

Written by
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It is that time again... For someone to make their, "Decision"

All the big names have signed or committed to their new or same team this off-season and the headlines now shift to.... Phoenix. The [Phoenix Suns](#) and [Eric Bledsoe](#) are the story. All the major outlets are covering this from all angles and have their two cents. Everyone has a theory or opinion, sources or not.

What is going on with Eric Bledsoe?

His agent is doing his job and the Suns are doing their jobs as a franchise that has to see the big picture. A player is looking at what affects them, but the team has to reflect on how this one player effects the salary cap, future signings, future drafts, winning, ticket sales, and etc. This is layered and guess what... Nobody is in the wrong here. Each party is doing their job, including the media when they are spewing their sourced (or not) updates.

Enough of this, let's get to what matters, the staff's takes on this subject!

1. *Breaking the Ice: What is Eric Bledsoe worth to you on yearly pay scale in today's NBA climate?*

Kris Habbas: Well, if we are operating in a world of wants and desires then the NBA teams would just sign players to NFL style contracts. Okay, you want the Max? Great, if you play all 82

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games and hit these markers that validate a Max contract then you will earn it, but if you don't then the scale slides downwards. Deal? In an NBA world though I feel they are offering Bledsoe market value" for a point guard that has proven himself over the course of a few years to be an above average player at his position with potential to grow. That is between 11-13 million dollars annually.

Austin Elmer: If Bledsoe would have stayed healthy the whole year, I think he'd have earned a max deal for 5 years. But, since he only played half the year due to injury, I think he is worth \$14M per year for 4 years. I would be fine with the Suns matching a max offer sheet if Bledsoe were offered one from another team.

Geoff Allen: I think the walk away number is more than \$14 million. I wouldn't mind doing a contract that averages that for 5 years, but that is front loaded, similar to the contract Channing Frye just signed with the [Magic](#) . Everyone knows the concerns with Bledsoe: he hasn't had a fully healthy season yet, and he hasn't been an upper echelon player for very long.

Mike Lisboa: I wouldn't be comfortable with the Suns paying him more than \$14 million a year over 4 years. I think the best benchmark in the league right now is Kyle Lowry's deal at \$48M/4 years. If he had played the entire season, this might be a different conversation, but he didn't so it's not. The argument can be made that when healthy, he's better than Lowry but he has to stay healthy to convincingly make that argument first.

Sean Sullivan: To the Suns, I think he's worth up to \$14/15 million a year, when healthy...that's the caveat, of course. Not only that, but if another team actually offered him the max, then I have no problem with Phoenix matching. But without any other offers on the table, I think the 4 year \$48 million is a fair deal for both sides.

2. Worst case scenario for the Phoenix Suns with Eric Bledsoe is... A) He signs the qualifying offer B) They max him out or C) He forces a trade?

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GA: Its easily if he signs a qualifying offer. This would likely sound the death knell of Bledsoe in Phoenix, and would effectively destroy our ability to trade him, as he would have veto power over where he goes (see CBA FAQ #100). So we would likely lose him for pennies on the dollar in terms of value. Even if he had a fantastic season and put up big numbers, I don't think the team is in a position to compete for much more than a surprise 2nd round exit and then we'd fall back to mediocrity without Bledsoe, so it would be a rather Pyrrhic victory.

AE: (A) He signs the qualifying offer would be the worst case scenario. I would hate to see Bledsoe and the Suns not reach a deal forcing him to sign the qualifying offer. It would damage the relationship between organization and player, and Bledsoe would most likely leave PHX for another destination next summer as a unrestricted free agent. If he forces a trade, at least we get something in return.

ML: He forces a trade. If he signs the qualifying offer, then it's true, he kind of becomes a dead man walking. The upside of that scenario is that he will likely play his ass off for the season to earn a max contract... likely somewhere else. But at least the Suns get him for that year. If Eric Bledsoe decides to try and force a trade, then things get ugly. Bledsoe would have to approve the trade partner and the Suns would have very narrow options in terms of what they could get back for Eric Bledsoe. Odds are it wouldn't even sniff Bledsoe's market value.

KH: Qualifying offer, no question. That allows him to leave in free-agency next year with no return for the team unless he gifts the team a sign-and-trade for an exemption or leftover lint in the pocket. Let's avoid that scenario.

SS: Worst case scenario is he signs the qualifying offer. This means he and the Suns couldn't come to an agreement, and it makes him an unrestricted free agent at the end of next season. With that, it also virtually ensures that he will sign elsewhere when his contract is up, as the relationship with the Suns organization will not be a very positive one. Not only that, the Suns would be unable to trade him without his permission if this were to occur. So the Suns would get one more season out of Bledsoe and then lose him for nothing.

3. The Suns were 20-19 without Bledsoe last year, 28-15 with him, but this is a slightly

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different roster with continuity... Who needs who more?

GA: I think Bledsoe needs the Suns more. Bledsoe is a player who is very much still a *potentia* / star.

He has, effectively, put up one season's worth of better than average starter quality play, but stretched out over two full seasons due to injury. He needs Phoenix - both because he would be the undeniable star of the team, but also because no one is going to be able to help him return stronger, faster and better from his knee injury. In the short term, Bledsoe needs the platform the Phoenix Suns can provide him.

