

Phoenix Suns Vs. Los Angeles Lakers Preview: Welcome Back Steve, Earl, and Mike!

Written by

Wednesday, 30 January 2013 13:57 -



Anytime two teams that combine to be 20 games under .500 meet up it brings up a big game feel. Or maybe it is anytime the [Phoenix Suns](#) (15-30) host the [Los Angeles Lakers](#) (20-25) there is a remembrance of a rivalry now buried in wet ash.

Then there is the added element of [Steve Nash](#) with his first game back in the Valley, Mike D'Antoni coaching up the resurgent Lakers, and [Earl Clark](#) playing some inspired basketball as of late. All former Suns.

In the end it will be about "Beat L.A." and "We Miss You Steve" dominating the arena sound as the Suns try to end a two game slide that coincides with the Lakers current three game winning streak. The Lakers brought over Nash this past summer, on July 4th, in return the Suns received a protected pick, that will be in the lottery, as long as the Lakers are there too.

This game is important on that level to where you want the Suns to improve their draft status, develop players, and get better by getting worse, but beating LA breaks all of those rules.

They need to give the Lakers as many losses as they can to do everything in their power to retain the pick. That is the only thing they control outside of their own record this season. Getting two lottery picks, one in the Top 5 and the other in the Top 14, is paramount in the rebuild. More assets, more opportunity to get better.

After two days off from the Texas Miss Step over the weekend the team should be focused and come in swinging for the fences with all the motivation in the world. They are on National TV (ESPN) for the second time in as many home games.

There are too many storylines on the table and this is a game created that almost seems to be

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created in an ESPN production meeting rather than on an NBA calendar.

(Recent) History Lesson

On the season the teams have faced each other once, a 114-102 Lakers win, that was so far back in the season that each team was just under .500 coming into the game.

Kobe dominated the scoring column with 31 points, Clark played 48 seconds, and Nash didn't even suit up due to injury. The Suns were coached by [Alvin Gentry](#) and were still starting [Michael Beasley](#)

. Again, not much to take away from that game other than Kobe did what Kobe normally does.

Head-to-Head (past four seasons including Playoffs)

Suns: 105.79 PPG (6 wins)

Lakers: 111.68 PPG (13 wins)

2010 Western Conference Semi's Lakers won 4-2 (Included in the totals above)

Head-to-Head (career)

[Kobe Bryant](#) vs. Suns: 26.8 PPG 5.0 APG 46.9 FG% (57 games)

[Jared Dudley](#) vs. Lakers: 10.1 PPG 3.9 RPG 49.2 FG% (17 games)

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In a word, Bryant torches the Suns, and that is not a good thing when you are facing him four times a year minimum.

One thing that has to be said about Kobe distributing the ball more as of late. In his past three games he has dished out 39 total assists, all Lakers wins. It took Kobe nine games to get 39 assists (41 to be exact) before this stretch. Typically the Lakers are a better team when Kobe is a facilitator because he can get his literally whenever he wants. For his career he has 83 games with 10+ assists including the Playoffs. The Lakers as a team respond well to that going 57-26 in those games.

That is a seasons worth of data. The Lakers could be a 68.6% winning team if Kobe did this nightly, sort of like what Nash did here.

Starting Line-Ups

PG - [Goran Dragic](#) v. Steve Nash

SG - [Jared Dudley](#) v. Kobe Bryant

SF - [P.J. Tucker](#) v. Ron Artest

PF - [Luis Scola](#) v. Earl Clark

C - [Marcin Gortat](#) v. Dwight Howard

Potential Suns Inactives: Jermaine O'Neal (Irregular Heart Beat)

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Potential Lakers Inactives: [Jordan Hill](#) (Hip Surgery)

Key Match-Up

[Luis Scola](#) vs. Earl Clark

Right now Clark is playing some inspired basketball including nine starts in his last ten games where he has put up some very respectable numbers, 11 PPG, 8.8 RPG, and shooting 49.5% from the field. That is sort of what the Suns thought they got when they drafted Clark 14th Overall in 2009. Three teams later and Clark has become a starter surrounded by Hall of Fame talent, which is something the Suns have to key in on.

If Scola and the rest of the team forgets about Clark he can knock down four threes like he did last night, crash the glass for a put back, or even take over the game for the first time ever in Phoenix.

Interesting Stat: 37.7

In 57 career games against the Phoenix Suns Bryant is averaging 37.7 combined points, assists, and rebounds which is his fourth highest total against any opponent. Again, not a good thing when you are also the team he faces four times a year and the 80 (including playoffs) total match-ups, sixth most of any team he has ever played.

Meaningless Stat: 1-6

The Lakers are 1-6 against the Suns specifically when Kobe goes for 10+ assists in a game. The one win? It came in the Playoffs in 2005. So there is that.

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