

Are the Phoenix Suns playing to the level of the competition night-to-night? Survey says... No

Written by

Thursday, 05 December 2013 18:35 -



The fable of the Suns playing to the standards of the competition might be a little premature...

There is a level of complacency that occurs when any level of success is achieved. Even if the success was minor and unexpected, that is just human nature to dial it back out of sheer confidence on occasion with the thought of, "We (or I) have made it."

That is something that the [Phoenix Suns](#) (10-9) have experienced a little as of late, but the stories of their demise are being written.

"What have we won, seven (10) games? We haven't proved anything," [Channing Frye](#) on the early success. "What if we finish the season 7-73? Then we just one nine games early. We have a lot to prove every game. They don't pay us to play 17 games, they pay us to play 82 so right now we compete against good teams and teams with lower record than us, do we compete the same? The coaches just want consistency."

After a tough loss to the Utah Jazz where they surrendered 51.3% shooting and a season high 112 to the previously last place Jazz was a low point in the season. Lately the team has regressed on the defensive end giving up 100+ points in five of their last six games has been the real issue, but the focus is on the recent play against sub-.500 teams as of late as they have gone 1-3 against the Jazz and the Sacramento Kings has people around the team talking.

"I don't think anything is unraveling," [P.J. Tucker](#) on the teams lackluster defense as of late. "It is energy and defense. With 82 games it is hard to do it night in and night out."

Early on this season they have been like a house on fire going 5-2 winning games with effort, defense, and flat out surprising some of their opponents. Effort has been the flag for the Suns through the first 19 games, when they play with it, they win -- when they don't they lose. For a

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team that lacks top level talent effort is what any overachieving team has to have, in spades.

WE DON'T HAVE THE TALENT TO JUST TURN IT ON REGARDLESS OF THE TEAM. -Channing Frye

It is easy to get up for the top teams in the league because they have a target on their backs. The [Spurs](#) , [Thunder](#) , [Heat](#) , Blazers, and [Pacers](#) have success that every team wants and individuals to key in on to make statements against.

Against the better teams in the league the Suns have consistently played with effort despite the up-and-down results. Their record is not great, 5-5 against teams at or above .500, but the effort is there.



(S = Suns OPP = Opponent)

They play even with the teams that are considered Championship Contenders and the statistics back that up. Then again, most teams do. Use the Jazz, for example, the once worst team in the league is 2-11 verse the best teams in the NBA, but with only a -8.1 scoring margin. They get up for the big games or the higher seeds hit snooze until late enough in the game to still come out victorious.



When playing against teams at or above .500 for the season the Suns are more consistent in

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the effort categories. They are out-rebounding teams, out-hustling teams, and shooting better overall. The Suns have won the rebounding battle 7-3, the shooting battle 9-1, and the hustle battle (steals + blocks) 7-3 in 10 games against good teams.

They are getting up for these games, clearly.

On the other hand when there is not the incentive of [Kevin Durant](#) , [LeBron James](#) , the Spurs rivalry, or the up-start young Blazers the Suns have seen the pendulum swing to the other side, but not to an extreme.



Playing with a winning record against the lesser teams in the NBA is what any team aspiring for the playoffs has to do. Rack up the wins against the struggling teams and play even with the better teams can put you position to be a playoff team in return.



There is no formula or equation for effort in sports. It is an eye test and more of the human element that, no matter the success rate, is visible to those who are looking for it. For the most part it is a visual test of how a team is reacting to runs, how they take punches to the mouth, and their overall demeanor on the court.

One way to look at effort is in a measurable statistic is the amount of free-throws a team earns and the amount of three-pointers they settle for. Against the better teams in the NBA the Suns are shooting 24.4 threes a night and 21.2 free-throws a night. That is two less threes a night than they hoist against the sub-.500 teams (26.4) showing a more aggressive and assertive

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team.

Are the Suns playing a lesser quality of basketball against specific teams? Situationally, yes, but overall no. The big picture is that they are a .500 team against any competition. Period.

YOU CAN'T JUST SAY WE WILL GET THE NEXT ONE. WE GOT TO HAVE THIS ONE... -P.J . Tucker

For the rest of this month the Suns have only three games against teams that are currently under .500 for the season in the [Toronto Raptors](#) (6-10), the [Sacramento Kings](#) (4-12), and the [Philadelphia 76ers](#) (7-12). Normally these would be games to look forward to, but with the effort level the Suns have displayed in recent weeks (1-3 against the Kings and [Jazz](#) collectively) this may be a cluster of coal scattered, masked, as gifts.

To use the Suns own formula that means they have an opportunity to win 5.16 of those games, therefore remaining an above, or close to a .500 team this month.

The sample size is small of them playing well and even smaller of them playing poorly against lesser teams.