

## Would Carmelo Anthony Make The Phoenix Suns a Contender?

Written by

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Taking a look at how signing Carmelo Anthony this summer would impact the Suns roster.

The [Phoenix Suns](#) have reached a delicate point where they're trying to figure out how to get from being a borderline top 10 team to a legitimate NBA Championship contender.

It will take precision from both general manager Ryan McDonough and head coach [Jeff Hornacek](#) for Phoenix to take this difficult next step.

According to [basketball-reference.com](#) when [Eric Bledsoe](#) was on the court this season the Suns, played to an offensive rating of 107.4 (points per 100 possessions) and a defensive rating of 103.2. That would have been good for the 13<sup>th</sup>

best offense and 5th best defense in the NBA. Without Bledsoe the offense improved, but the defense dropped dramatically. Phoenix profiled closer to a championship team when the Kentucky product was playing, but he missed 39 games.

When looking at what the Suns want to do this offseason there are tons of variables to work through.

Bledsoe and [P.J. Tucker](#) are restricted free agents, while [Channing Frye](#) can opt out of his contract.

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Phoenix currently has a little over \$25 million in 100% guaranteed money on the books for 2014-2015. Frye's decision along with the pending cap holds of Bledsoe and Tucker will change the amount they have available to spend on potential free agents. Phoenix also has four 2014 draft picks, which may cause a fluctuation depending on which of the picks wind up on the roster, stashed away in Europe or traded.

The Suns will have flexibility; it's more a question of how much.

Bringing back Bledsoe is a must, which will probably cost anywhere from \$12 million to \$15 million per season.

You also want to keep P.J. Tucker. His skill set compliments elite, high usage talent seamlessly. Tucker doesn't need the ball in his hands, shoots corner threes at a high percentage and has the ability to guard one through four depending on matchups.

If your top two targets this summer are [Carmelo Anthony](#) and [Kevin Love](#) (and they should be if you set aside the prospect of

[LeBron James](#)

or

[Chris Bosh](#)

becoming UFAs), it makes Frye expendable. Both Melo and Love need to be spend the majority of their minutes at the four position and to get the most out of either player you want a defensive minded rim protector next to them.

Frye alongside Melo/Love at center would be deadly offensively, but if your sinking that much money into one of those two prospective stars then redirecting the money that would be paid to Frye is a reasonable idea.

The Suns could try to clear enough cap space to sign Melo outright with available cap space or work out a sign and trade with the [Knicks](#) .

At this point Love would have to be acquired through a trade with the [Timberwolves](#) . This

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makes figuring out how to build the roster a more challenging process.

For the Anthony scenario we can keep it a little bit simpler, thus making it easier to determine if investing in him as your third major piece with Bledsoe and [Goran Dragic](#) makes sense.

### Looking at the payroll:

According to Shamsports.com the Suns have \$25,197,873 invested in Dragic, Beasley (not on team amnesty money), [Gerald Green](#) , [Alex Len](#) , [Markieff Morris](#) , [Marcus Morris](#) , [Miles Plumlee](#) and [Archie Goodwin](#)

Assuming Frye opts out to capitalize on his value from this past season to get a himself a three-year contract instead of being an expiring contract. -- he's off the books.

If Phoenix brings back Bledsoe for \$13 million and Tucker for \$5 million that puts the Suns at \$43,197,874 in player salaries with a projected NBA salary cap of \$63,200,000.

Using the 2013 Draft slot values of the Suns draft picks - and assuming they keep the 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> pick plus stash the 27<sup>th</sup> in Europe -- that adds on another \$3,424,080.

This brings us to a total of \$46,621,954 with 11 roster spots filled, giving Phoenix around \$16 million to throw at Anthony in the first year of the contract.

It also needs to be acknowledged that while this is a short term look, the long term reality is that

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after this season Goran Dragic can become an unrestricted free agent, Gerald Green is a UFA and the Morris brothers will both be restricted free agents.

### Why Melo Makes Sense:

The Suns goal is to get a player who can push them into a top 10 offense and keep them there defensively. When Bledsoe is healthy Phoenix is already in the top 10 on D, while adding Melo pushes them into the top third of the league offensively and won't inversely hurt them large amounts on the other end of the court if the former Knicks star is surrounded by the right players.

He's by no means an elite or even good defender, but with the right complimentary pieces, playing the right position and in a strong scheme, Melo can be part of a high level defense.

It wasn't by much or even an impressive number, but Anthony's 2013-2014 block rate reached a career high and his steal rate matched a career high in 2013-2014. On top of that, he's an excellent defensive rebounder for his size which helps make the smaller lineups with him at power forward work.

If you can limit the amount Anthony has to chase players around on the perimeter --where he doesn't enjoy fighting through screens, can be inattentive off the ball and with rotations -- you can limit the amount of damage he does to your defensive fluidity

Right or wrong, Anthony will also take to the challenge of one on one matchups he deems worthy. His help sliding over as the last level defending the pick and roll has improved, but still isn't something you put in a defensive teaching tutorial.

From my own experience of watching nearly every game of his since joining the Knicks, he also

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benefits from refs giving him a ton of leeway with his wild swats at the ball -- the full arm swing block or when instead of getting in good defensive position between the man and the basket he stands to the side to takes a swipe at the ball.

Having Melo surrounded by a defensive-minded center (getting to this position later), Tucker, Dragic and Bledsoe would be enough to keep the Suns in the top 10 of DRtg along with accentuating his offensive strengths.

### What Melo Brings on Offense:

In 10 seasons in the NBA, seven full with the [Nuggets](#) and three with the Knicks, Melo's teams were on average ranked 10th offensively for the entire period and in half of the individual seasons have placed top 10.

These past two seasons with the New York, Anthony has gone from being a great offensive player to an elite offensive player (I don't even really know what that means, but Anthony has improved).

If his body holds up, specifically his shoulders, he can continue to show late career growth with a superior supporting cast.

What makes Melo's improvement more impressive is he's become more efficient with the amount of possessions he finishes going up (USG%) and a decreasing free throw rate.

His turnover percentage has been below 10% the last two seasons (there are only 36 times a player has compiled a USG rate over 30 and a TO% under 10) and his true shooting percentage has been right about 56%.

This chart appropriately puts Anthony's previous two offensive campaigns in perspective:

