Andrew Bogut: Seven things about the Warriors' new 7-footer

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Perhaps because it was bracing for the chore ahead, Andrew Bogut's body took a break from growing when he was 12. Other boys caught up to his height. Coaches moved him from his center position to the perimeter.

"I was like, 'Holy (expletive), I better learn some new skills," Bogut recalled this week. "That's when I started working on my ball-handling and my shooting."

His body eventually resumed its expansion project -- he grew 5 inches at age 15 alone -- and now has to duck under doorways as a 7-foot, 260-pounder.

The recently acquired Warriors center recounted his rapid rise this week while attending Golden State's youth basketball camp at Freedom High in Oakley. He could only speak to students, rather than show them how it's done, because a fractured left ankle will likely keep him sidelined for the remainder of the season.

Until he takes the court, fans won't get a proper introduction to the center -- and the centerpiece -- of the controversial trade that sent Monta Ellis to the Milwaukee Bucks.

So as he recovers, Bogut is reaching out. He's active on Twitter (@AndrewMBogut has more than 80,000 followers) and has been happy to step into the public eye. He signed autographed photos for every kid at the Warriors youth basketball camp on Wednesday -- and then high-fived them again on his way out the door.

After that, he sat down for a one-on-one interview. In honor of the new 7-footer, here are seven things to know about Andrew Bogut:

1. He modeled his game after Toni Kukoc.

During those teenage years when Bogut stopped growing, he thought his basketball future would be as swingman. He worked toward becoming as versatile as Kukoc, the one-time Chicago Bulls forward known for his uncommon blend of skills.

Kukoc could handle the ball, shoot, pass and run the court. He would play every position on the court during an NBA career that lasted from 1993-2006.

That made him Bogut's kind of guy.

"Up until I was 16, I had a similar body to Toni when he came (to the U.S.) -- very skinny, very wiry," Bogut said. "He could handle the ball, pass and shoot. I liked to do all those things. He was a guy who wasn't the strongest beast, but he was very, very skilled.

Bogut averaged 12.7 points, 9.3 rebounds, 2.3 assists, 1.57 blocks and 32.7 minutes during his 408 career games for the Bucks. Since the 2008 season, he ranks fourth in assists among NBA centers.

Alas, he had to abandon at least one skill from his days as a shooting guard. "I really miss those days when I could jack up some 3s," he said.

2. He understands why fans booed Joe Lacob.

During the halftime tribute to Warriors legend Chris Mullin on Monday, fans at Oracle Arena booed loudly when the Lacob, the team's owner, took the microphone. Among other fuel for the hostility, fans are upset that their team traded prolific scorer Monta Ellis.

So, in a sense, fans were booing that they had Bogut instead.

"I didn't take that as personal toward me," he said. "I think the fans, obviously, are disappointed with the way things are going. You know, you can't fault them. They want to make the playoffs, they want to be successful and we're not having a great year."

Like others, however, Bogut was less concerned with the boos than with the timing. The incident overshadowed Mullin's moment in the spotlight.

"That passion is great, (but) it was probably not the right time to do that because it wasn't about Joe Lacob -- it was about Chris Mullin and everything he's done for this franchise and what kind of player he was," Bogut said.

3. Croatia means as much to him as Australia.

It's not a coincidence that Bogut picked Kukoc (aka, "The Croatian Sensation") as his role model. Though he was born and raised in Melbourne, Bogut's parents, Michael and Anne, are Croatians who immigrated to Australia from what was then Yugoslavia in the 1970s.

"My whole family is Croatian for as far as we look back on both sides," he said.

Though Kukoc is his template, Drazen Petrovic was his idol. Petrovic is a Croatian who died in a car crash in 1993, just as he was emerging as a star with the New Jersey Nets. When Sports Illustrated visited Bogut at his college apartment in Utah, the reporter found a poster of Petrovic on the wall as well as pictures of the player meeting Petrovic's parents in Zagreb.

"He was kind of an inspiration for a lot of the country," Bogut says now. "A lot of people haven't gotten over the tragedy of 1993. We're still feeling that today."

4. Yes, he roots for St. Mary's College.

Like any good Australian hoopster, Bogut is aware of the pipeline from his native country to Moraga. His loyalty is to the Utes but he cheers for the Gaels, too, because of the way coach Randy Bennett has built a powerhouse around Aussie imports such as Patty Mills and Matthew Dellavedova.

"It's great. I think it's a smart. I think more schools should do that -- create a pipeline from a certain country," he said. "When I was being recruited, nobody traveled (to Australia). Most schools laugh at you and never send a scout out there. Now it's quite changed."

Bogut says he knows Mills "very well" and the two constantly text each other.

5. He considers shot-blocking a science.

Bogut led the NBA by averaging 2.6 blocks per game last season. The year before that, he was second with 2.5.

His size helps, of course, but he said he puts a lot of film study and other preparation into the way he plays defense.

"It's a lot about timing: Getting there early," Bogut said. "I'm athletic, but I'm not the most athletic guy by any means. Basketball IQ plays a part in it. As a big guy, if you get there late, you're going to get guys who try to dunk on you."

Bogut said it will be important for him to gain the confidence of the Warriors guards, so that they can play pressure defense while knowing that they've got a 7-foot insurance policy behind them.

"If somebody blows by them, I'm going to be there to help," Bogut said. "And it's not just blocked shots. I'm also up there (in the rankings) in terms of taking charges. I take pride in that."

6. He has no plans to hit the town with Alex Smith.

In 2005, Bogut and the future 49ers quarterback were the VBMOC -- the Very Big Men on Campus. Smith was the No. 1 overall pick of the NFL in April of 2005; Bogut was the No. 1 overall pick of the NBA that June.

But Bogut said he has not called his fellow Ute for a scouting report since arriving in the Bay Area. They were mere acquaintances back during their school days.

"Me and Alex, obviously we know of each other," Bogut said. "We respected each other, but we never really hung out. He actually hung out with some of my teammates more than me."

This interview took place Wednesday afternoon, just as the 49ers formally announced that Smith had re-signed for three more years in San Francisco. "Awesome," Bogut said. "That's fantastic news."

7. He knows the Warriors history.

It's been decades since Golden State had a reliable center. If Bogut didn't know that already, he's knows it by heart now.

"I've heard that a lot since I've been here. A lot," he said. Then he laughed. "No added pressure."

When Bogut is healthy again, the Warriors hope he regains his form as one of the league's better all-around big men. He's no Dwight Howard, but during 69-game stretch before he suffered a broken elbow in 2010, he averaged 15.9 points on 52 percent shooting, 10.2 rebounds and 2.5 blocks.

Such numbers would end the Warriors' long-term problems at center. And Bogut envisions being the long-term answer.

"I'd love to be here for the rest of my career," he said. "This is a beautiful place."