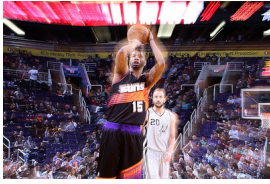


Phoenix Suns Marcus Morris trying to find way out of doghouse

Written by

Sunday, 07 April 2013 10:39 -



When [Marcus Morris](#) arrived in Phoenix to pair up with his twin brother Markieff, everyone thought (or at least hoped) they would "power up" as a duo in the Valley to rise to new heights together.

At first, that's how it appeared. After coming to Phoenix, [Marcus played at least 19 minutes](#) in 9 straight games.

Morris was productive and consistent for the first 7 of those games, putting up 12 points (52% on 3s, 48% overall), 4 rebounds and 2 steals in about 24 minutes per game. Every game was 20-28 minutes, 9-16 points. Not all-star numbers, but definitely quality production. Lindsey Hunter appreciated his fire and leadership, mentioning him by name in pregame press conferences.

Then it all went away. Poof.

First, Morris' production disappeared. In the next two games after that quality 7-game stretch (the first two of a 3-game roadie that saw the [Suns](#) lose by an average of 20 points per game), Marcus only put up a TOTAL of only 9 points, 4 rebounds a 1 steal in 41 minutes of play.

Then the minutes disappeared. Marcus has played in only 7 of the Suns last 10 games, and gotten more than 10 minutes on the court in only one of those.

"Early on, I was getting a lot of minutes," Morris [said to Paul Coro recently](#) . "And I thought I was producing with the minutes, and then it changed."

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"I'm upset that it (losing playing time) happened. I felt like I was playing real well. I was showing people what I could do. It happened, and I'm past it. I'm out here trying to have fun and improve."

Listening to Marcus, you would think that it was all hunky-dory and then suddenly he was hit by a train out of the blue.

But what really happened after his last productive game (home loss to Denver in which he scored 16 points) to put him in the dumps?

Quiet rumor is that Marcus began to feel entitled, and that Lindsey Hunter was hearing none of it. The details of what transpired are unknown, but something changed to the displeasure of a 17-year NBA vet who does not understand the feeling of entitlement.

It could simply have been a downgrade in effort, starting on the practice floor. Consistent effort has been a problem for his twin Markieff since he joined the Suns.

"I think a lot of times, I think [young Suns players in general] don't understand what [maximum effort] means," Hunter said in late March in response to a question on Marcus. "We have to show them what that means."

Asked if a feeling of entitlement is common among young players, he said, "A lot of the guys in the league look at it like that. I tell them that the league will go on with or without you."

Lindsey Hunter has consistently and constantly talked about effort, and that the lack thereof will get you out of the league faster than you'd like to think. Hunter is trying to instill a work ethic in these young players that won't hold unless there are repercussions. He feels like that's the job of a coaching staff - to each effort, and hold players accountable for it.

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The former part of that statement - teaching effort - is something not everyone agrees a coach can influence.

"You can't coach effort," Dudley said after a game recently. "That's up to the player."

But the latter part of that statement is necessary on a team of young players. It adds no value to preach effort and pride if you still give minutes to guys who don't exhibit those qualities. When you ask why [Goran Dragic](#) and [Luis Scola](#) are playing so many minutes in losses, ahead of guys like [Kendall Marshall](#) and Markieff and Marcus Morris, there is your answer. Plain and simple.

"Young guys, when they are tested and tried different ways, react differently," Hunter said last week. "New guy, first time struggling here, not playing much, it was difficult for him I can imagine. On a losing team, not seeing a lot of things going his way or our way.

"It's not what you go through, it's how you respond going through them that makes you or breaks you. We'll help him through it and hopefully he can come through it with some fight and it will make him better.

On Friday night, Hunter said he feels like Marcus is getting over his funk, and slowly returning to the guy who first arrived in Phoenix. But he's still not letting Marcus off the hook.

"I was challenging him also because he was kinda feeling sorry for himself," Hunter said. "I don't know where he was mentally but we had a good talk and I was like, look if I'm not playing you the best way to [get into games] is to bust your butt in practice and prove to me that you deserve to play. That was my message to him. Nobody's safe here. We haven't proven that we deserve X amount of minutes, you know. If you do what you're supposed to do, you'll get a chance."

Lindsey Hunter has a tough job, trying to instill a quality work ethic in his players as a foundation for next year without the benefit of winning ballgames to show them it works. And without the benefit of a contract that extends beyond the season. They see him as a short-term coach, and

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maybe they are taking the easy way out by tuning him out.

Mark Jackson, with a multi-year contract in his back pocket, did the same with Golden State a year ago. They won few games, but Jackson feels he laid the groundwork for winning seasons by teaching them "how" to practice and play last year.

"It's moments like this that build a foundation," Jackson said on the Suns struggles. "People look at us [Golden State] now and say we're a playoff team, that we've enjoyed a great season. Well they could have folded the tent last year.

"What you have to understand is, if you stay true to the process, it's going to play itself out. The foundation was laid, even though we won 23 games last year with our approach, our mentality, with our habits. And if you stay true to it, you'll be rewarded."

Asked specifically about Lindsey Hunter, the head coach of Golden State who also took over an NBA without a single minute of prior coaching experience had this to say.

"[Lindsey Hunter has] been great," he said. "I've got a lot of respect for Lindsey. One thing that's been tough to do is take over a team when he did and to get them to finish this thing out the right way. He's a guy that's done a heck of a job and he's certainly a head coach in this league."

It remains to be seen if [Lindsey Hunter's](#) tough love on his young players will have the desired result, or if they will tune him out long enough to get him fired before they start winning games (if they ever start winning games, that is).

But as a guy who values hard work and "the process" over quick and easy results, I have respect for Hunter's coaching style.

You cannot argue that Markieff and Marcus Morris won't be better players if they focused harder on their effort and their craft. They certainly would improve if that were the case.

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