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Granger Injury A Blessing In Disguise

January 18, 2013 [Brian Weiss](#)

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Danny Granger, the Pacers leading scorer for the 2011-12 season, has missed all 40 games this season with a knee injury. (Photo Credit: BleacherReport)

Through the first 40 games of the 2012-13 NBA season, the Indiana Pacers are 24-16, sit third place in the Eastern Conference and boast the No. 1 scoring defense in the NBA.

They've done all this without their star small forward, Danny Granger.

Granger continues to rehab a knee injury that has caused him to miss the entire first half of the season. Granger has led the Pacers in scoring every year since the 2007-08 season, including a career high 25.8 points per game in the [2008-09 season](#).

Without Granger, the Pacers struggled mightily at the beginning of the 2012-13 season, posting a 10-11 record through their first 21 games. It was evident that they missed the 18.2 ppg that Granger brought to the table last season.

The team struggled to find an identity over that stretch.

How would the Pacers keep up in a offense-based league without their best scorer?

The answer was simple: defense.

The Pacers lead the NBA in scoring defense at [89.1 ppg](#), a full point ahead of the next best team and 5.3 ppg better than their average last season.

Not only do opponents not score, they don't shoot the ball well. The Pacers also lead the NBA in opponent field goal percentage at 41.3 percent.

The lock-down defense can be accredited to a new team emphasis.

Defense first, scoring second.

In years past, the Pacers have put more of an emphasis on scoring, averaging more than 100 ppg in four of the last five seasons.

But in his first full season (82 games) as Pacers head coach, Frank Vogel has challenged his team to play tough, relentless defense, and it has worked. They have held teams under 90 points 20 times this season and held them under 80 points an astonishing eight times.

The Pacers have used the strong defensive performances to turn their season around, winning 14 of their last 19 games to move within three games of first place Miami in the East.

Offensively, the Pacers have used a [balanced attack](#) to counteract the loss of Granger. Three Pacers average more than 14 ppg with Paul George leading the team with 16.9 ppg.

This is where the Granger injury is really going to help the Pacers in the long run. The Pacers won't have to rely on Granger to average 20+ points a night because of the reliability of George, David West and George Hill. If one player is having an off night, a teammate is going to be right there to pick up the slack. The drop-off in scoring won't be as dramatic as it has been in previous seasons.

Vogel will also have plenty of options to choose from when it comes to drawing up plays. The versatility of the Pacers starting lineup will be like nothing we've seen since the days of Reggie Miller, Jermaine O'Neal, Ron Artest and Al Harrington.

The absence of Granger has not only improved the Pacers defense and balanced the scoring, it has allowed for bench players to get more playing time.

Lance Stephenson was thrust into the starting lineup and new addition Gerald Green has seen his fair share of minutes. The increased amount of court time has greatly improved the play of both players, who will be the go-to guys for the Pacers second rotation when Granger returns.

That rotation will consist of Stephenson, Green, D.J Augustin, Tyler Hansbrough and Ian Mahinmi. This is a bench that it going to keep you in ballgames. A bench that will match the play of other teams second rotations.

Granger's return has been kept hush over the past several months and their isn't an exact day for when Granger plans to return to the court but Vogel is optimistic that he'll be back in time to be ready for the playoffs.

In an interview with Dan Dakich on [1070 The Fan](#), Vogel said that he hopes to have Granger back by early February.

“His knee is healing and right now they're at the point where they are just trying to increase activity on a daily and weekly basis to make sure it can hold up to the wear and tear of the NBA season,” Vogel said.

A big concern for Pacer fans is that when Granger returns he will destroy the team's chemistry. It will take time for the Pacers to get used to having Granger back in the lineup just like it took time for them to get used to having him out of the lineup. That's why it is key for not only Granger, but the Pacers as a whole, that he returns with an ample amount of time before the playoffs.

Even if Granger were to push back his return into late February he would still have more than 20 games before the first round of the playoffs, which is plenty of time for the team to get used to having Granger back in the lineup.

It is important Granger buys into the defense-first strategy that has become the norm for the Pacers this season. If he does, this team is going to be a tough out for anyone come playoff time.

Granger's injury has resulted in a defense first mentality, balanced scoring and a deep bench.

For those reasons, the Granger injury has been a blessing in disguise for the Pacers.

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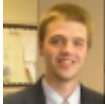
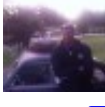


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