

BSOTS Round Table: Have Goran Dragic and Eric Bledsoe become the best back-court in the NBA?

Written by

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The gang is back to talk about the remarkable play as of late of the Suns backcourt and where they rank in the scope of the NBA...

Right now the [Phoenix Suns](#) (14-9) are just scratching the surface with the duo of [Goran Dragic](#) and [Eric Bledsoe](#), but they are catching the eye of the NBA already.

There are several duos in the NBA on the perimeter that are skilled, effective, and work well together, but there is not one with the aggressiveness or athleticism as the aptly named Dragon Blade. They are cutting through defenses with ease and reeking havoc on the village known as the NBA as of late.

Enough of me, let's get to what matters. The staff takes on Dragon Blade, here we go.

Twenty-Fourth Topic: How good is Dragon Blade?

1. Breaking the Ice: A five game winning streak, winning 9 of 12, and getting respect around the league... How good is basketball in Phoenix right now?

Jim Coughenour: Perhaps the best kept secret in the NBA. While the Suns may be garnering respect from those in the know I don't think that casual fans, even those living in Phoenix, have caught on to the fact that this is not only a good, but also electrifying team. I've had quite a few people asking me about them lately, though, compared to practically nobody at the beginning of the season, so maybe they'll break through the threshold of irrelevance if they keep up their sterling play. They lack true star power, which fans tend to gravitate towards, but even that could be evolving. The team is starting to look like they're definitely a playoff

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contender, and I really don't think that a top seed would be happy to draw them right now. But for me, the overall Suns experience needs a bought in fanbase. That tangible energy and excitement can mean more to my enjoyment of the team than just wins and losses.

Dave King: I will be the latest to admit that this team is better than I ever imagined, and they're going to get better still. I saw the signs - happy players, a coach who gets it, quality scheming, and a style that everyone to a man understands and agrees with - but I didn't believe it could turn into so many wins so quickly. The way they are playing now, the Suns could just be scratching the surface.

Kris Habbas: The Wildcats are No. 1, the Sun Devils are playing quality ball, and the Suns are moving up the standings, steadily. I cannot remember the last all three of those things were true statements. At the beginning of the season there were a handful of people that thought this would be around the total win total for the Suns on the season as a whole, but it is looking more and more like they are going to be a 5-8 seed in the Western Conference and a tough out no matter the opponent.

Sean Sullivan: The best we've seen since the 2010 season where we went to the Western Conference Finals. Of course we still have a long way to go to get to that level, but the level of excitement is at the highest it's been since that time. The potential of this Suns' team continues to climb, as we readjust our estimations of their collective ceiling. Who knows how far they can go? For now, I'm just enjoying the ride.

2. How much of the pie do Goran Dragic & Eric Bledsoe (Dragon Blade) deserve for the team's recent success?

DK: Let's see. How about 90% of it. Well, maybe a little less. 75%? At least a strong percentage needs to go to [Channing Frye's](#) ability to space the floor, and force the other team to either play a big out of position on the wing, or bench the second big. And then there's Coach Hornacek and his assistants. He needs a strong percentage. So, I guess then Dragic and Bledsoe might only claim 50% of the success. But they still get 50% because none of this happens if they aren't unguardable as a duo.

KH: Well, in the five games they are combining for 44.0 points, 10.8 assists, 4.4 steals, and

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51% from the field (51.1% from three) as a duo collectively. They could be better, but their play has allowed Miles Plumlee to make plays inside and Channing Frye to make shots from the perimeter. Take away their attacking style and the shots get significantly tougher for the rest of the team. For me, the pie is split 70% (Dragic/Bledsoe), 20% (team buy-in to their roles), and 10% (coaching staff) for the recent play.

SS: A huge chunk...at least 60%. Not only are they scoring a large portions of the points, nearly half, but they are also setting up many of the other shots, getting steals, and pushing the tempo and helping us score all of those fast break transition points as well. Tucker's defense and Plumlee's defense in the post gets the lion's share of the remaining portion, based on how they've impacted and changed the game plan for the other teams. The Morri and [Gerald Green](#) round out the rest of it.

JC: They are definitely indispensable as a catalyst for the team's success, but this really is a team effort. Against the [Warriors](#) Channing Frye was deadly from deep and [Miles Plumlee](#) was a true defensive presence in the lane.

[P.J. Tucker](#)

shut down

[James Harden](#)

and followed it up with a manly showing against the

[Raptors](#)

. The wonder twins were huge against the Raptors and

[Lakers](#)

. Dragic and Bledsoe have provided consistently excellent production, while different players have stepped up off the bench to complement them. So maybe as far as pies go Dragic and Bledsoe are the pumpkin pie itself while their teammates are the cool whip.

3. Dragic has moved to being more off the ball. Is this the role he is destined to be the most successful career? Like, say, [Manu Ginobili](#) ...

DK: I have always seen Dragic as a Ginobili type, except that he's not quite as savvy but he's a better passer/facilitator than Ginobili has shown. I think ultimately, Dragic is more like Hornacek than anything. A great, play-making combo guard who can play point and off guard in the same game, switching play by play.

