

Phoenix Suns give tribute, fans respond, Nash flattered

Written by

Thursday, 31 January 2013 08:10 -



Speculation was all over the map on the crowd's collective reaction to the return of Steve to the place he made his home for 10 years of his playing life.

On one hand, these [Suns](#) fans are season ticket holders who are sick of hearing fellow "fans" cheer for Laker players every time they visit US Airways Center. They are tired of season-ticket brethren posting and selling their prime game tickets to denizens of the enemy. I personally dislike attending Suns/[Lakers](#) games in Phoenix as a fan because of the sea of yellow and incessant trash talking carried on by their groupies.

So you can understand the primal need to boo anyone in a Laker uniform. Nash himself said at the beginning of free agency that he couldn't ever see himself as a Laker but "poof" there he was.

On the other hand, [Steve Nash's](#) best years were in Phoenix and we all loved him. He made the Suns the best show on hardwood for more than four years, turning this middling market into must-see national TV while the Suns made ill-fated run after ill-fated run at the Finals.

We knew there would be some boos. And we knew there would be some cheers. The question was which would drown out the other.

We got our answer when Nash was introduced last in the Lakers' starting lineup. What started with a mix of cheers and boos was quickly drowned in a standing ovation and prolonged raucous hooting and hollering.

"It was a great reception, obviously this is a very special place for me," Nash said later. "To be in front of these incredible fans -- I'm very grateful for the reception but also for my time here, which was the best years of my life."

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Nash seemed to take this visit personally. He showed up late last night with his teammates and spent the day with his kids, who still reside in Phoenix. Before the game, he talked to the media for a few minutes about how the game was special, the arena was special and the fans were special.

During the game, it appeared that Nash wanted to be anywhere but on the hated Lakers. He was slow, tentative and quick to defer to [Kobe Bryant](#), who was all too willing to dominate the ball. In this latest incarnation of Laker offense, Nash has been relegated to spot-up shooter.

On the opening possession, Bryant ran the offense, drew the defense and got Nash a wide-open three - which Nash clanked.

About midway through the first quarter, with the home team nursing a small lead, the Suns ran a video tribute to Nash on the big screens. Again, it started with a smattering of boos with the cheers, but as highlight after highlight ran by of Nash's layups, threes, passes and plethora of haircuts, the applause grew to a crescendo not heard in US Airways Center in a long, long time. The cheering was so loud by the end of the timeout that Nash felt compelled to wave and clap his hands as he retook the court.

"Very flattering and very sweet of the organization," he said. "It was very kind of them."

Word from the Suns is that the tribute was meant strictly for in-game promotion and was not intended to be made available to fans, though I suspect something will make the internets if it hasn't already.

Throughout the game, Nash was slow on defense and offense - on rare times he had the ball - and finished the first half with 0 assists. For the game, he had a measly 11 points and 2 assists while Kobe continued to run the offense.

After the game, Nash acknowledged his small role on the Lakers coupled with a "stagnant" fourth quarter offense and noted that, "I think I can help."

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Well duh. The two-time MVP, leader of (I think) 7 straight #1 finishes in offensive efficiency just might help the Lakers score more than 86 points if given the chance.

But on a team with prima donnas like Kobe Bryant, [Dwight Howard](#) and [Pau Gasol](#) , that is unlikely to happen any time soon.

"We have been playing well lately," Kobe said after the game, despite his team's record (20-26) and inability to close out the Suns. "I'm not concerned."