Two trains heading in polar opposite directions rarely meet on an equal playing field no matter the circumstances. That may be the case as the Phoenix Suns (13-26) host the Oklahoma City Thunder
(29-8) in the teams second meeting this season.

History Lesson

This has been a match-up that has seen runs of dominance by one team for two different stretches. The Suns won four of the first five head-to-head match-ups and the Thunder have taken seven of the last eight. Most recently the Thunder dominated the Suns for four quarters in Oklahoma City 114-96 on the last day of 2012. Happy New Year!

Head-to-Head

Suns: 106.2 PPG (six wins)

Thunder: 108.8 PPG (nine wins)

Durant vs. Suns: 25.6 PPG 6.1 RPG 44.4 FG%

Westbrook vs. Suns: 20.5 PPG 7.9 APG 47.2 FG%

Traditionally the Thunder put up points on the Suns as evident by the match-up earlier this

season. As individuals Durant is average against the Suns (if that is even possible) as they are the 14th best defense he faces in terms of points, 8th best team on the boards against him, and force him to shot the 3rd worst against them. They can D-up Durant, but most of that data comes from the Grant Hill Era.

Westbrook on the other hand torches the Suns to a tune of scoring the 10th most points against the Suns, dishing out the 5th most assists, and shooting the 3rd best against them. Basically these games can become the Russell Westbrook Show in a hurry.

Storyline

Alluding back to the trains mentioned before. The Suns train is rolling with a head of steam towards the 2013 NBA Draft Lottery Show while the Thunder are eying a return trip to the NBA Finals. In the short five year history of the Thunder (not including the Sonics here on purpose) the team has two wins in the NBA Finals, only two less than the Suns over the span of 45 seasons.

This stretch of games might lead to Lon Babby and Lance Blanks reevaluating their roster and making some moves here soon.

Although the team has been losing a lot as of late -- two wins in thirteen games -- they haven't been embarrassed often. That may change tonight as the best team in the NBA comes to town and may be looking to make a statement on the road after a close call the other night.

With only two games over the next nine days the front office may be looking at this game as a tipping point. After all, they are already talking trades that have been made public.

The Thunder are a team that attacks with their two headed monster of Durant (28.6) and Westbrook (21.8) who keep defenses on guard all game. They are balanced with opportunistic scorers like Serge Ibaka (14.3), Kevin Martin (14.3), and

Nick Collison
(5.9).

Starting Line-Ups

PG - Goran Dragic v. Russell Westbrook

SG - Shannon Brown v. Thabo Sefolosha

SF - P.J. Tucker v. Kevin Durant

PF - Luis Scola v. Serge Ibaka

C - Marcin Gortat v. Kendrick Perkins

Potential Suns Inactives: Jared Dudley (Right Wrist)

Potential Thunder Inactives: Serge Ibaka (Chest) and Thabo Sefolosha (Neck)

Key Match-Up

Wesley Johnson vs. Kevin Martin

Yeah, not what you would think, right? Let me explain.

With the Suns devoid of Dudley the team will be leaning more on Johnson to give the team a scoring boost off of the bench. On the season Johnson has compiled 23 Did Not Play Coaches Decisions and as of late has played well since getting some playing time due to injuries and unattainable comeback deficits.

As for Martin the Thunder are a different team when he scores the ball. On the season with Martin scoring 18+ points the team is 10-1 and when he is held to single digits, 5-3, both above .500, but obviously they are most beatable when Martin is held in check.

Interesting Stat: 38.3%

Last season that is the total percentage of points Scola, Dragic, and Martin combined to score for the Houston Rockets . They were also the top three scorers for the team in that order. All three are in different roles, on different teams, heading in different directions. The NBA is a fickle fraternity.

Meaningless Stat: 24.4 PPG

Apparently even NBA superstars suffer from the weekend hangover including Durant who scorers a "Day Worst" 24.4 points per game on Mondays. Small sample size of five games, but on every other day that ends in Y the Durantula averages AT LEAST 25.8 points per game. So there is that.