"We are in a bad spot right now."

That's Gentry talking about the team's current state of affairs, losers of 8 of their last 9 games and 16 of 21 overall since a 7-8 start to the season.The team is now 12-23 on the season.

Gone are the days of the easiest schedule in the league, which was the case in the first 20 games of the year based on their opponents' current winning percentage on the season. The Phoenix Suns have beaten only one team that is still above .500 right now (the Memphis Grizzlies).

But they have beaten 6 teams that were above .500 at the time of the game. So there's that. And they've played nearly every game down to the last few minutes of the fourth quarter, only to lose at the end.

"We've got to play with a little more confidence," he said yesterday in reaction to Luis Scola's comment that the team is almost expecting the worst now. "Not looking for the bad thing that's going to happen. As coaches, management, and as players, it all starts with confidence."

But bad things do happen. Like after a first quarter on Friday night that Gentry deemed "the best they played (offensively) all season" when everything just fell apart and never came back.

The team came into the Grizzlies game lacking confidence again last night when they started the game 2-for-14 with 4 turnovers. That's not going to get it done.

The guys are starting to realize that the season is already way down a slippery slope, and they have to fight to keep it together.

"The road can bring you together," Jared Dudley said, trying to grasp at anything. "But I don't know the stats, but we've lost something like 8 or 9 in a row."

He said it starts with the team captains, him and Jermaine O'Neal, to keep the team from falling apart.

It starts with Goran Dragic too.

"Goran's the point guard, he's got to get everyone into it," he said. "When he does bad, we struggle. When he goes good, we have a chance. I don't know how he did statistically tonight, but I think overall there was a lack of ball movement, turnovers. They got a lot of easy layups and we didn't."

The guys on the court don't always turn to Dragic though when things start to go sour. They try to do too much on their own. Dudley had six turnovers on bad passes on Friday night, and couldn't get his shot off very well against the Grizzlies' Tony Allen on Sunday.

Rebound outlets too often go to someone else, who doesn't often get a good shot once they cross the time line.

"We don't have one-on-one players, period," Gentry said before the game. "It's detrimental to our team. We are a much better team when we have 3 or 4 passes."

Yet guys are jacking up shots anyway, or trying to make hero passes that just aren't there. Some of it is a broken down offense. Dragic is getting trapped more and more often, forcing him to give up the ball to someone else on the perimeter (ie. not in shooting position) to restart the play. But the ball isn't getting back to him.

As Gentry says, there are "a lot of young players on this team that are trying to carve out a reputation."

One of those is Shannon Brown . Brown knows he's basically on a one-year contract, and he's trying hard to show he's worth a long-term deal. Getting relegated to the bench is not helping his confidence.

"He really enjoys starting, it's important to him," Gentry said of Brown's recent poor play. "But we need firepower off the bench. He needs to understand that."

Ultimately, it's sink or swim time. There's no easy road to turn onto. The Suns face a schedule that won't favor them for a single win between now and the All-Star break. Welcome to the world of Sacramento, Charlotte and New Orleans.

"The easiest thing to do it to point fingers and go our separate ways," Gentry warns. "We have just got to believe in ourselves. We're not just going to play out the season."