

## Center of the Sun: Back to Basketball

Written by

Monday, 21 January 2013 14:29 -

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Yes, the professional basketball team here in Phoenix does play actual basketball, here and there. This week was a bit of an unconventional break with only two games in nine days giving the team time to make some major decisions. And they took that time.

### Game Recaps

vs. [Oklahoma City Thunder](#) - L (102-90)

vs. [Milwaukee Bucks](#) - L (98-94)

It was nearly a full 48 hours between [Phoenix Suns](#) head coaches during this small break, unheard of when you consider this is still the regular season where practices, meetings, scouting, and more happen regardless of the game schedule. Last week the team lost both of their games by a combined 16 points. Each game was decided in large part due to the other team having play-makers that were comfortable down the stretch.

That does not change with a new coach.

Instead this could easily be more of the same as the next 30 days the team faces nine teams with winning records, 10 games on the road, and 14 games total leaving very little room for error. New head coach [Lindsey Hunter](#) couldn't of asked for a tougher schedule to start out his tenure with the team, but he will certainly be challenged early on.

The defense is where Hunter would like to see improvement as a former waterbug defender that knows a thing or two about great defenses. Excluding the [New Orleans Hornets](#) , all 14 of the opponents are in the Top 15 in points per game and can light it up.

Since the team does not have an isolation scorer that can take over down the stretch like most teams shifting the focus of the defense to take those players out of rhythm makes the most sense.

In only five of the teams losses this season they were beaten by a "role player" that traditionally does not dominate a game on the offensive end of the floor. That means there were 23 teams (games) that were decided by the other team simply having a closer that was unstoppable.

That defensive mindset could mean leaning heavily on players like [P.J. Tucker](#) , [Sebastian Telfair](#) , and Jermaine O'Neal, but those are not developmental talents aside from Tucker. The team wants to be more aggressive on the defensive end as point guard

[Goran Dragic](#)

told me, "I hope he can bring more toughness to this team. More toughness especially

pressuring the ball." Look for more of that with this new regime.

### **Head Coach Lindsey Hunter on his teams identity**

Once we establish an identity then you will start to see things happen. Of course I want to be a "hard nose defensive minded" team, that is what I want and that is what we are going to work towards being. I know that is kind of different than any other culture that has been here in the past, but things change all the time and like I told the team when you change, it is hard. It is like a kid growing and his knees are hurting all the time. It's growing pains and hopefully we can go through that and grow; and see some results.

### **Key Stats**

19.63 Points Per Game

That is the average points scored against the Suns by an opposing teams leading scorer. Albeit that is not terrible, but what it shows is that consistently the team gives up nearly a fifth of their defensive points to one player. I am not sure how that ranks against other teams in the NBA, but teams know who to go to in order to score on the Suns, but can the they find a way to stop them?

### **The Highs**

At this point in the season the positive notes are going to come from the teams development and the "jolts" of energy that are going to come with change. Teams respond well to a coach being fired, this was a mutual separation, but regardless the players should react well. Heading to Sacramento next in a winnable game against a common opponent that is circling the drain at the bottom of the Western Conference standings can only be described as welcome opponent. Especially after this past week.

### **The Lows**

See: [Gentry, Alvin mutual departure](#)

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### Practice Report

Check that out [here](#) and this serves as another one with some new quotes and takes from practice on 01/21/2013.

Apparently it was a practice worth watching as Suns Owner Robert Sarver, President of Basketball Operations Lon Babby, and General Manager Lance Blanks were all in the building observing. Babby and Blanks are consistent regulars, but Sarver was in to see his new head man.

### Grades

A look at three different players on the Suns for the week forming a good, bad, and a surprise either way each week.

C- for [Michael Beasley](#) : Another up-and-down week with two games, one double-double (14 points 11 rebounds) and another forgettable 5 point 3 rebound effort.

C- for [Marcin Gortat](#) : See above, Gortat was great against the Thunder putting up a double-double, but the Bucks front court dominated the game and Gortat as he had one of his lesser statistical performances of the season.

D- for [Markieff Morris](#) : Against two quality front lines Morris didn't play as much as he has in the past, but in tight games former head coach [Alvin Gentry](#) was playing strategy to win the game. Morris was not playing winning basketball last week.

### Player of the Week:

[Shannon Brown](#) - 20.5 PPG 4.0 RPG 2.5 APG 51.5 FG%

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If the Suns can get more players on board with 20+ point efforts the offense may not stall as much consistently, but Brown seems to be one of only a few players interested in scoring the ball. He scored 20+ in both games this past week, but neither resulted in a win. Over the course of the season [Luis Scola](#) and [Jared Dudley](#) have proven they can score on that level, but none of the three seem to do it together or with consistency.

After all, they are giving up basically a 20 point scorer a night (19.63) on average every game.

"You know, guys do what they do," said Brown after the Milwaukee loss. "I stick to what I do and guys stick to what they do, but it is a combination of things. We just have to become better as a basketball team. We have to be able to execute on the offensive end and we have to be able to play through adversity. If they make a run we have to push through that and make our own run. We have to make stops and we just have to lock in a little bit better. As far as the scoring that will come."

### Previewing the Week Ahead:

Wednesday, January 23<sup>rd</sup> @ [Sacramento Kings](#) (16-25)

Thursday, January 24<sup>th</sup> vs. [Los Angeles Clippers](#) (32-9)

Saturday, January 26<sup>th</sup> @ [San Antonio Spurs](#) (32-11)