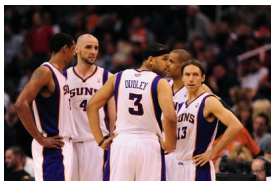


Written by

Tuesday, 03 September 2013 11:00 -



Last week a breakdown of the point guard rotation might have left the impression that the new duo of [Goran Dragic](#) and [Eric Bledsoe](#) will be the biggest strength for the Phoenix Suns this upcoming season. Now that discussion is tabled and looking at the front-court it may be time to rethink the strengths of this team.

Between the young, new faces in the paint and the veterans there are plenty of talented players on this roster capable of doing big things inside.

Once again the crew comes together to debate this topic as the season is rapidly approaching with Training Camp right around the corner and pre-season roughly a month away. Basketball is coming back like Channing Frye and I, just like everyone else, couldn't be happier for both...

Fourteenth Topic: [Phoenix Suns](#) front-court rotation

1. *Breaking the Ice:* Obviously [Channing Frye](#) being cleared to play is great news on a multitude of levels, but what was your initial reaction?

Jacob Padilla: At first confusion, because I first saw the news second- or third-hand on Twitter. Once I traced it back to the original tweet and had his return confirmed to me by Twitter, happiness was my reaction. Most of you know I'm a Creighton fan/student/basketball beat writer, and last year one of my favorite guys on the team was forced to retire from the game due

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to heart issues. I'm just glad to see Channing cleared to step back on the court and play the game he lives, something Josh Jones wasn't able to do. Channing has been one of my favorite players on the team the last few years, and I'm really looking forward to see him back on the court.

Dave King: Totally excited for Channing. To have your livelihood taken from you due to a largely untreatable condition is a terrible thing to endure. Sure, Frye would have been fine in an analyst role or some other basketball-related endeavor, but he's a player first and should be able to retire on his own terms. Now, maybe that's the case.

Kris Habbas: Pure elation. I am a resident of Arizona, born and raised just a few years behind Channing at the high school level. I remember watching him play at St. Mary's, then at Arizona, and now with the Suns. He has always been a very likeable guy so getting back to health is great for Channing, his family, and the Suns organization.

Richard Parker: Excitement. Not only was I immediately relieved for Channing, but I was excited to know that we'd be seeing him out on the court draining three pointers again this season. It's great to hear about his good health, as it obviously means a lot to him, his family, and his career. Moreover, he means a lot to this team and its fan base, and seeing him make this first three this year will bring a smile to thousands of fans.

Sean Sullivan: Very happy for him. The best news is that he appears to be healthy enough to play, which is bigger than basketball itself. As for the Suns, I think Channing will undoubtedly help Phoenix with floor spacing as well as, believe it or not, defense. I realize that the Suns are not trying to win for the sake of winning at this point, but I think Frye could still be an asset for the Suns moving forward.

2. So much talk about the Suns is about their point guard rotation. With a healthy Frye and [Marcin Gortat](#) isn't the front-court and their depth the biggest strength this year?

P.S. In Jacob's Rankings he had [Frye as a C and Markieff Morris as a D- at Power Forward](#) and Marcin Gortat as a (C+) and Alex Len NA (did not play, not ranked) at center

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JP: I still think the Goran Dragic and Eric Bledsoe duo will be the team's strength next year, but a Frye-Gortat frontcourt at full health is definitely solid and not a weakness by any means. However, I'm not sold on Markieff Morris as a positively contributing member of a rotation just yet and we have no idea what Alex Len will be like as a rookie (for comparison's sake, 2011 No. 5 pick and 2012-13 rookie Jonas Valanciunas put up nine and six in 24 minutes per game last year; good but hardly dominating). Plumlee and Kravstov are little more than bodies. The depth is a huge question mark. And we have no idea how Frye will play nor how long Gortat will be a Sun. There is some talent in that frontcourt, but it's far too unstable to call it a strength at this point.

DK: If Frye and Gortat are healthy and in shape, then it's arguable. But still no. The Suns strength is still at PG. Frye and Gortat rely on the PGs to set up the offense, take advantage of the spacing and get them the ball in the right spots. The bigs can do very little without help. Gortat and Frye might only score 20 points TOTAL per game next season if the PGs don't run a quality offensive set.

