

## T.J. Warren: Steal of the 2014 NBA Draft

Written by  
Sunday, 29 June 2014 11:10 -

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T.J. Warren didn't receive much hype here before the draft. Adreian Payne, Nik Stauskas and Gary Harris were generally preferred choices, but Warren's list of achievements and potential as a 20-year old is impressive. The Suns landed themselves an elite scorer at #14 with "Scorin" Warren.

Going into Thursday night's [NBA Draft](#) , [Suns](#) fans held high hopes for a franchise-changing trade, or draft pick, or both. Instead, the Suns hung onto their #14, #18 and #27 picks, and selected three players with impressive resumés.

Can any of those selections prove to be franchise-changers? Maybe not, but the Suns used their first selection on a big-time scorer from an elite NCAA conference in ACC Player of the Year T.J. Warren, a player who brings a skill set last season's team was missing.

The 2013-14 Suns were built around the 3-point shot. Their #8 finish in 3-point % and #2 finish in opponents' 3-point % were central to the team's 23 win improvement from the 2012-13 squad. Still, too often, the Suns' potent offense settled into an over-reliance on the 3 with a lack of other offensive options, and they lost leads in the process.

[Markieff Morris](#) displayed a solid, much-improved mid-range and post game, [Goran Dragic](#) and [Eric Bledsoe](#) could finish at the basket well, but the Suns were in dire need of another threat closer to the paint. There's nothing wrong with shooting a lot of 3s in the modern NBA, but other options are essential for success.

Anthony "T.J." Warren specializes in getting looks from 15 feet and closer, then nailing them. In scoring 24.9 PPG last season at NC State, Warren made 58% of his 2-point attempts, and went to the FT line 6.5 times per game. He does this with a bag of tricks that includes nifty footwork and a killer floater. It won't be as easy to do what he does on the next level, but a lot of those

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slick moves will transfer just fine.

A diversification and expansion of the Suns' offensive arsenal will involve crafty players who can play close to the basket; Warren is that. The knocks on him are that he's a "tweener", and that he lacks the perimeter game to be an effective NBA small forward. I'm not buying either as a fatal flaw for this talented, hard worker.

Warren grew his game from the 5th leading scorer on his team as a freshman at 12.1 PPG into becoming the leader of last year's Wolfpack, by a country mile, at 24.9 PPG. Warren carried a weak team (his 31.3 PER was next followed by Jordan Vandenberg's 15.3) to the [NCAA Tournament](#) by scoring in every way imaginable.

While his usage rate rose from 19.5 to 35.5, his TS% dipped only slightly, from .638 to .574, despite Warren being the focus of every opponent's defense. This wasn't a quality NC State team outside of Warren. He was just about all they had going, and he produced enough to take them to the postseason, while Warren topped #2 pick Jabari Parker for ACC Player of the Year honors.

In Thursday night's press conference, both GM Ryan McDonough and head coach [Jeff Hornacek](#) expressed their intention that Warren is a pure SF, who could possibly play PF in small ball lineups, but no "tweener." The 6'8" (with shoes), 220 lb-er with a 6'10" wingspan would compete with [P.J. Tucker](#) and [Marcus Morris](#) for playing time, assuming both those players return.

Warren's scoring abilities were deemed "elite" by McDonough, who said, "He has a unique ability to put the ball in the basket. He's got good size and strength, but more importantly, he has terrific instincts and a fantastic touch around the basket. We feel like he has a lot of the things you can't teach. He still needs to keep working on his outside shooting, but we think he has a chance to be a pretty special offensive player."

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Hornacek addressed Warren's supposed defensive shortcomings by saying, "A lot of these guys are big scorers in college, I think the coaches are telling them 'don't get in foul trouble,' and they may look terrible defensively on tape, but then when you get them live and see....In one of our drills, it was a mix. One time he guarded a point guard, next time it was a forward, next time it was a center who tried to back him down. He stopped all three of them pretty easily."

A player who possesses great instincts, touch and a reputation for strong work ethic, as he lost weight and improved his conditioning between his freshman and sophomore seasons at NC State, Warren needs to continue to expand his range. Fortunately, he'll be coached by Hornacek, who maximizes his players' shooting abilities.

Warren may never be a 3-point sniper, but won't have to be when on the court with a playmaker and other floor-spacers. No, the Suns will need him to be what he is: A versatile, crafty scorer from all over the floor.

Welcome to Phoenix, T.J. Warren. You're exactly what the Suns need.