

Phoenix Suns offseason on track, need to take it slow in free agency

Written by

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Historically speaking, this is a "lay low" year. If the Suns stay true to form, the roster would stay nearly intact going into the 2013-14 season. For the past five years, the Suns have alternated years of heavy activity in even years vs. virtually no activity in odd years.

Let's hope the pattern doesn't continue.

Odd Years

In **2009**, the [Phoenix Suns](#) laid low in the free agent market until finally signing [Channing Frye](#) to "replace" Shaquille O'Neal for barely more than the league minimum before re-signing [Grant Hill](#) and extending [Steve Nash](#) for two more years through the 2011-12 season. Thanks to that minor tinkering, the Suns were able to hit the 2009-10 with a running start and a clear vision, taking a 14-3 record before the league knew what hit them.

After the lockout ended in December **2011**, the Suns laid low again. They only patched the backup point guard (Telfair, Price) and shooting guard (Brown, Redd) positions while riding out Nash's last season with basically the same cast of characters that just missed the playoffs the prior season. 2011-12 This was the "stay the course" year, and the Suns did just that. They basically matched the record and result of the prior year, coming up short of the playoffs.

Even Years

In **2010**, the Phoenix Suns did anything but lay low. After losing [Amare Stoudemire](#) and GM Steve Kerr, the Suns quickly signed "Amare Lite" [Hakim Warrick](#) to an \$18 million deal less than 24 hours later on July 2. With the die cast, the Suns showed the world they were all in for a 2010 bondo job. Within ten days, they had signed [Josh Childress](#)

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for \$35 million and traded for Hedo Turkoglu's monster contract. All before a new front office was hired to manage the team going forward.

The herky-jerky player moves of the summer of 2010 quickly proved to fail in the 2010-11 season, with the Suns trying to play Hedo at PF to overwhelm teams with offense. The Suns limped to a 12-11 start before blowing it up with a six-player trade in December that left the team in further disarray until a late-season surge proved to be too little, too late.

Then **2012** happened. On July 1, 2012, the first day of free agency, the Suns visited their top free agent target, [Michael Beasley](#), and offered \$18 million over three seasons. They envisioned Beasley in his perfect incarnation - a dialed-in, matured small forward who could carry the scoring load for the offensively-challenged Suns.

By July 4, the Suns had traded Steve Nash for 4 draft picks, got verbal agreement to sign [Goran Dragic](#) for up to \$34 million, Beasley for up to \$18 million and made a restricted free-agent offer to SG Eric Gordon for \$48 million. That's \$100 million committed within four days of free agency, folks.

As you all know, those quick commitments were mostly failed moves. Beasley simply remained Beasley and the [Hornets](#) matched on Gordon. Only Goran Dragic proved to be a great value, and his signing was reportedly engineered by the owner rather than the since-deposed GM.

2013, an odd year

If the Suns stay true to form, they take this summer off and ride the current roster as hard as possible while adding only a low-level rotation player or two. Listening to new GM Ryan McDonough, that might just be what he wants to do.

"We'll be patient and deliberate and see if we can find some good values for us," McDonough [said to Paul Coro of azcentral.com/sports over the weekend](#). "Every year in free agency, a lot of money is spent right out of the gate. Teams spend big. The price gets driven up. A lot of times, it's to a point where teams feel uncomfortable, but they still do it because they're chasing guys. I don't think we'll be in that game."

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So far, so good. The Phoenix Suns have not (yet) jumped into the fray with an "aggressive" move to quell the nervous masses and curry short-term favor from the public. Often, those moves are the worst kind to make.

In fact, a full 30+ hours into free agency it's surprising that not a single NBA team has overspent yet. There have been a half-dozen "commitments" (only verbal agreements can be made until July 11), with none more than \$3 million a year I believe.

But don't let that fool you. Starting today, the big names will start to commit and money will begin to fly out of wallets at a record pace. Teams are fighting each other over positionless [Tyr eke Evans](#)

, not-as-good-as-he-should-be

[Josh Smith](#)

, and childish Dwight Howard. The only question is who signs first, and for how much.

The Suns need to stay out of that fray.

Breaking Bad

While I don't want the Suns to get a dime closer to the salary cap this offseason (they currently have \$6.5 of cap room), I would be quite disappointed if they bring back the same cast of characters next season only supplemented by a couple of impressionable rookies.

The was a bad locker room last season.

Oh, they were cordial to each other. To a man, they were all nice people. Dragic, Scola, Dudley and on down the line to [Kendall Marshall](#) . Every last one of them were good people.

