

Written by

Friday, 06 December 2013 12:24 -



The Dino's may be five games under .500 right now, but they have a young athletic team ready to pounce. After all, they are still in the playoff hunt out East....

Tonight the [Phoenix Suns](#) (10-9) put on their international hosting hats for the [Toronto Raptors](#) (6-11), our norther neighbors. This season the international hosting committee was gracious to the Polish with Polish Appreciation Night to open the season, five days before the season opener they traded their Polish star center.

Looking at the roster there does not seem to be any Canadian, or more specific Toronto natives to trade, so this one should go over a little smoother.

This is another cross conference game for the Suns, which they have had very few so far this season, but in the four games they are 2-2 early on. They have matched up well against the Eastern Conference beating quality opponents and hanging tough in losses.

The Raptors are a young athletic team with DeMarr DeRozan, and [Jonas Valanciunas](#) , as well as veterans in their prime with Kyle Lowry and [Rudy Gay](#)

"I think it is just consistency," Coach Jeff Hornacek on DeRozan's leap this year. "I think in the past he was up-and-down, have some big nights, and then some not, but he seems to be pretty consistent with all his play. He can shoot the three now and when you can add something to your game it makes you a better player."

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From a strength perspective the Raptors are tops in the league with 17.7 second chance points rebounding the ball on the offensive end and effectively scoring inside after. The Suns are 26th in that same category and give up the up the third most points to their opponents on second chance attempts.

"We are not a huge team," Coach Jeff Hornacek in pre-game on the teams play in the paint. "Especially if Miles (Plumlee) is not in the game you have Markieff and Channing. He has the size (Channing), but he does not have the bulky size of a lot of the guys in this league."

Athletically this is not your typical Raptors team with the way they get up-and-down the floor trying to push the tempo. They, like the Suns, are going to try and run out to get easy buckets in transition.

We are undersized so we really have to fight for those rebounds, then we can get out in the open court -Coach Hornacek

So far this season the Suns have been the best fast-break team in the league averaging 20.0 points in transition. They are getting out early and often, while the Raptors, for all their athleticism are near the bottom of the league (28th overall) in transition points at 9.6 per game.

(Recent) History Lesson

These two have not tangled this season to date. This is the first of two match-ups with the final affair coming Sunday, March 16th in Toronto. On the season the Suns are 5-4 at home and the Raptors are 3-5 on the road.

Head-to-Head (past four seasons including Playoffs)

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S: 101.2 PPG (4 wins)

R: 98.5 PPG (3 wins)

In recent years the teams have traded winning streaks with each other. The Suns won four in a row (109.5-98.0) before the Raptors took control as of late winning three in a row (99.3-88.0) muting the once potent offense. Right now the Suns are playing better, but the Raptors seem to have their number over the past few seasons.

Head-to-Head (This Season)

Rudy Gay: 20.1 PPG 5.6 RPG 1.6 APG 47.0 FG% (25 games)

P.J. Tucker: 4.0 PPG 3.5 RPG 1.5 SPG 57.1 FG% (2 games)

Gay is remarkable efficient against the Suns, by his standards, more on that in a moment. He has only played more games against the [Houston Rockets](#) and scores his fourth highest per game number in points against the Suns. His second and third highest individual scoring outbursts came against Phoenix (in Memphis) with 36 points on two separate occasions. He is also 9-16 career against the Suns...

On the other hand Tucker has had two humble games against the team that drafted him. That is largely irrelevant at this point with the new Tucker that is a much different role averaging 6.2 PPG 4.7 RPG in 31.2 minutes as a starter on a winning team.

Starting Line-Ups

PG - [Goran Dragic](#) v. Kyle Lowry

Preview: Phoenix Suns (10-9) v. Toronto Raptors (6-11) Will the Suns "play to the competition?"

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SG - [Gerald Green](#) v. DeMarr DeRozan

SF - [P.J. Tucker](#) v. Rudy Gay

PF - [Channing Frye](#) v. Amir Johnson

C - [Miles Plumlee](#) v. Jonas Valanciunas

Potential Suns Inactives: [Alex Len](#) (Left Ankle, Game-to-Game) and [Emeka Okafor](#) (Neck, Out Indefinitely)

Potential Raptors Inactives: N/A

Key Match-Up

Suns Bench vs. Raptors Bench

Statistically the Raptors have one of the least productive benches in the NBA, mainly because they play sparingly (15.5 minutes per game), but also because they just not effective. As a unit they are averaging 24.1 points per game (25th in the NBA), 40.1% shooting (25th), 30.4% from three (27th), and 3.9 assists per game (30th) making it one of the least impactful benches in the league.

On the other hand the Suns are Top 15 in points (17.2) and overall shooting (43.8%) in 17.2 minutes per game. They have brought the team back on numerous occasions with their shooting, energy, and scoring. Good be a game changing element.

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Interesting Stat: 18.8

This season Rudy Gay is averaging 19.6 points per game. He is taking 18.8 field goal attempts per game to get there. At this point he is shooting more times a game than 80% of the Top 10 scorers in the NBA, takes the 5th most shots per game in the league, and he has only 13 more points than shot attempts on the season. Enjoy those...

Meaningless Stat: 2-2

The Suns are 2-2 against the Eastern Conference this year, but could/should be 3-1 ([Nets](#) OT debacle) and that means nothing. The entire Western Conference is something like 11,527-5 against the East this year...