Getting started with the second era in Phoenix Suns (15-30) in the past seven months has to be tough, but they handled it as well as Eric Bishoff handled the final years of World Championship Wrestling. For the ten of you that got that reference, you're welcome.

Game Recaps

@ Sacramento Kings - W (106-96)

vs. Los Angeles Clippers - W (93-88)

@ San Antonio Spurs - L (108-99)

@ Dallas Mavericks - L (110-95)

In hindsight it will be the looked at as simply a 2-2 week with two sets of back-to-backs on the schedule. For those without a sense of revisionist history (rarity) this was a week of ultimate highs and very familiar lows. The team charged out to a 2-0 start under Interim Head Coach Lindsey Hunter
before dropping the next two on the road in Texas.

Before heading on the road to Texas it seemed Hunter was able maximize the effort from his

team. They came out playing great defense and scoring well in the first quarter, which has been a problem this season.

The issue the previous regime had with the roster was consistency. That does not seem to have changed as they won two games behind defense and lost two games behind defense immediately after. That balance of effort on the defensive end while still scoring enough to be competitive in the fourth quarter is the item behind mystery door number three, but the Suns keep choosing doors one, two, or falling short in the speed round just before.

Key Stats

16

Through 41 games the Suns were -16 overall (468-484) in offensive rebounding as a team. Over the last four games they were -16 (35-51) in that five day window alone. One of the staples of a good defense is the ability to shut the door on the possession with a rebound or forced turnover.

Coincidentally they won the first two games despite being aggressively mauled on the offensive glass, but as a whole the team does not have an enforcer in the paint to put the finishing touch on what have been very good overall defensive possessions. Instead they are giving up multiple shots most possessions making the defense work even harder while allowing the same amount of points to the opponent, just in more attempts.

They are currently on pace to be out-rebounded -164 on the offensive glass over the second half of the season. That is unlikely, but the pace is being set.

The Highs

Lindsey Hunter became only the fourth Suns coach to begin his career 2-0 joining the fraternity

of Jerry Colangelo, Scott Skiles , and yes, Alvin Gentry . The winning was short lived, but showed signs of potential.

In the two wins the Suns were a +15 overall in the scoring column holding two Divisional rivals to a combined 43.8% from the field, 37.9% from three, and forced a combined 39 turnovers. All three of those intangibles are reflective of the way the defense played.

The Lows

With three days of practice and against a struggling Kings team and a Chris Paul (less) Clippers team the Suns shined. On no practice the team was picked apart by a Tim Duncan (and Greg Popovich) less Spurs team and a struggling Mavericks team. That pretty much sums up the week.

There has to be consideration to the lack of practice time because Hunter is a new coach, but the Suns were outplayed from the jump in each game.

In these two games in particular however the team was simply outplayed by teams that were more prepared, coached better, and knew what to do to win games. That is going to happen often to the Suns and it is not meant as a knock in the slightest, but expectations should be realistic. The team is struggling and is going through the growing pains of a reboot.

Practice Report

Hunter was able to run three practices before the teams first game and they were ready to play. He emphasized defense, which the team delivered in those first two games.

Here are the highlights from practice.

There was a clear tone to Hunter and how he was going to handle things. This team is going to play defense, play hard, and make the philosophy switch never seen here in the valley before; Defense. So far that has been the case as they held their first two opponents to 92 PPG, but they were run out of the gym in Texas giving up 109 PPG. The learning curve seems to go up-and-down.

The team played hard under Alvin Gentry and gave effort on defense, but it wasn't to be. Seems Hunter is getting about the same out of his guys on that end.

Grades

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

- A- for Michael Beasley : The confidence is clearly there as Beasley averaged more points (+6.0) and rebounds (+1.4) this week, but more importantly he shot over 50% from the field and from three. Two areas he was struggling in all season.

- C- for Shannon Brown : In getting the younger players on the court there are going to be some minor sacrifices and Brown's minutes seem to be one of them. He is the main bench scorer, but in order to get minutes for Marshall, Johnson, and others he is the odd man out early in the rotation.

- C+ for Markieff Morris : With an increased amount of playing Morris struggled. Hunter applauded his defensive effort, but his shooting, rebounding, and scoring are all down getting about 6+ minutes more a game.

Player of the Week:

Goran Dragic - 15.75 PPG 2.25 RPG 9.25 APG 43.4 FG%

An aggressive Goran Dragic is what the Suns need and that is exactly what he provided early in the weeks two wins. He was attacking the rim going in with a purpose looking to score or distribute. On the defensive end he has spearheaded the noticeably more opportunistic defense.

Dragic is the straw that stirs the drink for the Suns so when he is aggressive and making plays the rest of the team has more of a pep in their step. They go after it harder on defense and become a better overall team.

Previewing the Week Ahead:

Wednesday, January 30th vs. Los Angeles Lakers (19-25)

Friday, February 1st vs. Dallas Mavericks (19-25)

Saturday, February 2nd @ Golden State Warriors (26-17)

****