

Written by
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Just like the NBA is taking a break from the regular season, I'm taking a break from my Around the Association column this week. Instead, I'm going to narrow my focus back to the organization to which this blog is dedicated: the [Phoenix Suns](#).

This week's hot topic is Mt. Rushmore, and more specifically, which four NBA players deserved to have their faces carved into a giant rocky monument as a way to honor them as the most significant players in league history. The discussion was sparked by an interview with [LeBron James](#) and quickly spread across the interwebs. We here at SB Nation don't like feeling left out, so we decided to join in the discussion.

I kicked around a couple different angles from which to tackle this topic. I could have gone big picture and stuck with my AtA theme, doing exactly what LeBron did and naming an all-time all-NBA Mt. Rushmore. However, plenty of other outlets have already done that and I wanted to be a bit more original. I could have looked back through the history of the Suns and named my all-time Phoenix Mt. Rushmore, but there are plenty of fans on this blog who have followed this team a lot longer than I have and therefore have a better read on who deserves to be on the rock and why.

Therefore, I decided to stick to something more personal: I'm picking my own Suns Mt. Rushmore based on the year's I've been following the team: from 2006 until now.

Even while limiting myself to more or less the last decade, this is a tough cut-down for me. I'll start with the honorable mention players. These guys are some of my favorite players to watch and cheer for and are big parts of my Phoenix fandom, but they didn't do quite enough with the Suns to make the mountain.

Honorable Mentions

- [Grant Hill](#) : Grant BAMF Hill was right near the top of y favorite players list during his time in Phoenix. When he first signed in 2007, I was nonplussed. He had gone from a surefire

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Hall of Famer to a guy who couldn't stay on the floor in Orlando, and at 35 years old my expectations were low. However, that changed quickly as Grant not only stayed on the floor and was effective, but he had reinvented his game. Hill became one of the better defenders in the NBA over his first couple of seasons, not to mention the veteran leadership on and off the court, the great locker room presence and, of course, the automatic mid-range game. Aaron Nelson and company kept him on the floor, and he showed how much he still had left to give to the game. From all accounts Grant is one of the best people in the NBA as well. Adding Miles Plumlee to his Rising Stars roster almost pushed him over the top.

- [Jared Dudley](#) / [P.J. Tucker](#) : Dudley and Tucker have actually followed similar paths once they arrived in the Valley of the Sun. They both came in as no-name players, guys who played inside a lot in college and had to transition to the wing and had limited athleticism. Yet both players worked tirelessly to turn themselves into contributors. They hustled their butts off, made the scrappy plays and just did the little things to help the team win. Dudley brought a little more offensively while Tucker is a better defender, but the parallels between the two are definitely there. They have both been a lot of fun to cheer for and watch succeed. These are the kinds of guys that push good teams over the top. They didn't necessarily do that for the Suns, but they've both been big parts of the Suns' recent success.

- [Channing Frye](#) : The Frye Guy. ICMF. Buffet of Goodness (wait, what?). Channing Frye has been through a lot with this team over the last five years. An Arizona boy through and through, Frye returned to the Valley in 2009 to begin his Suns career as the replacement for Shaquille O'Neal. When Frye arrived in Phoenix, he had attempted just 70 3-pointers over the first four years of his career. In his first season as a Sun and with the encouragement of

[Alvin Gentry](#)

, Frye fired up 392(!) bombs, hitting 43.9 percent of them, and just like that Frye had reinvented his game as one of the premier shooting bigs in the game. Frye was a key part of that Western Conference Finals team. Since then he has continued to work on his game, becoming more than just a spot-up shooter, and because of his shooting his impact has always transcended his individual numbers. Missing last season due to an enlarged heart and coming back strong this season has only added to his Phoenix legacy. Channing is another guy who is great on the team on and off the court, is well-spoken as a representative of the team and is a giant nerd (which I appreciate).

- [Pat Burke](#) : Gotcha! OK, seriously...

