

Game Preview: Phoenix Suns @ Houston Rockets

Written by

Wednesday, 13 March 2013 11:58 -



When: Wednesday, March 13, 2013, 5:00 PM local time (8:00 EST)

Where: Toyota Center, Houston, TX

Watch/Listen: TV: FSAZ, Radio: 620 KTAR

Last Meeting:

Saturday, March 9, 2013 in Phoenix

In the second game with a new starting lineup that included Wesley Johnson and the Morris twins the Suns stunned the Houston Rockets 107-105 despite a preternatural performance by James Harden. Harden finished with 38 points on 11-17 shooting, including seven three pointers, while distributing eight assists, but also committed eight out of 21 total team turnovers that led to 28 points for Phoenix.

Jared Dudley led the Suns with 22 points and seven assists, but it was Goran Dragic's 13 points in the fourth quarter that helped the Suns overcome 19 three point field goals by the Rockets in the game.

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Team Bios:

Houston Rockets: 34-30

Points per game: 106.8 (1st) Points allowed: 103.6 (29th)

[Complete Team Statistics](#)

Rockets are fast. The Rockets are fast. Houston pushes the pace to the tune of a league leading 106.8 points per game. More shots equal more assists and more rebounds as well, and the Rockets are also top 10 in those categories. Houston has hovered around .500 all year, so their recent stretch of 3-4 is fairly reflective of their season to date.

James Harden has blossomed into a quintessential star since arriving in Houston, quelling doubts that he was better suited as a secondary player. He has led both teams in scoring in exactly half (32) of Houston's games this season. He has the distinction of being the only player in the league in the top five in scoring (26.4) and steals (1.9). Omer Asik tucks the line inside and is second in the league in rebounding at 11.8 per game.

The Rockets are 20-9 at home and ensnarled in a battle to make the playoffs, so expect a valiant effort in front of an obstreperous home crowd.

Phoenix Suns: 22-42

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Points per game: 94.6 (20th) Points allowed: 100.3 (21st)

[Complete Team Statistics](#)

The renascent Suns are 4-3 in their last seven games, much to the befuddlement and vexation of a faction of their fans. While the inspired play of precocious players on the roster is very encouraging moving forward it also provides a dilemma for the rooting interest of their faithful fans. Coaches coach. Players play. The effort has been apparent and the wins and losses take care of themselves.

A lineup in tumult has provided a spark of interest lately, as Wesley Johnson, the twins and Hamed Haddadi are all playing integral roles. The Suns will need solid performances from these players to overcome a Rockets team that is in a melee for playoff seeding. While the Suns are only 7-25 on the road, they have had impressive victories over the Bulls, Grizzlies and (most recently) Spurs. However, it is somewhat apocryphal logic to think that the Rockets won't be jacked to play the Suns tonight after Saturday's loss.

What To Watch For:

James Harden: He always seems to torch the Suns. Despite going for 30, 40 and 38 points in the last three meetings, the Suns did manage to hold him to just 10 points in the game prior to his torrid streak. For some reason, though, I get the feeling that this is more about how Harden plays than how the Suns defend him.

Marcus Morris/Scola/Dragic: All three players return to Houston for the first time after being traded, amnesty'd and leaving in free agency. Suffice to say that the Rockets no longer desired their services. Look for vindication from this trio tonight. Morris has averaged 12.7 points while shooting 51% from the field and 52% from three his last six games. Dragic needs to bounce back after an unimpressive performance against the Nuggets following a 13 point fourth quarter against the Rockets and 17 points and 16 assists against the Kings. Hopefully Scola can break

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out of a recent shooting slump. The effort still appears to be there, evinced by his 13 rebounds (his third highest total of the season) against the Nuggets.

2013 Lottery Watch

The Suns are currently tied with Cleveland for sixth in the lottery standings. A loss tonight could move them as high as a tie for fourth. It would also help them keep the Rockets in front of the Lakers. The Wizards and Kings play at home tonight (against the Bucks and Bulls respectively) in winnable games which could help the Suns. The Timberwolves and Pistons play on the road against teams with winning records, which will very likely result in losses.

The Lakers, who have passed the Jazz and hold the eighth seed in the Western Conference, play at Atlanta tonight, so cheer for the Hawks to beat a Lakers team that is just 12-20 on the road this season. Utah, who is 2-7 in their last nine games, plays at OKC tonight, so don't expect much help there. In fact, Utah has been playing so poorly that the Mavericks are sneaking up on them for ninth.

The Lakers are actually playing for the sixth seed at this point, so hopefully Houston (who the Lakers now control their destiny against) and the Warriors can hold them off and give LA the best possible odds of getting knocked on their ass in the first round of the playoffs. Both the Rockets and Golden St. play exceedingly winnable games at home tonight.

The Final Word(s):

Will the Suns be emboldened by recent success? Are their fledging players too young and dumb to realize they shouldn't be able to compete in this game? Can they keep up with a

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Houston squad whose talent preponderates that of a Suns team mired in an underwhelming season?

I wouldn't count on it. But while this matchup seems heavily weighted in the Rockets advantage on paper, anything is possible. The Suns beat them just four days ago despite the juggernaut that is Harden having a dominant game and the Rockets had just as much on the line then. What I would forecast is an entertaining game with plenty of points as I expect the Rockets to impose their pace on the Suns.