

Preview: Suns look to change their tune against Jazz

Written by

Wednesday, 26 February 2014 10:00 -



The Suns look to shake off a two game mini slump and get into rhythm against the Jazz on the second game of a back-to-back. Phoenix has been discordant while giving up leads in the fourth quarters of their last two games resulting in broken record losses.

When: Wednesday February 26, 2014, 7:00 PM local time (9:00 EST)

Where: Energy Solutions Arena, Salt Lake City, Utah

Watch/Listen: TV: FSNAZ Radio: 620 KTAR

Last Meeting:

The 2-15 Jazz stunned the 9-7 Suns at US Airways Center on November 30th on the back end of a home-home series. Phoenix's defense was lethargic as Utah managed to shoot .513 from the field and .500 from three point range (9-18). The Jazz were also 25-29 from the free throw line in one of their better offensive showings of the season. Phoenix surrendered 34 points in the fourth quarter as they let Utah pull ahead 95-91 with 5:39 to go and never got any any closer in a 112-104 loss.

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Trey Burke scored 20 points for Utah in just his fifth game as a pro. Dragic countered with 24 points and nine assists in the loss. Eric Bledsoe missed the game with a shin injury. The Suns had beaten the Jazz 112-101 in Salt Lake City the previous night.

Phoenix leads the season series 2-1. Bledsoe hit a game winning three from the top of the key over Gordon Hayward to propel the Suns to an 87-84 victory in the second game of the season.

Team Bios:

Utah Jazz: 20-36

Points per game: 94.9 (27) Points allowed: 100.7 (14)

ORtg: 103.3 (22) DRtg: 109.7 (30)

[Full team statistics.](#)

Utah needs to re-scheme their offense this summer. Hopefully they'll have spare time while they're overhauling their defense... While the Jazz come into tonight's contest as one of the lowest scoring team's in the league, they are even worse on the defensive side of the ball. Their simple formula for failure involves allowing opponents to shoot a high percentage while not forcing them into committing turnovers. The Jazz are 29th in opponent's turnovers this season.

Despite some of these harrowing numbers the Jazz have actually outplayed their record to an

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extent. After a 1-14 start (without Trey Burke for the first 12 games) the Jazz are 19-22 since. Take away the bad start and they've almost played .500 ball for half of a season. Part of what skews the data is that 16 of their sound beatings losses have come by 15 points or more.

Derrick Favors (hip) returned to the lineup Monday and helped the Jazz snap a three game losing streak with a 110-98 victory against the Boston Celtics. While Favors and Enes Kanter can be a load inside, Hayward and Burke have struggled to keep this team out of the cellar... largely due to their shared offensive impotence. This is Utah's getaway game before a six game, nine day eastern road trip.

Phoenix Suns: 33-23

Points per game: 105.0 (5)

Points allowed: 101.7 (21)

ORtg: 108.9 (8)

DRtg: 105.6 (14)

[Full team statistics.](#)

Sunday night the Suns took a 10 point lead into the fourth quarter against Houston. They gave up 32 points to the Rockets and lost the game.

Last night the Suns took a six point lead into the fourth quarter against Minnesota. They gave up 35 points to the Timberwolves and lost the game.

The Suns were the Suns in some ways (28 fast break points), but not in others (only 15 three pointers attempted and only three made). Phoenix appeared to be in good shape when Ish

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Smith finished a three point play with 7:56 remaining to give them an eight point lead, but Minnesota blew their doors off with a 24-6 run that two timeouts from coach Jeff Hornacek couldn't stymie. After the game Hornacek appeared as perplexed by the second straight collapse as the rest of us.

Markieff Morris has scored 20+ points in three straight games for the second time in his career. He did it earlier this season when he was named Western Conference Player of the Week. He has scored in double figures in 18 of his last 19 games.

What To Watch For:

Pick up the pace - The Jazz are 27th in the league in pace. That's just above the Chicago Bulls and Memphis Grizzlies, teams the Suns are a combined 0-4 against this season. Though Phoenix has won two of three against Utah, one of those came on a last second shot.

Finish early - The Jazz have been prone to blowout losses this season. The Suns need to come out with a vengeance, seeking redemption for squandering leads in the previous two games. If the game is close early I expect it be close late. Stifling defense would be a key here, something the Suns have not been playing consistently. The 112 point the Suns surrendered to Utah earlier in the season (tied for Utah's third highest output) will not be acceptable.

Dragon fire - Goran Dragic needs to be Goran Dragic. I realize I'm being fastidious here, and somewhat discounting his career high in scoring Sunday, but in his last three games not including the one against Houston he is averaging just 13.7 points and 4.7 assists. Not very Dragon-like. Hopefully he will be engaged after never really getting into the flow of the game against Houston... and hopefully the training staff have enough rubber bands and superglue to keep his ankle from being an issue.

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The Final Word(s):

This game is more about the Suns than the Jazz. Phoenix is the superior team and if they come out and play to their potential they will win. Mere days after I suggested that the Suns should be looking ahead instead of checking the rearview mirror they are almost the team in the rearview mirror. They are now eighth in the Western Conference just a game in the loss column ahead of a Memphis team that owns the tiebreaker against them.

Can't afford to lose this very winnable game.