

BSOTS RoundTable: How will the lack of veteran influence effect the Phoenix Suns this year?

Written by

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One aspect of a re-build and a push for a younger, more dynamic team, is the potential loss of leadership and veteran influence on the roster. Young players need role models to an extent to see how things should be done and to tell them what they are doing is not right.

[Jared Dudley](#) had [Steve Nash](#) and [Grant Hill](#) to teach him how to be a professional when he first came to the [Phoenix Suns](#) , but who do the young players have here now?

The lack of veteran leadership is obvious and as red as the nose on Rudolph's face

Twenty-First Topic: How to use the veterans?

1. Breaking the Ice: How has the management team handled the balance of youth, potential, and veteran influence on the roster?

Jim Coughenour: Impressively. The team still has Frye and Dragic (and Tucker to a lesser degree), who can be emulated in terms of work ethic off the court and teach the tyros what it takes in terms of dedication and preparedness to succeed in the league. They even took divergent paths. Frye was a lottery pick that struggled and actually transmogrified his game through the development of a deadly three point shot to establish himself as a valuable rotation player in a stretch four role. He has added new wrinkles to his game each year past that, such as his improved interior defense. Dragic took the path of mid second rounder and struggled to get playing time behind a transcendent player before capitalizing on an opportunity in a new environment (Doesn't that sound similar to EB's possible career trajectory?) and solidifying himself as a starting point guard. P.J. bounced around the D-League before finally proving

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himself an NBA player through pertinacity and brutish intensity. Good role models. The goal was to go as young as possible and the Suns have done so while maintaining at least a modicum of venerable players.

Jacob Padilla: What Jim said.

Dave King: Pretty well, but not perfectly. There is no positive, outspoken influence on the roster to navigate through the tough times that are sure to come. Dragic and Frye are too quiet to inspire people and Gortat is too "out there" mentally (he's been that way since he was acquired). [Caron Butler](#) would have been a good influence this season. The Suns won't win a lot of games, but they needed an veteran that can steer them through the storm.

Kris Habbas: Veteran influence? All the veterans on the team are not traditional leaders like journeyman Shannon Brown, quiet [Channing Frye](#) , flamboyant Marcin Gortat, and timidly aggressive [Goran Dragic](#) are the most tenured NBA players on the roster, with world traveler [P.J. Tucker](#) as one of the elder statesmen in general.

Sean Sullivan: I think the team is certainly more focused on youth and potential than any veteran leadership to mold the young players at this point. The Suns are not in a win now mode, so they can get by with a team of young guys without a traditional locker room leader. If they were looking to compete in the post season, I may be a little worried, but for this season, I don't feel it's much of a concern whatsoever.

2. Does this team have any "veterans" in the truest sense of the word?

JP: See Jim's comment below.

DK: It's "Horny or bust" here. Hate to agree with Kris two questions in a row, but I don't have a choice because he's so right. If Hornacek is a really good mentor to the players, the team will be fine. If he isn't, then the team will fracture like they did under Gentry and Hunter last year.

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KH: With this roster the veterans that matter are Jeff Hornacek and Mark West with their years of experience on the court playing at a high level in the NBA. Those two are the veterans that will have the most influence and draw the most respect from the younger players on the roster that are vulnerable and malleable in their current stage in the game.

SS: Veteran players? I suppose Channing Frye, Goran Dragic, Marcin Gortat, and even Shannon Brown count. As for leaders though....probably not. The best chance the young players have is to model themselves after the direction and tutelage of Hornacek, who seems like a very down to earth coach who of course has tons of experience.

JC: ICMF. Frye is the elder statesman on the team in terms of age (30), NBA experience (this is his eighth season, nine if you include the season missed to the heart condition where he was still around the team in some capacity) and tenure (fifth year in the organization). He played with notable veterans such as Steve Nash, Grant Hill and Amar'e Stoudemire, who all had qualities worthy of imitating. From all accounts he is well liked and respected in NBA circles. While Frye isn't necessarily vocal, neither was Nash. I think lead by example personalities can be paragons in their own right and Channing fits the bill.

3. Players like [Shannon Brown](#) and [Gerald Green](#) do not necessarily fit into the future of the team so how should they be managed this season?

DK: At least Brown should be managed by trading him to someone. More than anything else, McDonough needs to continue his run of sending veterans to better environments for them (Dudley to Clips, Scola to Indy, Butler to hometown Milwaukee), starting with Brown. Brown already suffered through a DNP season and looks poised to have another. Green, on the other hand, should get lower priority at the moment, simply because I don't feel bad for him yet.

