

Los Angeles Lakers struggle, provide Phoenix Suns fans some relief in dismal season

Written by
Thursday, 10 January 2013 13:35 -



Last summer, the [Phoenix Suns](#) ' President of Basketball Operations Lon Babby originally had no intention to trade [Steve Nash](#) to a rival team like the [Lake](#)
[rs](#)

After some haggling and googly eyes from the Candian wunderkind, he and Managing Partner Robert Sarver eventually relented, in exchange for what appeared to be a bevy of low draft picks.

No lottery protection in 2013

Lost in the despair of such a depressing move was what turned out to be a stroke of genius: the Suns insisted on **NO LOTTERY PROTECTION** on the 2013 pick. (*confirmed once again today by Lon Babby directly to me*)

Back then, it didn't matter. The Lakers were going to win 70 games, so the pick would be of little value. It was a pipe dream to think that the Lakers would miss the playoffs THIS season, but there was certainly hope that the [2015 pick could be a good one with only top-5 protection](#) . Gasol, Nash and Bryant were getting older, after all.

But whether a pipe dream or not, credit the Suns FO for making the Lakers agree to remove lottery protection from the 2013 pick. They didn't have to ask for it, or require it. But they did.

Just like Sam Presti insisted on removing lottery protection from the 2008 and 2010 picks Steve Kerr handed Seattle/OKC in 2007 for taking on [Kurt Thomas](#) . Ultimately, OKC only got a couple of picks in the 20s from the Suns, but giving away those picks without protection proved to stunt the Suns growth in ways not entirely obvious at the time of the trade. The Suns couldn't "tank" or rebuild for years even if they wanted to because their draft picks were someone else's.

Now the shoe is on the other foot. And we're gellin' like Magellan.

Lakers struggling to win games

Los Angeles Lakers struggle, provide Phoenix Suns fans some relief in dismal season

Written by

Thursday, 10 January 2013 13:35 -

Lo and behold, the Lakers are struggling even now. They sit at 15-20 at the moment - 5 games under .500 with almost half the season in the books.

To make the playoffs in a typical year in the West, the 8th seed needs at least 46 wins in an 82-game season.

For the Lakers to get 46 wins, they would have to finish the year on a 31-16 run starting RIGHT NOW. The longer they wait to notch a run of wins, the harder it will be.

(As a side note, the Suns - who have played one more game than the Lake show - would have to go on a 34-11 run of their own to finish with my preseason prediction of 46 wins. LOL)

I can definitely see the Lakers getting better, but 31-16 means they have to get a LOT better. With [Dwight Howard](#) looking very stiff while still recovering from back issues (after his shoulder heals), [Pau Gasol](#) getting underutilized in lieu of [Metta World Peace](#) at the 4 for spacing purposes, and the season dragging on for oldsters Nash and Bryant, well... 31-16 would be quite the turnaround.

Add in a much tougher schedule for the Lakers in the second half than the first half and the effort seems even more daunting.

Low playoff chance

Basketball-reference.com gives the Lakers [only a 27.7% chance of making the playoffs today](#) .

The top 6 playoff seeds are fairly well set ([Clippers](#) , OKC, SA, Memphis, Golden State, Houston), the worst of whom (Houston) only has to go 25-21 the rest of the way to finish with 46 wins. Each has a 90+% chance of making the playoffs, per basketball-reference. However, Houston is on the road for 25 of those 46 games, and is only 7-9 on the road this season, so there's that.

Los Angeles Lakers struggle, provide Phoenix Suns fans some relief in dismal season

Written by

Thursday, 10 January 2013 13:35 -

Denver should make it easily too. Denver has an easy second-half schedule, with 27 of their last 45 at home (where they are 12-2 on the season), and only needing a 25-22 finish to get to 46 wins.

The Lakers' toughest competition to make the playoffs as an 8-seed comes from Utah and Portland.

Minnesota (without Love for 8 weeks), Sacramento, Dallas and New Orleans appear to be out of the picture.

(note: with Minnesota's trek daunting, note that the Suns would not get their pick this year if they miss the playoffs. The pick would roll over until Minny makes the playoffs, hopefully in 2014 when the draft is deeper.)

Portland is young and prone to wilt under pressure, like Houston did in prior years. Utah is a mishmash of vets and youth with no superstar to carry them.

Basketball-reference.com gives Utah a 50.1% chance to make the playoffs at this point, but only gives Portland a 15.9% chance.

But even if Portland goes just 24-24 (after their 19-15 start), the Lakers would have to go 29-18 or better to beat them to the 8th spot. Portland has 25 home games left (where they are 12-4) vs. 23 road games (where they are 7-11 so far).

Utah has more veterans and made the playoffs last season, so they appear to have the best chance for the 8th seed.

Even if Utah goes 19-18 to finish the year, the Lakers would have to go 28-19 to beat them out of the 8th spot.

Los Angeles Lakers struggle, provide Phoenix Suns fans some relief in dismal season

Written by

Thursday, 10 January 2013 13:35 -

The Lakers have to start winning. And fast. Right now, the Lakers are 11th in the West, which gives the Phoenix Suns their first round pick at #12 overall. Couple that with the Suns' own pick, currently at #5 overall, and the future looks brighter than it did last month.

So start rooting, gulp, for the **Portland Trailblazers and the [Utah Jazz](#) !!!**

(and, for Houston not to lay a second-half egg either)