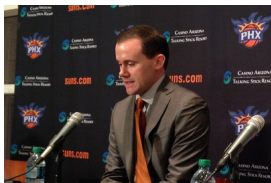


Phoenix Suns give fans a summer of discontent

Written by

Saturday, 09 August 2014 09:13 -



Welp.

That one word sums up the 2014 off season so far for the [Phoenix Suns](#) . The upstart 48-win Suns entered the summer loaded with assets and ready to take that next step into the NBA elite, but President of Basketball Operations Lon Babby and General Manager Ryan McDonough have come up fairly empty.

"Where else would you rather go than the Phoenix Suns right now?" asked Lon Babby at the end of season media conference. "Where else would you rather be, with Ryan and [coach] Jeff [Hornacek] making our important basketball decisions and with an ownership that's committed to winning?"

The Suns went after the brightest stars this summer and whiffed. In fact, you could make the case that the team has slightly regressed after the first five weeks of the offseason. Add in the inability to close a deal with [Eric Bledsoe](#) and it's downright disconcerting.

This is definitely a summer of discontent for Suns fans.

It was bound to happen, really. Everything went right for the Suns in the past year, better than any of us had any right to expect. And a lot of that success was McDonough being fearless about mass turnover. McDonough had it easier last summer than this summer. It's easier to come in and trade someone else's team away than to trade away the one you've grown attached to over the past year.

A year ago, McD had no reservations about trading incumbent quality for fresh faces, shipping out two players - [Jared Dudley](#) and [Luis Scola](#) - for four new ones who were less proven. It was easy to sign off on because those two proven players had just finished a 25-win season

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and needed a change of scenery. Done. Even the contract dump of

[Marcin Gortat](#)

,

[Kendall Marshall](#)

and two others for what turned out to be

[Tyler Ennis](#)

was easy to sign off on when you've got no emotional ties to the outgoing players.

A year later is a lot different. A year later, coming off 48 wins you can't just dump veterans for youth. For one thing, the team has plenty of youth. For another, there's hardly any veterans left. But the biggest thing of all is that the Suns assets are now McDonough's assets - his pride and joy. He's not going to trade them for pennies on the dollar.

"We'd like to retain and extend the core guys and keep them together for a while," McDonough said of the dueling priorities this summer. "And we'd also like to use our cap space and draft picks to add to our core and keep getting better."

In an attempt to trade "up", the Suns have done nothing yet. The Suns still have all those draft picks and most of that cap space. A year ago, McDonough had already made three trades and by November had turned over 75% of the roster. This summer, nothing like that has happened. Given what we were told about all the constant trade discussions that occur during June and July, you know the Suns had their chances. The only reason you don't pull the trigger is because you value your own assets more highly than the other team does.

Are McDonough and Babby overvaluing their own assets this summer? Or are other teams just simply undervaluing what the Suns have to offer?

I'm not even talking about Minnesota and Kevin Love. That ship sailed. The Suns didn't have the high-end jewel they needed to compete with Cleveland's Wiggins.

I'm talking about other trades. The thousand other ones surely talked about. Clearly, the Suns need to improve in the front court to take that next step into the NBA elite. The Suns have a bevy of good players but no one that is great, or has the potential to be great. Maybe that's next summer's task, but it's interesting that the Suns have done nothing there this summer except

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downgrade from Frye to Tolliver.

I'll say again that the current team may have slightly regressed. To prove me wrong, the incumbent players all have to improve yet again. The Suns may have hedged their bets against regression in the back court with the signing of Thomas, but the front court is still a house of cards.

[Markieff Morris](#) , [Marcus Morris](#) , [Miles Plumlee](#) and [Alex Len](#) aren't going to scare anybody coming into the season. There's no mismatch nightmare in that group.

Sure, IF Keef can add the "stretch four" part to his game, he could be deadly. But that's assuming he doesn't regress from his astoundingly unexpected rise last season in the midrange area.

Sure, IF Mook and Keef can belly up in post defense more than they ever have before, the Suns could be okay at the PF position all year. But there's been no sign of that in prior seasons.

IF Miles Plumlee can develop some post moves and gets better at his own post defense, while Alex Len develops into an NBA rotation player, the center position can be solid.

But that's a lot of ifs and no room for regression.

This summer was bound to be more difficult than last summer. It's easier to go from bad to good. Much harder to go from good to "really good" or "great".

The biggest discussions last summer were about underrated acquisitions. This summer, it's about underrated losses. Losing Channing Frye will hurt. Alienating Eric Bledsoe could hurt. Adding Isaiah Thomas is great. Adding a talented rookie class is good, but rookies won't play much unless there's mass trades or injuries.

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Counting almost entirely on internal player development is a solid strategy, but not a sexy one

Have the Suns already found most of their "keepers for the next great Suns team"? Or are they overvaluing their assets?

Either way, the summer has been a tough one for the fans to watch.