

Just how much younger have the Suns gotten this season?

Written by

Tuesday, 26 March 2013 08:00 -



As an NBA franchise, you don't want the double-whammy of being one of the oldest teams in the league AND fall short of the playoffs. And yet, that's exactly where the Suns were last season and the season before that.

Barely missing the playoffs got the Suns marginal prospects in the late-lottery that Seth Pollack [already detailed](#) were okay for where they picked, but certainly not good enough to revitalize a franchise. In fact, the Suns have not drafted a franchise-revitalizing player since 2003 ([Amare Stoudemire](#)).

Last summer, the Suns let go of their oldest players - [Grant Hill](#) (39), [Steve Nash](#) (37) and [Michael Redd](#) (32) - in a concerted effort to get younger when their contracts expired.

How much younger is younger?

By letting go of those three players and six others, and bringing in nine new players in their place, the [Phoenix Suns](#) **dropped the age of their 11-man playing rotation by three full years** - 29.2 years old to 26.1 years old* - despite bringing in 32-year old [Luis Scola](#) and 34-year old Jermaine O'Neal.

**I multiplied the ages of the Suns' actual playing rotation this March 2013 by the number of minutes they played this month, and compared that to a year ago March 2012.*

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Player	Age	March minutes	Age	* mins
O'Neal	34	138	35	4032
Scola	32	254	33	8128
Gortat	28	32	29	896
Brown	27	8	28	216
Dudley	27	206	28	5562
Telfair	27	0	28	0
Tucker	27	158	28	4266
Haciabed	27	221	28	3287
Dragic	26	284	27	7384
Johnson	25	254	26	6350
Bassley	24	185	25	4840
Garrett	24	36	25	864
Markieff	23	232	24	5336
Marcus	23	179	24	4117
Marshall	21	164	22	3444
Total	26.1	3940	26.1	95282

26.1 is the average age of the 35 players who played in the 3940 minutes that the Suns played in March. The average age of the 35 players who played in the 3940 minutes has declined this month, while those in

The Suns are still not that young

I did the same calculation for the entire league this March, to see where the Suns rank on the list.

Yet, a playing rotation that averages 26.1 years old is still just smack dab in the middle of the NBA for games played in March.

Age	Team	Last 10 games	Lottery position?	Lottery last 5 yrs?	Top 10 picks last 5 yrs?
1	23.5	CHA	2.8	X	4
2	24.0	ORL	2.8	X	0
3	24.8	NOH	2.7	X	2
4	24.4	POR	5.5	X	2
5	24.4	IND	5.8		0
6	24.4	CLE	2.7	X	2
7	24.7	UTA	3.6	X	1
8	24.9	TOR	3.6	X	4
9	25.1	PHI	4.6	X	1
10	25.2	BRW	6.6		3
11	25.3	IND	6.4		1
12	25.6	SAC	4.5	X	5
13	25.7	DET	0.9	X	3
14	25.8	MIN	3.7	X	5
15	25.9	WAS	5.5	X	4
16	26.1	PHO	3.6	X	3
17	26.8	ORL	10.0		0
18	26.6	MIL	6.4		0
19	26.6	ORL	8.3		0
20	27.3	ATL	4.7		0
21	27.5	MEM	7.3		0
22	27.5	CHI	3.5		0
23	28.6	SAS	6.2		0
24	28.6	NETS	5.4		0
25	28.9	BOS	6.3		0
26	29.3	LAC	4.4		0
27	29.6	DAL	7.3	X	0
28	30.2	NYK	5.6		0
29	30.2	MIA	11.0		0
30	31.4	LAL	7.3		0

The Suns are still the second-oldest non-playoff team in the NBA, in terms of who's playing minutes in March. The oldest, Dallas, is fighting the [Lakers](#) for the right to be the very oldest lottery team this season, sparing the Suns of ignominy.

Last season's Suns, if kept together as some suggested, would now average over 30 years old - right at the upper edge of all NBA teams.

What does age have to do with success?

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While age is not a primary, determining factor in success of NBA teams, it is quite instructive and interesting to me the nearly direct trajectory of age vs. success in the league.

How the best and worst NBA teams stack up in terms of age



Tom Ziller looks at how winning teams age.

For the most part, the youngest teams in the league miss the playoffs and get younger with a high draft pick. And the oldest teams, by and large, make the playoffs and stay just as old as they've always been.

Only three "young" teams (Houston, Golden State and Indiana) are projected to make the playoffs this season while a fourth, Utah, is dying on the vine while playing their younger players as Jefferson and Millsap have both battled injury this month.

In fact, the youngest teams have been bad for a long time. Look at the 'Last 5 years' column and nearly every one of them is a fixture in the lottery.

How to get even younger?

The problem is that there are only two pools of quality NBA players: free agency and the collegiate draft.

Part of the problem with getting truly younger in one summer is that unrestricted free agency only kicks in when guys reach about 25 to 26 years old (four years after their draft year). Anyone younger than that still is controlled by their drafting team, unless the team lets them go.

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To get a full rotation of guys younger than 25 or 26 requires a lot of draft picks and/or signings of young, un-drafted free agents.

If the Suns go this route to get younger, then don't expect a great deal of success in the win column. So, it's no wonder the Suns front office is trying to straddle that fence between too young to win and too old to rebuild.

The Suns will add a couple of young players in this year's draft, likely replacing a couple of middle-aged guys. But whether they bring back Jermaine O'Neal and [Marcin Gortat](#) , and even [Hamed Haddadi](#) , will indicate whether the Suns want to win games or if they just want to wait another year.

Don't count on the latter. The arena is getting emptier and the natives are either restless or, worse yet, losing interest. Expect the Suns to continue to straddle the fence on being too young vs. too old.