

## Phoenix Suns need a dose of 'tough love'

Written by

Sunday, 09 December 2012 09:15 -

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When Alvin Gentry walked into the postgame press conference following the loss to Dallas Thursday night, I anticipated the worst. Between the low muttering and the frog in his throat, I thought I was at a funeral.

Then, he surprised me by starting with "we're not dead in the water yet, guys." Okay, that was a nice start. But I was sure some heated words for his guys were sure to follow. None ever came.....and they should have.

Gentry is a holdover from the Mike D'Antoni days...when the plan was to just push the ball downcourt no matter how good or bad things were going. Increased pace and energy would surely solve any problem. Alvin shares a lot of the same coaching style of his predecessor, which includes self-deprecating jokes and refusing to criticize his players in the media.

Being around the coach the other night, and also in training camp, he carries himself as a very serious and demanding person away from the mic. I don't know what's said behind closed doors, but it appears that there's little confrontation going on.

I think a lot of the current Phoenix Suns could use some 'tough love' right about now.

First up? Michael Beasley. When Beez subbed out 4 minutes into the 2nd half Thursday night, I expected some fierce words from Gentry. At the least, maybe a cold shoulder. No, Alvin actually gave him a tap on the hip as he strolled by. I guess just breaking a sweat is good enough in coach's book these days. Somebody tell him that I can still hit a 'J'.

Back to Michael, he didn't return that game and his starting spot at SF is all but gone (not that he cares). After the game, Gentry was asked if Beasley's play was hurting the team. His response was "I wouldn't say that." Translation: 'it IS but I don't want to go there.' Beasley isn't

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the only one.

There are a few other guys who need a fire to be lit under them. Markieff Morris may just be the most physically-gifted Suns. But his lack of aggression (and a go-to offensive move) have him relegated to 'rim-protector guy' when Scola is out there. Elton Brand guarded Morris down the stretch Thursday, a size and athleticism mismatch. Markieff on just half the energy should've had his way inside and off of the dribble. Instead, Elton was so bored with Morris that he asked Brandan Wright to switch so that he could guard a real player, Luis.

Watching the Suns in the tunnel pregame, I saw a lot of frivolity from some guys who should quite frankly be dead serious. Wesley Johnson appears to think that his benching is a coaching decision and not a reflection of his abilities. Beasley, meanwhile, spent the bulk of his energy pregame racing an usher to the locker room.

It wasn't all jokes and pranks.....Marcin Gortat was focused and stretching while Luis Scola was organizing the guys into a huddle. P.J. Tucker, too, appeared to approach the game as an opportunity rather than an obligation. Jermaine O'neal was also intense before the tip. He carried that focus all the way into a near ejection after chasing Zack Zarba downcourt after a bad call.

Now that I think about it, Coach Igor (Kokoskov) was so stoic in warm-ups that I had a hard timing just getting him to crack a smile. I had to go deep in my bag of Serbian one-liners.

Alvin Gentry had this to say about the loss on national TV: "We compete and play hard like crazy but we have to be smarter." Well, unless the team plans on going back to college to boost their collective IQ, I think a swift kick in the 'asterisk' is what this group really needs short-term.

The harshest words from coach following the Mavs game was actually his criticism of the gatorade flavor chosen by his PR people. That kind of humor should be reserved for victories, only, Alvin.

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