire a #1 option and how much Granger or Iggy command.

The bottom line here is that we are one step closer to figuring out the correct path to success, and it isn't going to be through free agency. While FA might play a role [via acquiring other role players or upgrading our current roster], it certainly is not going to be the main catalyst for transformation.

Next, we will look at solving our problems through trades...