

Could It Be True: Josh Smith to Phoenix Suns?

Written by
Friday, 01 February 2013 19:08 -



Rumors are swirling that the [Phoenix Suns](#) are interested in trading for Josh Smith. These rumors started in 2004 and have come to a head only yesterday in a report by [Alex Kennedy](#)

. While John Gambodoro tweeted that these rumors are false, Suns fans have been on the Smith bandwagon so long it almost seems as if Smith has been a member of the Suns his entire career.

Smith has long been a Suns fan favorite for his high-flying aerial assault combined with his hard-nosed defensive ability. The Suns traditionally have lacked the gritty, bad-boy mentality and Smith certainly could bring this to the franchise in one swooping dunk. The recent rumor probably served to get his fan-base in Phoenix excited only to ultimately be disappointed that it won't actually happen.

"Why?" you say.

Well, let's break this down logically from both sides.

For Atlanta, they have made the classic Sarver [defined as holding on to an asset past the point of having any leverage]. The [Hawks](#) braintrust refused to trade Smith over the past few years, mostly because they have produced enough wins to be enticing, but not enough to get over the hump.

Last season, Smith had a career year, producing almost 20/10 per game and a career high in assists. A wise man would have seen the writing on the wall at this point in Smith's career and traded him at his peak. Instead, they chose to stay the course with Smith because they were winning, and chose to find a way to dump the terrible [Joe Johnson](#) contract.

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Now, Smith is in the last half of the last year of his contract and ATL finds themselves in a pickle. Smith certainly has value around the league and a large number of teams will show Smith some love. I also believe there are a few that would willingly overpay him, possibly making him a MAX player. Atlanta now finds themselves in the same jam that the Suns will be in next season with [Marcin Gortat](#) - a good player with value who will command more money than they are worth from another team, who is more than likely to go without the team receiving anything back.

For the teams figuring out how to deal with a guy who might leave, it is about extracting the most value from the situation when you have little leverage. For the team interested in trading for or signing a player, it is about waiting it out and leveraging the other team's impatience. For Atlanta, they made the mistake of letting it get to this point and now have a desperate situation in hand.

The problem is that Smith believes he is a MAX player. Much like Amar'e felt in his final season of his Suns contract, Smith has this firm belief that what he has done [and can still do] in his career warrants being paid as if he is a top 10 talent. Yet from outside of the inside of [Josh Smith's](#) head, that production just doesn't seem to add up to what a team would need to pay him. Smith is eligible as a nine year veteran for a raise equaling 30% of the cap [expected to be \$59 million]. In a sign and trade deal, he can get a four year deal starting at \$17.7 million in his first season and a maximum of 4.5% raises each year. This equates to a four year \$76 million contract [rounding up].

While some suggest that Smith is a franchise alpha, I would scoff at that description. Josh has managed a consistent level of play over his nine year career - to his credit. But that nine years show a track record of exactly who he is. Smith is basically a 16 point, eight rebound guy who takes a bit too many threes, but does bring a defensive presence. I am not sure how anyone can mistake that for a MAX franchise player.

The table below shows the top 70 salaries in the NBA for the 2013-14 season.



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At a maximum salary, Smith's deal would place him at 14th in the league between Rose and Durant. Um, something is not right about that statement. Other than

[Rudy Gay](#)

being way overpaid, I am sure you could say that Smith is not in the company of any of the players above him. But looking at the next 20 or so players, it is hard to say that Smith is their equal as well. Sure, some guys are overpaid [as a result of getting deals done before the CBA - Okafor, Boozer, and Deng to an extent]. But are you going to seriously argue that Smith is better than

[David Lee](#)

right now. Is

[James Harden](#)

\$4 million less of a player than Josh? How do the

[Spurs](#)

get away with paying

[Tony Parker](#)

\$12.5 M? The fact is, Smith is already overpaid at \$13.2 M. His teammate,

[Al Horford](#)

, is making \$12 million, and if money were eliminated from the equation, who would you rather have?

So from the money perspective alone, maxing out Josh Smith is equivalent to maxing out Joe Johnson - DUMB! While I understand there are teams that get desperate and overreach on players, usually you want to do that on guys that are young, haven't put a lot of miles on their body, and have a track record of improvement leading up to the deal so you can justify that the player will have huge upside. Smith is not that player. He is younger, but has already played nine years. He has steadily put up the same production for the bulk of those years and there is absolutely no reason to think that will change for the better.

The rumor with the Suns was that it would have to include Gortat, Dudley, Beasley and a couple of picks. None of that makes sense. Yeah, I can see throwing Gortat to the wind here, but why would you throw in Dudley? Why would anyone think putting Beasley in the deal makes it workable from ATL's end [they don't want him, do they?]? A couple of picks? What?

Smith is an unrestricted free agent in approximately three months. If you are going to sign him to a maximum deal, why would you use assets that could be used in other deals for a guy you could outright sign this summer? Wouldn't it make more sense to keep all of those assets [unless they really want Beasley - sure, we will do that], sign Smith to a max deal [although I wouldn't, but let's just suppose here we did], make a few other moves to get some wing help and draft some young guys for the future. Certainly adding Smith, trading Gortat for something, and drafting a couple of lotto picks turns our fortunes around much better than trading

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everything we have for a maxed out Smith.

From ATL's standpoint, it is obvious they want value for Smith. Yet they have little ability to get much more than some cap relief and possibly a thrown in player/pick. Even if they could extract Gortat from this, why would they want Beasley?

Basically, none of this makes any sense to me. If Gambodoro is right - the Suns want none of this. If Josh Smith is a target, the Suns should throw something at him this summer, but shouldn't overreach. Adding Smith would be nice [at say, \$8-12 M over 4 years], but maxing him out only kills our ability to do anything real down the road.

Poll **Do you think the Suns should pursue Smith?**

- Only this summer on a reasonable deal for his production value.
- Throw a MAX at him this summer and don't trade anything for him
- Trade Beasley, Brown, Bassy and JO for a MAX'd Smith
- Throw the kitchen sink at ATL - Whatever it takes!
- Sell the franchise and move it to Vegas!

393 votes | [Results](#)