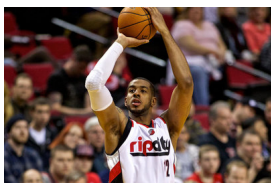


## Preview: Phoenix Suns @ Portland Trail Blazers - Suns try to avoid getting ripped in Hipster Hollow

Written by  
Friday, 04 April 2014 12:49 -

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A three game losing streak in this type of situation is quite undesirable, but that is what Phoenix is staring in the face as they travel to Portland. I expect to see a reinvigorated team after they got plenty of rest in the fourth quarter of their collapse against the Clippers.

I've decided to deviate slightly from the rigid format that I've followed on my game previews this season. I can be latitudinarian in the same way the Suns are completely flexible in the effort they've been giving lately.

In tribute to the Suns last two performances I first mused over mailing in the entire preview. But then I remembered the last game and figured I could at least write 75% of a captivating, engaging article before completely derailing and letting it devolve into a literary Blazers fan. I kid.

I've heard people talking about these already being playoff games. If the Suns are going to perform like they did against the Lakers and Clippers in the real playoffs then I'm not necessarily too interested in watching them play an extra four games... Instead I like to refer to these dandies as play in games. That sounds much more better.

Tonight's opponent, the Portland Trail Blazers, holds a special place in my cold, dead heart. Even though the pieces are different from seasons past it just gives me a warm glow of smug satisfaction when Phoenix trounces Portland that I just don't get with a victory over a team like the Rockets or Warriors. Beating them on their home court given the stakes would make writing a victory recap slightly more enjoyable than the alternative.

Speaking of home courts, I take exception to Willy and his "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet" gibberish since Moda Center sounds like a misguided case of naming rights going down the wrong path. In fact, I think switching from the elegance of the Rose Garden (which is just pretty cool) to the current Moda Center travesty sounds like a cruel prank the fans here in Phoenix would play on their buddies from (pick your favorite nickname) Stumptown,

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PDX, Rose City, Bridgetown, Beervana, Little Beirut, Potland, Munich on the Willamette, Rip City, Hipster Hollow, South Vancouver.

Yes, with all that great material to sift through they still came up with Moda Center. What the hell is a Moda with them?

I should probably put in here somewhere that tonight's game is at 10:00 pm EST (7:00 local) and will be televised on Fox Sports Arizona Plus. I actually got an email about this so it seems like there may be some change from the regular programming (due to Diamondbacks games?). To be perfectly honest I'm not really sure. The message listed a bunch of cable providers and the channels, but I'm not going to taint this preview (that is going so swimmingly) by cluttering it with a bunch of what will most likely turn out to be useless pertinent information. Just keep in mind that the game may not be on its regular channel. This probably does not affect those of you that are pirating illegal feeds to the game online.

After everything seemed roseate when the Suns were taking care of business against a soft spot in the schedule and rolling off six straight wins, the recent two game skid has drawn the ire of coach Jeff Hornacek as he seems to be hinting that one or more of a combination of Suns players that includes everyone not named P.J. Tucker and Goran Dragic are lacking focus/energy/heart. While Goran would appear to be above reproach in the effort department he has been more than culpable in the losses that have made him a great source of distraught quotes on the team's putrid play and the resulting playoff implications.

Coming off of an excellent effort against the Knicks, 32 points on 11-17 shooting, Dragic had his worst shooting percentage in consecutive games this season by combining to shoot 8-27 from the field. Eric Bledsoe has also struggled in only scoring 12 points per game and committing a total of nine turnovers while only dishing out seven assists. His uncoordinated drive at the end of the game against the Clippers where he had trouble turning the corner, couldn't elevate over Jared Dudley and had his shot blocked from behind by Darren Collison (which resulted in the ball bouncing off of him out of bounds while he was in the supine position) was very unslashy.

These two need to play better.

Speaking of playing better, Portland has regained traction after they appeared to be flirting with

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a spectacularly catastrophic slide out of the playoffs. Who knew that getting LaMarcus Aldridge back would help? They've now won four straight after a 3-8 stretch that had them creeping towards the bottom of the playoff picture. Aldridge has two games with at least 25 points and 15 rebounds during the win streak.

Portland and Phoenix have met up three times earlier this season (all before December) with the Suns (twice in blowout fashion) and the Blazers (once in a tight game) protecting their stomping grounds. Given the nature of those contests, and the fact that games in November are very useful as predictive tools for outcomes in April, I feel pretty confident in assuming that the Suns are in prime position for a win tonight. If the game is close, though, my advice would be to at least pretend to guard Damian Lillard in the waning moments. Just a thought.

The Suns are now 24-12 in games that Bledsoe has played this season (since people seem to love this stat). Rumors of his impact on the defensive end may be greatly overexaggerated, though, after they have been razed in their last two games.

I'm thinking the Suns are going to have to win at least two (my guess is three if they also go 2-0 at home) of these road games down the stretch to slink into the playoffs, so no reason to squander an opportunity to get one of those tonight. I'd prefer not to fall behind again from this point on. Speaking of squandered opportunities, I found it rather unpleasant to hear Doc Rivers say that if Phoenix would have kept up the pressure on the Clippers through the first part of the grease fire that fourth quarter turned into he would have never even subbed his starters back in to get them some rest.

Instead we helped get them all tuckered out so they wouldn't be able to complete the improbable comeback against Dallas last night like they just managed to do against us.

So that was nice.

There has been plenty of quippy banter circulating lately over the season being a success regardless of the outcome of these last seven games and how a consolation prize of moving up into the lottery would help assuage the wounded pride of falling just short... But I'm of the opinion that the Suns need to get their \*&%^ together and make the playoffs.

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They have set my expectations based on what they've done this season and I know their expectations are that they can do this. They're definitely capable based on their performance. I know they can do it. They know they can do it. All that's left is to... well, do it.

So, yes the season is still a success, and yes, getting McMiracle an extra six or seven spots up the draft board will give him a greater purview come draft day, but I will still be disappointed if these guys come up just short after everything they've accomplished this season because they will have failed to realize their potential given this final opportunity.

Which would suck.

So... I'm going to pick the Suns to win tonight.

*\*\*Mostly because that's what I want to happen and without really scrutinizing exact reasons why or parsing data to come up with some kind of supportable reason.*