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KH: Goran's assist numbers have gone down, but his scoring, shooting, and efficiency has gone through the roof. He has the size to play the two on both ends (except for select match-ups) and plays a style that is tough to handle for 35, 40 minutes a night. When Goran was coming off the bench he was a tough match-up, like Ginobili, and now has found a partner in Bledsoe that allows him to go back to that same style. This is the best role he has had in about 3-4 years.

SS: I just don't know yet. I'm surprised he's taken on more of the shooting guard role based on how well he plays the point. However, he's done an outstanding job off the ball as well, and he may be more suited to that role than Bledsoe would be, so we may continue to see more of it. Dragic is one of the rare players who can excel at more than one position. In fact, he's in the top 10 for both of them.

JC: I was somewhat dubious he would succeed in this role after a relatively poor showing as a shooter last season, but through 23 games he has been lights out. I don't know that Dragic has been deferring as much as I thought was a problem in the early going, though. Bledsoe's usage is 25.8%, but Goran is second on the team as 23.6%. Dragic's career average is only 21.7% and this would be over one percent higher than his career high. Both players have managed to dominate the ball, get their shots and act as facilitators. I would argue that both of them averaging nearly identical points and assists (19 and 6) also supports this analysis.

4. Bledsoe is averaging 7.8 assists per game during the winning streak (6.4 per game overall) and still closing games (5.5 points per fourth quarter) proving he can run the point. Thoughts?

KH: If you asked anyone before the season who has these numbers without assigning a name to them I think most would reverse the names. Dragic as the distributor and Bledsoe as the attacking scorer, but so far this season we have got more of the full package from Baby LeBron. With Dragic more comfortable playing "Hawk" right now he is better off the ball. One thing that Bledsoe has not shown this year is his ability to play off the ball as effectively as he can with it, but if he does this back-court might not have a ceiling.

SS: He's done an outstanding job. I still don't think he and Dragic have figured it all out yet, and Hornacek may also want to experiment further with their roles when playing together. But what they've done so far is one of the biggest surprises in the NBA this season. Most of us expected them to play well together, but I don't think anyone saw this coming.

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JC: Bledsoe isn't a prototypical point guard in the traditional sense, but that position has become more pliable. Some of the better talents, such as [Stephen Curry](#) and [Russell Westbrook](#) are combo guards. And while Bledsoe isn't a prolific distributor he can create his own offense, which is a common theme among the best point guards in the league.

DK: Bledsoe is a unique talent that makes it really hard on the defense, so whether he's a pure point or not it doesn't matter. He's an unguardable point guard who can set up teammates or himself on demand. And he will continue to get better as he tries new things and raises his own ceiling higher and higher.

5. Have you seen a backcourt every that reminds you of these two? Example, or how unique are they?

KH: No. When has the league had an aggressive point guard like Bledsoe that is an elite athlete, good shooter, and ball-hawk on defense teamed with another ball-handler that can shoot, distribute, and finishes at the rim as effectively as anyone in the league? Never. This is a unique style that might catch on with other teams in the future. An offense can be more dangerous with two attacking guards versus the traditional balance of passer and scorer. Dragic and Bledsoe are attacking scorer and attacking scorer.

SS: I really haven't. I suppose the KJ/Hornacek back-court compares, and the Curry/Thompson back-court is similar, but I don't think we've seen anything quite like the way these two are playing together. Not only are they scoring at a high, and efficient level, but they are also getting tons of steals and switching off to lead the team separately when the other rests. They are effective not only together, but separately as well,

JC: [Tony Parker](#) and Manu Ginobili? Either one can be a primary ball handler that the offense can run through. They are even somewhat similar physically and in terms of playing style. Not granting them status in that type of echelon, but that was the first thing that came to mind.

DK: Yep. KJ and Hornacek. Uncanny. Makes me smile.

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BONUS: Subjective, is this the best backcourt in the NBA today?

SS: I think it is...at least right now. They are doing it all, both together and separately. They are multi-dimensional players who positively impact the game in a variety of ways. They may not become the highest scoring back court, but I think they are the most effective when you add up all of their contributions. This could always change though, as the season is still young and players are still figuring things out. However, I have no problem stating that the Slash Bros. are currently the premier backcourt in the league.

JC: Dave's two are good. I'd add [John Wall](#) (20 and 9) and Bradley Beal (19 and 3) (who are only 23 and 20 years old) from the [Wizards](#) and [Chris Paul](#) and [Jamal Crawford](#) from the [Clippers](#) (Chris Paul and insert name here are probably good enough to be in consideration). Some others are close, but I'd definitely put Dragic and Bledsoe in the top five for backcourt tandems through the first (nearly) third of the season.

KH: I made a back-court formula that measures a back-court by points, assists, steals, FG%, 3PT%, assist-to-turnover ratio, and defensive rating. Through Monday the Suns duo was behind the Clippers, Warriors, and Wizards, but not by wide margins. Based on the last five games they would be No. 1 far and away. So no, they are fourth, Science Bright Siders! More on this from me later (the formula and etc)...

DK: Probably not. Curry and Thompson are still one of the best, as are Parker and Ginobili. I know I'm forgetting someone else. But Dragic and Bledsoe are playing as well as any of them on any given night.

Bright Siders, what do you think?