

## Phoenix Suns and Boston Celtics - An NBA Draft Decade in Review, Part 1

Written by  
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[Phoenix Suns](#) fans have not experienced a game-changing draft pick since [Amare Stoudemire](#) was taken with the ninth pick in 2003. Names like [Jackson Vroman](#), [Alando Tucker](#) and several guys named "Cash" were foisted upon the Suns for years under the guise of "basketball reasons" while the Suns were one of the best and youngest teams in the NBA.

In three of the past ten years, the Suns did not even bring a first round pick onto the team: 2005, 2006, 2010. Two other years, the Suns sold off at least one first round pick while keeping another: 2004 and 2007.

That's five of the past ten years coming out of the draft with less than they started with.

In recent years, the Suns kept their picks and took safe, if not impressive, players, though the grades were often good enough to keep a scholarship. [Robin Lopez](#). Goran Dragic. Earl Clark. [Taylor Griffin](#). Markieff Morris. Kendall Marshall.

After hitting rock bottom with that approach in the Western Conference, the Phoenix Suns now have a new General Manager in charge of making draft day decisions and a renewed commitment to build the team through the draft. Ryan McDonough, the new Chief Talent Officer, has surrounded himself with good talent evaluators who embrace hard work, lots of video and in-person scouting as well as analytics in deciding who to draft when.

Let's stack up the [Celtics](#) draft history since McDonough was part of their front office, compared to the Phoenix Suns history over the past ten years. McDonough was not the main decision-maker in Boston at any point in the past decade, but he has been openly credited with

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the success of their 2006 and 2010 drafts.

Brace yourselves, Suns fans. Let's just say I'd rather have had the Celtics front office over the past ten years than the Suns' when it comes to the [NBA Draft](#) .

\*all "misses" based on career [Win Shares of players still on the board when Boston/Phoenix picked](#) , per basketball-reference.com.

2004	
Picked	
Boston	Phoenix
AJ Jefferson (15)	*traded #7
Delonte West (48)	Jackson-Vernaman (31)
Tony Allen (25)	
Justin Reed (40)	
Missed	
Boston	Phoenix
Joel Smith (17)	Luol Deng (1)
J.R. Smith (18)	Andre Iguodala (9)
James Nelson (20)	Andre Biedrins (11)
Kevin Martin (24)	Chris Humphries (14)
Anderson Varejao (30)	3 Boston guys
Trevor Ariza (43)	Joel Smith (17)
	J.R. Smith (18)
	James Nelson (20)
	Kevin Martin (24)
	Anderson Varejao (30)
	Trevor Ariza (43)

With a lot of youth already on the **Suns** roster ( [Shawn Marion](#) , [Joe Johnson](#) , Amare [Lea](#)  
[ndro Barbosa](#)

all under 23), Bryan Colangelo and new owner Robert Sarver decided to forego the 7th overall pick in favor of free agent dollars (traded for #31 and 2006 first-rounder). That summer, after the youth won only 29 games, the Suns supplemented them with veterans: PG Steve Nash (Dallas, \$60 million) and SF Quentin Richardson (

[Clippers](#)  
, \$48 million). The Suns were also planning to pay Joe Johnson a potential extension (Suns offered \$45 million that summer, Johnson wanted \$50 million). You can't knock the plan too much, since the Suns went on a run with that core to the tune of 3 WCFs in 6 years. Still, [Luol Deng](#)

or  
[Andre Iguodala](#)

would have looked good in orange and purple after JJ left just a year later.

**Boston**, on the other hand, was just then getting their youth on. These three picks played a huge part in their eventual NBA Championship. The Boston "misses" are sketchy. You could argue none were better than what Boston took, even though they didn't all spend their careers in Boston. Three years later, West was part of the [Ray Allen](#) trade while Jefferson was

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turned into

[Kevin Garnett](#) .

