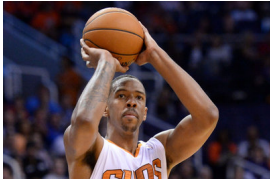


One final defense of Channing Frye, and why the Phoenix Suns will miss him

Written by
Monday, 14 July 2014 14:00 -



Channing Frye is a big loss for the Phoenix Suns.

[Channing Frye](#) has been the source of much debate on Bright Side of the Sun. In fact, the 6-foot-11-inch power forward has somehow become perhaps the most polarizing player on the entire blog. Many people see him as a player who can easily be upgraded upon and whose importance to the team has been wildly overstated. Many others, like myself, see him as a key part of what the [Suns](#) have done in recent years whose impact went far beyond his raw statistics.

With Frye signing a four-year, \$32 million deal with the [Orlando Magic](#), the heated debates about him are likely to die down. However, I'd like to offer one final defense of Channing Frye, and in the process show what the Suns are going to have to replace with the Arizona native no longer in the Valley of the Sun.

The debates have seemingly split the Bright Side into two camps: one that believes that Frye is - to put it mildly - a net negative for the team and easily replaceable, while the other the believes he is a key piece to the team and beyond reproach.

While I place myself in the latter camp, I don't believe that is a fair characterization. Like all players, Channing Frye has his flaws and I'll gladly admit that. However, from my perspective, it seems like many of the attacks against him are of the same lazy, ignorant, stereotypical nature that are unfair and off-base. Therefore, I reject that position and defend Frye against those claims, perhaps making it seem like I think he's a great player. He's not.

But arguments like "spacing is overrated," and "he's soft," and "he can't rebound" and "he can't even post up a guard" and "he's streaky" are constantly regurgitated as strikes against Frye's worth, and those frankly don't hold much water when you look closely at the situation.

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Here's why.

"Spacing is Overrated"

Floor spacing through the threat of a 3-point shot is the number one asset Channing Frye brings to a team. You can say that is an overrated asset all you want, but that position simply isn't backed up in the numbers. If you really don't understand why it is so valuable, I really can't help you.

The Suns' system is all about Goran Dragic and [Eric Bledsoe](#) driving the lane and scoring in the paint. Per the [SportVU numbers at NBA.com](#), the Suns are seventh in the NBA in points through drives. However, they are also third in the entire league in field goal percentage on drives behind only the [San Antonio Spurs](#) and the [Miami Heat](#), two pretty decent teams you may have heard of.

The Suns' success with drives is due in large part to the massive talents of those doing the driving - namely, Dragic and Bledsoe. They're two of the best. However, part of the reason for their success is Frye's presence on the court. Every team in the league knows what Frye is capable of, and every defensive game plan tells its players that they can't leave Frye open. His mere presence draws a defender away from the basket and gives the two point guards that much more space to work with. It's a symbiotic relationship, and one that has worked very well for the Suns over the years, something Kirk Goldsberry pointed out in a [midseason article](#) for Grantland,.

Frye has a gravitational pull that forces bigs away from the rim, creating attacking corridors for Dragic, who excels at "turning the corner," attacking the basket, and making plays. In turn, Dragic's attacking abilities create wide-open looks for Frye or other perimeter shooters. This symbiosis is the heart of the Suns' offensive ecosystem, and it is by no means an accident.

Frye's positive impact is plain to see by looking at point differential via [82games.com](#).

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In 2013-14, the Suns were +6.1 points with Frye on the floor (best among the regular rotation players with [Shavlik Randolph](#) and [Leandro Barbosa](#) as outliers), while they were -2.3 with him on the bench (second worst behind Dragic's -3.2). Frye's net differential was +8.2, second on the team behind Dragic's +8.6. Seven of the Suns' top 10 five-man line-ups include Frye, and the Suns were +145 with those 7 line-ups.

This has been a trend with Frye. In 2011-12, his on-court differential was +4.8 (best on the team) and off-court was -5.9 (second behind Steve Nash's -7.7). His net differential was +10.7 (second best behind Nash's +12.0). It was more of the same in 2010-11, where his on-court differential was +1.9, his off-court differential was -5.8 and his net differential was +7.7, all second behind only Nash on the team.

