

Phoenix Suns facing 'long season', coach and players at a complete loss

Written by

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To a man, the players and coaches are getting really tired of losing. But the problem is that none of them know exactly how to fix it. None of them has the magic bullet to playing better and winning games.

"I don't know," [Luis Scola](#) said once again to a throng of reporters after the game, his response as honest as it can be to the media. He was not angry or defensive or evasive. He was, and always is, open and forthcoming and willing to talk to the media after every game. He apologizes for not having better answers.

"We don't have a day off anymore," he said about Monday's off day after the back-to-back. By his tone, you could tell he was grasping at straws. "We need to practice. It's not going to happen by talking. I think a lot about it, I just don't know."

After we left him alone, he just sat there in his shorts at least ten more minutes. He didn't go take a shower or talk to any other players. He just sat there, staring at the floor. After being claimed off amnesty waivers this summer, Scola is beholden to the [Suns](#) for a full year. There's no point asking for a trade - the Suns couldn't accommodate him even if they wanted to. He's got to stick it out for the full season, good or bad.

[Marcin Gortat](#) is handling his frustration a different way. In stark contrast to Scola's candor, Gortat refused to answer any pointed questions: "No comment. Next question."

(READ: [Transcription of Gortat's most recent interview with Polish media](#))

[Alvin Gentry's](#) biggest frustrations are twofold: (1) players are not staying within the system and (2) players are not playing hard enough.

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They are not finishing plays the way they are designed. Instead, they are short circuiting plays the moment they have a clean shot at the basket no matter how far away or how difficult the shot.

"We are not doing a very good job of making basketball plays," Alvin Gentry said after the Suns loss to Orlando on Sunday night. "Cuts, shot selection, things like that."

But an even bigger problem is the lack of consistent effort being put out by the guys on the floor. Fans see it. Players see it too. Gentry knows it, and he does all he can to stop himself from throwing players under the bus. He goes out of his way to compliment the hard workers, to highlight their efforts in contrast to others who go unnamed.

"I think he played extremely hard," Gentry said of [Sebastian Telfair](#) , starting in place of [Goran Dragic](#) due to the flu. "I never have a problem with him. I know he gives you everything that he can give.

"We have got to have 12 guys that are doing that - not four or five."

Gentry has periodically praised - by name - the consistent efforts of Dragic, Telfair, Scola, [P.J. Tucker](#) and Jermaine O'Neal. I expect you can count those five guys as examples of how to play the game, as far as Gentry is concerned.

Consistency is lacking from the rest of the guys. Morris, Brown and Dudley are usually there, but sometimes they disappear and often it ebbs and flows right in the middle of a game. Marcin Gortat and [Michael Beasley](#) , on the other hand, are usually invisible, only occasionally showing flashes of necessary all-out effort.

Yet Gortat and Beez are two of the most talented guys on the team, while the all-effort guys are some of the least-talented. Hence Gentry's big dilemma.

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You can't win games without talent and effort. In the end, you need some guys who have a lot of both.

But the Suns don't have any of those, so Gentry has to cobble together different lineups until one or two of them click. Everyone knows that isn't the panacea though. Varying rotations cause confusion and hurt preparation.

"Usually when you know your role," Dudley said after the game. "Know when you're coming in, that's a confidence builder. Stick with it, know what you're going to do."

But he acknowledges freely that Gentry can't do that when the players are inconsistent. Gentry has to know what they are going to provide when they step on the court, has to be able to count on that.

"It's a tough job for Alvin."

Orlando Magic are a stark contrast to the Suns, in terms of execution at least on Sunday night. They don't have a go-to scorer either, and are even younger than the Suns. But they know their roles better than these Suns do, and they accept them with open arms.

Count Jared Dudley as one who was impressed.

"Their bigs are setting screens for JJ, they know Big Baby's getting the ball in the post, they know Jameer is running the show," he said, in explanation of the difference between the Suns and the Magic. "They have a shorter rotation. They are a little bit tighter with their rotations. They just know that their bigs don't do too much. They just know it."

"Right now we have a lot of guys who can score. So our point is identifying roles and that happens throughout the course of the season."

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He tried to explain the difference between specific roles and fluid roles, and how that can make life more predictable and hence less stressful.

"It could be [that their roles are more defined] or it could be individuals saying 'hey that's not my game'," he continued. "Like Channing is just a shooter. Channing's not going down to the post. We have guys that are more versatile, like Markieff who can go outside or inside where he can score different ways, where they have certain guys who just have set skills and they run plays to that."

Orlando has won only 8 games this season to the Suns' 7, so let's not hold up the Orlando model as gold quite yet. All Jared was trying to do was point out that, if guys are willing to accept specific roles then Alvin's job gets easier and maybe they can win more games.

Of course, if the Suns had specific roles and still lost seven straight, the rhetoric would be that they need more freedom to exploit different matchups and to use some of their skills better.

As I said above, no one knows exactly what will make this team better.

They just know that, right now, it looks like a long season ahead.