I have written on this topic several times (as far back as here in August 2010 and here in July 2010, when the Suns let their last franchise draft pick leave). At the time, losing a ton of games to win the lottery was a far-fetched and unlikely notion.

Fast forward to spring of 2013. The Phoenix Suns are now looking at the cream of the crop in the draft while suffering through the cost of acquiring a top pick: lots and lots of losing.

This is unfamiliar territory. The Suns are used to winning, and have publicly stated they would rather be competitive year-in-year-out than attend the Draft Lottery proceedings. To wit, the Phoenix Suns have the fourth-highest winning percentage in NBA history and have the 10th-most wins in NBA history. The Suns have qualified for the playoffs in a whopping 29 of those 45 seasons.

But of all the top-10 teams in NBA history, the Suns stand out with their inability to finish the job. They have won their division just 6 times, made 2 NBA Finals and have no championships on their resume.

Franchise	Lg	From	To	Yrs	G	W ▾	L	W-L%	Plyfs	Div	Conf	Champ
Los Angeles Lakers	NBA/BAA	1949	2013	65	5077	3140	1937	.618	59	32	18	16
Boston Celtics	NBA/BAA	1947	2013	67	5187	3086	2101	.595	50	30	9	17
Philadelphia 76ers	NBA	1950	2013	64	5014	2661	2353	.531	47	11	5	3
New York Knicks	NBA/BAA	1947	2013	67	5183	2584	2599	.499	41	7	4	2
Detroit Pistons	NBA/BAA	1949	2013	65	5078	2496	2582	.492	40	11	5	3
Atlanta Hawks	NBA	1950	2013	64	5014	2481	2533	.495	41	10	0	1
Golden State Warriors	NBA/BAA	1947	2013	67	5181	2375	2806	.458	28	7	1	3
Sacramento Kings	NBA/BAA	1949	2013	65	5078	2359	2719	.465	29	5	0	1
San Antonio Spurs	NBA/ABA	1968	2013	46	3687	2170	1517	.589	40	18	4	4
Phoenix Suns	NBA	1969	2013	45	3599	2000	1599	.556	29	6	2	0
Chicago Bulls	NBA	1967	2013	47	3758	1950	1808	.519	31	9	6	6
Oklahoma City Thunder	NBA	1968	2013	46	3678	1948	1730	.530	25	8	4	1
Houston Rockets	NBA	1968	2013	46	3680	1877	1803	.510	26	4	4	2
Milwaukee Bucks	NBA	1969	2013	45	3595	1874	1721	.521	26	13	2	1
Indiana Pacers	NBA/ABA	1968	2013	46	3685	1868	1817	.507	29	7	1	3
Washington Wizards	NBA	1962	2013	52	4157	1850	2307	.445	25	7	4	1
Denver Nuggets	NBA/ABA	1968	2013	46	3686	1842	1844	.500	32	10	0	0

No Top-5 Selections Since 1978

The Phoenix Suns have never had the top overall selection in the NBA draft. They have drafted #2 overall twice in their history, taking Neal Walk (after losing a coin flip for Hall of Famer Lew

Alcindor/Kareem Abdul Jabbar) and Armen Gilliam (taken just after Hall of Famer David Robinson).

Other high selections : Corky Calhoun (4th, 1972), John Shumate (4th, 1974), Alvan Adams (4th, 1975), Walter Davis (5th, 1978).

That's it. *No top-5 picks since 1987.*

Shawn Marion was a #9 pick, as was Amare Stoudemire. There was Tim Perry at #7. William Bedford at #6.

Superstars matter, and they come through the draft

The last 22 seasons have seen the following players lead their teams to more than one championship: Michael Jordan (6 rings, #3 overall), Hakeem Olajuwon (2 rings, #1 overall), Shaquille O'Neal (4 rings, #1 overall), Tim Duncan (4 rings, #1 overall), Kobe Bryant (5 rings, #13 overall) and
Dwyane Wade
(2 rings, #5 overall).

Of those **only Shaq was acquired via free agency**. The rest were drafted and kept.

Note the Shaquille O'Neal won his 4 rings only by teaming up with Kobe (3) and Dwyane (1). He did not do it alone. Jordan had Scottie Pippen (#5 in his own draft). Duncan started with David Robinson (#1 in his own draft). Wade had Shaq and
LeBron James
(#1 in his own draft). Kobe had Shaq for 3 of his 5 rings.

These 6 guys account for 19 of the last 22 championships in the NBA.

Jordan, Olajuwon, Duncan and Wade were drafted by their team's own draft pick. Kobe was

acquired via a draft-day trade with Charlotte. Shaquille O'Neal was signed as a free agent from Orlando.

Outliers

One-time winning teams include the 2004 Detroit Pistons (no franchise star), the 2007 Boston Celtics
(3 stars, but no one franchise player) and the 2011
Dallas Mavericks
(franchise player
Dirk Nowitzki
).

That's it. Three. Three championships won without a multi-ring franchise player at the helm in the last 22 years (since 1991).

Pretty obvious that you need at least that one guy, and that one guy must be acquired via your draft pick.

Lottery picks via trade can help

OKC acquired the #11 overall pick in the 2010 draft because they were willing to absorb a $5 million contract into their available cap space from a team desperate to shed payroll (New Orleans). In the past, they also acquired 2 unprotected first-rounders from the Suns to absorb Thomas' 8 mill. Those *could* have been high picks, but lucky for the Suns they weren't.

Utah Jazz acquired the #9 overall pick in the 2011 draft in a trade from years prior (involving the Suns, no less).

In 2010, Washington traded their #5 overall pick to Minnesota for a couple of warm bodies in their ill-fated attempt to bring in veterans for a playoff push. Minny drafted Ricky Rubio , their future franchise point guard.

Three years ago, the Celtics traded their #5 overall pick to Seattle for Ray Allen and a bad contract or two.

Remember, Kobe was drafted #13 overall via a draft-day trade and the Suns acquired PG Kevin Johnson (#7 overall) from Cleveland for Larry Nance back in 1987. So these high picks *could* turn out to be franchise-changing players.

Teams need luck

Utah had that unprotected 2010 pick for years from New York. It could have been a low pick (which the Knicks were banking on), but there was a chance the Jazz could have won the lottery with it too. Though John Wall , the clear #1 in 2010, wouldn't necessarily have fit alongside Deron Williams , that would have allowed them to move on from Williams even faster.

Lottery balls and coin flips have never gone the Suns way. The Suns, for their part, *almost* got Lew Alcindor in 1969. And they *almost* got David Robinson in 1987.

More recently, the Suns *almost* got a #6 draft pick (would have been used to take Joakim Noah) in the summer of 2007. They had Atlanta's top-3-protected pick. Unfortunately, Atlanta kept it by lucking into the #3 pick (taking Al Horford). The Suns had won 62 games that year and *almost* got the guy they needed in Joakim Noah that *could* have propelled them to a ring or two.

This year, it's possible that the Suns acquired 1 or even 2 lottery picks from the Los Angeles Lakers in the Nash trade. Those picks are potentially gold to a team needing lots of young talent.

Summation

If the Phoenix Suns want to win a championship some day, they need luck and high draft picks to do it.

The Suns are no longer on that playoff bubble of mediocrity. It's time to strike with young talent via the draft. Sure, there's no sure-fire franchise player in this upcoming draft, but the Suns need the best talent period. And any Top-5 pick is better than anyone on this current roster, and a LOT cheaper than anyone acquired via trade or free agency.