ML: Tough call. I think Phoenix needs Bledsoe ever so much more than he needs them. As successful as Bledsoe was in the Suns' system, his departure would throw their guard rotation into chaos. In all likelihood it would force minutes on to [Tyler Ennis](#) and [Archie Goodwin](#) that neither may be ready for. In terms of NBA-ready contributors at shooting guard, the Suns' depth chart reads "

[Gerald Green](#)

" if Bledsoe were to leave and force Goran Dragic? to start at the point. Bledsoe is going to thrive in the NBA regardless of where he lands. The Suns, meanwhile, would have a gaping hole to fill.

KH: While the two point guard model worked great for the Suns last year the team has some pieces in place to have a traditional line-up led by Goran Dragic. They have depth at most positions on the perimeter. Also, if they move away from Bledsoe in the near future then there will be some form of a net return adding to the roster as well. Bledsoe is a terrific player and will thrive in some capacity anywhere, but the Suns do not "need" him to the extent of killing their future financial flexibility. He isn't topping jersey sales charts, impacting the attendance dramatically, or the face of the team. Those are just facts.

AE: The Suns need Bledsoe more than Bledsoe needs the Suns. The Suns thrived with Bledsoe in the lineup, losing him creates a huge hole in the lineup that I'm not sure Thomas, Goodwin, and Ennis can fill combined. I believe the only reason other teams haven't offered Bledsoe a contract yet is because they think PHX will match it anyway. If Bledsoe were a unrestricted free agent he would have been signed long ago by another team in the NBA. If Bledsoe stays with the Suns, it creates one of the most dynamic backcourts in the NBA with Dragic, Thomas, and Bledsoe aka the [Ghidorah](#).

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SS: Sorry for riding the fence, but I think they need each other, to be honest. Right now, no other team is offering Bledsoe anything, so he not only needs the Suns for their system and training staff, but also for the \$12 million per year he is guaranteed if he stays. For Phoenix, the FO and coaching staff is looking to use a three guard rotation with two of the three on the court at all times, per Hornacek. This means they could split the minute distribution at 32 minutes each game among Bledsoe, Dragic, and Thomas...That ensures a very potent back court at all times with absolutely no drop off when someone has to rest.

4. How is the geometry of this team looking as of this moment in the off-season?

ML: What kind of shape is fairly well-balanced, but lacks a center? And that's not a joke about [Alex Len](#)
or

[Miles Plumlee](#)

! I think this Suns squad is fairly well balanced right now. With the departure of

[Channing Frye](#)

, Alex Len should get the bulk of the minutes at back-up center, and as long as he and Miles Plumlee stay healthy, Phoenix should be all right down low. I think what the Suns sorely lack is a guy who is both a vocal leader and one of the two best players on the court. That may be ignorant on my part (not having locker room access), but I'm not sure Phoenix has had a true alpha player since Charles Barkley, someone whose words and play complemented each other in equal parts. It may be atavistic, but I think all the great teams have that guy to rally around.

KH: Sort of like an irregular hexagon... Was this question literal or figurative? The backcourt is deep, loaded, and talented. The perimeter is pretty deep, diverse, and interesting. The frontcourt is a mess. Entering the season Miles Plumlee, Markieff Morris, and and injured Alex Len are your three "big men." Then the likes of [Marcus Morris](#) and Anthony Tolliver come into play. Something is missing.

AE: To put it simply... pretty damn good. The guard positions are deep (had to combine the guard positions because of the Suns system) Dragic, Thomas, Green, Goodwin, and Ennis. (Hopefully Bledsoe soon) SF is also very deep with Tucker, T.J. summer league stud Warren, and Marcus. PF should have a good rotation between the Morris brothers and Tolliver. The Center position should be fine as long as Plumlee and Sir Lancelot stay healthy and keep developing. If either get injured or god forbid, both, we will have to watch [Shavlik Randolph](#) get a lot of minutes. Getting good minutes is going to be an issue for a lot of the younger players on the roster.

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GA: Geometry? I was never good at that subject. I'm still concerned about the rebounding propensities of this team moving forward - the best rebounder is still likely to be 6'5 PJ Tucker, which is not a flattering thought. The team is either going to have to make a concerted effort to crash the boards more, or sag off more and transition to defense more quickly. I'm also a little worried about the locker room, which lost two of its apparently more vocal leaders in Frye and Christmas. Chemistry is such a fragile thing, and even slight changes such as losing a bench warmer like Christmas can matter tremendously.

SS: I'm more of a physics guy my self, but assuming you are speaking of the trajectory of the team, I'd say pretty darn good. Losing Frye is the biggest negative of the off-season, but I would call it a net gain with the addition of a truly dynamic scoring point guard in Thomas, the re-signing of Tucker, and the drafting of Warren. Tolliver should be able to at least keep the defense honest and provide enough spacing for the guards to operate...but I think Frye's absence will be still be noticed.

