

Full Coverage: Suns drop tight one to Pacers

Written by
Sunday, 31 March 2013 09:43 -



The Indiana Pacers are rolling while the Phoenix Suns are getting rolled.

Since losing starting C [Marcin Gortat](#) to a foot injury, the [Phoenix Suns](#) are 2-10 and looking worse by the day. The [Indiana Pacers](#), on the other hand, have been missing their best scorer, Danny Granger, almost the entire season and have thrived.

The difference? Better collective talent, and an excellent, defense-based gameplan.

Pacers a model?

If you are looking for a model the Suns might want to emulate, you might want to look at the Indiana Pacers for inspiration. After making it to the Eastern Conference Finals in 2004, the Pacers declined slowly. Eventually, they missed the playoffs for 4 straight seasons from 2006-2010 under a coach (Jim O'Brien) that had them (failing to regularly) score from the perimeter while playing middling defense.

When the team stopped progressing, they handed the reins to untested [Frank Vogel](#), who had never been a head coach before (though he had spent 10 years as an NBA assistant). Vogel instituted a defense-first mentality that used an efficient inside-out offensive scheme (offensive rating jumped from 26th to 7th), took the Pacers to the playoffs and now has them seeded third in the East with an even more focused defense sans Danny Granger's offense.

Their best draft moves were getting lucky with Danny Granger (17th overall in 2005) and then Paul George and Lance Stephenson (10th and 40th in 2010). But that's the highlight of their draft prowess using their own picks during that timeframe.

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They traded erstwhile All-Star Jermaine O'Neal to Toronto for the rights to rookie C Roy Hibbert (17th in 2008), who went on to exceed expectations along with Danny Granger.

Hibbert and Granger developed with a ragtag group of middling players who wouldn't be starting for any playoff team, and certainly didn't in Indiana.

Then the 2010 draft came along (George) and they fully revitalized their team in 2011. The Pacers bookended the 2011 lockout by trading the 15th overall pick ([Kawhi Leonard](#)) to San Antonio for George Hill, and later signing free agent David West before the 2011-12 season finally started.

Since then, the Pacers have been on the rise in the East without boasting a top-10 player in the NBA. They are doing it with defense - ranked #1 overall this season by a wide margin.

The Phoenix Suns could do well to emulate this pattern. They already have the several-seasons-outside-the-playoffs thing going, and won't pick up a franchise-changer in the upcoming draft. But that's where the similarities end.

At some point, the Suns have to start trending back up. It won't happen in these next 9 games, but this summer is crucial to start turning the tide in the right direction.

The Suns reportedly want to win with defense going forward, and getting the right coach into position to do so (like the Pacers did with Vogel) is vital. Is [Lindsey Hunter](#) that coach? Maybe. Maybe not. The Suns have to put Hunter against a number of other candidates this spring to find out.

Vogel was in a different position than Hunter is in right now. In fact, Hunter's position more closely resembles Jim O'Brien's in Indiana - the guy who presided over the team while they got younger, after the playoffs slipped away.

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Vogel took over a team that was already young and ready to implement his teachings, while Hunter is still going through the roster transition. Will next year be different? Who knows, at this point. Depends on how the summer goes.

Earlier Matchup

Goran Dragic missed the first game of the season series, where the [Suns lost in Indiana 97-91](#). The Suns played a tough game but came up short at the end. Telfair put up 19 and 6 in Dragic's absence, while Marcin Gortat had 15 and 10 against Roy Hibbert. The Suns don't have either of those players tonight.

This is Indiana's only trip to Phoenix this season.

Tonight's matchup

The Pacers' #1 defense in the NBA face the NBA's worst overall offense since Hunter took over. Expect starting point guard Goran Dragic back in the lineup tonight, along with Jermaine O'Neal.

The Suns like to "get up" for playoff teams, so maybe tonight will be a revelation of effort and execution like we saw against Houston, the Lakers and New Jersey. But don't count on it.

The Pacers are on a roll while the Suns are getting rolled. Expect more of the same, no matter who starts for the Suns tonight.

Cute little fun-fact that means nothing

Tonight's game against Indiana will be the FIRST EVER NBA game to feature two pairs of brothers facing off against each other. Indiana boasts Tyler and Ben Hansbrough, while the Suns boast Marcus and [Markieff Morris](#).

Let's get ready to rumble!

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Check out the other side of the coin

[SB Nation's Pacers blog - Indy Cornrows](#)

Indy Stats

| FG | | 3PT | | FT | | Rebounds | | |
|----------------------------------|----|-----|------|----|-----|----------|------|-----|
| G | | M | | M | | A | | Pct |
| Paul George | 72 | | 37.5 | | 6.4 | | 15.1 | |
| David West | 66 | | 33.3 | | 6.9 | | 14.0 | |
| George Hill | 69 | | 34.4 | | 5.1 | | 11.5 | |
| Roy Hibbert | 72 | | 28.7 | | 4.7 | | 10.7 | |
| Lance Stephenson | 70 | | 28.9 | | 3.4 | | 7.6 | |
| Tyler Hansbrough | 73 | | 16.8 | | 2.2 | | 5.1 | |
| Gerald Green | 55 | | 18.2 | | 2.4 | | 6.9 | |
| Danny Granger | 5 | | 14.6 | | 2.0 | | 7.0 | |
| Ian Mahinmi | 73 | | 16.5 | | 1.9 | | 4.3 | |
| D.J. Augustin | 68 | | 16.3 | | 1.4 | | 3.9 | |
| Orlando Johnson | 43 | | 12.2 | | 1.5 | | 3.4 | |
| Jeff Pendergraph | 32 | | 9.7 | | 1.6 | | 3.4 | |
| Sam Young | 49 | | 12.7 | | 1.1 | | 2.8 | |
| Ben Hansbrough | 26 | | 7.0 | | 0.5 | | 1.4 | |
| Miles Plumlee | 12 | | 3.8 | | 0.2 | | 1.3 | |

Bold Prediction

At some point in the second or fourth quarter, all four brothers will be on the court.

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One of the four (either Markieff or Tyler) will have a significant game, while the other three lay an egg.