

Preseason Recap: Phoenix Suns keep it interesting, but lose to Clippers 102-96

Written by

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The night started off well. Everyone was happy to see each other. [Alvin Gentry](#) joked with the local media before the game, quipped that he had "eight great years here... I was here nine, remember."

And it ended well, with the deep bench scrapping and clawing to cut the big [Clippers](#) lead to 1 with 38.6 seconds left. A 30% full stadium cheered louder than I've heard since the [Lakers](#)

game last spring. Hornacek's ragtag lineups didn't ever give up, and found a way to get the crowd on their feet, screaming to close out the game.

Former [Suns](#) forward Louis Amundson got a nice dunk to give the Clips a late 3-point lead and then [Kendall Marshall](#) got blocked on a drive. After getting hacked on the fast break, the Clippers' Willie Green made a couple of free throws to ice the game.

But at least it was interesting, which is more than can be said of last year. The Suns did not give up - finding a way to make it tight at the end, even with the deep bench.

Jeff Hornacek was still experimenting with lineups tonight. Before the game he talked of the twin tower look he started with Plumlee and Gortat.

"We'll find out a little tonight," he said, of whether Plumlee can play the four position. "Probably the best lineup for [Plumlee] is at the 5 spot with a stretch guy. But we'll play several teams with two big guys, so we have to find out if he can play the 4. If not him, then can we move Gortat to the 4? Or if [Alex Len](#) is in the game, can we move one to the 4. We'll just have to see how it's going to work."

The Clippers started [Jared Dudley](#) , [Chris Paul](#) and [DeAndre Jordan](#) , while Redick and [Blak](#)

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[e Griffin](#)

were out hurt.

Chris Paul had two assists on his first two possessions, while the Suns worked a two-man game to expose [Byron Mullens](#) in the post. Dragic took the ball on the side to pass into Plumlee in the post.

Paul accounted for nearly all the Clippers points (3 assists, 8 points), possibly to make a point to [Eric Bledsoe](#) that he can still dominate the younger player, on the way to a 17-7 early lead that didn't look as close as the score. The Suns, as you can guess, came out tentative rather than aggressive, like they will need to be this season.

DeAndre Jordan had two early blocks to help the Clippers extend their lead, making the Suns tentative in the paint despite starting two 6'11" guys.

Paul had 13 points and 3 assists, the Clips with a big lead, before Eric Bledsoe was able to steal the ball away from Paul for a breakaway playup. The whole first 8 minutes felt like the Paul vs. Bledsoe show, where Paul reminded Bledsoe who was boss.

Loouuuuuu and Duds were on the court for the last few minutes of the first quarter, making plays exactly as Suns fans remember them. Lou with a good rebound in traffic, Dudley with a second-effort breakaway finish.

And then [Shannon Brown](#) stepped in, and immediately got himself into a dribble tantrum where he dribbled around the wing, into a defenders area, and then took a contested two. Luckily, Lou fouled him on the way back down.

Amundson committed three fouls in his first three minutes, by the way. Just by being Lou.

Jared Dudley had a really good exorcism first half by scoring every time he got the ball. His only

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miss, a fastbreak layup in traffic, he got his own o-board and put it back in. His five makes included a very long two and a pair of threes on the wing.

"They're going to have to box out," Hornacek said of his guys. "A guy like Miles, in practice does the same thing a lot of guys do - if you don't box them out, they get the rebound. He's actually made our guys box out, get used to doing that. So hopefully we'll keep that up."

The Suns did not keep that up early in this game, getting outrebounded 11-4 in the first 10 minutes, and 26-12 deficit by halftime.

"You would think that after 3-4 exhibition games," Hornacek said of the rotation. "Guys would separate themselves. But every guy that gets in there has done well."

Except for tonight, when the Clippers played like they really wanted to play basketball, at a level of execution the Suns had not seen yet this preseason. Very few Suns players looked good in the first half against the Clippers. Outrebounded 26-12. Out-blocked 6-1. Out assisted 15-10. And outscored 63-47.

To be fair, the Suns played a lot of weird lineups that they hadn't tried before, while the Clippers top 6 players got regular minutes and then some. So there's that. The top six Clips played at least 13 minutes apiece, while only two Suns reached that mark (Plumlee and Bledsoe).

The second half was a different story altogether. It's as if the Suns and Clippers decided to play entirely differently at halftime. The Clippers came out with the same lineup but were flat, while the Suns turned up the effort behind Bledsoe and scrambled into a comeback that saw the Clips only score 3 points in 8 minutes while the Suns cut the 16-point lead to 3.

