

## Game Preview: Phoenix Suns @ Los Angeles Lakers

Written by

Tuesday, 10 December 2013 13:15 -

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The Phoenix Suns go for three wins in a row tonight as they play a very beatable Los Angeles Lakers team in a state of flux. Supposedly some guy named Kobe Bryant just returned from an injury.

**When:** Tuesday December 10, 2013, 8:30 PM local time (10:30 EST)

**Where:** Staples Center, Los Angeles, CA

**Watch/Listen:** TV: Fox Sports AZ Radio: 620 KTAR

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### Last Meeting:

The Suns thrashed LA 99-76 at US Airways Center on March 18, 2013. Phoenix blew the game open with a 28-10 fourth quarter powered by Luis Scola, who scored all of his team high 14 points in the period. Goran Dragic also recorded a double-double (12 points and 10 assists) to help the Suns' cause.

Steve Nash tallied a game high 19 points for the Lakers, but only shot 6-17 from the field. The Lakers team as a whole was stymied by Phoenix's defense as they shot a measly 33.3% (29-87) in the game. Dwight Howard finished with 16 points and 11 rebounds. Kobe Bryant did not play, as he was out with a severe ankle sprain.

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Tonight's game includes six players who logged major minutes in that contest. Dragic, Markieff Morris and P.J. Tucker are still on the Suns and Steve Blake and Jodie Meeks return for the Lakers. The other player is Wesley Johnson, who was a Sun last year but now plays for Los Angeles. Johnson started the game for Phoenix and put up 14 points while grabbing nine rebounds. Johnson is a likely starter for the Lakers tonight.

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### Team Bios:

### Los Angeles Lakers: 10-10

Points per game: 101.0 (14) Points allowed: 103.0 (28)

ORtg: 103.8 (18) DRtg: 105.9 (19)

[Full team statistics.](#)

The big news dominating the Lakers landscape, and the NBA as a whole, is the return of superstar Kobe Bryant who, whether you like it or not, has his own gravitational pull. Kobe's return fizzled, however, as he bungled away nearly as many turnovers (8) as he scored points (9) in a 106-94 loss to a shorthanded Toronto Raptors team that entered the contest 6-12. The Lakers starters were soundly whipped by their counterparts on the Raptors as they **combined** to score only 23 points (on 8-32 shooting) while Kyle Lowry (23), DeMar DeRozan (26) and Amir Johnson (32) tied or beat that total.

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Kobe finished the game with nine points, eight rebounds, four assists, two steals and eight turnovers in 28 minutes.

The Lakers had won six of eight games prior to Bryant's return, helping them recover from a 4-7 start. Los Angeles averaged 105.8 points per game over that stretch while outscoring their opponents by an average of five points per game. The Lakers had been winning by sharing the wealth with eight different players recording at least 20 points in a game during those eight games. Kobe's return may provide the Lakers with a dependable scorer, though, as right now Nick Young leads the team in scoring with 14.4 per game and only two other players average double digits. Pau Gasol leads the team in rebounding with 9.7 per game, but is well below his career average in scoring (14.2) while shooting a paltry .416 from the field.

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### **Phoenix Suns: 11-9**

Points per game: 101.2 (13) Points allowed: 99.5 (15)

ORtg: 107.2 (9) DRtg: 105.4 (17)

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[Full team statistics.](#)

Phoenix comes into the game looking for its first three game winning streak of the season, as the team's inconsistent play has resulted in two game streaks ending on four previous occasions.

The Suns last played Friday and beat the Toronto Raptors 106-97 in a game they led comfortably for most of the last quarter and a half. Markieff Morris led all players with 25 points while grabbing 11 rebounds in the victory. Morris made his first 11 shots in the game before missing his last three. Not to be outdone, Tucker had 18 points and 13 rebounds, including two key offensive rebounds in the closing minutes that stifled any possibility of a comeback by the Raptors. P.J. was 2-4 from three point range in the game and is tied for third in the league at 50%. I guess we know that someone was working hard last summer.

After a stretch of indefensible defense, which saw their DRtg plummet, the Suns have appeared to regain their footing by yielding just 35.2% shooting to the Rockets and 40.2% shooting to the Raptors in their past two games.

The work in progress that is the Suns' starting backcourt will chug along tonight with both players (rarely) healthy. Interestingly enough, both Dragic and Bledsoe are basically averaging 18 points and six assists on the season.

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### What To Watch For:

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**Kobe Bryant vs. P.J. Tucker:** Tucker is coming off his best back-to-back games of the season in which he averaged 18 points, 9.5 rebounds and 2.5 steals a game. Just as importantly, if not more, has been his suffocating defense. In particular, he ate James Harden's lunch by holding him to just 14 points on 3-17 shooting (0-10 from three). Bryant, like Harden, doesn't possess blinding quickness so P.J. may be able to frustrate him by blanketing him and getting a little physical.

**Gerald Green?:** Green is shooting just 3-17 (17.6%) from three point range in the last three games after returning to his role coming off the bench with Eric Bledsoe's reinsertion into the starting lineup. A solid performance from him could help the Suns combat the long, athletic duo of Wesley Johnson and Xavier Henry.

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### Factoids:

Mike D'Antoni is 4-6 against the Suns since leaving after the 2007-08 season to coach the New York Knicks. His teams have failed to score 100 points against the Suns in each of the last four games, averaging just 90.3 points per game.

Kobe Bryant scored his season high for points in 2010-11 (42) and 2011-12 (48) against the Suns.

Through his first two seasons (145 games) Markieff Morris had scored 20+ points six times and recorded four double-doubles. Through 19 games this season he has five 20+ point games and three double-doubles. All three of his double-doubles this season were 20/10 performances, of which he had none his first two seasons.

### The Final Word(s):

This would seemingly be a felicitous time to go up against the Lakers and take advantage of a

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team lacking stability as they attempt to reincorporate their star, who is obviously far from top form, one quarter way through the season. But with the Lakers playing at home and Kobe's loathing for the Suns, which may spur him to a better performance than his season premiere, I give them a slight edge.

Phoenix's sporadic play also makes them hard to gauge, though, and I wouldn't be surprised if they won or lost by 20. After playing mostly close games at the beginning of the season, no final margin has been within seven points for the Suns over the last ten games.

But if the Suns play the pertinacious, pesky defense we've seen they are capable of this season they should have a pretty good chance to...

Beat LA!