KH: With respect. Last year Lindsay Hunter had no respect for his veteran players moving them in and out of the rotation, to the bench, to starting, to DNP's on a whim. There was no direction and the players themselves were not treated as pawns in a game of checkers. Neither player, at this stage in their careers, should be on a losing team. While they are here though having the role of mentor for the younger players and getting court time early in the season is one way of easing the burden of being a part of a potential bottom five team this season.

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SS: As needed. I see no reason to force minutes to either of them unless it benefits the team. To Green's credit though, he's seemed to play fairly decently overall in preseason, so maybe he'll prove to have some chemistry with the players that could prove beneficial. I really don't see much need for Brown at the moment though, and I wouldn't be surprised to see the Suns include him in a trade at some point ... It would probably be best for both parties.

JC: Shannon should be assigned the role of shot selection coach with Gerald as his assistant. If I remember correctly a "cannon" (affectionately named after the Brown Bomber) is an instance where a player exhausts noticeable energy to end up taking a markedly worse shot than when they initially received the ball. Yeah. I would let them "compete for playing time" on a completely unlevel playing field with the younger players and look to move them to a better situation if we can trick someone into taking them the opportunity presents itself.

JP: Stick them on the bench. Trade them if the opportunity arises. I really have no desire to see either one of them on the court for Phoenix. However, [Archie Goodwin](#) isn't ready and I'm not so sure force-feeding him minutes is the right decision. Therefore, one of them will get minutes early in the season. I disagree with Kris about them not belonging on a losing team; being on a losing team is exactly where they belong. They play a losing style of basketball. Green had his chance on a winning team last year.

4. Are Channing Frye and [Marcin Gortat](#) strictly assets or potential pieces for the future?

KH: Right now I am inclined to say assets. Frye has high value for the team going forward as a veteran shooter that can stretch the floor and add versatility to the team. If he can net the team a future asset of higher value than he currently is then you move Frye, but if not he is on a good contract and is a positive to the team. Gortat on the other hand has been traded for about a year and a half. The team couldn't capitalize on his quality play early on last season, then he fell into a tailspin, and now he has to remind the league of his value before they can get anything for him. Purely an asset, that has little to no positive value.

SS: Definitely assets. Gortat knows he's as good as traded as soon as the right deal comes

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along, and seems to be handling it well, at least in interviews. And as much as I love Frye (I was one of his staunchest supporters when he was being unfairly criticized for his pretty decent defense), he also doesn't fit the long-term direction of this team. I think Frye is more likely to finish the year a Sun than Gortat; because of how well he fits the offense, his history here, and his chemistry with Dragic, but I would be surprised if both of them aren't being aggressively shopped.

JC: Define future. Tomorrow is the future. I expect Gortat to be gone by the trade deadline. Frye may follow suit depending on his resilience in the first half of the season. Gortat is expiring. Frye has a player option. Since my hopeful time-line for a return to competitiveness is the 2015-16 season I don't see them as pieces in that puzzle. Actually, I'll be surprised if more than four players on the current roster are on the starting roster that season.

JP: Gortat is definitely an asset. His time in Phoenix is nearing its end, and it's time both parties move on; at least by the trade deadline once [Alex Len](#) has had some time to get stronger and make the adjustment to the NBA game. Frye, on the other hand, I view like I viewed Dudley and still view Dragic. As good players, they are definitely assets. But they also have ties to the organization and community, and they still provide on-court value as well. If the right deal presents itself (as it did with Dudley and Bledsoe), go ahead and make the move. But there's no reason to trade him just to trade him. He can provide value to the team either way.

DK: Gortat is strictly an asset, but I think Frye is the kind of you keep around. While Gortat should be traded for something, anything, this season before he walks next summer for nothing, Channing Frye should only be traded if it makes the Suns get better. Frye should only go in a "Dudley deal" while Gortat should go in a "Scola/Butler" deal. The Dudley deal was a net positive (Bledsoe), while the others were only to get younger.

5. What is the impact (negative or positive) from not having a traditional, veteran, voice in the locker-room for this roster?

