

Are the Phoenix Suns Tanking for the 2014 NBA Draft?

Written by
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There's no question about it, the [Phoenix Suns](#) are in full rebuilding mode and looking to acquire young talent at nearly every position.

Although the front office at the time seemed reluctant to do so, the Suns were basically forced into this reality last season when they earned the 4th worst record in the NBA, going 25-57. After posting the second worst record in the history of this successful franchise, everyone predicted a change in staff and philosophy on the horizon...and that's exactly what happened.

Where They Stand

With the ousting of Lance Blanks and [Lindsey Hunter](#) , and the acquisitions of GM Ryan McDonough and Head Coach Jeff Hornacek, the Suns appeared to be starting fresh, and finally beginning their process of rebuilding without trying (unsuccessfully) to be mediocre at the same time.

The [2013 NBA Draft](#) netted the Suns' a top five draft pick which they used to draft Maryland Center [Alex Len](#) , and also the 30th pick, which they traded up to 29th in order to draft Kentucky PG [Archie Goodwin](#) . Both of these picks have a great deal of upside and potential, and could develop into future starters at their positions in a few years.

Both picks were investments for the future and not expected to make an immediate impact. This fit with the Suns' new strategy of getting better through acquiring young talent in the draft, and still puts them in prime position to acquire another top pick in the 2014 draft, which is [regarded by many to be the most talented group of prospects in over a decade.](#)

So far so good.

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In addition, the Suns weren't expected to be major players in free agency this year. Instead they were expected to maintain their cap flexibility for the coming years when they could take a shot at one of the top free agents in either 2014 or 2015.

However, when free agency began, it didn't take long for the Suns to jump in head first with one of the biggest trades thus far. The Suns acquired one of the most sought after assets in the NBA with PG [Eric Bledsoe](#) , in addition to SF [Caron Butler](#) and his \$8 million expiring contract. Outgoing was fan favorite SG/SF [Jared Dudley](#) and a 2014 2nd round pick.

While this trade was regarded by most as a huge win for the Suns, new questions now arise as to the immediate impact on the Suns' future.

What Happens Next?

As of right now, the Suns have 15 players under contract for next season, and are sitting right at the salary cap limit.

PG: [Goran Dragic](#) , Eric Bledsoe, [Kendall Marshall](#) , Archie Goodwin

SG: PJ Tucker, [Shannon Brown](#) , Malcolm Lee

SF: Caron Butler, [Michael Beasley](#)

PF: Luis Scola, [Markieff Morris](#) , [Marcus Morris](#)

C: [Marcin Gortat](#) , [Channing Frye](#) , Alex Len

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That's the current roster, but the positions above aren't set in stone...as many of the players have versatility to play two positions, (Dragic, Bledsoe, Goodwin, Tucker, Beasley, Morri, Frye)

This versatility gives the Suns the option to make more moves either in free agency, or before the trade deadline in February...and more moves are certainly expected to happen.

But what will they be?

Trading Scola seems very likely once July 15th comes around...but what is his value?

Gortat is a top 10-15 center in the league on a great contract and could be moved for another 2014 first round pick at some point, but it's unlikely it will be to another rebuilding team with a high draft pick next year.

Dragic could also be traded now that the Suns acquired Bledsoe, but I believe this is the least likely scenario given his relatively young age (still just 27), and his status as the current face of the franchise and best player on the team. Besides, there are indications that the Suns plan on using both Dragic and Bledsoe together in the starting lineup.

So How Good/Bad Will the Suns Be Next Season?

Honestly there's no way to know at the moment as the roster is still in flux. But we can at least look at a few factors to see where they are headed.

A back court consisting of Dragic and Bledsoe at the same time would give the Suns speed, athleticism, and aggression on offense; and in my estimation, could be one of the better defensive back courts in the NBA as well.

If the Suns choose to keep Gortat for the time being, the Suns will retain one of the better centers in the league, and also expect to see the return of Channing Frye who will add three-point shooting and help the Suns space the floor either as a back-up center or possibly a

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starting power forward.

But surely losing Dudley will hurt them, right?

His veteran leadership and chemistry with his teammates will certainly be missed. However, one can't forget the one-year rental of Caron Butler who could start at small forward for the time being, and averaged 10.4 ppg last season in around 24 min; while shooting approximately 39% from beyond the arc and 42% overall.

These stats are at least similar to Dudley's production of 10.9 ppg in 27.5 min, averaging around 39% on three point shots and around 47% overall.

In my opinion, the Suns look like a better team overall, which is certainly a good thing...But how much better? And, will it hurt their chances of landing a coveted top five pick in the highly anticipated 2014 Draft?

The Competition

The Suns are just one of the teams who will likely be playing for a top lottery pick next season, whether intentionally or unintentionally. While anything can happen, it looks like the [Boston](#)

[Celtics](#)

[Charlotte Bobcats](#)

[Orlando Magic](#)

[Philadelphia 76ers](#)

[Milwaukee Bucks](#)

[Detroit Pistons](#)

[Sacramento Kings](#)

, and

[Toronto Raptors](#)

are just some of the teams that could be competing with Phoenix for one of the best picks next season.

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Even with the recent additions to the Suns thus far, Phoenix still projects to be pretty bad next season...But will they be bad enough?

Historically speaking, there is a [significant drop off in a team's chances to land an All-Star caliber player after the fifth pick in the draft](#)

Here's a look at the percentage of draft picks who turn out to be All-Stars by their draft position, taken from the link above:

1. Pick #1 - 18/27 - 67%
2. Pick #3 - 12/27 - 44%
3. Pick #5 - 10/27 - 37%
4. Pick #4 - 10/27 - 37%
5. Pick #2 - 9/27 - 33%
6. Pick #10 - 6/27 - 22%
7. Pick #9 - 6/27 - 22%
8. Pick #6 - 6/27 - 22%
9. Pick #18 - 5/27 - 19%
10. Pick #24 - 4/27 - 15%
11. Pick #17 - 4/27 - 15%
12. Pick #11 - 4/27 - 15%
13. Pick #7 - 4/27 - 15%
14. Pick #21 - 3/27 - 11%

There's no question that the first pick gives a team the best odds (67%) of landing a future All-Star by far. However, pick #3 also gives 44% odds, while picks 4,5 at least give teams 37% odds of drafting a game changer.

But as you can see, after the top 5 picks, the percentages drop significantly and the difference between them becomes much less significant.

The projected top prospects in next year's draft will be Andrew Wiggins (SF), Julius Randle (PF), Jabari Parker (SF), Aaron Gordon (PF), and Marcus Smart (PG). There will certainly be other risers and perhaps some fallers (like Shabazz Muhammed this year), but either way, the top five of a draft is usually where the best talent is found.

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So will the Suns really be bad enough next year to secure another top 5 pick?

Time will tell, but with every improvement they make right now, their chances of doing so goes down.

Would the Suns be smarter to wait until next year to make any more trades for other valuable players, and trade only for draft picks and expiring contracts? Or, should the Suns jump at the first opportunity to improve their team, regardless of whether it comes via free agency or the draft?

Even if they choose to stand pat as far as talent and only acquire more picks and role players for the time being, just how bad are the Suns likely to be next year with the team they currently have?

Poll Which draft pick will the Suns land next year based on their record?

- 1-5: They'll still be really bad next season
- 6-10: They made minor improvements, but still looking at a top 10 pick
- 10-14: They'll still be in the lottery, but much more competitive
- 15+: The Suns made significant improvements and will make the playoffs

1056 votes | [Results](#)