

Phoenix Suns preparing for adjustment period when Eric Bledsoe returns

Written by

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The Phoenix Suns know that Eric Bledsoe makes them a better basketball team, but the adjustment period could be rough as he is incorporated back into the rotation after 31 games out.

The [Phoenix Suns](#) will finally be [adding a big piece to their team](#) in the coming days. Not from a deadline trade, nor from overseas or from their couch in Miami (apologies, Shavlik).

With the Suns playing a back-to-back on Sunday (Golden State) and Monday ([Los Angeles Clippers](#)) before returning to play Cleveland in Phoenix on Wednesday, expect the Suns to be cautious with Bledsoe's return. After 31 games out, it's not advisable to force Bledsoe to play a back-to-back when he's hardly done that in scrimmages.

UPDATE: Bledsoe says to expect Wednesday against Cleveland:



The Suns are 16-8 in 24 games with Bledsoe this season. When both he [Goran Dragic](#) finish the game together, the Suns have an even better 13-5 record. Without Bledsoe, the Suns are 20-17 on the season.

[Eric Bledsoe](#) , step right up. But please, don't mess it all up in the process.

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"You have to get him in at some point and it's always an adjustment," coach [Jeff Hornacek](#) said of Bledsoe returning after 31 games away. "Especially for a guy who's been out for a while. Guys' minutes will be different; they're going to be playing with different groups of players, so there's always that little adjustment. We have to somehow figure out how to get him into that without screwing up our rotation."

My guess is that Bledsoe will come off the bench for a couple of games as the first guard up, with a minutes limitation to build up his stamina. He will share some minutes with Dragic, with Green, with [Ish Smith](#).

Very quickly, however, Bledsoe will be right back in the starting lineup and finishing games alongside Dragic. Remember, the Suns are 13-5 this season when they finish games.

But can the Suns afford the inevitable adjustment period while they are fighting to keep their playoff spot?

"You saw it in Oklahoma City when Westbrook came back," Hornacek said. "It takes a couple of games to get back to being used to the rotations and who you're out there playing with. That's hard."

Thunder coach [Scott Brooks](#) wouldn't lay the [Thunder's](#) three game losing streak upon Westbrook's return on his point guard, though.

"I think a lot of people thought we would have trouble adapting Russell (back in), but that wasn't the problem at all," Thunder coach Scott Brooks said. "We weren't playing defense. Adding one of the elite players in the league is gonna help us. When you've got one of your better players back to play, you put him in his normal spot."

Indeed, despite [Reggie Jackson](#) playing so well in the starting position, it's really Russell Westbrook's position. As you saw on Thursday night against the Suns, Westbrook was excellent in his minutes. He torched the Suns offensively and defensively.

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But the Thunder's defensive rotations were weak, and their second unit's cohesiveness was missing. Jackson was the team's point guard when the Suns went on that 28-5 run.

"Obviously every game is a big game from this point on," Hornacek said. "We can't afford (losing three straight, like the Thunder did) when does back so hopefully it's seamless and guys jump right back into it."

For the Suns, the transition will be different. Shooting guard [Gerald Green](#), who just scored 41 points on Thursday, is the players who will eventually lose his starting position.

Much has been made of Green's poor play off the bench earlier this year, but that was overblown. Green actually took and made more three-pointers in November and December (198 attempts, 39.4%) than in January and February (160 attempts, 35%) despite playing more minutes. It's his mid-range game and drives to the hoop that have expanded in recent months, primarily due to being a bigger part of the offense with Bledsoe out and playing against starting defenses.

Green will still get his most of his minutes, and he will be a good soldier about it. He's said over and over again this season that he doesn't care what his role is. He just wants the team to win.

But the initial games will be a challenge as Bledsoe re-integrates into the lineup. Just when the Suns schedule gets really tough and every game counts.

At least, he's got a set of teammates who [aren't letting the pressure of a playoff run ruin their fun](#).