2005	
Drafted	
Boston	Phoenix
Gerald Green (18)	*traded #13
Paul Gougeon (52)	*traded #19
	*traded #10
	*traded #17
Missed	
Boston	Phoenix
Nate Robinson (21)	same as Boston
Garrett Jack (22)	
David Lee (30)	
Ernie Grunwell (36)	
Monta Ellis (40)	
Lou Williams (45)	
Amir Johnson (56)	
Marcin Gortat (57)	

The 2005 Draft wasn't a boon of talent where the Suns and Celtics were picking, but there were still a lot of talented players left when they each picked.

**Phoenix**, who had just finished 62-20 with one of the leagues youngest rosters, totally punted on the draft. This was Bryan Colangelo's last draft for the Suns (he left for Toronto before the end of the 2005-06 season). The Phoenix core was still young and (they thought) intact. But a LOT of money was about to be thrown around, so the Suns sold off their draft pick. Sarver was looking at spending as much as \$180 million in extensions that summer that summer alone.

Both Amare Stoudemire AND Joe Johnson were eligible for, and wanted, MAX extensions. No way was that going to happen without Sarver putting his head in a vice. Two max extensions in one offseason is unheard of. Seriously. But Sarver was willing to spend most of it, at least. He wanted to keep JJ, but at \$60 million rather than \$90 million.

Joe Johnson, feeling disrespected, forced a trade to someone who would give him the max, so the Suns relented and at least got [Boris Diaw](#) and two future #1s for him. Amare signed his \$90 million extension three months later, just a week before season-ending microfracture surgery.

The Suns traded four different draft picks that year, though two had been traded at least a year before: #13, acquired years earlier, was traded to Charlotte in 2004 in order for them to select Jahidi White in the expansion draft. #21 ( [Nate Robinson](#) , which had been acquired for Luol Deng, was used to acquire [Kurt Thomas](#) ),

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and #57 (

[Marcin Gortat](#)

, years away from playing in the NBA) were traded during or soon after the draft. Their own #30 had been traded in 2003 for the rights to Leandro Barbosa.

For **Boston**, high-schooler [Gerald Green](#) was a boom/bust player who turned out to be a bust. There were so many better players than Gerald Green in that draft.

[Ryan Gomes](#)

was a second-round steal and played well enough to be part of the Garnett trade as well.

2006	
Drafted	
Boston	Phoenix
Randy Foye (7)	Traded #21
Rajon Rondo (11)	Traded #27
Missed	
Boston	Phoenix
None	Rajon Rondo (21)
	Kyle Lowry (24)
	Steve Novak (32)
	Craig Smith (36)
	Daniel Gibson (42)
	Paul Millsap (47)

2006 was Ryan McDonough's coming out party in the **Boston** front office. He was sure that [Rajon Rondo](#)

was one of the two best players in the entire draft and he was absolutely right. No one contributed more Win Shares since being drafted in 2006 than Rondo.

[Randy Foye](#) was taken at #7 by Boston and bandied about that day, ultimately ending up in Minnesota. The Celtics came out of it with [Sebastian Telfair](#) (2005, #13) and [Theo Ratliff](#)

The **Suns**, once again, punted. Mike D'Antoni led the Draft effort as the interim GM after Colangelo left, and D was never much for drafting end-of-the-bench guys. He liked his 8-man rotation, which was about to be a 9-man rotation with Amare returning healthy. The Suns had just made their second straight WCF and would be a favorite for the 2007 Finals.

Plus, a year after extending Amare the max, the Suns had two more youngsters ready for extensions. Leandro Barbosa and Boris Diaw. were both up for extensions, and got them to the

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tune of \$14 million per year (\$75 million total), starting a year later.

With Amare's contract kicking in, the Suns were bleeding money. They traded both picks away for cash, the first of which not only was the best player in the 2006 draft, but was a pick that had come from Atlanta in the JJ trade a year earlier. Technically, the Suns got a 2007 first rounder from the Celtics for Rondo, but the Suns sold that one too.