The fact of the matter is the Suns have been better with Channing Frye on the court. You can say that's more about who he is playing with than anything he is doing, but Frye is the one common denominator and to assume he has little to do with it is reaching; Occam's razor says Frye is valuable.

Don't take my word for it. Former Sun and a long-time teammate of Frye, [Jared Dudley](#), follows me on Twitter (humble brag) and while I was tweeting about the Suns' offseason Dudley direct messaged me, saying "No Frye though? Spacing won't be the same." This is a man who has benefited first hand from the Frye spacing and played alongside him for years. He knows Frye's value.

"He's soft"

People often comment about how Frye is too weak inside and some think any player ([Alec Brown](#) , John Leuer, insert favorite random stretch four here) can replace him.

First of all, this is 2014. NBA big men don't all have to be back-to-the-basket, old school post players. The fact that Frye does most of his damage outside the paint is not a check mark against him. Where it matters - on the defensive end - Frye does just fine.

Per MySynergySports.com, opponents shot 45 percent against Frye in the post and scored 0.83 points per possession, ranked a respectable 115th of all qualifying NBA players. He only fouled

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8.5 percent of the time, while forcing a turnover 15.2 percent of the time. He fared even better against roll men in the pick-and-roll, as opponents shot just 39.5 percent against him and scored just 0.83 points per possession, good for a rank of 37th overall. Frye's interior defense is good enough to get it done.

"He can't rebound"

Frye's total rebound numbers have been very underwhelming for a starting big man in the NBA. However, Frye holds his own on the glass better than his raw totals would lead you to believe. Frye has been an average-to-solid defensive rebounder, where it is truly important. It's his offensive rebounding that brings his total number down so much. That's where being a stand-still 3-point shooter hurts him. Frye pops to the 3-point line or spots up at the top of the key and on the wings, and his lack of foot speed means he rarely gets involved in offensive rebound chances.

His defensive rebounding percentage was down to 16 this year, but he was playing next to a guy who chases after every board in Plumlee (24.4 percent defensive rebound rate) and there's that whole coming back after a year of inactivity thing as well.

In 2010-11 and 2011-12 he was over 20 percent on the defensive glass. That's better than guys like [Markieff Morris](#), Ryan Anderson, [David West](#), [Roy Hibbert](#), [Serge Ibaka](#) and Taj Gibson. His career defensive rebound rate is at 18.9 percent which, while not among the league's best, isn't as bad as the total rebound number indicates.

There aren't many players who can shoot it as well as Frye does yet also hold his own defensively and on the glass. There's a reason guys like [Luke Zeller](#) can be the "best shooter in the world in practice" yet not even make an NBA roster.

"He can't even post up a guard"

Many lament Frye's lack of versatility, saying all he can do is shoot 3-pointers. However, his third most common play type (behind spotting up and pick-and-roll/pop) is posting up, something he did 95 times in 82 games last year per Synergy. Frye shot 48.9 percent in the post and scored 0.95 points per possession, ranked 34th overall.

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Frye is not a guy who you can dump it down to in the post against anyone and expect to get a quality look. He isn't [Al Jefferson](#) or [Tim Duncan](#) or Zach Randolph. However, when he gets a perimeter player switched onto him - something that is pretty common with the Suns' pick-and-rolls - Frye is more than capable of posting up and scoring if the situation calls for it.

"He's streaky"

I can't really argue this one, sadly. Shocking development here, but a jump shooter is streaky.

Here are his 3-point shooting percentages by month this past season: 20.0, 41.1, 42.9, 42.1, 32.9, 28.6, 31.7. That's pretty consistent, actually, until you get to his post All-Star break slump. He shot 37.0 percent from three overall.

Let's compare those numbers to [Ryan Anderson's](#) relatively healthy 2012-13 numbers, as Anderson is the player most compared to Frye. His numbers are: 20.0, 45.5, 37.2, 38.5, 39.4, 35.2, 30.4. Anderson shot 38,2 percent from three.

Shooters are going to be somewhat inconsistent from game to game, but that's because it's really hard to be a knock-down shooter in the NBA. However, those numbers tend to show consistency in larger sample sizes, and even with his slump Frye was still one of the premier shooting big men in the league.

The following are from the [SportVU numbers on NBA.com](#).