5. Mathematically, what is the team missing on the roster?

KH: Ummm.... See above? They need a big man that might be able to switch between the four and the five, can shoot a little, and get buckets around the basket here-and-there. Sounds like Channing Frye, but if they added Tolliver and, say, a [Reggie Evans](#) type, then the position would have some diversity. They are minimum one frontcourt piece away from being a competitive playoff contender again.

AE: With eleven players on the roster, not including Bledsoe, Ennis who hasn't been signed yet, Bogdan who's playing overseas, and [Alec Brown](#) who also hasn't been signed, the suns are looking pretty good position wise. It will be interesting to see if Markieff and Tolliver can fill the stretch four roll, if not, that is a big hole for the Suns.

GA: In terms of what the teams weaknesses will be statistically, I think there is going to be a regression in post defense and pick and roll production. I think we lost our best producer in those categories, and replaced him with an inferior player. I'm also not sold on whether the team will have enough 3 point spacing - while a lot of the guys can hit the shot, only Green is really capable of being a volume shooter from that range, which is kind of disconcerting.

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ML: I'm not studied up on my post-positional math, but I think the Suns are missing another shooting guard. If Gerald Green goes down, the NBA is going to see exactly how sustainable a two-point guard, no shooting guard attack is. I have no doubt that [Markieff Morris](#) is going to continue and/or improve on last season's strong work,

[Anthony Tolliver](#) will provide the spacing necessary for guards to work and that Alex Len will be a solid presence defensively (if not offensively). But something about the 2 spot leaves me feeling a little thin.

SS: Position wise? I think they're good. Quality wise? I think the stretch four position is still an unknown. That's the only position I think they potentially downgraded this off-season, and it's yet to be seen how well The Morri and Tolliver can fill Frye's shoes.

BONUS: You are the Suns brass, what is your sales pitch to Eric Bledsoe during these negotiations to want to be here long-term and sign at (what he perceives as) a discount?

AE: I show him \$52M/4years. Show him how great our training staff is and how it revitalized the careers of countless players and then show him the nagging injuries players tend to get after they leave the Suns. I tell him we missed the playoffs by two games last year and that with him healthy and everyone else improving over the off-season we will have a better chance at making the playoffs. I tell him he is important to the franchise and make sure he knows he is a highly respected player and person. Then I slide him the contract with a picture of him in a Suns uniform holding up the championship trophy.

GA: I don't think I try to sell Eric Bledsoe on Phoenix, per se. I don't think Eric Bledsoe cares where he plays, and I know Rich Paul doesn't. I think I try to sell him on why Phoenix is the best place to grow his brand, to play competitive basketball, and to be the face of a franchise. There aren't a lot of places where all three of those things can be true, but they would be in Phoenix. I also think I offer him a 5 year, \$68 million contract (to see if more years and thus more guaranteed money will satisfy him) or a 3 year, \$42 million dollar contract with a player option after year 2 (at which point the new TV contract will have been negotiated and the two parties can renegotiate). This allows Bledsoe to pick his poison.

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ML: I would invite the countless professional athletes that call Phoenix home to the office. I would show footage of [Steve Nash](#), Shaquille O'Neal, and [Grant Hill](#) playing with the Suns and after they left the Suns. I would create an infographic demonstrating the free agent possibilities with the Suns' available cap space over the life of the contract they are offering. Then I would show a display of all the great point guards to play in Phoenix: Kevin Johnson, [Jason Kidd](#), Steve Nash... and a reel of Eric's highlights from last season placing him in that pantheon. I would sell him on his past, present, future and deep future in Phoenix. It's good for his health, it's good for his bank account and it's good for his legacy.

KH: "See those numbers from last year, the success, the fun style, and the way we put you in a position to succeed? That is who we are. We are not the [Lakers](#) with the glitz, the [Mavericks](#) with an owner in the club, or bottom feeding team willing to throw the checkbook at you sacrificing the future for one player. If that does not entice you, let us make a few calls."
(Bledsoe has been here for 82 games, 43 he played in, and was distant from the organization all in all. Loyalty is paramount in business for continued success, but that is twofold.)

SS: My pitch? We are offering you 4 years and \$48 million to be the starting point guard on a young, upstart team who only missed the playoffs by two games last season. Not only that, we added another potent guard into the mix to make the new and improved Slash Brothers a three-headed monster that will be an unstoppable force. With you healthy, Eric, we are a virtual lock to make the playoffs...and then, who knows? Let's make it happen. *Hands Eric the pen and paper as Rich Paul takes a bathroom break*

Bright Siders, what do you think?

I leave you with an excerpt from a Bill Russell Red Auerbach interview in 1987:

"You see, in sports you have so many things that aren't expected. There's so much uncertainty. So when players find themselves in a situation where management has a great deal of integrity and they can depend on my word or anybody else's word in the organization, they feel secure. And if the players feel secure, they don't want to leave here. And if they don't want to leave

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here, they're going to do everything they can on the court to stay here.

I've turned down a lot of trades where I might have gotten a better player, but I wasn't totally sure of the chemistry of that new player coming in. Even though he might possess golden ability, his personality and the way he gets along with teammates might be things you just don't want to cope with."