SS: Like I stated above, I think it would be worrisome if this team were trying to compete. A veteran presence is essential for keeping the team focused and together through the peaks and valleys. However, the players realize where this team is at, and their expectations are just as tempered as ours (though they would never admit it). This team is playing with house money this season. I think they can afford to let things fall into place organically and see what happens. If it somehow proves to be an issue this season they can always address it in the off

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season. No rush.

JC: Very hard to determine through qualitative analysis. The first season of the [Thunder's](#) existence in OKC the team had two 20 year old phenoms in Durant (one year) and Westbrook (rookie). The veterans on that team included

[Chucky Atkins](#)

,
[Desmond Mason](#)

,
[Malik Rose](#)

,
[Robert Swift](#)

and Earl Watson. I'm not sure their combined tutelage was vital in the development of the young nucleus. Since the Suns can aspire to duplicate that type of success, maybe mentoring is more of an extrinsic benefit than a vital component. Of course examples of rudderless rosters may argue the counterpoint here... The Suns don't have players that need babysitting (e.g.

[DeMarcus Cousins](#)

) in my estimation. I'm inclined to say that the current leadership situation is tenable and probably won't have a deleterious impact.

JP: This roster is going to see a lot of change over the next two years, so I don't think how it looks right now matters all that much. I think Jeff Hornacek, Goran Dragic, Channing Frye and P.J. Tucker are enough as lead-by-example types (at least the players) to help the young guys grow and develop the right way.

DK: I mentioned it above, and it's not good to be missing a steadying, rallying voice in the locker room. Someone needs to take the heat this season when the team stumbles, falls and bruises their way to 55-60 losses. Someone needs to keep these guys in a positive frame of mind no matter what. So far, that's missing. And that just means that 5 game losing streaks become 10 game losing streaks.

KH: I feel it is a positive and a test. The young players have a chance to grasp this team by the horns and establish their leadership style early on. Make this their team. That is the test for Bledsoe, Len, and to a smaller extent Goodwin as they are a vision of the future for the team. Having no established leader means things can come together organically, the right way, and give this team a true voice that earned this role.

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BONUS: Should the Suns have gone full on [Philadelphia 76ers](#) this year and gutted their roster of any NBA players?

([Kwame Brown](#) and [Jason Richardson](#) are 10 & 12 year veterans respectively, but you know what we mean...)

SS: I think what the Suns did this off-season was nothing short of brilliant...and I wouldn't have changed a thing (ok, I probably would have drafted McLemore and I wouldn't have exercised the team option on Brown...but still). I think the Suns have done an outstanding job overall of acquiring assets and giving themselves maximum cap flexibility going forward, and they still have a few cards to play with Gortat and possibly even Dragic, Frye, or even Bledsoe to get even more (not saying I think they will trade all those players, but that they have the option to do so if the right deal comes along).

JC: Different situation. Philadelphia needed to get worse because they might have still finished 10th or 11th in the weaker Eastern Conference with Holiday on the roster. A #7 pick wasn't helping a putrid roster go anywhere. Instead they got [Nerlens Noel](#), a pick that should fall somewhere between 9-15 in the stacked 2014 draft and effectively moved up several spots to likely give themselves the best odds at the #1 overall pick. If the Suns could have traded Gortat and Dragic for the same package (2013 #6 and 2014 top five protected) I'd have pulled the trigger. I believe the Suns are still in for more roster attrition, though. McMiracle seems like a rather shrewd fellow, so I can't imagine he doesn't realize the value of a top five pick in next year's draft. Any deal he makes this season (barring some supernatural coup) will be to get worse short term, not better.

JP: The amount of blatant tanking going on in Philadelphia is laughable. I feel bad for [Thaddeus Young](#) for having to play on that team. And for what? A few more ping pong balls that doesn't assure them of anything with the lottery system in place? No, I'm perfectly happy with the way the Suns have gone about their business. The Suns managed to hold onto a few players that could be part of the next playoff team or at least be used to acquire the players that will be part of that team, while also adding in rookies that will form the team's core moving forward. And it appears as if they'll be in position to add more highly talented rookies to that core next year, even without getting rid of all the good ones they already had.

DK: Absolutely not. I wrote about this last night so look at the 'On Noel, tanking and the Suns'

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article for my views. The Sixers are laughing at the basketball gods and will almost certainly pay for it. The worst record has a better chance at the 4th pick than the 1st.

KH: How entertaining would a line-up of Marshall, Goodwin, Tucker, Markieff, and Len look with a few middling veterans coming off the bench? Yeah, the Suns are doing it right.

Bright Siders, what do you think?