In catch-and-shoot situations, Frye's 5.0 3-point attempts per game is second among big men (behind 22 games of Ryan Anderson) and fifth overall. In makes, he's third in big men behind Anderson and [Kevin Love](#) and eighth overall at 1.9 per game.

In percentage (38.1), he was seventh among big men behind [Spencer Hawes](#) , [Anthony Tolliver](#) (obligatory sign Tolliver comment here), Anderson, [Dirk Nowitzki](#) , Love and Mirza Teletovic. Again, this is taking into account Frye's numbers post All-Star

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break/hitting the wall.

In total catch-and-shoot points, he was second in big men behind only Nowitzki and fourth overall with 562 points. On a per game basis, he was seventh overall, but he was second in players that saw less than 30 minutes per game (he played 28.3 per).

Frye is one of the very best jump-shooting big men in the league, and he is not going to be easily replaced unless you can acquire Dirk Nowitzki, Kevin Love or Ryan Anderson.

Final Argument

I've spent 1700 words on Frye, and I haven't even touched on his biggest contribution other than spacing - the pick-and-pop.

Per Synergy, Frye scored 1.18 points per possession as the roll man in the pick-and-roll, which includes both roll and pop numbers. That was ranked 17th overall. He shot 48 percent overall as the roll/pop man and 46.1 percent from 3-point range.

On February 28th of last season, NBA.com's John Schumann [wrote a post](#) for the Hangtime Blog about the best pick-and-rolls in the league, and the Suns featured prominently at the top.

Most points per pick-and-roll possession, team

Team	Screens	Scr100	Rank	P&R Poss.	Team PTS	PTS/Poss
Phoenix	2,640	47.8	24	2,162	2,382	1.093
Houston	2,480	44.2	27	2,091	2,282	1.091
Portland	2,805	49.7	23	2,295	2,499	1.089
Oklahoma City	2,834	50.0	22	2,354	2,554	1.08
New York	2,782	51.9	16	2,292	2,452	1.07
Miami	2,768	54.0	12	2,145	2,294	1.07
Dallas	3,855	69.6	1	3,031	3,226	1.06
San Antonio	2,752	50.7	20	2,224	2,351	1.06
Indiana	2,420	44.6	26	2,015	2,139	1.06
Toronto	3,529	66.2	2	2,696	2,848	1.06

Scr100 = Screens per 100 possessions

Per Schumann, at that point Dragic and Frye was the best two-man game in the league with at least 100 pick-and-roll possessions.

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Most points per pick-and-roll possession, tandem

Team	Ball-handler	Screener	Scr.	P&R Poss.	Team PTS	PTS/Poss
PHX	Dragic	Frye	425	392	510	1.30
MA	Wade	Andersen	131	124	160	1.29
OKC	Durant	Collison	119	114	143	1.25
OKC	Westbrook	Durant	156	148	185	1.25
NOP	Holiday	Anderson	130	125	156	1.25
SAC	Thomas	Gay	188	165	202	1.22
POR	Batum	Lopez	183	180	220	1.22
POR	Williams	Lopez	121	111	135	1.22
IND	Stephenson	Hibbert	147	144	175	1.22
OKC	Durant	Perkins	209	195	238	1.21

Most points per pick-and-roll possession, ball-handler

Ball-handler	Poss.	Team PTS	PTS/Poss.	Top Partner	Poss.	Team PTS	PTS/Poss.
Goran Dragic	1,172	1,361	1.16	Channing Frye	392	510	1.30
Dellar DeRozan	690	793	1.15	Amer Johnson	261	303	1.16
Kevin Durant	732	812	1.11	Serge Ibaka	284	296	1.04
Jeremy Lin	528	585	1.11	Dwight Howard	166	181	1.09
LeBron James	659	729	1.11	Chris Bosh	188	225	1.20
Damian Lillard	1,121	1,238	1.10	LaMarcus Aldridge	441	528	1.19
Dejane Rooks	499	516	1.03	Chris Bosh	165	144	0.87
Jose Holdley	783	859	1.10	Anthony Davis	245	256	1.04
Monta Ellis	1,451	1,583	1.09	Dirk Nowitzki	500	554	1.11
George Hill	619	672	1.09	David West	258	279	1.08

Among all scoring core players in the pick-and-roll game.