

Game Preview: Minnesota Timberwolves (23-43) at Phoenix Suns (23-46)

Written by

Friday, 22 March 2013 13:27 -



The Wolves entered the season with dreams of the playoffs in their heads, but ended up right back where they've been for eons since they traded [Kevin Garnett](#) to Boston in 2007.

This time, a major injury to Kevin Love played the biggest part in the Wolves inability to sniff the playoff picture. The team began the season with a bang (and even without Love) at 16-15, only to fall completely apart to the tune of a worse-than-the-Suns 7-28 since then.

Love is still not back, though Ricky Rubio is getting stronger and stronger by the month even though he still can't hit his jumper consistently. Head coach [Rick Adelman](#) has missed a lot of time this season with an ill wife, and the Wolves have endured a handful of other major injuries to mess with their rotation.

Last matchup

The last matchup, in Phoenix, was one of the worst overtime basketball games I've ever witnessed. The Suns eventually won 84-83 after 53 minutes of play, outscoring the Wolves 7-6 in the overtime period.

It was a breakout game for former Timberwolf Wesley Johnson: 14 points (on 7-14 shooting), 9 rebounds, 3 assists and 2 steals. Since this game on February 26, Johnson has been a rotation regular and one of the few bright spots on the season.

Conversely, another former Wolf - Michael Beasley - had a terrible game with 4 points, 4 assists and 2 rebounds in only 13 uninspired minutes.

Wolves on the road

Minnesota has lost 17 of their last 18 on the road, so don't be surprised if the Suns pull out another win.

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Key Matchup

Each game, it seems the Suns' [Goran Dragic](#) must face another elite point guard. So far, Dragic has faired well in just about every PF matchup this season including last time against Rubio.

In the last game, Rubio finished with only 5 points, 10 assists and 4 steals (but 6 turnovers to boot). Dragic had 10 points, 7 assists and 4 rebounds (with 3 turnovers). It was a wash.

Worst perimeter shooting team in the NBA

You thought I was going to say the Suns right? Wrong.

It's the Wolves who are worst in the NBA, though they have recently returned Chase Budinger to their lineup after missing all but 6 games this season. On the season, the Wolves have hit only 29.4% of their three-pointers and have been even worse on the road.

Budinger can hit the outside shot, but he needs to share his minutes with Andre Kirilenko and is still getting into game shape.

Suns injuries

Certainly, starting center [Marcin Gortat](#) is out. Possibly, Jermaine O'Neal (calf strain) is out as well.

That leaves [Hamed Haddadi](#) to man the pivot with PFs [Markieff Morris](#) and [Luis Scola](#) backing him up. Scola has done well against bigger centers this season by annoying them on defense and pulling them out of the paint on offense. Maybe he will do that to Pekovic tonight.

Lotto balls

As the season progressed, the Suns went from hoping for the Wolves' first-round pick (if they made the playoffs) to hoping to fend off the Wolves for a higher pick overall.

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Both teams have 23 wins on the season, though the Wolves have done it in 3 fewer games.

Just like Wednesday's game, the Suns are fighting for lotto position while also fighting for inspired play that can portend well for next season.

Wolves stats

FG		3PT		FT		Rebounds		
G		M		M		A		Pct
Kevin Love	18		34.3		5.8		16.6	
Nikola Pekovic	51		31.4		6.1		11.9	
Andrei Kirilenko	48		32.9		4.6		9.0	
Luke Ridnour	66		31.2		4.7		10.5	
Derrick Williams	62		24.1		4.2		10.1	
Chase Budinger	7		22.6		3.9		8.1	
J.J. Barea	58		23.6		4.3		10.5	
Ricky Rubio	41		29.4		3.0		8.4	
Alexey Shved	61		26.1		3.4		9.1	
Dante Cunningham	65		25.1		3.7		8.1	
Mickael Gelabale	28		22.0		2.4		4.6	
Brandon Roy	5		24.2		2.2		7.0	
Chris Johnson	21		11.8		2.0		3.2	
Malcolm Lee	16		18.0		1.8		4.8	
Greg Stiemsma	61		14.5		1.5		3.3	

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