Since the All-Star Break the Phoenix Suns are playing .500 basketball going 5-5 and displaying that they have something to play for. It is called pride.

Get used to seeing these guys, since the Suns play the Rockets four times in the next four weeks including twice in the next several days. Keep your tissues handy to wipe up the drool over their youth and upside compared to what the Suns have to offer.

There's no way to slice it except that the Rockets jettisoned their aging players a couple years ago, so they're 1-2 years ahead of the Suns in the rebuild process.

Houston, too, had middle-aged players until just last season when Morey cleaned the last rooms of the house for new residents. Goran Dragic was their starting PG after Kyle Lowry got hurt, and Luis Scola was their starting PF for the last five seasons.

Houston Rockets GM Daryl Morey spent years acquiring assets and clearing books so that he could restart his team's future with younger players who, collectively, had a higher ceiling. Yet he kept the team winning while doing all this work behind the curtain. The Rockets missed the playoffs the last three years, but still had winning records.

While the Rockets are still not a contender, they are set up to become one if they can add that one more piece to their puzzle in the near future. For now, they are one of the two youngest teams in the NBA and yet have a strong chance to make the playoffs with a heavy dose of home games the rest of the season.

The Rockets' best player is 23-year old James Harden, the crown jewel of "available" players over the past two seasons. He was bought for a Kings ' ransom (a guaranteed lottery pick,

quality SG, 2012 lottery SG and spare parts) and got even better than anyone had hoped.

Harden's supporting cast is talented but not win-the-whole-thing talented.

Chandler Parsons , a 2011 second-round pick, has become a quality small forward (15 points, 5 rebounds, 3 assists a game) who has been on an absolute tear lately. He has scored at least 20 points in six straight games, including 27-44 three-pointers. Let me repeat. That was 44 3-point attempts in the last six games by Parsons alone.

PG Jeremy Lin is no Goran Dragic, but he's two years younger (24 vs. 26), so there's that. Lin puts up 12 points and 6 assists per game and does a good job of getting out of James Harden's way.

C Omer Asik is young, but not that young (26 yrs old), and does a quality job manning the middle. Asik is a rebounding machine who has pulled down 32 boards in the last two games alone. He is currently licking his chops at the prospect of fighting for boards with Hamed Haddadi and Markieff Morris .

The PF position is still a conundrum for Houston, who generally just go small with a stretch four on the floor for spacing. Marcus Morris and Patrick Patterson were that guy until the trade deadline, and Thomas Robinson hasn't found his niche yet in the Houston offense.

Only Harden is all-star caliber, but that's enough to make the playoffs this season.

Tonight's keys

The Rockets are young, but will likely be tired after the top four guys played at least 37 minutes

against the Warriors last night.

The Suns are playing a kinda-young rotation right now, but also put in big minutes against Sacramento. Wesley Johnson , Goran Dragic and Luis Scola all played at least 35 minutes.

(By the way, Johnson got his first start of the season last night (along with the Morris twins in the starting lineup!) and put up 19 points and 4 rebounds. Nice.)

Let's see who comes out more focused.

Key matchup

James Harden vs. Michael Beasley

I write this with tongue in cheek because they don't play the same position and aren't the same caliber.

Yet Michael Beasley played his best game in a thousand years last night - 24 points on 10-21 shooting, 4 rebounds, 2 assists and a block - while James Harden played one of his worst - 20 points on 3-17 shooting, 6 rebounds, 11 assists and three steals.

My guess is that this matchup will reverse itself tonight.

Beasley has not had two consecutive good-shooting nights all season, and just might get only a handful of minutes if he comes out lethargic.

Harden has made it a career to kill the Suns. Last season with OKC, he put up 26.7 points on 60% shooting in three games against the Suns, in only 32 minutes a game.

Look for that matchup to be a frustrating one for Suns fans tonight.

Goran Dragic vs. Jeremy Lin

Now this is a better matchup to watch. The Rockets dumped Dragic for Lin, even paying Lin more money than Dragic took from the Suns.

Last night against Sacramento, Dragic put up a heckuva stat line: 17 points, 16 assists, 5 steals and 4 rebounds. Since the All-Star break, he is putting up 14.7 points, 10.8 assists and 2.4 steals per game - easily his best stretch of the season.

Let's hope Dragic wants to send a message back to Houston tonight.

Summary

Don't look forward to a Suns win, but don't be surprised if they pull one out either. The Suns are 4-5 since the All-Star break with some nice wins under their belts.

The Suns have three guys on their roster who might want to send a message back to Houston: Dragic, Scola and Marcus Morris.