Then Chris Paul woke back up and scored 4 points to steady the Clips as the quarter drew to a close. [Archie Goodwin](#) switched onto Paul after that, but Goodwin got the steal as Paul tried to shake and bake the taller player. Guessing Paul won't let that happen again.

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On the next possession, Paul dipped and weaved into a great alley oop to DeAndre Jordan for a 7 point Clipper lead. By the end of three, it was back to 10 points and the Clippers never allowed the score to get any closer as Jordan stayed out there into the fourth and then Chris Paul came back at the 8 minute mark.

The Suns did not help themselves by playing lineups that just didn't work together. There were so many substitutions that it was hard to keep everything straight.

When Kendall Marshall came in, you knew the game was a "tryout" for minutes the rest of the way. He teamed up with Goodwin, Green, Plumlee and Marcus Morris. And then Kravtsov comes in. Where's Christmas?

Crowds love breakaway dunks even more than anticipated threes. Plumlee and Green both got big dunks in the 4th, eliciting bigger cheers than any other play tonight. Let's hope the Suns can have more of these nights - at least exciting the crowd that stays late into a big loss to a good team. That would be a step up from last year.

Game notes:

First half

- [Markieff Morris](#) "grabbed" a rebound that hit him in the stomach (where he hadn't raised his hands for the carom) and then on the other end faked an open three and instead drove a couple of steps into a running, one-handed 15 footer. I mean, what could go wrong with that shot selection?

- Play got sloppy when each team went to their deep benches, with the Suns sporting Shannon Brown and [Ish Smith](#) together to "run the show".

- By mid second, Markieff had been beaten for at least two rebounds for not putting his hands up when the shot came off the rim. He hustled otherwise, but really needs to hone that "get your hands up for rebounds" skill.

- Dragic and Bledsoe came back late in the second and had a nice possession with Bledsoe swinging the ball over to an open Dragic at the 3-point line. I can see that happening a lot this season because Dragic can easily put the ball on the floor if the defense over-reacts on a close out.

- The Suns at one point cut the lead to 5 at 45-40, but then Chris Paul ran a nice pick and roll to set up Jordan and then set up Jared Dudley for an open three (that was counted as a two

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with Dudley's toe on the line).

- [Channing Frye](#) had some real nice shots for three, making 3 of 5 threes against the slow close outs by fellow stretch-four Mullens.
- Suns weak side defense on the pick and roll was terrible, leaving Dudley open over and over for 2-2 on threes, plus that long two with his toe on the line.
- This is an example of how tough it will be for the Suns this season against good teams, by the way
- Halftime: Frye leads Suns with 11 points. Bledsoe has 6 points, 6 assists and 3 steals (along with 2 turnovers), while Dragic has 10 points and 1 assist. Plumlee had a bad half, while DeAndre Jordan looked bigger than anyone on the court (5 blocks at half)

Second half

- Rivers is not even coaching the second half, by the way. Gentry has taken over coaching duties.
- Markieff Morris gets the second half start over Plumlee, gets an early offensive rebound. Suns get three o-boards on first possession.
- Morris got another o-board and putback layup. He's the difference!
- Tucker quickly gets his third and fourth fouls on new "points of emphasis" calls on perimeter
- Tucker bricks two straight corner threes. THAT'S why he can't start with Bledsoe and Dragic
- Gortat is actually boxing out Jordan this half. In other news, Clippers are not nearly as dialed in this half.
- Suns have missed three open threes this half already, all wide open, all right before they wanted it (Tucker x2, Bledsoe). Dragic finally makes one to cut the Clipper lead to 10.
- Suns are looking much more active in rotations, making Clippers go to fourth, fifth options. Bledsoe leading the energy charge.
- Paul is so good at drawing contact on his shot even when in a bad position
- Morris with ANOTHER o-board, followed by Dragic open three. Lead cut to 7.
- Then Suns force shot clock violation. They are worked up!
- Dragic has a good drive/dish to Gortat, drawing Jordan to him for the easy Polish layup
- More hustle from the Suns, more points as a result
- Markieff Morris having a very positive impact on the Suns in the second half.
- Clippers had only 3 points in the third Q through eight minutes until a Chris Paul long jumper.
- Paul helped steady the Clippers to retake a 10-point lead, basically going one on one for jumpers against Goodwin and Bledsoe.
- [Gerald Green](#) trying some hero ball, driving the rock to the hoop but not putting up a good shot.
- Clippers rode the Hollins and Mullens duo to the end, with good results because Paul stayed in the game to control the ball
- Crowds love breakaway dunks even more than anticipated threes. Plumlee and Green both got big dunks in the 4th, eliciting bigger cheers than any other play tonight. Let's hope the Suns can get more of these nights - at least exciting the crowd that stays late into a big loss to a good team. That would be a step up from last year.

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