**Scouting Report - New York Knicks**

Martin Knezevic

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Mike D'Antoni was much maligned after his brief stint with the New York Knicks a few years back. Sure, the offense was great but the team defense didn't improve. After acquiring Carmelo Anthony midseason, management thought a change needed to be made. While the Knicks were much improved in 2012-13 under head coach Mike Woodson, it's worth noting that the team still ran much of Mike D'Antoni's offense.

OFFENSE

Strengths: ball movement, player spacing, passing angles, protecting the ball Weaknessess: inside scoring, stagnation (isos, shot clock), rebounding

The Knicks like to play SF Carmelo Anthony at PF. Tyson Chandler then mans the middle while three perimeter shooters space the floor. This 'four out, one in' style is a clear remnant of the D'Antoni days. In this alignment, Chandler rarely occupies the low post. He starts almost every possession at the top.

1-5 PICK & ROLL

Chandler sets a screen for PG Ray Felton up top, with Anthony and two other shooters (Shumpert, Prigioni, Smith, Novak, etc) spacing the floor. As the play develops, Chandler roles hard to the rim, sucking-in the other defenders. Then the Knicks play 'hot potato' on the perimeter as they pass the ball around until an open shot or driving lane opens up. Anthony, of course, is rarely left open. If the ball is swung to him, he'll look to score even if covered. The corner three is what the Knicks often look for in this set, with the man on the wing making the extra pass. {The Knicks also will occassionally run a double-pick up high for Felton. Chandler will roll hard and the other player will usually spot-up for a jumper. If Melo is the other player here, look for him to stay idle after the screen. His mere presence up top draws the defense up. The corner three, again, is what the Knicks like here.}

HORNS/UCLA SET

In this formation, Chandler starts at the elbow (usually right side). As the first pass goes to the wing, he screens for the guard coming off towards the middle. The objective is to suck the defense in with both guard penetration and the center diving to the rim. In the case of early ball pressure, Chandler is also a pressure release at the high post. The ball isn't in his hands long, as he's not a decision-maker. His role is to screen and then crash to the rim. Tyson rarely looks at the basket, or even faces it, unless he's rolling for a lob. When Anthony plays the elbow in this set, it's pretty much just a masked iso-play. He'll catch and then wait for everyone to go through, then operate going towards the baseline (usually right elbow). Occassionally, Chandler will come over and screen for him up top, making it a tough decision for the primary defenders. Next season, expect to see Chandler & Bargnani together up high in this horns set.

ISOS

Whether the offensive set starts in a 1-5 pick-n-roll or a pass to the wing for guard movement, most of the time the ball ends up in Anthony's hand in an iso situation. His preferred spot is the mid-post area on either side of the court. He can either face-up or back his man down, depending on the matchup or his level of condition at the time. When tired, Melo prefers to back his man down {this arguably takes more energy}. Occassionally, the team will not even run a set. They'll just come down and find Melo sealing his man in the mid-post area. He'll ever catch there and operate or step out to about 20 feet and face. The double-team is sure to follow, setting up his shooters on the weakside. Carmelo is more effectin on the right block area, going right towards the baseline. J.R. Smith, coming off the bench, is the team's other main scoring weapon. His isos will occur behind the three-point line. Woodson does a good job of using J.R. in pick-n-roll settings, forcing him to look for teammates. Smith was the most unselfish he's ever been in 2012-13. Expect more progression and play-making from J.R. in 2014.

THE PACERS SERIES: The Indiana Pacers brought the Knicks offense to a grinding halt as their six-game series went on. Just as they do on offense, Indiana took the 'inside out' approach on defense. They didn't overplay the Knicks shooters, even giving them open jumpers to start the series. Then, they beat the Knicks at their own game: funneling all ball-handlers into Roy Hibbert. The difference was that the rest of the team was better at helping and recovering. The Knicks, meanwhile, could not make enough shots to affect the Pacer D. In short, the Knicks' shot-making blitzed teams during the fast-paced regular season. Against a prepared and great defensive team like Indiana, their bluff was called. This is also why NY had trouble with the Celtics in round 1, who's team defense under Doc Rivers was still very reputable.

