

How Does T.J. Warren Fit With The Phoenix Suns?

Written by
Friday, 27 June 2014 09:00 -



With the 14th pick in the NBA Draft, the Phoenix Suns selected T.J. Warren, SF/PF from North Carolina St. Here's a little more about one of the newest members of the Suns.

[T.J. Warren](#) is a pure forward who knows how to score in and around the paint at a very efficient rate ... and he scores them by the bucket load.

Warren averaged nearly 25 points per game last season, and did so while shooting over 52% from the field.

His highest scoring game last season came against Boston College, where he scored 42 points on 14 of 23 shooting ... without ever taking a three. Doing the math you can see he also had no problem finding his way to the free-throw line, where he shot 14-17. He also managed to pull down 13 rebounds. Definitely his best overall game of the season.

But before you begin discounting that game as an aberration, know that he also scored 41 points against Pittsburgh while shooting 16-22 overall. In that game he made three of five attempts from downtown, while also pulling down 5 rebounds and getting his hands on 4 steals.

As you can see, Warren knows how to score the basketball, and can be relied upon to do so at a very efficient rate.

T.J.'s secret weapon is a deadly floater ... one of the best in college, and certainly unique for a forward. He is very crafty with the ball, and has no problems converting his runners in the lane at nearly 50%. In fact, his overall scoring ability in the paint is an extremely efficient 69%, and that's where he took over 40% of his shots last season.

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However, as well as Warren scores on the interior, perimeter shooting is his biggest offensive weakness. In the 2013-14 season, he shot only 27% from three ... and keep in mind that's from the shorter college range. He was also a questionable defender in college, sometimes out of position or getting beat by quicker, more athletic players.

But one of the things the Suns noted about Warren during his workout in Phoenix was how he impressed on the defensive end of the court.

Head coach [Jeff Hornacek noted](#) during his workout, "The question for him wasn't the scoring part, it was the defense. I thought he did a great job defensively. Getting his hand on the ball, he was better than I anticipated from watching tape."

That was obviously something the Suns were intent on finding out during his visit, and he must have met or exceeded their expectations.

The Suns must also be sold on his potential to develop his shooting stroke from outside, since that is such an integral part of their offense. When [McDonough made the statement before the draft](#), "What we don't want to do and will never do, is just draft a guy who is older and maybe more ready over a guy we think is going to have a better career." He was not only talking about a guy with huge upside and limited NBA-readiness, he was also talking about players who still need to develop certain aspects of their game to become complete players.

T.J. Warren fits this desire, being that he is a player who could already be a deadly scorer, but who could possibly become elite if he develops his shooting from outside.

To this effect, McDonough also said, "The draft is the best way to get guys who are going to be starters or stars, and get them on a rookie contract, rather than just take the low hanging fruit and sign a guy who we think might help us win a few more games but has a lower ceiling."

It's pretty clear this is how the Suns view Warren, as McDonough elaborated in the post-draft press conference last night. "T.J. is an elite scorer. He's one of the best scorers in the country."

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He has the unique ability to put the ball in the basket ... He has terrific instincts and a terrific touch around the basket." McDonough continued, "We feel he has a lot of the things you can't teach. He still needs to work on his outside shooting, but we think he has a chance to be a pretty special offensive player."

McDonough also stated that the Suns intend to use Warren as a three (small forward), where he can be most effective with using his skill set.

At the same press conference, Hornacek also mentioned what he liked about Warren. "It's the little things that he does. He uses his hands to snag the ball, he catches passes that aren't great passes." As for what Hornacek liked about his defense during his workout in Phoenix, "A lot of these guys who are big scorers in college, their coaches are telling them don't get in foul trouble. They may look terrible defensively on tape, but when you get them live and see them (it's different)."

This was an interesting statement due to how the Suns must view Warren's defensive struggles in college. They obviously think he has all of the tools to be a much better defender, and that his lack of defense in college was more due to the coach wanting him to stay out of foul trouble than an inability to do so.

Both McDonough and Hornacek concede that Warren will have to continue to work on his three-point shooting, but Hornacek also gave an indication of why that may not be as big of a deal as you may think for a wing in the Suns system. "He's such a great scorer, he's not going to have to rely on the three-point shot. He'll be able to move without the ball and catch it on the move. When he moves he's very slick, and he knows when to get the ball up or take an extra dribble and take it up. He has a great feel for the game offensively."

He continued, "Anytime you have a guy out there that can score, in our system with Goran and Eric ... he's going to be able to get kick-out passes from those guys and as they're running out at him, he'll be able to drive right around them and then get to the basket ... He moves very well without the ball, with back-cuts and that stuff. When teams are looking at our other players and how they're going to help out on Goran and Eric, he's going to slip behind them."

That was a great preview of how they intend to use Warren, and why they view his skill set as

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being so important. Not only will Phoenix be a threat with the pick and roll and the drive-and-kick to an open perimeter shooter, they will utilize Warren's ability to move and cut through the defense to take them by surprise and get to the rim where he does his best work.

Hearing how the Suns intend to use Warren in the system certainly seems to make a lot of sense, and should ease the minds of fans who may not have understood why Phoenix valued Warren as much as they do.

Still not convinced? Just imagine the slashing and cutting that he and [Archie Goodwin](#) could provide on the court together.

It's obvious that the Suns have big plans for Warren, and while he may or may not be an instant contributor, the Suns will eventually unleash another unique scoring threat in an already very potent offense.