

Phoenix Suns Welcome Alex Len: 2013 First Round NBA Draft Pick

Written by
Saturday, 29 June 2013 15:48 -



During the highly anticipated [2013 NBA Draft](#) which took place on Thursday night, the [Phoenix Suns](#) drafted [Alex Len](#), a 7'1" sophomore center from Maryland with their 5th overall pick in the first round.

This was the Suns' highest draft pick since 1987, when the Suns selected Armon Gilliam at #2 overall. Understanding that Phoenix was in the rare position to take a true top-level talent, the front office and coaching staff unanimously agreed to bet the farm on the biggest player with arguably the highest ceiling, who they also reported to have ranked as the top prospect on their draft board as well.

Now that the draft is over, the Suns made it official yesterday with the introduction of the newest addition to the Suns.

After a brief introduction from Lon Babby, Ryan McDonough began by strolling down memory lane in which Ryan McDonough discussed his long-term scouting of Len which began three years ago in Lithuania. He stated how familiar he was with Alex's game and how closely he followed him over the past three years, and how impressed he was by his character, work-ethic, and potential.

So what are the plans for the future now that the Suns have their man?

Here are some excerpts taken from yesterday's introductory press conference.

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Some of the more noteworthy quotes from Len were as follows:

Alex Len

On how he sees himself fitting in with the Suns and the NBA in general

The NBA has better spacing, so it makes it easier on the big guys because we have more space to work on the (low) block. I know I can contribute right away on the defensive end of the floor. I have size, I can alter shots, I can rebound and run the floor, and on offense we'll see what coach wants me to do.

In regard to the stress fracture of his ankle:

It's been like eight weeks or two months after the surgery, but the doctors are telling me I'll be cleared to do stuff on the court in August and I should be fine by training camp.

About his athleticism and mobility:

I know the Phoenix Suns like to play high tempo and run up and down, so I think it fits my game well. I think my agility came from a long time ago when I did gymnastics when I was young which helped with my coordination and my agility.

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On what he plans to work on during his transition to the NBA

Getting stronger is the first thing, and polishing my post moves.

In my opinion, Len's best response came when asked why he wasn't able to get more shots in college and why his team wasn't more successful:

In college the spacing...sucks (laughter from the crowd). Every time I got the ball it was a double-team so the coach wanted me to kick (the ball) out to my teammates, so that's what I did.

The Suns' new GM Ryan McDonough also fielded a couple of questions about the process of making the decision to draft Len.

Ryan McDonough

One of the things that really impressed me about Alex (vs other top NBA prospects) is how he rose to the occasion, and how he was able to score effectively against NBA size, length, and athleticism. And defensively, how he was able to guard those guys and lock them down on the other end of the court.

He goes on...

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The best barometer of how a guy is going to play in the NBA is how he does against other NBA players, and I thought Alex did extremely well in those match-ups

One of those match-ups that McDonough may be referring to is when Maryland played Kentucky last season, in which Len matched up against none other than [Nerlens Noel](#) in the season opener. In that performance, Len was dominant against Noel, registering 23 points (10-18), 12 rebounds and 4 blocks. Comparatively, Len held Noel to only 4 points (2-6), 9 rebounds, and 3 blocks.

Although this was only the first game for the freshman Noel while playing against the sophomore Len, it was still Alex's best performance of the season, and just happened to be against the very player he would be competing against in the draft. One has to believe his dominating performance against Noel was at least of some significance in making the decision to rank him higher.

Finally, the Suns' new head coach Jeff Hornacek was also given an opportunity to discuss how Len may be used by the Suns.

Jeff Hornacek

We're going to be pushing the ball...He's either going to be the first one down (offensively) in that post up area, or he's going to trail the play, swing it, go into quick pick-and-rolls. He's got a great pick and roll pop action where he can make that 15-17 foot shot. So there's a variety of ways we can use him...especially in the post where he's going to command double-teams and open it up for a lot of other guys.

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Although Len wasn't the most mobile big in the draft, the Suns seem to think he is more than capable of playing their up-tempo style and using his size and agility to create match-up problems for the other team.

Final Thoughts

In the end, the Suns seem to believe they got exactly the player they wanted, and it also seems as if Len shares the same enthusiasm about playing in Phoenix.

While fans, analysts, and everyone in between may continue to dissect this pick, or scrutinize it based on who the Suns could have taken instead, the Suns clearly had a vision and a plan going into the draft, and they stuck with it.

Good for them.

Full video of the press conference courtesy of Suns.com