KH: I think so. With the young guard (Markieff and Len) as well as the older guard (Gortat and Frye) the team has quality depth in the front-court. It is yet to be seen if any of them are stars or even healthy enough to play 35 minutes a night, but regardless of that they have depth and talent in the paint.

RP: I'm not ready to call it a strength just yet. Frye will be returning from an entire year off so it's tough to expect much from him initially. This means Gortat (who has just recovered from an injury himself) will be starting alongside Markieff Morris, and until the latter shows serious improvement from this first two seasons, I can't call the frontcourt a strength. I'm also not expecting too much from Len this year. Save for a few flashes of potential and brilliance on both sides of the court, Len will be a net negative on the year, as is the case with most rookie big men.

SS: I think it could be a strength for the Suns, depending on how the Suns choose to handle the rotations. It's possible that Frye will play only sparsely in the second unit upon his return, until he gets back into basketball shape. Not only that, but I doubt Gortat has much of a future with the Suns, so who knows what the front court will really look like this season.

3. Overall impact -- offense, defense, leadership, and experience; is Frye the best player on the Suns roster?

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DK: I see Frye taking Dudley's spot in the locker room right next to Dragic, with those two handling all the post game interviews along with Gortat. Frye will definitely be the emotional bellwether for this team of pups. But his conditioning and near-certain drop in FG% due to lack of activity will make it hard for him to be a difference maker on the court on a consistent basis. Sure, Frye will have a few games with 5-7 threes, but more of them will be poo poo platters. I would love to be proven wrong.

KH: No Dudley. No Hill. No Nash. Who else is supposed to be the leader? On this roster, with his personality, Frye has the best chance of being an impactful leader than any of his teammates. His combination of experience and skill should provide good mentoring for both Markieff and Len.

RP: No. Frye might be the best presence in the locker room due to his experience and likable personality, but the best player on the roster is still Goran Dragic. Neither is a natural leader though, so it will be interesting to see who takes that mantle this year. I'm guessing it will be a collective effort, which Frye will only help.

SS: I've never really pictured Frye as a leader, but he's certainly one of the elder statesmen now with this very young team. He has a decent offensive game when used correctly, and is an underrated defender, but I don't think he has the talent of Bledsoe, Dragic, or Gortat ... so I very much doubt he'll end up being the best player for the Suns this season.

JP: No, he's not the best player on the roster. The best shooter, yes (which is somewhat depressing considering he's a 7-foot forward/center), but not the best player. He's a solid two-way guy and his leadership and locker room presence will be big for this team, but he still falls behind Dragic at the very least in the Suns power rankings.

4. *The concept of being healthy is very different than being in basketball shape. How much does that concern you with Frye (and [Alex Len](#) to an extent)?*

KH: That is the million dollar question for Frye. Even if he is cleared to play, when will he be ready to get on the court and positively affect the team? He has a month of training camp and then a month in the pre-season to knock off the kinks of having 12-15 months of golf, yoga, and video games as his primary forms of exercise.

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RP: I fully expect Frye to be entirely rusty to start the season. I'm talking 2010 WCF Games 1-2 rusty. After a year off from basketball, anything he provides beyond that at the beginning of the year will be a nice bonus. Alex Len will take a little while to get there as well. Since he's been losing weight while recovering from his surgeries, I expect him to start getting back to game shape in training camp, and carry that over into the season. To answer the question though, I'm not too concerned about their basketball shapes. It's to be expected (and it's not like the Suns are competing for a title from day 1).

SS: It doesn't really concern me that much. The biggest thing is that Frye is healthy, for his sake. If the Suns were playoff contenders and he was the missing piece then yes, I may be concerned. But the Suns are in no rush for him to produce at this point, so he can afford to be brought back slowly.

JP: I'm very concerned. Before getting hurt at the end of 2012 and missing all of last year, Frye was already struggling with his shot in the 2011-12 season. He shot a Suns career-low 34.6 percent from deep. He claimed a big reason for this was his belief that the players would be locked out for the entire season, which led Frye to basically take the summer off instead of preparing for the season. Well, Frye has been away from the court for even longer than that and hasn't even been able to perform any kind of strenuous exercise. I'm not sure we can really expect anything from him.

