

Nobody puts Phoenix Suns swingman P.J. Tucker in a corner

Written by

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Last season, [Phoenix Suns](#) all-everything [P.J. Tucker](#) was that guy who got the partially guaranteed contract thanks to a quality Summer League stint after spending several seasons overseas. He wasn't expected to play at all, sans injuries to the guys ahead of him on the depth chart.

Yet, by opening night, P.J. Tucker had established himself as a player you just can't put on the bench. He hustled, dove, got into the opponent on defense, and ran one-man fast breaks that probably should have qualified for most of the Suns "Top 10 plays of 2012-13".

Nonetheless, his play earned him a 25 minute highlight video on YouTube. If you haven't watched this video, you need to do it now (well, after reading this article I guess). You'll be a better basketball fans for it.

The video went viral last week when SB Nation wrote a feature story on the video maker, and Tucker said his twitter timeline blew up with mentions and links.

"Oh yeah, I saw it," he said with a big smile. "A lot of them, I even forgot about. A lot of stops on D. At the end of the day, I played 25-26 minutes a game so it wasn't hard for him to find 25 minutes of stuff, but it's the *kind* of stuff he did. I liked it though. It was nice."

As one of the oldest returning players this season, Tucker (28) has an opportunity to play a

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leadership role along with [Goran Dragic](#) and [Channing Frye](#) . General Manager Ryan McDonough mentioned the team's veterans - predictably leaving Tucker off the list, as it the norm for Tucker's career - as guys who can help the kids get better.

The problem is that none of these guys is vocal - they would rather lead by example through their play and work ethic.

"I've always been a leader in my own right, leading by example," he said. "I'm not much of 'tell guys what to do', I just try to lead with 'this is the way we go'. We are going to put out the effort, either get on the train or get off."

In Europe, Tucker worked himself into being the best player on his team, the most important player because of his hustle and commitment on both ends of the court. Last season in Phoenix, Tucker was seen by coaches as the perfect example of how they wanted to play - with heart, hustle and never-say-die attitude - but that never resonated with the team.

This season, he's not looking to make any changes.

"It's gonna be tough", he says of the losing streaks a young team will face this season. "I'm going to handle it exactly how I handled it last year. Going into every game and playing it for what it is. Every game. In this league you gotta have a short memory. You can't linger on from the last game because whoever is coming in is going to be tough. So you gotta have a short memory and keep playing. You got to fight through it.

"Sometimes you go on losing streaks and it's not going so well. Sometimes you get tired. Guys got to tough it up and get through it. From me, I gotta show these guys to be resilient, to keep fighting no matter who we got next."

Hopefully, this season's cast of characters will respond to Tucker's play and emulate it rather than simply observe it. So far Tucker sees a lot of positives from the team through pickup games in September, but he knows this time of year can be deceiving.

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"Coming into camp last year," he said, with a shake of his head. "We didn't think we would have the season we did. It felt good, everything was good. You just never know until you get into the season."

Asked how he sees this team playing this season, Tucker went back to his mantra: "Young and energetic. I think everybody that checks in is going to play hard. I think the way Jeff wants to play, get up and down, you know. Just being a tough, energetic team."

Suns fans can only hope that Tucker's vision for the Suns comes true. He's smart enough to know that the players have to prove it when the games count. But he's an optimistic sort who would rather expect the best than any alternative.

"There's a lot of positive energy right here, right now, going into Flag," Tucker concluded. "So we'll see."

Players who have impressed Tucker so far

- [Ish Smith](#) : "I like Ish. Ish is really good. His tempo, the way he sees the floor, his decision-making is great. I like Ish a lot. He knows how to play, just give him a chance. You could be on a great team and know how to play but just be any roster spots or places on a court to be able to show what you can do. He's a good player."
- "Frequent Flyer" Miles: " [Miles Plumlee](#) looked really good in pickup. He's so athletic, just throw it up to the rim and he'll put it down. He's physical, so I think he'll be a good addition too."
- [Eric Bledsoe](#) : "Eric can play. I love the way he plays D. His ferocity on defense is crazy, the way he pick up, the way he gets through screens, it's amazing. So I'm excited to get out there with him on D."

Extra point

Tucker's playing time this season might just be dependent on his ability to make a corner three, which he has been terrible at doing so far. With Goran Dragic and Eric Bledsoe pushing the ball down the court and into the teeth of the defense, they will need at least one reliable outlet shooter on the wing who can take the dump off pass and make a shot. The Suns are hoping that Channing Frye can be one of those outlets, but the small forward position might just be [Ma](#)

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' to lose because he's a much better 3-point shooter.

But then again, we're talking about P.J. Tucker. While head coach Jeff Hornacek might not trust Tucker setting up in the corner for an open three point attempt, he likely won't be able to deny Tucker playing time because of his hustle and commitment. Tucker is always the guy the coaches love, even though he's on his third coach in nine months.

"Jeff's so mild mannered, so cool and laid back," Tucker said of his new head coach. "He tells you exactly what he wants, how he wants it done, what you should do to get better. I was a fan of [former Suns coaches] Alvin [Gentry] and Lindsey [Hunter]. I think they have a lot of the same qualities. I like Jeff just as much as I liked those two."