2007	
Drafted	
Boston	Phoenix
traded #8	*traded #24
traded #24	Alando Tucker (25)
Gabe Pruitt (33)	D.J. Strawberry
Glen Davis (35)	
Missed	
Boston	Phoenix
Marc Gasol (48)	Rudy Fernandez (24)
Josh McRoberts (37)	Aaron Brooks (26)
	Aron Alreja (27)
	Thabo Sifiso (28)
	Carl Landry (31)
	Glen Davis (35)
	Josh McRoberts (37)
	Marc Gasol (48)

In 2007, the **Suns** had just had their hearts broken by San Antonio for the second time in 3 years, falling short of the WCF despite being supremely talented. Now, the tax bill was coming due. Both Barbosa and Diaw had been extended for a total of \$14 million per season, and Amare's salary was growing each season as well. Add in Nash and others and the Suns were looking to be well into luxury tax territory.

Suns part-owner Steve Kerr took over the front office and promptly sold off three first round draft picks (#24 in 2007 that had been acquired for Rajon Rondo, plus unprotected first-rounders in 2008 and 2010) as well as Kurt Thomas. All to save money for the tax bill on the Suns' remaining players. The Suns were a top-10 spending team for several years in a row during this period.

And that's not even considering Shawn Marion, who was up for an extension of his own that would start in 2008. Marion's tenure and previous max contract would require more than \$20 million per year if signed off. Sarver was already paying gobs of lux tax money. So Steve Kerr politely told Marion that only a handful of guys in the league deserve max money. Marion did not like that.

\*Special footnote: the Suns ALMOST had the 8th pick in the 2007 Draft from Atlanta, but the [Hawks](#)

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got the ping-pong balls to jump to #3 and keep their pick. The Suns reportedly really wanted [Joakim Noah](#) to replace Kurt Thomas... When the Suns didn't get that pick, it rolled over to 2008.

For **Boston**, the summer of 2007 was a watershed moment in their franchise. After finishing 5th-worst in the NBA, they traded the #5 pick and others for Ray Allen. Then they traded [Al Jefferson](#) and others for Kevin Garnett. These trades were fueled by the Celtics draft success in recent years.

In a span of one offseason, the Celtics went from bottom-5 in the league to Finals contender to NBA Championship winner.

2008	
Drafted	
Boston	Phoenix
J.R. Giddens (30)	Robin Lopez (15)
	*traded #24
	Goran Dragic (45)
Missed	
Boston	Phoenix
Nikola Pekovic (31)	Ray Hibbert (17)
Mario Chalmers (34)	JoVale McGehee (18)
DeAndre Jordan (35)	J.J. Hickson (19)
Omer Asik (36)	Ryan Anderson (21)
Lut Mbaha a Moude (37)	Serge Ibaka (24)
Goran Dragic (45)	Nicolas Batum (25)
	George Hill (26)
	plus Celtic misses

The **Suns** finally got more payback than Boris Diaw from the JJ trade when they took Robin Lopez in 2008. But by this time, the bloom was off the rose of these Suns. They'd already seen it wilting, and tried to jumpstart the team by trading Marion for Shaquille O'Neal. It was a misfit from the start, and the Suns went home in the first round.

Lopez was a nice pick, but look at the picks that came after that. Several of them would have been as good as Lopez. Note: [Serge Ibaka](#) \*could\* have been taken with the Suns' own pick later in that round, but it had already been sold off with Kurt Thomas the year before.

Less than a week after winning a thrilling Finals over the [Lakers](#) , **Boston** came into the draft with a hangover and promptly fell asleep with the phone off the hook. They missed on a boatload of talent to take a guy who would hardly ever play in the NBA. Shows what can happen when you think you've got it all, and a late first can't possibly help your team.

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Okay, that's enough bloodshed for the day. Tomorrow, I will recap Phoenix and Boston's 2009-2012 drafts. It's important to look at recent events as a barometer for success in the immediate future.

In summary, Boston did better in the 2004-2008 drafts than the Phoenix Suns did.