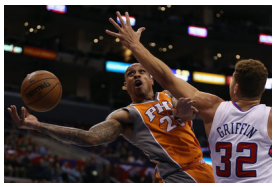

The Phoenix Suns (14-28) finally got some good news to mix in with all of the negative backlash this week both local and national. They took their show on the road knocking off the Sacramento Kings
106-96 for only their 4th road win on the season and now they come right back just 24 hours later to host the Pacific Division leading
Los Angeles Clippers
(32-11).

In the long arguous marathon that is an NBA season every team has their fair share of back-to-back situations.

This is one of those situations after being on the road last night. On the season the team has played in eight total back-to-back games going 1-7 overall on the back end. If I looked at every team in the league I am sure there are very few that win the second game on a back-to-back especially with travel involved. The only win was at Chicago to end their last road trip.

Granted this is a new coaching staff with an energized team that may come together in the aftermath of all of the moves and drama that was this past week, a back-to-back doesn't get any easier.

To a finer point this is another game against a divisional opponent. Through the first six games (2-4) the Suns fared well against the Kings (2-0), but have dropped every game to the other three who have winning records. Looking at the schedule -- including tonight -- there are 10 more games against their divisional foes. An opportunity to salvage some pride from one of the worst seasons in franchise history.

The last time the Suns finished under .500 in the Pacific Division was the 2003-2004 season. At this point they would need to go 6-4 or better to avoid that dubious distinction this season.

(Recent) History Lesson

This season the teams have locked up twice. Once in Los Angeles (99-117 loss) and once in Phoenix (77-103 loss), both with very similar results.

In each game Griffin and Crawford scored over 20 points while Paul directed the offense with a double-double. Those three combined with great defense, causing turnovers, and running up-and-down the floor were the Suns demise.

Head-to-Head (past four seasons)

Suns: 103.57 PPG (10 wins)

Clippers: 100.28 PPG (4 wins)

Head-to-Head (career)

Blake Griffin vs. Suns: 21.7 PPG 10.0 RPG 52.1 FG% (10 games)

Jamal Crawford vs. Suns: 16.6 PPG 4.2 APG 43.4 FG% 31.7 3PT% (25 games)

Michael Beasley vs. LAC: 20.2 PPG 5.2 RPG 53.8 FG% 51.6 3PT% (11 games)

One thing about Michael Beasley is that he has always played well against the Clippers, including this year when he came out like a house on fire torching the Clippers in the first half of

the first meeting. He tapered off in the second and the Suns lost, but he has the ability to put up points against this club.

Starting Line-Ups

PG - Goran Dragic v. Eric Bledsoe

SG - Jared Dudley v. Willie Green

SF - P.J. Tucker v. Caron Butler

PF - Luis Scola v. Blake Griffin

C - Marcin Gortat v. DeAndre Jordan

Potential Suns Inactives: Jermaine O'Neal (Undisclosed Injury/Illness)

Potential Clippers Inactives: Chris Paul (Right Knee), Chauncey Billups (Left Foot), and Trey Thompkins
(Left Knee)

Key Match-Up

Luis Scola vs. Blake Griffin

This season Blake Griffin has become a much better all-around offensive threat and it has showed in the two games this season as he scored 23.5 PPG on 62.1% shooting from the field. He is not going against the best defensive front court in the league, but in Luis Scola he faces a frustrating opponent.

Scola is an aggitator that can get under his opponents skin. Just ask DeMarcus Cousins, Carlos Boozer, and, well Blake Griffin.

In order for the Suns to have a competitive edge in this game Scola has to use his fouls wisely, not allow Griffin to score as easy as he has, and put him on the free-throw line where he is shooting 60.3% (59.9% on the road) career. This season he has improved to 65.4% (63.8% on the road) career, which is a improvement, but still very low for a contact player like Griffin.

I wanted to go with Luke Zeller and Ryan Hollins just to get them in the preview, but this did the trick just the same.

Interesting Stat: 17 and 12

The Clippers speed up every team and get them out of their comfort zone, that is why they are so good this season. With the Suns in particular they force an average of 17 turnovers per game and rack up 12 steals along the way. Both are above the season average for the Clippers so those perimeter defenders lick their chops when the Suns come up on the schedule.

Meaningless Stat: .500

For his career as a head coach Vinny del Negro has been .500 (7-7) dating back to his time as the head coach of the Chicago Bulls . There is that.