

## It might be time to start considering the fact that the Phoenix Suns are just a good team

Written by

Wednesday, 13 November 2013 13:00 -

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Maybe it is time to change the tune that is being sung about the sun...

There are always going to be things that you are "not supposed to like" or that are meant to be bad. That happens in life. It goes back to the old adage of not judging a book by its cover, but that is tough in the information age we are in.

In the world of sports the internet has created a bevy of information and a thirst for instantaneous reactions.

With that ideology the consumers of sports, fans and media alike, have a certain stubbornness about them. When an idea or theory starts to show cracks in the foundation of what it was based on, so few will step off the foundation and take a look around. That is a flawed way of thinking that is being tested more than ever this season in the NBA. At the beginning of the season the [Phoenix Suns](#) and the [Philadelphia 76ers](#) were projected as the two worst teams in the NBA with win ranges of 16-25 games across many different platforms.

Early in the season the Suns (5-2) and 76ers (4-4) are proving their skeptics wrong as well as the [Boston Celtics](#) (4-4) and the [Dallas Mavericks](#) (4-3) in testing that theory. They are all winning at a much higher rate than most gave them credit for and look overall like better teams.

It is tough to come full circle with the arena of sports opinions. That conversation has to evolve, which could start here in Phoenix with this team and for the others that have proven to be more than what they were cast off as.

Now, after seven games it is fair to reassess the foundation that predicted the Suns to be a 16-25 win team and create a new theory to ponder:

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*At what point do we start to say, "This is just a good team?"*

Through seven games the Suns are in the most simplistic description a tough disciplined team that rebounds the ball, runs the floor, and has become very opportunistic in the half-court. That is the kindergarten description of the team this year. The more pronounced description is woven finely into the numbers and the eye test watching this team play.

Is this just a good team?

Not necessarily a Championship caliber team, but simply a good team. While the sample size is small, just seven total games (8.5% of the season), the Suns are hanging their hats on the right things early on.

The team is playing defense on the perimeter and at the rim. They tied for sixth in the NBA in both steals and blocks, force turnovers at a good rate (T-15th), and have improved leaps and bounds this season on that end. Having a defensive foundation is the most secure way to win games. What has been most impressive with this team this year on the defensive end is their poise.

"Typically the young guys get panicked and it gets even worse," Coach Hornacek on the teams poise. "Our guys are not doing it and that is a great sign. Usually it takes a couple of years to get the composure and poise."

In the fourth quarter the young Suns have showed resilience as well as poise.

Through these seven games, in every game, the Suns have trailed or led by 5 points or less with under 5:00 minutes remaining. They have played well and done the right things to close out those games as their 5-2 record would suggest. In the fourth quarter the Suns are one of the more opportunistic teams in the NBA this season. They are +5 in total rebounds in the fourth quarter, average 2.4 steals, 1.7 blocks, and have won the fourth quarter consistently.

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[Eric Bledsoe](#) is a major part of this trend with his 8.7 points per fourth quarter (total), 53% shooting, and a huge game-winner against the [Utah Jazz](#) .

It is just six games so it is hard to tell, but I love the direction that we are going. There are no egos here. -Gerald Green

Individual accomplishments aside this is a team effort by the team with strong defense. Right now, through seven games, the Suns are tied for 6th in points allowed (96.0), have the 6th best field goal percentage against (43.0%), they are the 11th best overall rebounding team (44.0) and 10th best defensive rebounding team (27.3). They are playing hard for 24 seconds each possession, contesting shots or blocking them, then ending it with a rebound, unlike last year (19th in rebounding and 26th in points against) where they struggled on the defensive end.

"We can go as far as we work hard," [Gerald Green](#) on the team's long-term sustainability. "If we keep working, and just keep striving, and keep just staying humble, listen to each other, and play within the team then we can really go a long ways."

The sample size is small, but when does that argument go away? Ten games in? Twenty? The sample size is good enough to say the [Indiana Pacers](#) are a great team because they have equity, that team has proven itself over years of quality play.

For the Suns, this is literally out of nowhere for them.

At the beginning of the season the world all thought the Suns would be at or near the bottom of the NBA. CBS picked the Suns to win between 9-17 games, ESPN had them at 29th in the NBA, and the Bright Side Staff predicted them to fall between 16-30 wins. To be that bad, the Suns are going to have to look in the mirror and go 4-71 the rest of the way to hit the low water-mark of nine wins.

"Our team is kind of like my golf game," Coach Hornacek on his metaphor for this team. "One day I can drive and put and other days I can't chip. Some days I get two or three of the things, hopefully we get games where we put it all together where we execute, play defense, and shoot the ball well, and we will be a good team."

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Through seven games that is exactly what the Suns are doing. They are rebounding, playing defense, and getting great output from the offense at the right times. There may not be a superstar on this team, but the team of misfit NBA'ers may not be the case anymore.

Bledsoe went from a back-up, playing 12-22 minutes a night, to very high level point guard. For his position this year Bledsoe is in the Top 5 in points per game (20.9) and the Top 10 in assists (7.3) as well as steals (1.8), which was not happening behind [Chris Paul](#) in Los Angeles.

Gerald Green and [Miles Plumlee](#) were buried on the Pacers bench and have come out of the gates looking like quality starters on both ends of the floor. They are combining for 25 PPG, 12.9 RPG, and 3.0 SPG with their energy and athleticism.

I think we will be solid. We are not going to get too over our heads and start talking playoffs or anything crazy, we are just playing one game at a time. -P.J. Tucker

The team is still getting great production out of [P.J. Tucker](#) with his energy and defensive mind-set. He is one of the leaders on the team this year as one of only three hold overs from last year.

None of these players has done this for a full season, which prompts the critics, cynics, and talk of eventually "they will come back down to earth." That is true. Bledsoe has never led a team for 82 games, Plumlee has never played more than 56 total minutes in a season, Green has never been a consistent option at the wing, and Head Coach Jeff Hornacek has never coached a full season. There is a lot of unproven entities on this team.

Even Markieff Morris, for how great he has been as of late (22.7 PPG 8.2 RPG 69.8% shooting), has never played that way for more than two games let alone four, let alone a season.

"I think we can be successful and be a good team," [Goran Dragic](#) told me after the New Orleans win. "We have played seven games, one, or two games against top contenders

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(Oklahoma and San Antonio) and we played both those games well. We will see when the schedule gets tougher and we have a few games back-to-back."

There will be some tests along the way for the Suns, and every other surprise team this year, but the Suns have already answered a few questions along the way.

This is a fun team that likes playing together. That might get lost in the "Important Factors" debate, but it is an important element to making any team average, good, or great.

"We don't have any superstars" Tucker says about the chemistry. "Everybody is playing together to win and the vibe of our team is unbelievable."

So you can dismiss the Suns because of the sample size, jump on the Championship bandwagon overrating them, or simply evolve the conversation. The internet has created far too many radical opinions to where a change like this is highly unlikely, but if the Suns can change their fortunes as quickly as they have then it is apparent that impossible things are possible.