- [Leandro Barbosa](#) : Although LB may have taken a few stops outside the Valley during his career, the Brazilian Blur is and always was a Phoenix Sun. Barbosa began his career with the Suns as a young kid from Brazil, blossomed into a deadly scorer and Sixth Man of the Year, and now he has returned to the team as an experienced veteran (and the oldest player on the roster). Leandrinho's blazing speed and deadly perimeter shooting off the bench made him one of the biggest weapons in the NBA, as reflected by the 2006-07 NBA Sixth Man of the Year award, and he was as big a part of those Seven Seconds or Less Suns as anybody. Now Barbosa is back and has filled in admirably (considering he tore his ACL last year and was found playing in the Brazilian league) while [Eric Bledsoe](#) has been out. It's really good to have LB back in the Valley.

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All right, there are your honorable mentions. Now it's time to get to the guys that made the final cut. They are the most significant players in the last decade of Phoenix Suns basketball.

Mt. Rushmore

- [Steve Nash](#) : This is as big of a given as there is. Steve Nash is the reason I'm here right now writing this on Bright Side of the Sun. Without him, who knows what team I'd be rooting for? Mike D'Antoni was the architect of 7SOL and the players around him allowed them to play that way, but Steve Nash is the one that turned the Suns from just another high-scoring, up-tempo team to one of the best offensive teams of all time during a time when offenses were falling behind. Nash's style of play made him one of if not the most entertaining players in the entire league and he was just so ridiculously good. Toss in all the off court stuff (charitable contributions, great interaction with the media, comedic videos) and his on and off court leadership, and this was a no-brainer. It's painful to see Nash as he is now - a broken down shell of his former self in a Laker uniform - but it won't be long until he retires for good and the Suns can welcome him back home and put him in the Ring of Honor.

- **Amar'e Stoudemire**: Amar'e is an interesting case. He was phenomenal in Phoenix, one of the best scorers in the NBA, yet he always seemed to leave you wanting more. However, there is no denying how devastating he was as Nash's pick-and-roll partner. In fact, the Nash-Stoudemire pick-and-roll is as unstoppable a play as I've seen. Nash's ability to shoot when you went under the screen, drive when you went over and make that pocket pass when you focus on him combined with Stoudemire's athleticism and finishing ability on the roll and shooting touch on the pop meant there really is no way to defend that. Stoudemire never became the consistent rebounder or defender that you would have liked to see from a guy at his level, but that doesn't change how devastating he was offensively and how important that scoring was to the Suns.

- [Shawn Marion](#) : Marion is as unique an NBA player as you are going to find, and his versatility as the perfect complement to the Nash-Stoudemire pick-and-roll elevated the 7SOL Suns to greatness. Marion's ability to not only play power forward but to dominate at that position at 6-foot-7 was invaluable to that up-tempo system. Nash ran the team, Stoudemire scored and Marion did everything else: pulling down double-digit rebounds, scoring 20 points per game as a third option and strictly as a finisher, spacing the floor with his ugly yet oddly effective 3-point shot and defending position one through five on the other end. Marion did not part with the team on the best of terms, but that doesn't change how much he did for the team when he was in the Valley. Guys like [Raja Bell](#) , LeBron Barbosa and [Boris Diaw](#) played their roles and played them well, but the Nash-Stoudemire-Marion trio is the reason for 7SOL Suns and what they accomplished.

- [Goran Dragic](#) : The first three spots on the mountain went to the guys that defined the first era of Suns basketball that I witnessed. Therefore, it is only right that the final spot goes to the driving force behind the current era of successful Suns basketball. Goran Dragic etched his name onto the hearts of Suns fans forever with his 23-point fourth quarter against the [San Antonio Spurs](#) in the 2010 playoffs, but he etched his face into my Mt. Rushmore with what he has done this year. We all are witnessing how great Dragic has been this year and many words have been and will continue to be written about how good he is, so I won't spend many more here. However, it

NBA Mt. Rushmore: Phoenix Suns edition

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truly is incredible how far he has come and how many twists and turns his career has taken since the Suns plucked him out of Slovenia late in the second round of the 2008

[NBA Draft](#)

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There's my Mt. Rushmore. Now it's your turn Bright Siders. Who makes it onto your own personal mountain? Make sure to let us all know why you picked the guys you did. It's Valentine's Day after all, and sharing is caring.