

Phoenix Suns want to use Emeka Okafor - the best trade chip in NBA - to fortify roster

Written by

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One of the best assets in the NBA is Emeka Okafor's expiring, insured contract, and one of the league's most innovative GMs has it in his back pocket for trade.

[Phoenix Suns](#) fans have wanted to get some value out of [Emeka Okafor](#) since he was acquired, along with a first round pick, from Washington in the [Marcin Gortat](#) trade.

As it turns out, the [Wizards](#) pick may end of up being the best draft pick the Suns own this year (2014). The pick is only top-12 protected (meaning the Wizards keep it if they lose a lot of games), but in the terrible Eastern Conference the Wizards are a 90% lock to make the postseason before being trounced by one of the top teams in the East.

Even so, if the Wizards fall completely apart and end up keeping the 2014 pick, the Suns will eventually get their first round pick in a subsequent season no later than 2018. There is continued protection (top-12 in 2014/15, top 10 in 2016/17) until 2018, but that's it.

Still, it may turn out that Emeka Okafor is the best asset in that trade.

Just like the Suns turned [Luis Scola](#) into two starters and another #1 pick (likely #30 in 2014), the Suns hope to turn Emeka Okafor into something more than a contract.

Okafor has been injured all season, leaving many to wonder if the Suns would just let his contract expire this summer leaving max cap space to sign someone else.

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But as of last Wednesday, the Suns started getting 80% of Okafor's remaining 2013-14 salary covered by insurance. That means the Suns are only on the hook for 20% of his salary for the rest of the season.

That also means that any team to which the Suns trade Okafor would basically be getting him for the cost of minimum salary player.

In return, the Suns could absorb a large contract (up to about \$19.5 million full season value) in a simple 1:1 trade if need be. That kind of cap space allows an underachieving, big-spending team to save themselves some huge money this season. Some examples of huge expiring contracts on teams that could want to save money this season are Pau Gasol (\$19.2 million, [Lakers](#)) and [Kris Humphries](#) (\$12 million, [Celtics](#)).

There are a lot of other players on expiring deals, but it's not readily apparent who will want to trade off their assets in the East given how easy it is to make the playoffs.

I personally don't see Pau Gasol fitting into this system right, but I could see Humphries being a good rebounder off the bench in supporting minutes.

Neither of those players whets my whistle though.

I am not a trade machine guru, but for those of you who are, there are a few tenets I believe will be important to consider in any machinations:

- the incoming player must be on an expiring contract OR be 25 or younger. There's no way the Suns invest big, long-term money into middle-aged supporting player (I see you, 27 year old [Jeff Green](#) who makes \$9+ million a year) who is overpaid for their efforts.

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- The Suns will only sacrifice 2014-15 cap space for a young player on the upside.
- the incoming player must be appreciably better than anything on the Suns roster at their position. It's only "fortifying the roster" if the incoming player is a lot better than what the Suns already have. There's no point forcing the issue, and upsetting chemistry, if it's a level swap of talent.
- the incoming player must clearly fill a gaping need

Please don't make trade suggestions that don't really help the now AND the future. The Suns won't do anything to shackle them this offseason unless they get a star, not a role player. No way the Suns make it harder to acquire a max-salary player like [Kevin Love](#) or an upcoming restricted free agent.

And remember: McDonough and Babby got two starters and a future #1 for a one-year rental on Luis Scola. Don't buy low.

The trade deadline is February 20. That's four days after the All-Star game. Likely, the Suns will hold out until after the ASG to acquire a star who may already be an All-Star (ie. Love) before jumping at any lesser offers beforehand.