DK: Certainly, Frye's personality and maturity will have a positive impact in the locker room and practice floor from day one. But on the court? Frye hasn't played NBA basketball in almost a year and a half (shoulder injury). He hasn't even broken a sweat in 12 months. Even if his heart is perfect, I wonder what shape his shoulder is in? I had shoulder surgery 10 years ago and because I didn't do professional-level rehab I still don't have complete range of motion. The scar tissue is so thick a masseuse can't work it out in one session. And then there's the re-injury issue due to overtaxing the body. The Suns will take it slow, and give him only a few minutes at a time for a while. By the way, the same goes for Alex Len. Few minutes to begin the season, with a ramp-up after the All-Star break.

5. *Since he was just cleared, how long (pick a date) in your opinion before Frye is in good enough basketball shape to affect wins, losses, and have an impact on the team?*

RP: It's pretty much an entirely arbitrary guess, but I'll say January 1st. That would give Frye a couple months to get back in the groove and start to show some consistency in the new

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calendar year.

SS: Hard to say. It really depends on how much he's been doing to keep himself in shape during his recovery. At best it will still take him at least two to three months I would think, but it could also be as much as the whole year if he is still somewhat limited due to his health scare. I would be surprised if he were to jump right back in to a full speed NBA training regimen. My best guess is that they take it a little slower with him, and that he never really gets back to full speed at all this year.

JP: I honestly have no clue and any date I throw out there would be a complete shot in the dark. I don't know enough about the shape Frye is in or what it takes to play basketball at the NBA level to say anything meaningful.

DK: March 1, at the earliest. Until then, Frye will be incredibly up and down and barely working himself into shape. NBA shape is different than any "shape" we regular fans can imagine. His shooting will be down because he won't have the legs into the shot like he needs. His rebounding will be down because he can't get into position fast enough. He will get turnstiled in the post a lot as well. March seems like the first month we can hope he will be the old Channing.

KH: December 1st feels like a realistic date. The team wants to run and score, which Channing can do the latter without question, but the former is going to be a work in progress. Give him 3-4 months of intense basketball training (and with Aaron Nelson) and he will be the old Channing.

BONUS: *Loyalty is all about value it appears with this new front office. Can you see the team sending off Frye a la [Caron Butler](#) if a trade with value presents itself?*

SS: For sure. Although I'm sure the Suns' FO is fully behind Channing and pulling for him to get back into basketball shape and have an impact, this is a business, and I don't think they would hesitate at all to improve the team if the opportunity presented itself. You saw how McDonough gushed about Caron Butler at his introductory presser, only to send him packing six weeks later. Frye won't be treated any differently.

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JP: Well, it appears trading Butler was, in a way, being loyal to his wishes as he reportedly asked to go home to Wisconsin. Frye is an Arizona boy born and bred and seems to love being a Phoenix Sun, so I don't foresee him asking for a trade. However, as the others have said, if Frye can get healthy and show he has value and another team comes calling, Ryan McDonough isn't going to say no depending on what he's getting in return.

DK: In trading Dudley, Scola and Butler, Ryan McDonough has told anyone who will listen that he's starting over. No one on this roster is safe, simply because no one on this roster is better than most of the starters at their position in this league. You don't "no trade" a role player. Yes, I see Gortat, Frye and even Dragic being traded if the opportunity brings back a much higher-ceiling talent.

KH: In a heart-beat. Moving Butler was much easier, but if value presents itself like with the trading Dudley for Bledsoe then expect the team to jump on the opportunity. This front office is about actually acquiring assets, not just talking about it.

RP: Definitely. Although Frye's a likable home-grown player, he doesn't figure to be a major factor in the team's future. If the front office is presented with a scenario in which they can trade the remaining two years of his contract for some value, I don't think there would be any hesitation. If Frye returns to full health, there will definitely be some demand for him. Andrea Bargnani (a Channing Frye clone, just a lot worse at pretty much everything) and the New York Knicks proved this.

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