The Indiana Pacers took another step forward in 2012-13 and so did swingman Paul George. He emerged as the main shot-creator on this team, earning himself an All-Star nod in the process. I decided to breakdown George's progression as a play-maker in the halfcourt offense using Synergy Sports Technology. Paul tallied 273 total assists in the halfcourt during the 2012-13 regular season and 86 more in the playoffs. Here's what I saw.....

Paul George's main beneficiary, whether off of a double-team or simply running the offense, was PF David West. West always had his hands ready, high, and calling for the ball. The high post and the short wing (rolling off pick-n-rolls) were David's preferences. This made PG's new job as franchise player so much easier early on in the season. The addition of Luis Scola, a similar player to D West, means even more smooth outlets for Paul in the halfcourt next season. {SCOUTING REPORT: As an opposing coach I would never help off of West at the high post. I'd rather leave Lance, or even Granger, open for 3 than have David alone at the top with options and space to work with. \* Paul's tendency is took look to his bigmen rather than to spot-up shooters. Make him swing the ball to the weakside.}

George, believe it or not, was double-teamed quite a bit early on in 2012-13. Opposing teams saw Danny Granger's absence and pretty much knew Paul would be the focal point offensively. You can blame the marathon NBA preseason for giving that scouting report up to opposing teams. Early on in the season, at San Antonio, he had only 1 assist in the halfcourt. He responded in the following games showing he took that as a learning experience, a good sign of maturity. Where as most players put up bigger scoring numbers against bad teams, George racked up more assists against the bottom-feeders (see Detroit & Charlotte). Miami held him to only 2 halfcourt assists in their first meeting (both being deep Lance Stephenson jumpers). As the season went on Paul George actually saw LESS traps, creating more opportunities off of the dribble for teammates. His high efficiency in dealing with double-teams early on in 2012-13 scared teams off from that strategy. {SCOUTING REPORT: As an opposing coach, I would not send a double-team regularly at Paul. When I do, I'd make sure it only came from his blind side. Unless you catch him off guard, you're better off playing him straight up.}

Lastly, it's worth noting that head coach Frank Vogel likes to use Paul George as his inbounds passer on both sideline and baseline sets. His length and ability to hold the ball up high creates numerous different passing angles against pressure. He is also a serious threat to score off of the return pass. The old phrase "the most dangerous player is the guy taking it out of bounds" is worth hammering home into your defense when facing the Pacers.

Strengths: Length (keeping ball high), Demeanor, Knowledge of plays, Accuracy of passes, Feeding post (one of the best in the league).

Weakness: Strength, Left hand, Off-dribble (good, but could use improvement).

Likes: Paul George has a smoothness and calmness out on the floor, even while dribbling into a crowd. He rarely played 'hot potato' with the rock, keeping the ball until the most opportune time to dish it off. This should bode well for him in 2013-14 as team defenses start throwing the kitchen sink at him. PG also used a lot of pass/shot fakes when delivering to his guys, usually up high using his length as an asset. His post-entry passes, an underrated ability these days, were also impressive. He may just be the best swingman in the league at feeding the post. Teams liked to front the post against Indiana, something Paul George picked apart most of the season. ATTN NBA COACHES: fronting the post doesn't work against Indiana. Paul was able to pick apart shifting defenses with the ball (and a live dribble) on the wing all season long.

Dislikes: I didn't really see any 'escape dribble' moves from Paul George, something he may need next season as team defenses turn up the heat and watch even more tape (plug: Synergy Sports). Also, playing a lot of minutes, Paul would show fatigue late in close ball games. While this didn't really affect his passing accuracy, it did affect his scoring aggression. Team defenses can key on this and start playing him for the pass late in games. Lastly, George did have a string of low assist games midseason, likely adjusting to different coverages in the halfcourt (it's a 'copy cat' league).

Defense: Now, you can't talk about a great two-way player like Paul George without at least mentioning his defense. He showed the rare ability to continue his defensive role despite an increase in offensive resbonsibility. This is a common criticism of super star swingmen (see Kobe, Paul, and Dwyane).

PLAYOFFS - Paul George continued his above average play-making but was forced to dribble the ball more into sets, likely causing him to wear down more as the postseason went on.

VS ATLANTA: More of the same from the regular season. His main role was feeding the bigmen, West & Hibbert, over Atlanta's fronting defense. He was very successful. VS NEW YORK: It was traditional playoff basketball with a lot of post feeds, especially early on in the series. The Knicks were playing Carmelo and (current-Pacer) Chris Copeland at the 4-spot. He also swung the ball to shooters a lot, which made the native New Yorker Lance Stephenson very happy.

VS MIAMI: He saw very few 'effortless' assists in this series, with everything coming off of pressure or active backline defense. Indiana force-fed the ball inside to Hibbert in this series, which made Paul George shine as a post-feeder. He was still very efficient at this. As the series went on, 'PG' got into the lane more often and was able to create shots. It's worth noting that, as Lebron's assists went down as the series went on, Paul seemed to get more efficient. He also was guarding Lebron, which speaks volumes. However, the long series took its toll on George. By Game 7, he was hardly the same play-maker for Indiana. His first two assists of the pivotal game were passes to Lance and Hill for deep contested jumpers. Next season, expect to see a stronger and more prepared George. This team has Finals aspirations and he'll likely make sure that his body and mind are ready for that long haul.

Paul George made his initials proud in 2012-13, playing de facto 'PG' for much of the season. Coach Frank Vogel will need more of this in 2013-14 if the team is to unseat Miami in the East (my prediction).