The New York Knicks were the best team in 2012-13 at controlling the ball. Despite their perimeter-based attack, they didn't turn it over very often. Their crisp ball movement and the ability to hit open threes was essential (see D'Antoni). 23.7% of their possessions ended up with spot-up shooters taking a shot (this included transition opportunities). According to Synergy Sports, they were very efficient in spot-up shooting, pick-n-roll, and iso situations (their 3 main staples). By the same token, Anthony's individual play and Chandler's dives to the basket are pretty much the team's only paint points. Also, the offensive tends to bog down when the shot clock hits single digits. New York often found themselves launching low percentage jumpers to beat the shot clock in 2012-13. Opposing defenses should focus on making them use the clock more, with pass denials on the wing and fronting of Chandler at the high post.

The Knicks began the season very efficient on offense. The team showed a trust and confidence in each other, making them the best three point shooting team in the league. However, by the end of the season, their ball movement had diminished. Whether it was trust or simply fatigue, the Knicks resembled a more selfish, iso-ball team by Spring. Anthony, as the team's franchise player and isolation-type player, appears to have rubbed off on the team as a whole. It will be interesting to see how 2013-14 starts out offensively for the Knicks.

If the team starts new acquisition Andrea Bargnani, that will push Anthony to his natural SF spot. This may crowd the floor a bit for Melo and will take a period of adjustment. In the long run, I think the Knicks are better with Anthony at SF. Miami may be successful with a smaller lineup but Indiana has shown that your best shot against them may be to counter with traditional size.

DEFENSE:

Strengths: post-ups, defensive boards

Weaknesses: closing-out on shooters, pick-n-roll coverage

This is where Mike Woodson shines. He brought a new defensive identity to this mainly offensive team when he took over for D'Antoni. Tyson Chandler is the play-caller here, quarterbacking the defense in pretty much every type of set. Synergy Sports, however, seems to rank the Knicks at below average pretty much across the board in 2012-13. That's curious considering that they made their first serious playoff run in years.

PICK & ROLL The Knicks chose to switch most of their high screen n' roll coverages (or 'WHITE'), something I like. It negated the ability of the ball-handler to get into the lane and create havoc. However, they still gave up a fair share of jumpers with the often bigger player stepping out hesitantly to the ball-handler. They also weren't always on the same page defensively, as the switch wasn't an automatic call. Lastly, this strategy created mismatches for the offensive team to milk.

PENETRATION

When the ball-handler did make an attempt to get into the lane, the Knicks did a good job of funneling him into the shot-blocker Chandler without fouling the dribbler. The real improvement of the Knicks in 2012-13 was that the next guy over was very disciplined in covering Chandler inside while he helped. This, however, left shooters wide open behind the line.....

SPOT-UPS

For a team that lived off of spot-up shooting last season, you'd think they would defend the other team's jumpers better. The Knicks didn't close-out on shooters nearly as well as they should've. Especially considering their shot-blocking presence in the middle. However, this did pick up a bit as the playoffs approached.

POST-UPS

The Knicks played the post straight-up last season, rarely fronting or even doubling. They had the primary defender stay behind the offensive player, with the help converging in the paint. Against mismatches or better low post players, the Knicks would send their help defender on the first dribble. For a team with a slender center and a SF playing at PF, they were surprisingly very efficient at guarding the low post.

Getting Tyson Chandler in foul trouble is key to loosening up the Knicks defense. When he wasn't in the game, far more players got to the rim for lay-ups. Also, the communication on screens wasn't nearly as clear, nor was the weakside help as quick. In short, the Knicks defense IS Tyson Chandler.

The addition of Bargnani will undoubtedly make the Knicks' team defense slower. It will be a challenge in training camp as the team tweaks last year's strategies to incorporate Andrea into the fold. Expect Tyson to do as much coaching he does playing in camp. Anthony, too, will have to adjust to guarding threes more than fours. His conditioning and footwork must be strong at the SF spot, defensively.