

## Suns Look to Sweep Season Series from Pelicans, Keep Pace in Playoff Race

Written by

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The Phoenix Suns (46-31) hope to hold onto their precarious, 1 game lead over the Memphis Grizzlies for the #8 playoff seed tonight, facing a banged up Pelicans squad (32-45) in New Orleans. The Pelicans are languishing through a five game losing streak, and have dropped all three of their contests versus the Suns this season. Can the Suns enjoy a cool, refreshing win at Smoothie King Center tonight? Or will they be left with a brain freeze?

With five games remaining and a razor-thin margin for error to secure one of the final playoff spots in the West, the [Suns](#) can't afford to squander their opportunity tonight against a struggling [Pelicans](#) team which features blossoming superstar [Anthony Davis](#) and little else. Davis has been suffering back spasms recently, and is questionable to play, while [Eric Gordon](#) will definitely not play, likely out for the remainder of the season.

After a five game winning streak, with four of the wins over playoff teams ( [Clippers](#) , [Nets](#) , [Heat](#) at [Hawks](#) ), the Pelicans have taken a hard slide by losing their last five, and are starting to look like a team mailing it in for the balance of the season.

Injuries have taken a toll on their chances, as Gordon appears to have joined [Ryan Anderson](#) , [Jrue Holiday](#) and [Jason Smith](#) as players who are now out for the season, while Davis has been playing, but not at 100%. When this season started, it was the Pelicans who were supposed to take a major step forward in the West rather than the Suns, but they have disappointed.

Meanwhile, the Suns have rounded into virtually full health since [Eric Bledsoe's](#) return as they

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make their final push towards a playoff spot. That the Suns are in this position with a roster that was picked by the vast majority of experts to be one of the worst teams in the league is a testament to the amazing offseason overhaul by GM Ryan McDonough, and masterful coaching performance by

[Jeff Hornacek](#)

McDonough and Hornacek are strong candidates for postseason honors, as are [Gerald Green](#) (Most Improved Player),

[Goran Dragic](#)

(All-NBA team) and

[Markieff Morris](#)

(6th Man of the Year). It has been that kind of a season for the Suns, unbelievable compared to last season's squad and expectations, yet it would leave a sour taste in everyone's mouth if this fantastic performance fell short of a playoff spot.

Some fun stats from this season's Suns so far:

- Gerald Green leads the team with 192 converted 3 point shots, making them at a .398% clip.
- [Miles Plumlee](#) has played 1856 minutes this season, after playing only 55 in his rookie season. He is the Suns' leader in D-Rating at 103.
- Goran Dragic and Eric Bledsoe are combining to average 38.1 points, 11.4 assists, 7.8 rebounds and 2.8 steals per game.
- Markieff Morris' eFG% has risen from .442 last season to .506 this season, while his points/36 minutes average has risen from 13.1 to 18.7, and his win shares/48 minutes from .044 to .145.
- [P.J. Tucker](#) is second on the team (behind Dragic) with a .400 3-point %. He's made 72 3-point shots after having made only 22 in his NBA career before this season.

That's an impressive list, and isn't comprehensive in detailing all the Suns player improvement from last season. Phoenix figures to pad some of those offensive stats tonight versus a Pelicans teams which fields the 27th ranked defense in the league with a D-Rating of 110.1.

When the teams last played in late February, Dragic scored 40 points on only 21 FGAs, and the Morris twins combined for 33 in a 116-104 Suns win. Except to see more offensive fireworks from a Suns team that has scored 108, 109 and 122 in its three April games so far, all versus

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Western Conference playoff teams.

### Projected lineups

**PG:** Eric Bledsoe vs. [Brian Roberts](#) **SG:** Goran Dragic vs. [Tyreke Evans](#) **SF:** P.J. Tucker  
vs. [Darius Miller](#) **P**

**F** :

[Channing Frye](#)

vs. Anthony Davis

**C**

: Miles Plumlee vs.

[Greg Stiemsma](#)

**Key Pelicans reserves:** [Anthony Morrow](#) , [Austin Rivers](#) , [Al-Farouq Aminu](#)

In a tight playoff race, versus a poor opponent, this is a game the Suns need to win. They must come out with the urgency befitting the situation, and I expect they will. My forecast: Suns 115, Pelicans 99.

Note: All statistics cited courtesy of [Basketball Reference](#) .