

Full Coverage: The Phoenix Suns beat the Los Angeles Lakers again, gaining the home sweep

Written by

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The Suns may only have 23 wins on the season and are having one of the lesser years in franchise history, but can you put a value on beating the Los Angeles Lakers both time they visited the Valley? Can you?

What is a snake without its bite? Well, the [Los Angeles Lakers](#) (36-32) are still [Dwight Howard](#), [Steve Nash](#), and a very dangerous team, especially to a team like the [Phoenix Suns](#) (22-45) at this point in the season.

With [Kobe Bryant](#) out, the Lakers were able to win their last game and they even won a tough one against Eastern Conference contender in the [Indiana Pacers](#) with only 12 minutes out of the Mamba. He is the best player on the Lakers roster, but when you start to create a pecking order of the best players in this match-up, the pendulum swings to L.A. and stays there for a while.

Universally, Bryant is the best player. It would be hard to argue that 2-4 are Dwight Howard, Pau Gasol, and Steve Nash. The debate could even be made that Ron Artest is the fifth best player between the two teams.

Subtracting Bryant makes this a lesser team, of course, but against a bottom-three team in the league, it does not make them terrible.

The Suns have something to play for as every Lakers loss gives them a better shot at two lottery picks in the upcoming NBA Draft. It is also the Lakers. So little needs to be said about knocking off the divisional rival and playing the role of spoiler for them.

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(Recent) History Lesson

This will be the fourth and final installment of the Lakers-Suns this season. The Lakers won two of the first three, but they were all close affairs. In those three games, the teams have played tough, lower scoring games to a tune of the Lakers (97.0 PPG) being only a +4 on the Suns (93.0 PPG) in the series. The Suns look to even the season series tonight at home where they are 1-0 against their rivals.

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

Suns: 104.2 PPG (7 wins)

Lakers: 108.5 PPG (14 wins)

There has been a triple-overtime game, six battles in the Western Conference Finals, and animosity between these two teams over the past four seasons. It has not always been this way, with the Suns looking at the lottery and the Lakers looking at the playoffs. This was a fairly even battle over the past 12 years.

Head-to-Head (career)

Lakers Player vs. Suns: 15.5 PPG 4.8 RPG 2.4 APG 2.4 SPG 42.8 FG% (34 games)

Suns Player vs. Lakers: 9.2 PPG 2.4 RPG 1.0 APG 1.0 SPG 40.7 FG% (9 games)

More on Artest below, but the Suns need a big game from Johnson as he will be matched-up with [Jodie Meeks](#) rather than Bryant. That is a situation that a player has to take advantage of. In his career he is 0-9 against the Lakers, but has broken out for a pair of 20+ point games,

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including a career-high 29 while in Minnesota.

Smiling Wes has scored 20+ points five times in his career and 40% of those games are against the Lakers.

Starting Line-Ups

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

SG - [Wesley Johnson](#) v. Jodie Meeks

SF - [Marcus Morris](#) v. Ron Artest

PF - [Markieff Morris](#) v. Earl Clark

C - Jermaine O'Neal v. Dwight Howard

Potential Suns Inactives: [Marcin Gortat](#) (Foot)

Potential Lakers Inactives: Kobe Bryant (Left Ankle) and [Pau Gasol](#) (Plantar Fascia)

Key Match-Up

Marcus Morris vs. Ron Artest

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When you face the Lakers, you have to win the individual battle with Artest. Because if you do not, that typically means they are running away with the game. Or does it? He is a shell of his former self, meaning that Marcus cannot let him get into his head and throw his game off.

On the season, the Lakers are 4-4 when Artest scores 20+ points, 11-9 when he scores between 15-19 points, and 20-19 with 14 points or less.

Marcus has been in a funk the past few games and could use a breakthrough against what is now his biggest rival other than his brother wearing the same thing as him when they get ready to go out.

Interesting Stat: 14 Games

The Lakers only have 14 games, including tonight's tilt with the Suns, before the playoffs start. If they are a Top 8 team in the West at that time, then the Suns are drafting with their pick and Miami's pick. Getting this win to help the reeling [Utah Jazz](#) would give them .5 games back on the Lakers, who they have the tie-breaker with based on the in season match-ups.

Meaningless Stat: Lakers Offense

With Bryant: 102.3 PPG 22 APG 94.7 Pace 1.06 PPP (52.2% Winning Percentage)

Without Bryant: 113 PPG 28 APG 92.7 Pace 1.32 PPP (100% Winning Percentage)

That is a one game sample without Bryant this season by the way. You are welcome.