

## Phoenix Suns GM Ryan McDonough talks about the process, Bledsoe, Dragic and playing fast

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During the fourth quarter of Thursday's Summer League game, where the Suns were holding a big lead to go 4-0 and qualify for the quarterfinals of the SL tourney, new Suns GM Ryan McDonough laid out the blueprint for the [Phoenix Suns](#) going forward.

"When you think of the [Phoenix Suns](#)," he said to Rick Kamla and Sam Mitchell of NBATV. "You think of fast-paced offensive basketball, aggressive, putting a lot of pressure on the defense. And we're trying to bring that back."

Over the past few forty years, the Phoenix Suns have wanted to play fast, exciting offense with enough defense sprinkled in to close out games. When the Suns acquired players, it was always with an eye toward scoring. And if they could play defense as well that was a bonus.

With an offense-first, defense-second mentality, the Suns were always a pleasure to watch and the eventual purveyors of heartbreak in the playoffs. But at least the fans were happy and the players loved the scheme.

Occasionally, the Suns would put together the right lineup to score the ball like crazy yet boast just enough two-way players to keep the other team from scoring even more.

In the late 80s, it was Jeff Hornacek and [Dan Majerle](#) on the wings who could both score and defend with defense-only Mark West guarding the paint. In the early 90s, during the Finals run, Majerle still offered two-way play while Westphal rotated in offensive and defensive players often enough to approximate enough defense to win a ton of games.

In the late 90s, the Suns went too heavy on defense, too light on offense and began to lose the interest of the fan base while scraping into the playoffs for early exits.

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In the mid-2000s, the offense returned with a vengeance. The Nash era boasted league-leading offense with elite-ish wing defenders [Shawn Marion](#) and [Raja Bell](#) who provided enough defense to keep the other team in check while defensive specialists (ie.

[Kurt Thomas](#)

) dotted the lineup as needed.

As always before, the offense-first, defense-second mentality was a pleasure to watch but eventually broke hearts in the playoffs. So the Suns briefly tried to morph into a defensive team (without having the necessary defensive players) without losing a lot on offense. It did not work.

The offense, win totals and fanbase suffered as the team lost its identity.

Enter a new era with a Back to the Future theme.

"We're trying to play with effort, pushing the ball and trying to play uptempo," McDonough said of the plan for the Suns going forward.

He brought in one of the Suns' two-way players from yesteryear, Jeff Hornacek, to show these guys the right way to play. When pre-SL practices started, Hornacek spent time on three major things:

- run, run, and run some more
- shoot, shoot and shoot some more (game-speed shots, not jacking randomly from the perimeter)
- generate offense off defensive turnovers

The immediate results are encouraging. The Suns incumbent players - [Markieff Morris](#) , [Marcus Morris](#)

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[Kendall Marshall](#)

,  
[Diante Garrett](#)

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### [P.J. Tucker](#)

- are all in great shape and moving at a faster clip than at any point last season.

Hornacek says he had to spend time last week making these guys pick up the pace - no walking it up the court, no loafing - and it's worked to the tune of a 4-0 start in SL with three of them convincing wins (and one buzzer-beater after a 24-point comeback). You've seen it yourself. These Summer Suns are running on every possession, and they are playing very efficient basketball. High field goal percentage and SL-leading offense.

It helped that Hornacek knew what he was walking into.

"He knew every single player on our roster, their strengths and weaknesses," McDonough said of Hornacek's job interview.

Since taking over, McDonough has shown that he knows how to formulate a roster to execute his vision. He has drafted and/or acquired three two-way players - C [Alex Len](#) , G [Eric Bledsoe](#) and G

### [Archie Goodwin](#)

- who can move the ball with speed. Goodwin is already showing flashes of this in Summer League. The other acquisition -

### [Caron Butler](#)

- offers shooting on the wing and a leadership presence for the young locker room.

Those new guys supplement a host of players that just might not be as bad as they played last year. The Morrii and Marshall, in particular, are proving that they are not the worst collection of young talent in the NBA. They have led an SL team that's 4-0 and has barely broken a sweat doing it.

Folks question how all these parts will fit next season. When Bledsoe was acquired, folks wondered about incumbent PG [Goran Dragic](#) . McDonough and Hornacek have no such qualms.

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"It's not Goran or Eric, it's Goran and Eric," McDonough said without hesitation or contrived confidence. "The way Jeff and I would like to play is whoever gets the ball outlets it to the guard on that side. Goran and Eric are both very aggressive, very athletic, they get in the paint well and they play defense well."

These Suns are going to be blinding fast. And with Dragic, Goodwin and Bledsoe on the perimeter they can also defend at a high level and create offense with turnovers and fast-breaks.

But before you start getting excited about the Suns win totals, McDonough wants to preach patience. He knows the Suns haven't arrived anywhere yet.

"This year, I think the process is more important than the results," he said. "If we can get these guys to buy in, they play hard, they play unselfishly, they're not worried about shots or minutes. If they're just worried about winning and playing the right way, I think we'll do some great things."

Certainly, the Suns are not going to win many games without more talent. Winning requires top-end talent that can close out games. The Suns don't have any top-end talent.

But they can play fast. And maybe they can get the fans a little more excited about their future while coming up short in the win column.

"We still have a ways to go," McDonough warns us.

### **Extra point:**

McDonough riffed a bit on his background, and the mistaken notion that he's all about analytics over traditional methods of scouting.

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It's a supplement (analytics). I came up as more of a traditional scout. For me, analytics help complement what my eyes can see. I try to watch as many games as I can in person or on film. I try to study the players and get to know everything about them. And you hope what the analytics show confirms what your eyes tell you. Sometimes it confirms it, sometimes it refutes it.

There are a few guys in the draft model, for example, that I didn't like as much or didn't spend as much time on, so then I'll go back and spend more time on those guys to see if I'm missing something. But for me it always is traditional scouting first and foremost, and I know Jeff's the same way. He goes by his eyes, but also understands the analytics, understands the effective field goal percentage, the value of 2-for-1s.