But they didn't get along professionally. They didn't pull for each other. They didn't hold each other accountable, or keep one another in line, or rally to support each other in bad times. They simply fragmented more and more as the season went on.

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The Suns were right to move on from Gentry, who wasn't getting through to them. The worst locker room scenes were in the last weeks of Gentry's reign. But Hunter fared no better, and in the end it was the players.

"We have had more than 90 games to figure it out," Dragic said with a shrug late in the year in response to this question: *Would the team be better off next year after a summer to refresh?*

To a man, every single player, as well as the coach, knew that this roster was incompatible with each other. Not enough leadership, not enough basketball IQ, not enough commitment to excellence. Too many players wanting each others' playing time.

This roster has to change. I really hope that at least 40% of last year's roster is gone by October. I don't care how fast it happens, or how many fireworks are shot off. I only care that it happens.

And I don't mean I want the Suns to win more games next year. I am ready for a tough season that bears fruit via the 2014 lottery. I just want different players.

Unfortunately, in my mind anyway, the Suns declined to release chemistry-failure Michael Beasley before July 1. If they had done so, they could have not only relieved themselves of the SuperCool headache but stretched the cap hit of his remaining \$9 mill owed over 5 seasons (twice the remaining years plus one).

Of course, the Suns aren't in the business of saving cap room this year, so maybe they want to wait on that decision until they see how the summer plays out. Yet, I really would be disappointed if Michael Beasley goes to training camp with this team next fall. He's a nice guy, but he's that guy who always makes you breathe a sigh of relief when he's gone. He's tough on the coaches because he can't stay within a scheme on offense or defense, and he's tough on his teammates because he's unpredictable in every aspect. Rookies should not have Beasley around to influence their habits.

[Luis Scola](#) can be traded as of July 15, and he should be. For any price available. He is such a

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classy veteran, but he just doesn't want to be part of serious losing. I've never seen a more depressed individual than Scola while enduring last season's debacle. Please, Suns, move him to a playoff contender. Indiana could use him, as could San Antonio. Get an asset back. Though, don't hold your breath for a 2014 first round pick, Suns fans. Scola isn't worth that. But a second rounder would be good enough for me.

One or more of [Markieff Morris](#) , [Marcus Morris](#) and Kendall Marshall should be swapped out for other comparable talent with team-first, effort-first attitudes. It's not that these guys are bad players. On the contrary, they could each be very good. But their collective contribution to the Suns was lacking in terms of effort and consistency. All of them wanted more than they deserved in terms of playing time, and were surprisingly lacking in self-awareness of their own faults.

At the end of the season, Suns vets hinted at young players who thought they were better than they really were, and who wouldn't listen to the vets for advice or help. I think the more you have of these guys, the more likely they are to feel validated because other kids are getting away with it.

The combo of Beasley, Morris, Morris and Marshall - in other words, all the Suns players 23-and-under - fed off each other's attitudes to ultimately pull them down as a group. When you have a group that's not succeeding as a group, you split up the group. That's Management 101.

After that (divesting of Beasley, Scola, and 1-2 of the three Ms), the Suns' moves should all be about the future. If they trade [Marcin Gortat](#) and/or [Jared Dudley](#) , it should only be if a good, young asset comes back in return for each. That could be a 2013 pick, or a 2014 pick or another young player with big upside.

Gortat is not a clubhouse leader, but he is a good NBA player and can play all the minutes that [Alex Len](#) is not ready to play.

Dudley is not a superstar nor is he a mentor in the classic sense, but he is a good example for the young kids to follow in terms of attitude and work ethic. He's a lot like new coach Jeff Hornacek in that regard, though not nearly as talented or accomplished.

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Summary

So far, so good this offseason.

1. Fire Blanks. *Check.*
2. Hire a great talent scout. *Check.*
3. Surround that talent scout with more talent scouts. *Check.*

4. Hire a promising, young coach. *Check.*
5. Surround that promising young coach with veteran coaching talent. *Check.*
6. Hire a player development coordinator with actual, successful player development on his resume. *Check.*

7. Draft at least two guys with major upside. *Check.*
8. Turn over the roster enough to make sense for the future. *TBD.*

Let's keep it going:

- don't be hasty... "lay low"

- trade Scola to a contender
- trade Gortat and/or Dudley for good, future assets

- make small trade(s) to replace one or more of Morris, Morris and Marshall

- sign supporting players to deals that only guarantee 1 year
- plan to come to training camp without Beasley
- plan to have a "development" year with focus on progress rather than wins
- position team to have the most cap space possible for next summer