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This past [NBA Draft](#) was a doozy. Every player had at least one wart. None of them projected as multi-time All-Stars based on the skills they already showed in college. The final draft order shocked most of the scouting and fan communities despite consensus that the top five or six prospects were fairly interchangeable.

Of the top seven picks taken in the 2013 NBA Draft, only one was a lock for weeks ([Otto Porter](#) to Washington at #3). Two of the most heralded prospects dropped to 6th and 7th ([Nerlens Noel](#) and [Ben McLemore](#)), while two late risers went top-4 ([Anthony Bennett](#) and [Cody Zeller](#)). Muddying the waters was the number of top prospects rehabbing from surgery, unable to work out against their competition.

In the end, three of the top six picks were guys who hadn't picked up a basketball in months before being selected and weren't guaranteed to play by training camp. What got them picked was their combination of youth and potential.

All three rehabbing prospects are quite young. #1 overall pick PF/SF Anthony Bennett and #6 overall pick PF/C Nerlens Noel are still just 19 years old. Alex Len, picked fifth, just turned 20 over the summer.

Bennett's claim to the top spot was an offensive arsenal not displayed by any other front-court prospect. He can score inside and outside, like a new-day Grandmama. Cleveland, picking first, already had 2011 #1 overall pick [Kyrie Irving](#) and 2012 #4 overall pick [Dion Waiters](#) in their backcourt. They needed a frontcourt player, yet still had 2011 #4 overall pick [Tristan Thompson](#) at power forward. With a list narrowed to SF and C, the Cavs were rumored to be considering

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Alex Len and Otto Porter.

In the end, they decided Bennett's potential was the greatest and called his name. Bennett's problem is size (he's a tweener, much like [Derrick Williams](#) in Minnesota) with an allergy to defense. But he's young and talented, so there's that.

Charlotte, in need of big bodies who could score down low, passed on Alex Len to take Zeller. Zeller's game is that of an NBA center, but he's slightly undersized (6'10" in height and length) and the [Bobcats](#) somehow paid [Al Jefferson](#) \$14 million to play center a month later. Zeller will have to make his NBA mark as a stretch-four, something he's never done before. Is he the next [Channing Frye](#) ? To me, that's his best potential. Maybe a better version of Frye, but still Frye. Nothing wrong with that, but with the #4 overall pick that's a low ceiling (sorry Channing).

After Orlando ([Victor Oladipo](#)), Washington (Porter) and Charlotte (Cody Zeller) took healthy players, the Suns had their choice rehabbing Noel and rehabbing Len, or even sweet-shooting Ben McLemore.

Reportedly, the Suns ruled out McLemore after he showed up at a pre-draft workout. While Oladipo and other guards relished a chance to compete against each other, McLemore chose to work out alone and (again, reportedly) dogged it. Soon after McLemore's workout, I recall Hornacek saying that if a player can't get up the energy to go all out in a pre-draft workout he had a short career ahead of him. Not sure if that was about McLemore, but the Suns did pass on Ben a month later.

That left Noel and Len as the two best remaining prospects when the Suns picked at #5 overall. Neither had a perfect future laid out for him. Noel is a gifted defender, grabbing almost 10 rebounds and blocking four shots per game as an 18-year old freshman. But Noel had a gruesome knee injury at Kentucky that gave pause to every front office. Couple that with a non-existent offensive game, a rail-thin waist and legs so skinny you can see through them, and you've got yourself a big, huge question mark at the NBA level.

Finally, there was Alex Len. Len played much of his sophomore season on a stress fracture and showed little progress from his freshman year. Some scouts blame that on his teammates, while

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others just see a guy who won't dominate in the NBA. Yet he was picked by professional NBA draft scouts as a top prospect who could be taken as high as #1 overall thanks to his nimble feet, defensive ability and offensive touch.

[5. Phoenix Suns: C Alex Len, Maryland](#)

The Ukrainian big man has tremendous potential because of his great touch around the basket and his defensive awareness despite not playing basketball for very long. His upside hinges on that point, that as he learns the game he might become dominant. The Suns were able to take the best available player here, and they graded Len above Noel. McLemore's scoring ability could have been valuable, but the centers had too much potential. Did Phoenix take the wrong one? **Grade: B-**

None of Bennett, Len or Noel played in Summer League. All have basically dropped off the face of the earth. Golden children from the 2013 Draft are now the healthy ones - Oladipo, Zeller and later pick [Kelly Olynyk](#) .

Next Starts Now

Next week, training camps open for business. Of those three rehabbing picks, it looks as if Anthony Bennett and Alex Len are fully recovered from their injuries. Both have been cleared for contact, and will be ready (but possibly on a limited basis) to play in training camp.

Bennett was reportedly [cleared for 5-on-5 play last week](#) , while Alex Len was cleared to work out last month and [recently cleared for contact work](#) .

[Assistant coach Mark] West already has been working out players, like first-round pick Alex Len who resumed court activity last month after his second ankle surgery. Len was cleared for

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contact work with training camp starting in nine days. He has impressed coaches with his shooting touch, soft hook and eagerness to be taught.

Both players have an uphill battle for playing time. Anthony Bennett has to either smoothly transition to a new position - small forward - or fight for minutes behind Tristan Thompson and [Anderson Varejao](#)

while Cleveland tries to win a lot of games and make the playoffs. My skepticism of Bennett's smooth transition of spot-up small forward comes from watching players like Michael Beasley and Derrick Williams - to name a couple - have trouble with that same transition in prior years. Both were #2 overall picks who'd dominated in college at the 4 position but were too small to play the 4 full-time in the pros. It's possible that Bennett becomes the new Larry Johnson or [Paul Millsap](#), but Tristan Thompson is in the way of that.

[Alex Len's](#) rehab has gone exactly as the Suns predicted. They predicted clearance for work outs in late August, and clearance for contact by training camp. It remains to be seen what Len's real status is (same for Bennett), but we'll know more by the time training camp is a few days underway.

On the other end, Nerlens Noel still has no timetable for return. The Suns staff took a hard look at Noel's medicals and came away with reservations. As did the other teams in the top 5 of the Draft. Noel was clearly the top talent, but five teams passed him up.

Philadelphia decided to roll the dice anyway. They gave up [Jrue Holiday](#) for Noel and a 2014 #1 as they rebuild from the bottom up. Noel is rehabbing like a demon, apparently, but the Sixers are no closer to having their top 2013 pick take the field. With an injury like Noel's, where his success is wholly dependent on his ability to move his feet, the effect on his game could be devastating. If Noel doesn't regain full mobility, what else can he fall back on? He's got no sand in the bucket, so he can't fight for position under the boards.

The [Phoenix Suns](#) pick of Alex Len will always be scrutinized by Suns fans and national media. His career will always be compared to Nerlens Noel, Ben McLemore and 55 other guys taken after him in the 2013 Draft.

Phoenix Suns C Alex Len "cleared for contact", looking for head start over Nerlens Noel

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But at least he's starting out on the right (and healthy) foot.